Assynt Crofters' Trust
The Next Generation

Report of the 'Fling in the Fank' Conference
Stoer, North Assynt, 28-30th August 2003

Compiled and edited by David Reid
The Fling in the Fank was held over three days at the end of August in 2003. A number of marquees were erected on the green at Stoer and used for the conference during the day, for ceilidhs in the evenings and for a feis on the Saturday afternoon. The organisers used local organisations and resources wherever possible. Catering was provided by a local firm and local bands played at the ceilidhs.
## Contents

| Acknowledgements                          | 2 |
| Towards an agenda for the next ten years: key themes and issues | 4 |
| The conference                            | |
| Welcome and introduction: Kenny Mackenzie and Laura MacLean | 7 |
| Community land ownership: sharing the experience | |
| Embarking on a buy-out: David Cameron, North Harris Estate | 8 |
| Business planning: John MacKenzie, Assynt Crofters’ Trust | 9 |
| Looking to the future: Maggie Fyffe | 10 |
| Involvement of the young people of Assynt: Laura Maclean, Sarah MacLeod, David MacPhail and Calum Millar | 11 |
| The Long Haul: Kenny Maciver | 13 |
| The wider context                         | |
| The political context: John Watt | 15 |
| Strategic action on landownership: Bill Ritchie | 15 |
| Current legislation: Allan Wilson | 16 |
| The crofting community right to buy: Bob Perrett | 18 |
| Sustainable development | 19 |
| Challenges and opportunities              | |
| Crofting in the 21st century: David Green | 20 |
| Surviving CAP reform: Becky Shaw and Sarah Allen | 21 |
| Housing: John Tool, Maggie Fyffe and Wilma Robertson | 22 |
| Supporting young people’s involvement: Allan Wilson | 24 |
| Working together: John Watt | 25 |
| Organising for change: Camille Dressler | 27 |
| Developing fishing and wildlife tourism   | |
| Angling: Cathel MacLeod, Iain MacLeod, Calum Millar and Mark Mackenzie | 29 |
| Wildlife tourism: Peter Cairns | 30 |
| Forestry                                 | |
| Crofter forestry in Assynt: Bill Ritchie and David MacPhail | 31 |
| Culag Community Woodland Trust: Claire Belshaw and Robin Noble | 31 |
| Forestry and Rural Development Scheme: Chris Perkins | 32 |
| Renewable Energy                        | |
| Assyt Hydro Scheme: John MacKenzie | 33 |
| Options for communities: Iain MacIver and John Priddy | 34 |
| Building on cultural resources: Norman MacLeod and Iain MacDonald | 35 |
| Appendices                               | |
| Appendix One: Conference programme | 36 |
| Appendix Two: Field trips and workshops | 37 |
| Appendix Three: Participants | 37 |
Towards an agenda for the next 10 years

Key themes and issues from the conference

• There is a growing movement in community landownership. The achievements are impressive (particularly those of the last ten years), but represent only a few steps on a long road. It is important to keep up the momentum: as they move forward, new buy-outs inspire, encourage and support aspiring communities.

• The political context, new legislation, reforms (proposed and in progress) and the support available to communities (from agencies and other organisations) indicate that the tide is in communities’ favour.

• Individual communities must seize opportunities, but there is a need for a strategic approach and an awareness of the full variety of the different forms of community landownership.

• Release of government-owned land would be a means of recreating communities in emptied areas and of helping existing community landowners to ease shortages of land for housing and new crofts.

• It is a huge privilege and opportunity to have control of the land, and to take responsibility for sustainable social, environmental and economic development. However, self-reliance is not an easy option.

• Communities can achieve much through partnerships, particularly if they approach these flexibly, ready to assume whatever role is the most appropriate in their circumstances.

• Nearly all existing community landowners currently depend on large amounts of voluntary effort in running their affairs, accessing funding and taking forward projects.

• In recent years community landowners have had access through the Community Land Unit (CLU) and the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) to a wide range of support not available in the past to either the Stornoway Trust, in the distant past or the Melness Crofters Ltd or the Assynt Crofters’ Trust in the last decade.

• The activities of Melness Crofters Ltd and Assynt Crofters’ Trust show clearly that action by crofting community ownership groups achieves positive economic, social and environmental impacts for the wider community as well as for...
crofting members. In these two cases in which all the land is in crofting tenure, the motivation is to facilitate better economic returns for the crofting tenants but the activities pursued to achieve this benefit the whole community.

- Communities must look after their members and encourage their participation by being inclusive, open, democratic, accountable and engaging (by communicating, consulting and listening); and by providing opportunities for them to receive training in a wide range of project development and other skills.

- Communities' long-term welfare and viability depends on the active participation and involvement of their young people. Several communities are already benefiting from the work of their young people.

- Many existing and aspiring community landowners see the return of local people who left after schooling as an important factor in securing their long-term viability.

- They see the availability of affordable housing as a crucial factor in encouraging potential returners and as a very important measure of success in meeting community needs.

- Virtually all community landowners are confronted by a serious shortage of affordable housing and of the resources needed to provide it.

- Imagination and readiness to innovate may be as important as finance in devising and developing projects which can generate income and support livelihoods. Communities should not underestimate the potential economic benefits of projects based on the sustainable development of cultural and natural resources.

- There are many benefits for individual communities in networking, which should be encouraged in ways which meet local needs and which can be greatly facilitated by electronic means.

- It was important to agree key issues and action points (see page 6)
Issues and action points

At the closing session of the conference participants identified what they considered to be the most important issues and action points for the next ten years:

Issues

Housing: Community landowners need to be able to ensure the availability of good, inexpensive housing for their young people and for those they hope will come back.

Mutual learning: Community landowners can benefit greatly from sharing information and experience. There is a need to develop effective ways of maximising the benefits. The conference was a timely event and a stimulus to the networks that are beginning to develop. There is a need for regular conferences at different venues at which people can explore the commonalities. From this process bigger, stronger and more powerful networks can grow.

Sustaining the momentum: Many communities rely on substantial contributions of time, energy and ideas from volunteers for sustaining momentum. They need to be able to access training and other forms of skills development. They need to explore ways of reducing the pressure on volunteers in innovative ways, such as paying honoraria out of core funding, arranging secondment from private companies and drawing on the experience of other sectors of the social economy.

Actions

Land: Action to bring about the release of land for community needs, especially for new housing and new crofts. There are huge opportunities for the release of land - 12 per cent of rural land in the Highlands and Islands is in public ownership. The framework exists to make this possible though the procedures may be complex.

Involving young people: Action to encourage young people to take on important roles in project planning and strategic planning for the future. There may be practical problems to overcome. Young people under the age of 18 cannot serve as directors of a company limited by guarantee, but it may be possible to co-opt them as directors.

Core funding: Action to ensure that core funding is made available for the training and skills development necessary for community landowners to prosper in the long term. The groups also need to be able to pay contractors and/or staff to carry out basic project work. Without this volunteers burn out and new volunteers are discouraged from participating.

In innovative ways, such as paying honoraria out of core funding, arranging secondment from private companies and drawing on the experience of other sectors of the social economy.

At the closing session of the conference participants identified what they considered to be the most important issues and action points for the next ten years:
Welcome and introduction

Kenny Mackenzie, Chairman, Assynt Crofters’ Trust, welcomed everyone to the conference, particularly those representing other community land buy-outs. He said that they were all part of a movement that started long ago and they had a responsibility to keep it going. The purpose of the Fling in the Fank was to look forward and form a clear vision for the next 10 years and he hoped there would be cross-fertilisation and positive discussion - but it was important not to lose touch with the past.

In his view, the aim of community landownership was to attempt to redress the wrongs of the past by switching on some of the lights that had gone out. The Assynt Crofters’ Trust had been working on several fronts: forestry, housing, hydro-electric power, deer management, fishing. It had been a slow business but the Trust still existed and was still positive.

The last 10 years and the next 10 years

Laura MacLean, ACT under 30s

During the early 20th century things were far from easy for the people of Assynt. The young people left to find work, generation after generation. In a book published in 1955, Frank Fraser Darling called our home ‘the disintegrating parish of Assynt’.

It has taken hard work and strong beliefs to begin to recover from those times. The creation of the Assynt Crofters’ Trust, through the hard work and determination of the communities of North Assynt, was a big step forward in 1992. Everyone here took that step to try to create a better future for all.

The Assynt Crofters’ Trust has now owned this land for a full 10 years. There have been ups – not least that of ‘winning the land’ on 8th December 1992 – and there have been downs. Above all there has been courage and commitment in tackling the task of running the land on behalf of the community. It has been a hard and daunting task. It is impossible to sum up all that has been learned along the way. Today there are some 50 island or Highland communities that have taken their land into community ownership. In 2001 it was estimated that about 26,000 people owned 300,000 acres of land in the Highlands and Islands. But those 300,000 acres amount to only three per cent of Highland and Islands land. Clearly there is still a long road to travel.

Nevertheless advice, support and funding are now much more easily available from a range of sources than they were just ten years ago. Several Assynt crofters have been instrumental in providing or creating these new types of resources for community groups embarking upon a buy-out. Taking part in this sort of work has been a great honour for all those involved.

Assynt Crofters’ Trust aims to celebrate the 10th anniversary with many of the people who helped them achieve landownership. Our main focus has been to provide the opportunity for people from across the Highlands and Islands to come together to share experiences and discuss the key issues of the day. In that way all participants will be able to learn from each other and highlight the things that matter most to the community of Assynt and to other communities like Assynt.
Community land ownership: sharing the experience

Embarking on a buy-out

David Cameron began his presentation by thanking ACT for helping the North Harris Steering Group in the early days. In describing the North Harris experience he did not wish to be thought prescriptive, for every community buy-out was different.

750 people live on the 55,000 acres of the North Harris Estate, half of them in Tarbert, half on crofts. The estate had been owned by a succession of landlords who were interested in the castle, the fishing and the shooting, but to whom the potential of the rest of the estate meant nothing. Because most people were quite comfortable with the landowners, the idea of buying all or part of the land was the last thing in people’s minds. However, in late April 2002, Alasdair Morrison MSP called a meeting under the auspices of the Scottish Crofting Foundation, and a Steering Group was formed.

The Steering Group called a meeting to confirm that it had a mandate from the community to explore the possibility of a buy-out, and then asked other people to contribute to its work, to give it more balance. It also wrote to every household, recommending that if the buy-out was successful a group should be elected to explore all the options. It proposed that the elected group would have nine members, each representing a geographical area and about 60 people. Five members would represent crofting areas, and four the town of Tarbert – an acknowledgement that the crofters, though numerically outnumbered, controlled much of the land, and that Tarbert should not dominate. Thus the group which was eventually elected was of an appropriate size and structure, and had legitimacy and credibility, being open, transparent, accessible and engaging.

David Cameron, North Harris Trust

The Steering Group drew up a tight remit for the feasibility study and took trouble over the choice of someone to carry it out. It asked eight consultants to say how they would approach the task, and then invited three to elaborate on their ideas, before choosing Graeme Scott with whom they were to develop a good working relationship.

During the consultation period that followed, it was established that four criteria would have to be met:

- The financial contribution required from the community had to be realistic.
- The land had to be viable.
- Expertise had to be available locally or readily obtainable from elsewhere.
- There had to be a minimum of risk in the whole operation.

The group received Graeme Scott’s draft feasibility study with little time to spare. At the public meeting at which it was discussed one individual who had been a vociferous opponent of the buy-out announced that he had changed his mind. For the first time the group felt there was a chance of a positive outcome to a ballot on whether to purchase or not. Within 24 hours they contacted every household by letter, urging a ‘yes’ vote. In the postal ballot that followed, 75 per cent of those entitled to vote did so, with 75 per cent voting in favour of a buy-out. There had been a lot of listening to reasoned argument, and in the end the Steering Group received very strong support indeed.

The bid excluded parts of the estate the community was not interested in, as the
Steering Group had accepted that it would be necessary to divide the estate to safeguard the community's investment for future generations. However the bid was declared 'not acceptable' - later amended during a meeting in Edinburgh to 'not acceptable in its current form'. When in February 2003, after several more steps in the bidding process, a joint offer was eventually accepted, the community was the first to know - a tribute to the many who had helped.

Participants in a follow-up workshop identified the following key factors in the success of the bid:

- It might well have needed someone to give an initial push as Alasdair Morrison had, but the community had also needed openness and time to form a view: the idea of change could be unsettling.
- The process of consultation with the community was as inclusive as possible. The Steering Group made a point of involving young people, and also of inviting to their meetings women as well as men, and individuals opposed to the idea of a buy-out. There was an emphasis in the consultation on providing opportunities for young people to come back.
- The group controlled information and managed the media. They did not tell the press about public meetings, but briefed later. They kept out of the press reports of negotiations with the selling agents as these could have given rivals an advantage.

Business planning

John MacKenzie quoted a passage from the introduction to the Business Plan prepared for ACT by Steve Westbrook and Graeme Scott in August 1992:

"The economic principle for purchasing the land is to ensure that the income and wealth, which it is capable of generating, stays within the local community. Much of the potential benefits will only be realised in the long term, however, and the crofters are as much interested in providing the next generation with a sounder base, as in improving their current economic welfare."

The economic and social benefits were classified in the report as follows:

- Psychological benefits (in terms of self-confidence, etc) to the crofters and their families from being in control of their own destiny, rather than being constrained by the policies, attitudes and whims of external landlords.
- Population retention or growth (with the associated stimulus to local services).
- More control over community development, especially through the types of housing developed, through the leasing policy for any housing for rent and through exerting influence on the Crofters Commission to deal with the problem of absentee crofters.
- New job opportunities, generally of a part-time nature and thus compatible with crofting activities.
- Improved estate management in terms of farming practices, natural woodland regeneration, deer population control, enhancement of sporting value, attraction of tourists and other visitors, wildlife and botanical conservation and enhancement.
- Opportunities to generate a surplus for re-investment in the estate.
- Improved potential for co-operation between resident crofters in undertaking development programmes, agreeing
conservation measures, providing social and residential facilities in townships, etc.
• Removal of constraints which landlords have imposed on the development by local people of shops or other small-scale service businesses.

John MacKenzie concluded by saying that as a result of developments in housing, forestry, fishing, and renewable energy most of the objectives set out in the ACT Business Plan have been achieved, to a greater or lesser extent, during their first 10 year period. (For more details, see Involvement of the Young People of Assynt (page 11) and the sections on Housing (page 22), Fishing and Wildlife Tourism (page 29), Forestry (page 31) and Renewable Energy (page 33).

Looking to the future

Maggie Fyffe reviewed the benefits that the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust (IEHT) has achieved in the past six years. She hoped further progress would be built on these.

IEHT has set up three subsidiary companies (Eigg Trading Ltd, Eigg Tearoom Ltd, Eigg Construction Ltd). These companies have responsibility for the day-to-day management of island businesses but they work closely with the Trust board on strategic issues and on matters with large financial implications.

The three businesses have created multiple benefits - employment for local people, better social and economic opportunities, and improvements to the island’s infrastructure. The Trust has also embarked on major projects, having accessed essential financial assistance. It has renovated four of its properties in a rolling programme of repairs, undertaken by Eigg Construction Ltd, which will take several years to complete. It also has a five-year woodland management programme including regeneration and the reinstatement of a bog which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In advancing these projects it has invested in machinery and training.

In the last financial year the Trust and its subsidiaries had a joint turnover of about £360,000 of which nearly £90,000 was paid out in wages, a significant achievement considering none of the jobs had existed five years before.

By its nature the Trust is a partnership, ready to form larger partnerships with organisations that can provide relevant skills and experience. Through this approach the Trust has been very successful in accessing funding for projects.

The Trust is also committed to improving the infrastructure of the island. It has set up two micro-hydro projects and has initiated an island-wide energy feasibility study, which includes surveys of needs and aspirations and identification of possible sites. The Trust hopes to create several new crofts, and is making low-cost building plots available.

Maggie Fyffe, Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust
Laura: The members of the group became involved in Assynt Crofters’ Trust activities through the previous year’s consultation process. Through their voluntary work they all learnt a lot about organising and running events, project funding and grants, marketing and a range of other topics very relevant for their working lives and for voluntary work on behalf of the community.

Sarah: Last winter there was a workshop for 16 – 30 year olds to discuss what was good and what was bad about living in Assynt and what they would like to see done. The group agreed that Assynt was a great place, but had concerns which focused on:

- The lack of affordable housing for rent and affordable house sites for self-build.
- The main work opportunities being focused on the sea (work as a deckie or in fish farming) or tourism.
- The lack of public transport which tended to cut young people off from each other.
- The very few young people in North Assynt.
- The lack of social events for the younger age group.

The young people’s ideas for action included:

- A music festival (now taking place).
- Active management and promotion of fishing while “keeping it wild and untouched”.
- Development of more tourism activities to make the most of the very fine coast, beaches and hill ground – for example, water sports, orienteering, triathlon and bird watching.
- Building bunkhouses with good facilities linked to such activities.
- Maintaining good access to the beaches.
- Improving and extending the community taxi service for younger people and elderly people so that they can get out more easily at weekends and in the evening.
- Organising a study trip to Ireland to see how they run tourism there.
Wider community consultation showed that what the majority of people liked most about North Assynt was:

- The scenery, landscape and open spaces.
- Being part of a community.
- The freedom – the peace and quiet.

The things the majority of people most disliked were:

- The long distance to leisure facilities.
- The land being taken over by bracken and rushes.
- Problems in accessing housing and employment.

The three most popular aspirations for the future were:

- Achieving co-operation, vision and direction.
- Implementing development ideas.
- Creating a community where young people want to stay or return.

Laura: Other development ideas put forward as a result of the consultation last winter included:

- Continued action on housing issues.
- Trying to improve transport for young people and elderly people.
- A focus on developments which create even short-term local work.
- Development of children’s play parks at Clachtoll and Drumbeg.
- Continued efforts with woodlands and forestry to maintain the local economy and environment.
- Imaginative support for tourism.

- Creation of a decent Assynt Crofters’ Trust Office at the heart of the community – then using this building to improve access to other facilities, including a shop and better community halls.

The most popular topic proved to be ‘Agriculture and Horticulture’. Ideas included:

- Marketing of local produce.
- Access to machinery and equipment through machinery groups and rings.
- Access to cheaper feed and other supplies through a local feed co-op.
- Trying to stop the rapid advance of bracken and rushes across the croft lands.
- Trying to repair dykes and peat roads.
- Organising information about grant options and other kinds of support.

These ideas were now under discussion by the Assynt Crofters’ Trust Board of Directors who aimed to produce a Whole Estate Plan in the coming months.

David: In the past ten years ACT has done much to create work and other benefits. With the support of the Trust, the townships of North Assynt have planted 800 hectares of native woodlands through crofter forestry schemes. That planting has created some £193,000 of contract work in the parish of Assynt, which is the equivalent of three or four full-time jobs during the past seven years. Much of this work was taken up by younger people who also worked on similar forestry schemes across the county and beyond. In an effort to make the most of local resources, the Trust has developed a hydro-electric project with commercial partners (for further details, see Renewable Energy, page 33). The Trust has also put in a lot of work to try to tackle the housing problem and this year four Housing Association properties are being built in Stoer township.

During the past ten years there have been 13 new entrants (under 45 years old) to crofting in seven North Assynt townships. Since over 35 per cent of our North Assynt communities are over retirement age this has an important impact.
An area of Trust work which depends on very significant voluntary effort is the administration. This is unglamorous, demanding and time-consuming, whether it involves croft administration or secretarial chores. The Trust relies on an average of 48,000 voluntary hours per year to maintain its activities.

Calum: A key area of Trust activity has been the development of the brown trout fishing. This is a main source of income which helps to maintain a long-term part-time job – that of the Cuidiche. Assynt’s brown trout fishing is a very precious asset with a great deal of potential. The Trust wants to manage it well but at the same time keep it ‘wild and untouched’.

The Trust’s activities in developing the fishing have been varied – stocking the Manse system, building traps, tagging smolts, buying eight new boats, creating a brochure and selling permits. All of these activities depend on a huge amount of voluntary effort. During the season Calum works on a self-employed basis, teaching fly-fishing and taking people fishing and stalking.

The fishing and stalking are very important for local tourism. Tourism provides direct employment or income for over 20 per cent of local households and an even greater number when the positive impact for local shops and other services is taken into account. Through ACT activities over one thousand new ‘bednights’ have been created in the parish before the conference.

The Long Haul

ACT and IEHT have been in existence for relatively short periods, compared to the Stornoway Trust (ST), which is now almost 80 years old. Kenny Maciver, a trustee for the last 17 years, reviewed what he called the Long Haul – the continual effort required to ensure the long-term survival of the Trust.

The reality of survival is the need to maintain the Trust’s lands by generating a surplus from the sale of some product or the charging of rents. It is a privilege to be entrusted with the administration of the land, but it is no easy ride. I wish I could say that it got easier but that would not be true. The Trust has to depend on its own efforts for there is no one else to bail it out.

The Trust has existed since 1924. In that year Stornoway Town Council responded positively when Lord Leverhulme offered the island of Lewis to its people - although the greatest part of the island wanted nothing to do with landownership. The Trust’s land, the old parish of Stornoway, extends to over 28,000 hectares. It comprises 40 crofting townships and includes 1339 crofts with associated common pasture held in crofting tenure; 279 small allotments held by individuals on annual tenancies; some agricultural land leased to various tenants; other tracts held on seasonal tenancies; residential and commercial sites; the 600 acre woodland park known as the Lews Castle Policies; and also some fishings and shootings leased to local groups. Around 14,000 people (two-thirds of the population of Lewis and Harris) lives in the Trust area. In the 100 years to 1985, the rents have remained unchanged, averaging £1.50. Currently the average rent is in the region of £10.

The trust is a democratic organisation. However this has not always been the case. Until local government reorganisation in 1974 only five of the ten trustees were directly elected (but only by those whose names appeared on the valuation roll). The other five were nominated by the Stornoway Town Council. Since 1994 however everyone whose name appears on the electoral roll has been entitled to vote
at elections held every three years. At each election half the trustees stand down but are eligible for re-election.

Unfortunately there is no great public interest in the work of the Trust unless people feel that their interests are threatened. Then they realise the value of having a landlord they know, whom they can approach and whom they could replace if necessary.

The Trust makes land available at nominal charges for public housing, public utilities and community ventures, and in encouraging new younger crofters has allowed tenants to keep their houses and gardens, before this right was enshrined in law. A continuous income stream from rock quarrying, which started in the 1940s, has been vital for the Trust's survival.

The Trust has tried to attract industry and encourage employment, providing up to 50 per cent subsidies for community projects for the long-term unemployed in the 1970s and 1980s. It has always looked for opportunities to attract long-term investment and seek finance for projects likely to result in enhanced facilities and job opportunities. Examples include a £1 million grant from the Millennium Commission for the Lewis Castle Policies, which helped to provide new planting, a new sawmill, an interpretation centre and new jobs. The most spectacular has been the Arnish Fabrication Yard, which provided a steady rental income for a long period until its closure, which brought financial difficulties. The Trust went to court to safeguard the fixed assets of the yard, and worked in partnership with local and national agencies to bring about its re-opening and the creation of new jobs for local people.

The Trust is currently in negotiations with several agencies, both public and private, about a huge wind farm project, which could transform the Trust's financial outlook. It is well aware of how little it can do on its own and of the need, when working in partnership with other agencies, to play the most appropriate role, which is sometimes that of facilitator. The trustees are always conscious that they have been elected, that the whole community are their shareholders and that their first duty is to advise on many mundane but important issues such as boundary disputes and transfers of tenancies that can be so time-consuming. They are conscious of the privilege of owning their land and have been very aware of the responsibility, especially at periods during the long haul when there seemed no light at the end of the tunnel. However they believe in the importance of community landownership and in managing their own affairs to the best of their abilities.
Community landownership: the wider context

The political context

John Watt, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)

Support for community landownership operates in a context in which government policy favours an emphasis on community involvement and partnership (working together) in the delivery of the social inclusion and sustainable development agendas. It does so at a time of significant restructuring in British society with a move away from the old-fashioned welfare state and top-down, state-driven development through the direct intervention of public sector agencies to community involvement and a role for civil society and the social economy.

Partnership is very much in vogue. There are public-private partnerships and community-led partnerships. There is also ‘Community Planning’, which has been given a high prominence and is still evolving. However, it is neither led by communities, nor has to do with what we normally mean by planning. It is about the strategic alignment of agencies to deliver public services more effectively, with community involvement in the process.

Community land ownership is real community planning at the local level: it is community led with agency support. Increasingly community landowners have aspirations to move into new areas: community-owned commercial renewable energy; community ownership of the marine resource, both of the portion of the sea-bed owned by the Crown Estate and of fish quotas; and most recently, community broadband.

Strategic action on landownership

Bill Ritchie, Assynt Crofters’ Trust

Many countries are engaged in land reform - righting the injustices of the past through the redistribution of land. In these countries land reform is about putting lights back on in the emptied glens – as it should be in Scotland. It is what the people of the Highlands and Islands wanted 200 years ago, what the Clashmore crofters wanted 115 years ago, and what people today should be demanding from land reform. However it is not clear whether the government agrees.

When the Land Reform Bill was introduced in Parliament the government stated clearly that the bill was not about redistributing land, a view endorsed recently by the First Minister when he spoke in Stoer about “enabling existing communities to be ambitious and to take responsibility for their own lives”.

These objectives are very laudable, and many community land-owning groups, including ACT, have demonstrated what can be done once local people own the land. But will they lead to lights being switched back on in the emptied glens?

In 10 short years 31 new community trusts have been created in the Highlands and Islands, with about 11,000 members managing around 250,000 acres - about 2.5 per cent of the land. The Scottish Land Fund
has helped over 100 community groups with an amazing range of initiatives, large and small. But these all focus on existing communities and on their economic and amenity welfare. There is only one exception – Fearnaig Community Trust, which plans to create nine new small holdings on 110 acres.

The Land Reform Act was designed to facilitate such action by existing communities. What it did not do was address the situation where the glen has been emptied and remains empty. It is highly unlikely that there will be a major overhaul of the Act in the foreseeable future, so people need to be very creative and strategic about the use of the power they have.

Consider the following “wee idea”, based on two facts: the government owns 1.7 million acres of land, most forested and many of them in emptied glens; and it is proposing to make it possible to create new crofts and new crofting communities. If people could persuade the government to turn 10 per cent of its forest land into woodland crofts and then use the Land Reform Act creatively to turn these into community trusts, they could put a thousand new lights on in the glens. That would be a big step forward on the long road of land reform. The government has the resources and the power to make it happen, but does it have the political will? It would be exciting if people could agree to act jointly to persuade the government to take that step. Then they could tackle the privately-owned empty glens.

Current Legislation

Allan Wilson, Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development

A llen Wilson congratulated the Assynt Crofters’ Trust on the 10th anniversary of its acquisition of the North Assynt Estate. It had made the first big step in community ownership, which required skill, planning, commitment and determination; and many other communities had already learned from its experience.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act is very important for future generations of communities throughout rural Scotland. It gives them an opportunity to ensure their communities remain sustainable and to enjoy the benefits of community ownership if that is what they are determined to achieve.

The Scottish Executive is currently consulting on the draft order supporting the community right to buy.* The consultation highlights the new proposal that communities with populations of up to 10,000 will have the community right to buy. If the proposal is accepted, another 117 settlements would be able to exercise the right to buy in addition to those already qualifying under the original threshold of 3,000. Over 600,000 people in Scotland will potentially be able to benefit.

Some communities may prefer to negotiate with landowners rather than register their interest and then wait for land to come on the market.

The Crofting Community Right to Buy

The crofting community right to buy introduces a strategic change in the relationship between crofting communities and the land, and gives them rights of purchase which they may exercise as they choose. These rights recognise their contribution and commitment to their land.

The aim of the proposed legislation is not to seek vengeance for past wrongs, as some have alleged, but to make it possible for crofting communities increasingly to be in charge of their own development and future, for which the control and use of land is

*The section of the Act dealing with the community right to buy came into force on 14 June 2004. Under it all communities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants qualify for the community right to buy.
fundamental. Assynt has been successful without such legislation, but other crofting communities now have legal rights to buy land.

The legislation is complex, as it must preserve the freedom and rights of individuals as well as communities. Exercising the right to buy is a serious undertaking for crofting communities. However, it is clear that the very existence of the legislation is important in bringing about change, for crofting communities are in a much stronger position in negotiating with their landlords, as discussions in the Uists have already illustrated.

Revised Crofting Legislation
The Executive has taken on board many of the comments on the White Paper. The main proposals are:

- To make it possible for crofts and common grazings to be put to wider income-generating uses than the Crofters Act currently allows.
- To remove the veto which a landlord currently has over crofter forestry.
- To enable the creation of new crofts to meet local needs.
- To counter the dereliction of croft land.
- To allow resumed or decrofted land to return to crofting.
- To simplify procedures and cut through red tape.
- To provide a right of appeal against decisions of the Crofters Commission.
- To ease the development of wind farms and other energy generation on croft land.

Discussion
In an earlier presentation, John MacKenzie, ACT, had taken issue on two points, firstly the motivation for land reform: “For the Assynt crofters the aspiration to be free for evermore from the dictates of an autocratic absentee landlord was at least as important a motivation as accessing the potential for economic development”.

He went on to state that the crofting community right to buy section of the Land Reform Act failed to consider communities in which nearly all the land was in crofting tenure. He opposed the requirement that a majority of all adult residents in crofting communities, and not just a majority of crofters, must vote in favour of a buy-out. He stated that many in crofting communities welcomed in principle the long overdue legislation but were outraged by the abandonment by the legislators of the original pattern created in Assynt. North Assynt Estate was bought for the crofters by the crofters of Assynt and their supporters. However, other groups of crofters would not be able to make similar purchases under the provisions of the new legislation and the rules governing support by the Scottish Land Fund.

Andy Wightman welcomed the extension of the community right to buy to larger communities. However, despite the fact that only six of the additional 117 communities were in the Highlands, the announcement helped to perpetuate the myth that land reform was exclusively for the Highlands and Islands. In reply Allan Wilson said that he shared the aspirations of those who wished to see land reform extended to urban and suburban communities. However the Land Reform Act was not a mechanism for extending reform to urban areas and there was a need for other mechanisms.

Bill Ritchie asked whether the Scottish Executive was considering releasing some of the 1.7 million acres of land it owned for community ownership. Allan Wilson replied in the affirmative: the Executive was considering how to take forward policy on dispersals of Forestry Commission land.
Participants in a workshop on the crofting community right to buy reiterated John MacKenzie’s reservations about the requirement that a majority within a crofting community must vote in favour of a buy-out in a ballot (which must also demonstrate a majority of crofters in favour). Assynt Crofters’ Trust would not fall within the definition of a “crofting community body” in terms of the Act.

It was pointed out, however, that the requirement was in line with the Scottish Executive’s policy on social inclusion. It was suggested that Assynt Crofters’ Trust would have been able to work within the constraints of the definition to achieve the same result. The “body” would be a company limited by guarantee consisting of 20 or more individuals, of whom more than half must be crofters, of voting age and living within 16 kilometres of the croft (not absentees).

Other points raised

Participants in the workshop also discussed other aspects of the crofting community right to buy legislation, which applied to eligible croft land including common grazings, mineral and salmon rights, and included limited rights to acquire additional land.

Details of the procedure for making an application for a crofting community buy-out were set out in the Act.* Certain criteria had to be met. The community could force a sale, but this involved finding out all the details of the estate without the co-operation of the owner, so negotiation was advised. It was suggested that the Scottish Executive included this provision to encourage negotiation.

In order to complete the purchase, the crofting community body had to prepare all the legal work and retrieve the necessary details from the owner. If this could not be done by negotiation then it was possible to force the owner to hand over the required details under section 86 of the Act. The crofting body would have six months from the date of the valuation to prepare all the legal documents for the sale.

The valuation was assessed in terms of the market value of the land, which could be increased by the potential for windfarms. This was a point of contention and it was suggested that an owner could take advantage of this factor. The value might also be affected by the interest that such use of the land would create.

A crofter’s right to buy his or her croft would be suspended from the time when the Minister consented to the application until the sale was concluded. The right to apportionment would not be affected, but this issue was legally complex. However, the Act would not affect the continuing right to purchase by negotiation.

There was discussion about owners attempting to circumvent the crofting community right to buy, for example by leasing, attempting to resume land, or withholding a “ransom strip”. However, an owner must have “reasonable purpose” to resume land from crofting tenure. It was accepted that the Crofting Reform Bill would remedy any problems that arose in this area. There was also mention of the Transfer of Crofting Estates Act, which facilitates the sale of estates owned by the Scottish Ministers to crofting communities. In many cases, such sales would previously have been prevented by terms and conditions attached to these properties when they were first acquired.

* For guidance on buy-out applications go to www.scotland.gov.uk
Discussion on the community right to buy

In a workshop on the community right to buy, discussion touched on a number of issues. It was initially thought that there would be five registrations a year. Now with the upsurge in community land purchase and the increase in population threshold from 3,000 to 10,000, the number of applications could be considerably higher. It was impossible to predict.

The group asked whether an urban community could register an interest in “rural” land, if they were able to demonstrate a “connection” to that land. It was confirmed that members of an urban community could be members of a rural community’s community body, as long as rural members formed the majority. However, the Act required the community body to represent a rural community and members of urban communities could not therefore be included as part of the rural community or register an interest as an urban community body.

There was also discussion on the potential of tactical registration of land from an anti-development viewpoint rather than pro-development (e.g. protecting green belt). One question raised was tactical registration of all land around a township. Scottish Ministers would need to be satisfied that the legislation was not being used to blight development, particularly on land identified for development in local plans. A separate planning process already existed, which is used to determine whether such development is in the public interest.

One key challenge for communities was to generate their own electricity and encourage the cheap economic location of business.

The workshop ended with confirmation that registration itself was free, but all other costs such as setting up a company would have to be raised by the community.

Sustainable development

The objective of land reform was to remove the land-based obstacles to sustainable development, according to the Land Reform Policy Group. Participants in a workshop on sustainable development identified key elements of a sustainable community as: people, community confidence, good communication, good quality of life, community inclusion, voluntary contributions, partnership working, better local housing provision, better public facilities, a secure and stable economy, effectively managed resources and adequate employment.

The workshop explored what implementing sustainable development meant at a community level and how to assess the impact of individual projects in achieving sustainability. Network 21’s Sustainability Checklist was used as a tool to look at some case studies and most participants found it useful as it provides a framework asking sensible and practical questions. There was some concern that some agencies might choose to use the checklist in an inflexible way, thus reducing its usefulness as a guide to communities. The Community Land Unit was cited as an example of an agency that managed to meet the needs of the community at a local level.

It was also suggested that people should think of crofting communities in a more inclusive way, encompassing all those involved in crofting activities and acknowledging the contributions of all family members, not just single representatives from each croft.
Challenges and opportunities

Crofting in the 21st century

David Green reviewed some of the huge changes which had taken place in crofting in recent times.

Just over ten years ago, Achiltibuie was still suffering from many of the obstacles to full agricultural production identified in the Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Crofting Conditions (the Taylor Report) published in 1954: absentee tenants, aged tenants, tenants absorbed in other occupations, lack of capital, limitations on individuals’ initiatives, marketing, transport facilities and costs. The reasons Taylor gave for people leaving crofting still applied too: hardship and lack of amenity; no work for young men; young women no longer satisfied with their traditional role in crofting; a restricted life with few exciting prospects and not much hope of marriage.

Now there is a new school in Ullapool, a new community hall in Achiltibuie, a new fire depot, a new £1.4 million water treatment plant, a new path up Stac Pollaidh, a majority of crofters involved in tourism, a pilot Broadband connection for crofters and a much better social infrastructure – all bringing better amenity and job opportunities and offering much more to entice young folk to consider coming back.

There have been changes at the Crofters Commission too. Just over ten years ago it was a mainly regulatory body, totally under the wing of the Department of Agriculture. Today the Commission is modernising, becoming more open and accountable, and streamlining some of the regulations. It now meets in public in different venues in the Highlands and Islands.

In Badenoch and Strathspey, Archie MacNab has been working with the Cairngorm Crofting Group to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to crofting needs and opportunities in the new National Park in which there are over 100 crofts. In partnership with the park authority, he is carrying out a baseline study of crofting activity and how it could be developed in line with the aims of the Park. In Sutherland John Toal has been working with the North West Cattle Producers Association to reverse the decline in cattle production, the Commission contributing over £2,000 to a study of the options for supporting cattle production. On Islay, Colonsay and Jura work is being done on creating new crofts or making better use of existing ones.

The future for both the Commission and crofting communities is bright and challenging. What ACT has done has been an inspiration to all. The new Crofting Act will mean a new Commission with its own
budget and staff and a clearer focus on crofting. It will have more freedom to move forward with a broader sustainable development remit. The Land Reform Act creates new opportunities for sustainable economic development, e.g. through use of mineral rights and salmon fishing. There are other opportunities through the Community Land Unit, The Crofting Communities Development Programme and the review of the Crofting Buildings Loans and Grants Scheme - and it may be possible to do more with croft land to provide affordable housing.

Agriculture will continue to be the anchor, with an emphasis on quality produce and local marketing. There are opportunities in developing public access, and securing environmental benefits, perhaps through land management contracts as part of wider, more crofter-friendly agri-environmental schemes, which currently less than 5 per cent of crofters can access.

There are four major challenges ahead:
- To develop more grass-roots initiatives.
- To encourage creative and innovative approaches to land management.
- To help ensure sustainable populations in crofting areas.
- To work in partnership to help secure economic opportunities and incomes for crofting people and their communities.

Increasingly, people see crofting as a model for sustainable rural development and a valuable mechanism for retaining population in fragile rural areas, a view supported by recent research. I am confident that crofting will continue to change in ways that will benefit those two great resources – our land and its people.

Surviving Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform

Becky Shaw and Sarah Allen reviewed current CAP support and outlined proposed reforms.

Scotland currently receives £450 million in CAP subsidies per annum. 80 per cent of the total (Pillar 1) goes on production subsidies e.g. Suckler Cow Premium (SCP) and Slaughter Premium (SP). 20 per cent of the total - £88 million - subsidises rural development (Pillar 2), e.g. Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS), the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS). It has been claimed that the 20 per cent for rural development brings significant money into the Highlands and Islands.

The Proposed Reforms
The Council of Ministers are due to decide on the reforms soon after the conference in September 2003.

The main elements are likely to be:
- **Financial discipline**: European enlargement will spread existing payments more thinly.
- **Cross-compliance**: Payment of subsidy will depend on meeting certain criteria - relating to the environment, public and animal health, animal welfare.
- **EU modulation**: the transfer of a percentage of the funds in Pillar 1 to Pillar 2. The first £3,300 of subsidy under Pillar 1 schemes will not be modulated, so smaller-scale producers, including most crofters, will not lose money.
- **Decoupling of support**: current subsidies are linked to over-production. The reforms will allow producers to step off the treadmill of overstocking to keep up headage payments. There will be a shift to single income payments, based on 2000-2 payments. These will be linked
to the producer not to the land, the intention being that farmers and crofters will respond to market drivers. Payments will be conditional on farming to an agreed standard – the Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition. Producers entitled to a decoupled single income payment will be able to trade their entitlements. It is expected there will be big negative impacts on marginal areas. There will be a national reserve fund for new entrants.

• National envelope: Scotland will have the power to take 10 per cent of the Pillar 1 subsidy of sheep or cattle and put it into related schemes (e.g. marketing, supporting production in fragile areas). This measure is intended to mitigate the negative effects of decoupled support (£17 million will be available for a beef national envelope). The challenge is going to be to make sure a beef national envelope is targeted effectively.

There will be some flexibility. The Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) will be able to define the criteria for cross-compliance in Scotland, the Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition can be defined “locally”, and the degree of decoupling is negotiable.

Discussion
Participants felt that decoupling was likely to have a negative impact in the Highlands and Islands, but the national envelope should have a positive impact on crofting (but was not likely to be available for infrastructure). It would be important to develop local brands, as Orkney had done. The shift from subsidising production to support for wider rural development including social and environmental values meant there should be scope to argue for Pillar 2 money to be spent on communal action and township schemes. There was a need for the Scottish Crofting Foundation (SCF), the National Farmers Union of Scotland (NFUS), the Highland Council and others to formulate a Highlands and Islands position. The Highlands and Islands were well placed to receive continuing support, but would have to work hard to make a case for it.

Housing

There was ready agreement in the Housing workshop and on field visits (to see the new houses being built in Stoer in Assynt) that housing was a major issue for community landowners.

The availability of affordable housing is a key factor in encouraging young people to stay in their communities and in helping to persuade those who have left to return. Yet in many areas there is a shortage of affordable housing, particularly for young people and key workers. In the short term at least there is very little land both suitable for housing and available at prices which local people or housing associations can afford.

Community landowners may have a mix of housing on their land – private houses, croft houses, rented Housing Association houses, or community-owned properties let to sitting tenants. Some community landowners (e.g. Eigg and Gigha) have acquired a high proportion of properties in poor condition and in need of repairs or renovation.

Addressing the situation
Community landowners have addressed the situation in several ways:

• Renovating existing houses: The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust (IEHT) created its own construction company to carry out
renovations, and accessed public funding that covered 75 per cent of the cost of the work.

- **Acquiring land and building new houses:** Eigg crofters gave land on which Lochaber Housing Association (LHA) built five houses (with priority for the elderly). IEHT and LHA are trying to make plots available for £3,000 rather than at the market valuation of £15,000. In Assynt all but one of the 13 crofting townships have agreed in principle to identify land for housing. One site has been made available to Albyn Housing Association for £1,000. In Harris, where the only available land is croft land, the North Harris Trust approaches crofters about house sites on behalf of enquirers. On Islay help from agencies including the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) and the Community Land Unit (CLU) was crucial in acquiring 18 hectares, for housing, leisure facilities and crofting. CLU also helped the local housing association to buy two croft house sites. Six houses are to be built under a collective Rural Home Ownership Grant (RHOG) scheme in which the new owners will share planning and design costs. Melness Crofters Ltd have provided land for 13 new houses, including four for local people, and five for people with local connections. Six more houses are planned for young people wishing to return.

- **Housing surveys:** A housing survey on Eigg, carried out before IEHT was established, identified that most of the houses on the island were Below Tolerable Standard (BTS) and that many people lived in caravans. With the help of the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT), Assynt also carried out a survey to establish housing needs in their community.

- **Community planning:** IEHT also carried out a community consultation on where new houses should be built. As a result two areas were identified. The exercise gave community backing to planning applications and proposals to zone the land for housing.

- **New approaches in crofting communities:** There is a need to explore the possibilities of using croft land to provide land for housing for family members while retaining it in crofting tenure; and of taking land out of common grazings for housing for members of crofting communities.

**Difficulties encountered**

- There is a need for low-cost sites for private housing, which will also generate income for the community landowner. Local people, especially young people, cannot pay the prices asked for plots on the open market which only second homers and retired incomers can afford.

- Making croft land available for housing involves negotiations with townships and requires their co-operation.

- Even when land is made available, there can be long delays (up to two years in Assynt) before agreements are reached with the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and Scottish Water.

- There is a need to ensure that an affordable plot or house is not lost to the community if the owner tries to sell it on for profit. Eigg and LHA have a payback scheme. The policy of HSCHT is to have rights of pre-emption on plots and houses. In Assynt the new houses are housing association houses, to which the right to buy does not apply. (Only housing associations that are recognised Scottish charities have exemption from the right to buy.) A new Act, the Titles Conditions Scotland Act, (which comes into force in November 2004) will help with the imposition of conditions on the disposal of affordable housing.

- When the number of applicants exceeds the number of new houses for rent, issues arise about highest priority need and there can be conflicts over the competing claims of local people and incomers. Albyn has a Local Lettings Initiative that allows the community to decide on the categories of greatest housing need (e.g. young
married people, the elderly, key workers, etc) before it selects tenants from applicants in these categories.

Solutions
In conclusion, workshop members drew up a list of initiatives that would improve the housing situation:
• Using rights of pre-emption to protect affordable housing.
• Making more croft land available for housing with the co-operation of crofters.

Allan Wilson stated that as community land purchase was for the longer term, it was vital to include the views of the younger people within the community, as ACT had done. The people of Assynt had demonstrated, by holding workshops targeted at young people, that they were listening to the young people and had taken their views into account.

It is also vital that young people appreciate the important role they can play in ensuring the success of community purchases, and that they are given both support and opportunities to fulfil that role. They must be well informed about the issues on which they have to make personal choices, and must understand how to influence those who take the decisions that affected them.

One form of support is Young Scot. Young Scot one of the most comprehensive and advanced information services in Europe, which provides information in hard copy and electronic form for all young people as well as other benefits, such as:
• The Young Scot card, which entitles holders to discounts in thousands of shops in Scotland and across Europe.
• A free, confidential 24 hour Legal Advice line.
• An Action Fund to provide grants to help young people turn ideas into action.

Supporting young people's involvement

Allan Wilson, Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development

In the last two years, YoungScot.org, a national youth information portal, has provided:
• Over 2,000 pages of high quality, accurate information that is updated every day.
• 17 information channels covering topics ranging from benefits and volunteering to health, relationships and education.
• A national and local on-line news service
• Local information, produced by teams of young people who write up information on what is happening in their local area.
• UrSay Discussion Forums through which young people can take part in on-line national and local discussions, on an informed basis, about topics relevant to them.
• A postcode search facility to allow young people to search for local services in their area.
• Other features such as the Vote of the Day, entertainment and gossip.

The portal is part of the Dialogue Youth Project, a partnership between the Scottish Executive, Young Scot, COSLA, local authorities and their community planning partners, and young people themselves. It is a major national initiative funded by the Scottish Executive. Units are being established in all local authorities across Scotland. The project aims to:
• Promote cross-departmental and joint agency working.
• Provide a focal point for engaging with young people at a local and national level.
• Stimulate lifelong learning, youth mobility, community safety, healthy lifestyles and enterprise education.
• Promote citizenship and social inclusion by involving young people as full partners in the design and delivery of services and facilities.

No other country has such an advanced and comprehensive means of informing, educating, consulting and engaging with its young people.

Active democracy
Society needs its young people to engage in the democratic processes on which so much of its citizens’ lives depend. The building blocks of a structure for youth democracy are in place in Scotland e.g. local youth forums and youth councils in schools and wider communities and the Scottish Youth Parliament, which is the only youth-led youth parliament in the world.

The Scottish Executive has been discussing with the Scottish Youth Parliament the support it requires to strengthen and build on its record of success. It is important that it is able to engage fully in both rural and urban areas of the country and in all sectors of our communities.

The Scottish Executive is committed to supporting and enhancing all aspects of rural life in Scotland, and recognises that the involvement, energy and enthusiasm of young people are a crucial part of rural life, and integral to its success. Youth projects in Aviemore, Orkney and Lochinver have benefited from awards from the Scottish Rural Partnership Fund, an annual, competitive fund that offers grant aid to rural communities with innovative projects for tackling local problems or creating a wider range of opportunities. In 2003-4 awards totalled £2.8 million. One qualifying activity for the Rural Challenge Fund in 2004-05 is providing opportunities for young people.

Working together

John Watt, Highlands and Islands Enterprise

John Watt explained that support existed to help communities wishing to take land into community ownership to overcome obstacles and exploit opportunities.

In the three years of its existence (prior to the conference in August 2003) the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) has approved nearly 120 applications for assistance and over £9 million in grant assistance. It has provided technical assistance at a pre-acquisition stage in a third of all cases, but this accounts for only about 1 per cent of the fund. 10 per cent of the fund has been allocated to the purchase of buildings; 10 per cent to post-acquisition development; 10 per cent to development plots and amenity areas; and 70 per cent to large multi-sectoral land management projects, e.g. Knoydart, Gigha, Harris, Anagach, Bhaltos.

The Community Land Unit (CLU) works with community landowners on a range of varied projects with the aim of generating income from assets: for example, land management (including game management) in Knoydart and Harris; renewable energy in Knoydart, Eigg, Stornoway and possibly Pairc and the Uists; forestry in Abriachan, Anagach and Laggan; and housing – everywhere.

Tips for working together within communities include:
• Agree a shared vision and action plan (refresh this regularly).
• Be open and democratic in decision-making.
• Ensure boards are as representative as possible.
• Maintain discipline in governance (it is easy to slip into bad habits).
• Maintain good communication with the wider community and engage them
through newsletters, public meetings, AGMs, involving young people (as in Assynt), and encouraging attendance at board meetings.

- Engage and value members, both local and others.
- Manage conflict - by listening, persuading and using external assistance for conflict resolution.

- Record achievements and tell people about them – members, the community, the press.
- Engage and exploit agencies.

Engage with the Community Planning process.

Working together between communities

There is now a growing movement of community landowners and considerable accumulated experience. HIE has assisted groups to exchange experience. For example, Gigha talked to Eigg; Harris to Assynt, Bhalts and Knodart; Anagach to Abriachan. HIE had also funded get-togethers, e.g. as at this conference in Assynt, and on Eigg, and training sessions in Inverness and Abriachan. It also helped with the three volumes of case studies published by the Not-for-Profit Landowners Project Group. There needs to be more of this.

Some kind of formal working together is important. This will grow organically when:

- There is a critical mass of members.
- It is needed and people want it.
- Members have the capacity to contribute.
- There is a clear agreed purpose (e.g. lobbying, exchange of information and good practice, training, other services).
- It is not being provided elsewhere.
- It can be sustained without external subsidy.

Is electronic communication a solution?

In conclusion:

- There has been huge progress in the last ten years.
- Working together is fundamental to the process.
- Communities need to continue the move forward: e.g. Bill Ritchie’s ideas for newer and bigger communities on state-owned land.
- Communities must be clear about what they want and be ambitious.
- They must use all the resources made available by agencies. Communities should aim to drive the agencies, and not be driven by them.
- Communities should learn from each other – they are rich in experience.
In her presentation Camille Dressler argued that community landowners needed to form a network to help them meet the challenges of community landownership, sustain the momentum, and take advantage of the opportunities available at a time when there was growing support for the social economy. A network would allow communities to exchange information, skills and experience as well as support each other in encouraging active community involvement and understanding of community development and the social economy.

Background to the CLAN proposal
The idea of a networking organisation for community landownership initiatives emerged at the Eigg Community Forum on Land Reform in June 2000. The aim of the conference was to reach a consensus on what community groups really wanted out of land reform and to inform the policy makers. The following aims for the network were identified:

- To promote solidarity, and build mutual support between community land groups.
- To empower and build the capacity of communities which have responsibility for their land and their future.
- To help remove the land-based barriers to the sustainable development of rural communities.

The Community Land Action Group (CLAG), was formed on a voluntary basis, and set up in September 2000 a prototype website with an e-discussion group. Through feedback from its e-group, CLAG was able to take part in the last stages of the consultation process for the Land Reform Bill. A year later an accord for a Community Land Action Network (CLAN) was circulated and adopted by 12 community groups.

The CLAN accord lists the following aims, objectives and benefits:

**Aims**
- To help communities achieve their goals of sustainability, regeneration, social inclusion and healthier economies.

**Objectives**
- To set up a self-help ICT network of community ownership initiatives (CLAN info website).
- To set up a database of community ownership initiatives to be used as reference, template and idea bank (community pages).
- To facilitate exchange of ideas and airing of views (discussion group).

Camille Dressler, CLAN
Discussion
In workshop discussion it was agreed that there was a need to strengthen community landowners' capacity building and that a network had huge potential to contribute. It could help with training and provide access to new ideas. However CLU was currently providing new community landowners with substantial help in these areas.

It was suggested that the principles for setting up a network were essentially the same as those for developing a community initiative: build from the grass roots, and start from the needs of members. It was also suggested that, initially, a series of annual meetings of community landowners at different venues was more useful than a website alone as a networking tool: people needed to come together and get to know each other for a website to be sustained and used to best advantage. Community woodland groups had taken two to three years to get to know each other before they began to network. Such meetings helped to formulate the objectives. In setting up a network it would be important to start small, on a scale that people knew they could manage, to let those involved sell the benefits by word of mouth, and to be very clear about the specific aims.

Benefits to members
• To offer guidance and advice to increase understanding and knowledge of organisational, communication and media skills (tool kit, useful links, event bulletin).
• To provide regular info-digests (newsletter).
• To provide networking opportunities (yearly forum).

At the Abriachan community conference in December 2002 a broad consensus emerged that CLAN should be set up as an independent self-help network. In May 2003 Camille Dressler obtained a Level 1 award from Scotland Unlimited to take CLAN forward.

Those attending the Fling in the Fank conference were invited to help make CLAN what they wanted it to be.
Developing fishing and wildlife tourism

Angling

Field trip led by Cathel MacLeod, Iain MacLeod, Calum Millar and Mark Mackenzie

Angling is very important for tourism in Assynt and has an important role to play in the survival of the Post Office, shops and B&Bs. The wild brown trout and sea trout fishing impressed visitors as far back as the middle of the 19th century. The lochs still provide very good fishing, so loch fishing seems to be sustainable.

However, the sea trout fishing collapsed countrywide during the 1960s. Back then members of Assynt Angling Club - all volunteers - took on the difficult task of trying to improve the sea trout fishing in the Manse System, and during the 1970s a weir and fish pass were constructed to create a new loch at the outflow from the system into the sea. This weir was built with the best of intentions but unfortunately contributed further to the collapse of the sea trout fishings. Fewer fish than ever entered the system, partly because of the inadequate design of the fish pass, and partly because of the continuing decline of sea trout countrywide. After winning the land ACT made alterations to the fish pass, to allow better access for migratory fish. These have been successful, with several hundred adult sea trout now returning each year through a trap, where they are tagged before being released into the system.

Over a four-year period ACT carried out a re-stocking programme of the Manse System, with advice and assistance from the West of Sutherland Fisheries Trust, and with the blessing of the North and West District Salmon Fisheries Board. 200,000 unfed sea trout fry, obtained from hatcheries at the Seafield Centre, Loch Kishorn in Wester Ross, were released into the headwaters during this period. During the year 2002, over 1,000 sea-going smolts were caught in the trap, and tagged before being released into the sea. That year, the return rate of tagged fish to the system was 33 per cent. (The national average return rate is estimated at 10-12 per cent.) At the Manse System, ACT volunteers are also engaged, in association with the University of St Andrews, in a very important international experiment to control sea lice infestations on sea trout.

Angling provides ACT with a very welcome source of core income, in the region of £4,000 each year, and has the potential to generate considerably more income in the future. Visitors can fish any of 200 lochs for £5 a day. Permits and boat hire are sold by the local Post Offices, Assynt Visitor Centre, Cruachan Guest House and other volunteers.

The Fling in the Fank 29
Wildlife tourism is the fastest growing sector of the fastest growing industry in the world. People living in urban environments need to reconnect with nature. Scotland can offer puffins, seals, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, dolphins, otter, red deer, wildcats, buzzards and osprey - all of interest to a great number of people. There is a lot of diversity and internationally important breeding populations of golden eagles, seals and seabirds.

Peter Cairns described four case studies of relevance to community landowners:

- **Loch Garten Osprey Centre** has had over two million visitors, since it opened in 1954. RSPB has invested £250,000 in a new visitor centre, recognising that the people who visit the osprey centre are not birdwatchers, but tourists. No ospreys nested there in 2003, but visitor numbers went up to 37,000 in six months.

- **Speyside Wildlife Pine Marten hide**: after feeding pine martens for a year or so, the owners of the hide realised there was a market and built (with grant aid) a comfortable, purpose-built hide for 20 people at £15 each per night.

- **Gigrin Farm Red Kites Centre**, a 200 acre upland sheep farm in Rhayader in Wales, attracts 70,000 visitors a year to its three hides, shop, camp site, self catering accommodation, guided activities, day excursions, etc. Rhayader and the surrounding area is now known as Kite Country with local businesses benefiting from the farm’s activities.

- **Norway**: a small farmer in the west of Norway decided to take advantage of a (free) local resource, which also happened to be a passion of his - sea eagles. He now has four hides, for which he charges £90 per day. His community has established a wildlife tourism visitor centre. He and other local business people have re-invented their village to provide community benefit.

Not all projects require major financial investment – often time and imagination are more important. Many local communities do not realise what they have to offer – because it is so familiar to them. Scotland has enormous potential, but the packaging and presentation of the product must be very good. If a community is to benefit, it has to work together to offer a good quality service. Marketing also has to be of a high standard, using high quality photography - good pictures sell.

Projects can be as simple as setting up a bird feeding station outside the dining room window of the local hotel or B&B. They could progress to the provision of nest boxes, artificial floating platforms for divers or feeding stations for birds or otters. It is all down to imagination and innovation.

For further information, go to [www.greentourism.org.uk](http://www.greentourism.org.uk) (for general information, case studies, research, latest developments, events, etc.)
See also [www.speysidewildlife.co.uk](http://www.speysidewildlife.co.uk), [www.gigrin.co.uk](http://www.gigrin.co.uk), [www.AAospreys.org.uk](http://www.AAospreys.org.uk).
Forestry

Crofter forestry in Assynt

Field trip led by Bill Ritchie and David MacPhail

The native woodlands of Achmelvich and Torbreck have been part of the crofting landscape for generations - used for firewood, shelter for livestock and as a source of hazel for creels. These semi-natural ancient woodlands, together with the 800 hectares of new crofter forestry schemes, mean that 10 per cent of the North Assynt estate (perhaps a fifth of the area, if the lochans are excluded) is under trees. That may be the maximum amount of woodland, given the need to retain land for grazing.

The woods bring great aesthetic benefits, attracting tourists and enhancing the fishing. The big fences also help to manage the deer on the estate.

Participants discussed at length how crofting integrated all the different forms of land use. They agreed there was a need to campaign strongly for CAP reforms that would support such integrated land use, particularly the beneficial interactions between cattle and woodlands. Crofter forestry had also brought significant socio-economic benefits to Assynt including a sustainable local tree-planting business. Bill Ritchie described the woods as "a gift to the next generation", who could use them as they saw fit.

Culag Community Woodland Trust

Field trip led by Claire Belshaw, Secretary and Robin Noble, Project Officer

Culag Community Woodland Trust (CCWT) was originally created because of concern in the early 1990s over windthrow damage to the Culag Wood following the development of the harbour. A company limited by guarantee with charitable status was created with support from Assynt Community Council, and the Culag Wood area was secured on a long lease from the local estate. A great deal of hard work followed to reinstate old path networks, provide access points and train volunteers in chain saw use and other relevant skills. In 2000 the Little Assynt Estate, two thirds of which had recently been planted with native deciduous species, came on the market. CCWT made a successful bid for this ground, which extends to 1100 hectares, and so became "community landowners". Following wide local consultation varied plans for this ground were agreed and funding was secured for a project officer post (jobshare) for three years. Current activities include building an all-abilities path at Little Assynt, an allotment scheme, a community orchard and work to improve access from the road.

The field trip was limited to a whirlwind tour after dropping off the other groups on the way. It included a visit to CCWT's brand-new office in Lochinver, the purchase of which was funded by the Scottish Land Fund and the Community Land Unit. It is partly an office for CCWT's two project officers and partly a community room with four computers for internet access. There was also a brief look at the 36-hectare Culag Wood on the edge of Lochinver.
Over the last 10 years the Trust has not only improved the network of paths through this mature mixed wood but has also set up a number of trails, “Orienteering” and “All the Time in the World”. It is a gorgeous place to hide from the weather and has a different sort of feel around each corner. There is the most wonderful bog in the middle surrounded by mature trees. If this was Canada brown bears would be living in the wood. The latest project is a play area for the under 5s with a woven willow igloo and a tepee about to go up.

Forestry and Rural Development Scheme

Workshop led by Chris Perkins, Scheme Co-ordinator

Chris Perkins outlined the Forestry and Rural Development Scheme (FRDS), a partnership project administered by Highland Birchwoods, with the Forestry Commission, Scottish Natural Heritage, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, The Highland Council and the Crofters Commission as partners.

FRDS has a budget of £2.9 million over the next three years, with a dedicated £520,000 package for community groups. FRDS is available only for the management of existing woodland and forestry, and is designed to improve the local forest resource and help to develop social, economic and environmental capital in order to contribute to the local economy.

Theme Three of the scheme is aimed at community-managed woodlands and crofting townships. It pays up to 100 per cent of actual costs for community-based forestry-related developments.

The aim of the community-based element of the scheme is to help communities achieve greater social, economic and environmental benefits by participating in forestry. It covers wider operations than those covered by the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS) administered by the Forestry Commission Scotland. The scheme takes a flexible approach to funding and supplied public match funding for operations as part of the £520,000 package.

Eligible applicants for the community element of FRDS are communities with an interest in woodland management, including non-profit-distributing woodland groups, crofting townships/grazings committees, and other constituted local community organisations.

Applications should be made for assistance with the total cost of projects. A mixture of European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidelines Fund (EAGGF), Forestry Commission SFGS, LEC and SNH funds will make up the total project value. Applicants should discuss applications with Chris Perkins before submission, and the application must be for an element of work entirely funded by FRDS. The maximum sum for each application would be £25,000 EAGGF funds with match funding from the other budgets in the Scheme.

Applications will be processed first by the FRDS Scheme Co-ordinator to ensure that they are eligible, and then scrutinised by a Theme Advisory Group (TAG) made up of organisations with an interest in community woodlands.

Discussion focused on the application procedure in more detail, questions on particular projects and the eligibility of particular woodland operations.

For further details, contact Chris Perkins, FRDS Scheme Co-ordinator at Highland Birchwoods (01463) 811611 or email chris.perkins@highlandbirchwoods.co.uk
Renewable Energy

Assynt Hydro Scheme

Within a year of the crofters taking possession of the Assynt Estate, an application for assistance with the cost of a feasibility study into the prospects for hydro-electric generation had been approved by Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE). While this study was in its infancy, Ian Lang, then Secretary of State for Scotland, announced the first Scottish Renewables Obligation (SRO1). The proposed feasibility study was transformed into an application within the SRO process, which attracted almost 200 expressions of interest. ACT was awarded one of the 40 contracts that resulted from this process and is contracted to deliver up to 220kW into the grid for a period of 15 years. A substantial grant towards the capital cost of the project was secured from the Highlands & Islands Partnership under the provisions of the European Regional Development Funding Programme.

Discussions began with Scottish Natural Heritage when it soon became evident that the original design proposals to utilise the storage capacity of Loch Poll alone would not be acceptable to them. This was principally due to their concern for the well-being of a pair of black-throated divers (a protected species). The significant variation in loch level, envisaged under the original design proposals, was considered to be detrimental to the breeding prospect of these birds. This created years of struggle for the Trust until the intervention of the Minister for the Environment at the Scottish Office brought about a successful outcome.

ACT has formed a partnership with Highland Light and Power Ltd (HLP) that will endure for the period of the SRO contract. The two parties have jointly subscribed share capital to Assynt Hydro Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of ACT, which was charged with the responsibility of designing, building and operating the plant. Project funding also involved substantial borrowings from Triodos Bank.

The cost of environmental protection work dramatically exceeded original estimates. To ensure the continued viability of the project, the mechanical and electrical equipment was procured from the Czech Republic and Croatia, resulting in substantial savings in the capital cost of the project. However, projected output and revenue have diminished, as the imported machinery is less efficient than the UK manufactured equipment originally proposed.

The plant was commissioned in September 2000 but since then there has been a progressive annual reduction in rainfall. Output in 2002 was 56.9 per cent of target and it is anticipated on current performance that output in 2003 will be similar. Nevertheless, repayment of the bank loan remains on target at approximately £1,600 per month and it is hoped that the loan will be entirely extinguished within the originally agreed period of 10 years. At maximum output, current revenue amounts to approx. £1,500 per week. On expiry of the contract between ACT and HLP it has been agreed that there will be an equal distribution of any capital balance remaining after necessary plant refurbishment has been paid for. It is hoped that there will be a capital sum in excess of £100,000 remaining for distribution and that the entire facility, free of debt, will be wholly owned by ACT. The life of the plant is expected to be in excess of 50 years.
Jon Priddy explained that in the Highlands and Islands, HIE’s Community Energy Unit (CEU) implemented the Scottish Communities and Household Renewable Energy Initiative (SCHRI), which was funded by the Scottish Executive. It has a team of five officers who cover the Highlands and Islands.

CEU aims to assist community groups to make as much use as possible of renewable energy in running facilities, so reducing their energy costs. CEU does not get involved in large wind-farm projects. Instead it targets its support on community-owned or community-managed projects such as leisure facilities (for example, swimming pools), community halls, offices used by community organisations, schools (Scoraig Primary School recently received funding for a replacement wind turbine) and also smaller scale projects such as mini-hydro in the grounds of Lews Castle.

CEU will assist projects using any renewable technology, or a mix of different technologies, which will result in a reduction of greenhouse emissions compared with the use of fossil fuels.

There are two streams in the funding provision for communities:
- Technical assistance, which can fund feasibility studies up to a maximum of £10,000.
- Capital assistance for projects up to a maximum of £100,000. CEU normally provides 40-60 per cent of total funding, but it can provide 100 per cent funding in very exceptional cases. CEU is able to point applicants to possible sources of match funding.

To be eligible for assistance under the SCHRI, an applicant must be a constituted community group with open membership and demonstrable support, which exists to deliver benefits to the community.

There is a variety of possible arrangements and partnerships for community groups to consider. Under the 1976 Act a crofting group and the landowner are each entitled to a 50 per cent share of revenues, which might be in the region of £4,000 per megawatt generated.

CEU is working with other organisations on guidance to communities on the benefits they might receive from local commercial renewable energy projects. This issue is largely unresolved in this country, in contrast with European countries where communities may have an equity share or outright ownership of one or two turbines.

For further information contact Eric Dodd, CEU Manager on 01463 667271.
The Taigh Chearsabhagh Trust was established as a charitable trust in 1994 and Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Arts Centre opened in 1995. The Trust incorporates two bodies - the Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath (North Uist Historical Society) and the Uist Arts Association.

Needing space for collections and exhibitions, the directors of the trust identified a derelict 17th century Grade Two listed building close to the ferry terminal in Lochmaddy and sought funding to transform it. Extended in 2001, the building now consists of a museum, two galleries, a studio, a 45-seat café, a print workshop darkroom, a research area, office and storage space.

In Taigh Chearsabhagh there is a shop which is the trading arm of the Taigh Chearsabhagh Trust. The shop includes the Post Office, which moved to the building in 2002. The profit made by the trading company is covenanted back to the Taigh Chearsabhagh Trust.

The focus of the workshop discussion was how Taigh Chearsabhagh was run. The Arts Association is responsible for the arts side with a planning and funding group making decisions on the arts programme for the year with the help of the arts officer. The Historical Society decides on its programme for the year with help from the dedicated museums officer. Taigh Chearsabhagh has been a revenue client of the Scottish Arts Council for the last year. Prior to this it relied on project funding. It also receives revenue funding from the Western Isles Council, and applies to charitable trusts for part of its project funding.

Norman MacLeod writes: When Taigh Chearsabhagh was asked to be involved in the Fling in the Fank it was considered quite an honour, for we had heard so much over the years regarding the Assynt buy-out. It was also an opportunity to have a look at how a community has changed over these last 10 years and to learn from them.

On arriving in Stoer I took the camping option (something that I have not done in years) and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It was breathtaking sitting on the beach watching the sun slowly sinking into the Atlantic.

Although the participants in the workshop were few in number, there was plenty of quality, with discussion of the importance of art and heritage, the possibility of a similar centre in Assynt, and the challenges of such a venture. The talk was kept very informal with participants encouraged to ask questions.

Assynt would be a good location for a centre such as Taigh Chearsabhagh to give it a focal point and a sense of history, as you are creating your own history. It does not have to be anything big or fancy - only a living, breathing building. When speaking to local people the general feeling I got was that possibly new blood was needed in Assynt because there seemed to be a feeling of “burn out” with the community having to work so hard to survive. There is a feeling of the importance of art and heritage but this would be a new project and who would progress the project? Hopefully the Fling will encourage young people to return or new people to relocate.

Assynt is a fantastic place. It has been about 20 years since my last visit, but it most certainly will not be another 20 years before my return. In fact it will be Easter time.

For further information about the Taigh Chearsabhagh Trust and its activities, contact Norman MacLeod on 01876 500293 or by email: Norman@taigh-chearsabhagh.org
## Appendix One: Conference programme

### Thursday 28th August

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.30 am</td>
<td>Introduction and Welcome</td>
<td>Kenny MacKenzie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.40 am</td>
<td>The Last Ten Years</td>
<td>John MacKenzie, ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.55 am</td>
<td>Strategic Action on Landownership and the Next Ten Years</td>
<td>Bill Ritchie, ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00 am</td>
<td>The Last Ten Years and the Next Ten Years</td>
<td>ACT under 30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.25 am</td>
<td>Embarking on a Buy-out</td>
<td>David Cameron, North Harris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.40 am</td>
<td>Looking to the Future</td>
<td>Maggie Fyffe, Eigg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.55 am</td>
<td>Organising for Change</td>
<td>Camille Dressler, CLAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.10 am</td>
<td>Question and Answer Session</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11.40 am</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30 pm</td>
<td>Field trips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00 pm</td>
<td>Thursday Ceilidh House</td>
<td>Kenny John Matheson &amp; Friends</td>
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### Friday 29th August

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.30 am</td>
<td>Introduction and Welcome</td>
<td>Simon Fraser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.40 am</td>
<td>Current Legislation</td>
<td>Allan Wilson, Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00 am</td>
<td>Working Together</td>
<td>John Watt, HIE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.20 am</td>
<td>Crofting in the 21st Century</td>
<td>David Green, Crofters Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.40 am</td>
<td>The Long Haul</td>
<td>Kenny Maciver, Stornoway Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00 am</td>
<td>Question and Answer Session</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11.30 am</td>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.30 pm</td>
<td>Field Trips</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8.00 pm</td>
<td>Ceilidh</td>
<td>Blue Ridge and Peat Bog Faeries</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Saturday 30th August

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.00 am</td>
<td>Introduction and Welcome</td>
<td>Graeme Scott</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.10 am</td>
<td>Moving Forward</td>
<td>Simon Fraser and Andy Wightman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.25 am</td>
<td>Group work: create display summarising key ideas from workshops and field trips</td>
<td>Andy Wightman</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.30 am</td>
<td>Ideas Market Place</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30 pm</td>
<td>Key Issues for the Future</td>
<td>Andy Wightman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 pm</td>
<td>North Assynt Feis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.30 pm</td>
<td>ACT 10th Anniversary Ceilidh</td>
<td>Graeme Mitchell Scottish Dance Band, Ishbel MacAskill, Ian MacKay and others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Two: List of workshops and field trips

Field trips
Crofter Forestry
Fishing, Game and Tourism
Housing and Community Facilities
Renewable Energy
Culag Wood

Leaders
David MacPhail and Bill Ritchie
Cathel MacLeod, Iain MacLeod, Calum Millar & Mark MacKenzie
Sarah Macleod, Laura Maclean, Kenny Mackenzie & Durrant MacLeod
John Mackenzie
Claire Belshaw and Robin Noble

Workshops
Organising for Change
Surviving CAP Reform
Rural Housing
Building on Cultural Resources
Crofting Community Right to Buy
Forestry and Rural Development Scheme
Taking Control of Your Land
The Crofting Reform Bill
Renewable Energy: Options for Communities
Sustainable Development
The Community Right to Buy

Leaders
Camille Dressler, Community Land Action Network
Becky Shaw, Scottish Crofting Foundation and Sarah Allan, The Highland Council
Maggie Fyffe, Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, Wilma Robertson, Melness Crofters Ltd & John Toal, Crofters Commission
Norman Macleod and Iain MacDonald, Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Arts Centre
Andrew Anderson, Community Land Unit and Bob Perrett, Scottish Executive
Chris Perkins, Highland Birchwoods
David Cameron, North Harris Trust and Sandra Holmes Community Land Unit
Alastair Maciver, Scottish Crofting Foundation and John Toal, Crofters Commission
Iain Maciver, Stornoway Trust & Jon Priddy, Community Energy Unit
Amanda Bryan, Aigas Associates
Catherine Francis, Community Land Unit and Richard Frew, Scottish Executive

Appendix Three: Participants

Wildlife Tourism Development
Di Alexander
Sarah Allen
Andy Anderson
John Bannister
Claire Belshaw
Maurice Black
Mark Brennan
Amanda Bryan
Simon Byron
Peter Cairns

Peter Cairns, Northshots
The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust
The Highland Council
Community Land Unit
Scottish Crofting Foundation - Skye & Lochalsh
Culag Community Woodland Trust
Erisort Trust
Crofting Community Development Scheme
Aigas Associates
Scottish Crofting Foundation
North Shots
David Cameron
Alasdair Campbell
Diane Campbell
George Campbell
Lucas Chapman
Bob Cook
Robin Currie
Sandy Dear
Camille Dressler
Ron Duncan
Anne Edwards
Henry Fosbrooke
Catherine Francis
Simon Fraser
Richard Frew
Maggie Fyffe
Romany Garnett
Munro Gauld
Rob Gibson
Kenny Graham
Neil Graham
Colin Gray
David Green
Brian Greene
Mandy Haggith
Sam Harcus
Sandra Hogg
Sandra Holmes
Roddie Kerr
John MacAskill
Anne MacCrimmon
Iain Macdonald
Alastair Maciver
Iain Maciver
Kenneth Maciver
Donnie Munro
Kenny MacKay
Kirsteen MacKay
Alastair MacKenzie
Andrew Mackenzie
John Mackenzie
Kenny Mackenzie
Mark Mackenzie
Fiona Mackenzie
Morag Mackenzie
Laura Maclean
Ruairidh MacLennan
Alister MacLeod
Cathel MacLeod
Donald MacLeod
North Harris Trust
West Highland Free Press
Culag Community Woodland Trust
RSPB Scotland
Community Land Unit
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Crofters Commission
Visit Scotland
Community Land Action Network
Scottish Agricultural College
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Woodland Orchestra
Community Land Unit
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Scottish Executive
Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust
Culag Community Woodland Trust
MSP
RSPB Scotland
Stornoway Trust
Scottish Executive
Crofters Commission
Community Land Action Network
Achmelvich, North Assynt
Westray & Papay Development Trusts
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
Community Land Unit
Clashnessie Grazing
The Arkleton Centre for Rural Development, Aberdeen University
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Taigh Chearsabhagh
Scottish Crofting Foundation
Stornoway Trust
Stornoway Trust
Community Land Unit
Erisort Trust
Melness Crofters Estate
Laide & Aultbea Community Woodlands
Assynt Crofters’ Trust under 30s
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
The Arkleton Centre for Rural Development, Aberdeen University
Balchladich Township
Assynt Crofters’ Trust under 30s
Strutt & Parker
North Harris Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Donald MacLeod
Durrant Macleod
Iain Macleod
Janice MacLeod
Norman Macleod
Rodney MacLeod
Sarah MacLeod
Issie MacPhail
Madeline MacPhail
Pat MacPhail
David MacPhail
Allan MacRae
Steve McCombe
Anna McConnell
Nuala McKay
Diane McPherson
Caroline Middleton
Calum Millar
Jeremy Money
Sandy Murray
Graham Newport
Robin Noble
Charles O’Neill
Adam Pellant
Chris Perkins
Bob Perret
Jon Priddy
Shane Rankin
David Reid
Bill Ritchie
Wilma Robertson
Ulisdean Robertson
Neil Ross
Alex Scott
Eleanor Scott
Graeme Scott
Becky Shaw
David Shaw
Ian Smith
John Toal
Ilona Traut
Helen Turnbull
Piers Voysey
Bruce Wares
John Watt
Andy Wightman
Allan Wilson
Kylesku Crofters Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust Croft Administrator
Taigh Chearsabghagh
Kylesku Crofters Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust under 30s
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Clashmore Township
Clashmore Township
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise
Community Land Unit
North Uist Community Council
Laide and Aultbea Community Woodland Group
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Anagach Woods Trust
Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise
North Highland Forest Trusts
Culag Community Woodland Trust
Achnacarrin
Culag Community Woodland Trust
Highland Birchwoods
Scottish Executive
Community Energy Unit
Crofters Commission
Conference Reporter
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Melness Crofters Estate
North Uist Community Council
Community Land Unit
Scottish Natural Heritage
MSP
Assynt Crofters’ Trust
Scottish Crofting Foundation
Gualin, Durness
Economics Dept, University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Crofters Commission
Community Land Unit
Network 21
Anagach Woods Trust
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
Community Land Unit
Caledonia Centre for Social Development
Land Programme
Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development
When we organised the Fling in the Fank conference, we aimed to celebrate our 10th anniversary with many of the people who helped us achieve land ownership. We wanted to provide the opportunity for people from across the Highlands and Islands to come together to share experiences and discuss the key issues of the day.

We hope that this report will reflect the success of the event and the celebration of the last 10 years, while looking forward to what the next generation will bring.