

Headlines

- Further changes resulting from the Crofting Reform Act 2007 came into effect on 31st January. (details from Crofters Commission website: crofterscommission.org.uk)
- Level 2 Certificate in the Welfare of Animals During Transport required for journeys with livestock of over 65km (40 miles). See page 3 for details.
- The Crofting Inquiry Committee has presented its recommendations to Scottish Ministers More on page 2.
- The Trust has appointed a new Secretary to the Board. See Notice Board on page 3.
- ACT Deer Larder nears completion – see page 3 for update and photos.
- Fishing permit sales up 24% last year

Further Changes to Crofting Regulations

Important additional changes to crofting legislation came into force on 28th January 2008. The main changes are:

- Subdivision of a croft will be known as 'division'.
- Consent to family assignation no longer lies with the landlord. Crofters must apply to the Commission for consent to any family assignation.
- Significant changes to the application process for assignation, sublet, re-let and division of croft land.
- New powers for shareholders to apply to put part of a common grazing to some new use other than grazing of livestock or forestry.
- The Commission has the power on the application of the Committee or owner of the grazing to investigate and, where necessary, take action against a shareholder breaching Grazing Regulations.
- Changes to rules relating to the succession of a deceased crofter (including changes to notification and application processes). The landlord can still object to a bequest to a non-family legatee but not to a bequest to a member of the deceased crofter's family. Crofts cannot be transferred by a deceased crofter's executor to any successor

(including a family member) without Commission consent.

- Changes for the Register of Crofts.

Obtaining Commission approval or consent to assign*, sublet, re-let or divide a tenancy

It is the applicant's responsibility to:

- complete and return an application form to the Commission – the application must include a scale plan detailing the croft boundaries;
- advertise the application in the local press; and
- give the landlord written notification of the application – again the notification should include a scale plan detailing the croft boundaries.

*This includes family assignation.

The relevant application forms have all been revised and the Commission will therefore be unable to accept old style forms after 28th January 2008.

The Commission's website is currently being updated, but in most cases the new forms are available to download.

Application Intervention Criteria for Assignation, Sublet, Re-let and Division of croft land

The intervention criteria fall into two categories, General and Specific.

General Criteria

The Commission may decide to intervene in relation to any application if it considers that it could have a negative impact on:

- The interests of the estate.
- The interests of the crofting community (this means any member of the crofting community in the locality – including, where that land is, or is part of, a common grazing, the Grazings Committee or any shareholder who shares in the common grazing).
- The interest of the public at large.
- The sustainable development of the local crofting community.

or

- if it considers that the application does not contain enough information to allow it to reach a decision on the proposal.

Family assignation applications will be assessed against the above general criteria only.

There are further specific criteria relating to the various types of application mentioned above. Further details available from the Crofters Commission.

The ACT Crofting Administrator can provide informal advice on forms / form completion.

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Assynt Hydro

The hydro-electric plant continues to operate successfully since substantial electrical and mechanical repairs were carried out in the aftermath of a major problem in December 2006. This had been caused by a bearing having overheated due to a control gear failure, resulting in ignition of the gland packing in the stuffing box on the non-drive end of the turbine. Thankfully the cost of the repair as well as the resultant loss of revenue was covered by insurance. The original Czech PLC

(programmable logic controller) had failed and had to be replaced but it was decided, on the basis of cost, to replace it with a relay logic control system. Although this has resulted in it being no longer possible for the equipment to be remotely controlled and managed by computer, operation of the equipment has nonetheless proved to be more reliable as a result.

Output to the grid during 2007 was the second highest annual generation figure since the plant was commissioned in 2000, exceeding annual target by over 200,000 units. In December,

repairs to the generator were found to be necessary and we carried out this work ourselves with the capable and resourceful assistance of Gordon Nairn Engineering. This involved lifting out the generator to facilitate access to the drive-end bearing so that it could be removed and replaced. We hope that it might be possible for us by the same means to remove the turbine itself during the summer period of reduced output. The intention is to open up the turbine for examination and possibly carry out specialist crack detection procedures on the stainless (contd. On p2)

Sutherland Local Plan

Highland Council published the Deposit Draft version of the new Sutherland Local Plan for consultation commencing in November.

The deadline for representations was February, but the draft is to be consulted on again due to the Environmental Report not having been completed during the winter consultation period.

Representations already received will be considered along with any further ones, and changes to the plan may be proposed.

The Deposit Draft Local Plan may still be viewed on the Council's website, along with the Environmental Report.

There have been some concerns locally about the inclusion of the area known as "The Glebe", opposite Stoer Primary School, which is shown as H1 in the Mapping and accompanying text for Point of Stoer, along with a site

on Clashnessie grazings by the radio mast. The text reads as follows: *"Single house developments or applications for small scale developments are best assessed on their individual merits against the policy framework. However the Assynt Crofters Trust are supporting the allocation of two sites on common grazings land and these allocations are the appropriate locations for more substantial levels of housing within North Assynt. The school roll projections estimate that the primary school will remain slightly over capacity until 2009 and will need to be monitored."*

As previously reported, the Trust is looking at various potential sites, in consultation with grazings committees, for affordable housing/affordable house sites. Any development going ahead would of course require the agreement of the township's shareholders.

It transpires, however, that The Glebe does not belong to the Trust. Having been gifted to the

Free Church many years ago by the Duke of Sutherland, it is not part of North Assynt Estate and the Trust therefore has no say in this matter other than as a neighbouring landowner.

The ownership of various Free Church properties remains in dispute, however, and the latest communication from the Council indicates that the site would be removed only if neither party involved in the current ownership of assets dispute want it to be included.

To clarify, the Local Plan does not require land to be released for development, but is for guidance in determining future planning applications for specific types of developments (e.g. multiple house sites, industrial). In other words, if the owner does not want to develop a site, its allocation in the Local Plan will not make that happen.

Those with concerns about any development proposal brought forward would have the opportunity to make

representations through the usual channels at the time of a planning application.

Planning Applications in respect of individual houses will continue to be assessed on their own merits.

Crofting Inquiry

The Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, set up last May, has now presented its report to Scottish Ministers.

Amongst its recommendations, the Shucksmith report calls for crofting to be regulated by locally elected boards; for a fair allocation of Less Favoured Area support; retention of the support schemes unique to crofting; a new and enhanced Croft House Grant and Loan Scheme; measures to ensure active use of crofts; assistance for new entrants to obtain crofts and access entitlements to support schemes.

The government will now consider the recommendations of the report carefully and begin its work on a response.

Assynt Hydro (contd.)

steel runner. The problem with this is that output from the turbine is carefully regulated during the diver breeding season to enable us to accurately maintain the water level in Loch Poll to suit their nesting habit.

The progressive build up of gravel deposits at the confluence of the tailrace and the original watercourse continues to be a problem. At the insistence of SNH, our Environmental Consultants carried out a survey of the gravel some months ago. This revealed the presence of a hand full of mature freshwater pearl mussels, with the result that SNH and SEPA refused to permit removal of the gravel. We calculate that we are currently losing annual income of more than £3,000, based upon the present rate for generated output, and this will obviously increase with the passage of time. Directors of Assynt Hydro Ltd. believe that the operation to remove the gravel should be treated by the environmental bodies as an occasional maintenance operation. David McKenzie of Highland Light & Power Ltd., our partners in the project, is hoping shortly to have a meeting with SNH in an attempt to persuade them of the justification of that argument.

Sport & Game Report – Deer Stalking

2007/08 Season

Commercial Stalking

The stalking season went well, with 23 stags and 14 hinds. Gross fees received totaled £8,350, with a further £1,368 in venison sales.

Bookings are going well for 2008/09 season, but again a cautious approach is being taken with in respect of numbers due to activities on neighbouring estates.

Non-commercial Stalking

Cull return forms were sent out in March – many thanks to those townships which have returned them. It is helpful to

all concerned to have a realistic view been going on.

Neighbouring Estates

The John Muir Trust reached its cull target of 45 stags and 45 hinds on Quinag, nearly double the level of last year and well over the level of previous years. ACT wrote to JMT expressing its concerns about the high numbers proposed and the potential effect on neighbours, but received no response.

Ardvar is entering into a voluntary Section 7 agreement with Deer Commission Scotland (DCS). This means DCS will be

involved in setting up a management plan, in consultation with neighbouring estates, including Quinag and North Assynt. Initial meetings with DCS will be held in May.

Deer Commission (Scotland)

The Association of Deer Management Groups has submitted a response to the proposed merger of DCS with SNH, highlighting various concerns over conflicts of interest, welfare and skills/experience, but it looks likely that the merger will go ahead.

See page 3 for updates on the deer larder, fishing etc.

Commercial Deer Stalking

Season	Stags	Hinds	Calves	Gross Fees	Venison	Gross Revenue	Fees	Gross Profit
2004/05	11	14		£2,380.00	£733.20	£3,113.20	£1,414.40	£1,698.80
2005/06	14	21		£4,545.00	£1,097.50	£5,642.50	£3,333.60	£2,308.90
2006/07	18	18		£5,805.00	£968.22	£6,773.22	£4,432.65	£2,340.57
2007/08	23	14	3	£8,350.00	£1,367.88	£9,717.88	£6,124.50	£3,593.38
				(1)	(2)		(3)	(4)

Notes

Season runs late August to January, while ACT accounts are calendar year

2007/08 Season

(1) £1000 of fees still to come in (of which £700 from 'blank day' fees)

(2) Venison prices were up this season, hence increase despite lack of proper larder facilities

(3) Stalkers' fees (65% stags / 75% hinds) and booking/admin fees (8%)

(4) Gross profit to ACT (note: vehicle upkeep, fuel, advertising etc. costs are not taken into account here)

APPOINTMENT OF NEW SECRETARY

Following Kirsty MacLeod's decision to stand down due to family commitments, the post was advertised locally and we are pleased to announce that Ian Colston has been appointed as Secretary to the Board, effective 1st April.

Ian has lived in Clashnessie for the past three years, and currently works in the Visitor Centre in Lochinver.

CROFTING ADMINISTRATION

Queries relating to crofting matters should continue to be addressed to Kirsty MacLeod (contact details on page 4). Crofters Commission leaflets and guidance are available on request.

CROFT RENT

There are still a number rents outstanding for 2007. We would like to remind those who have not yet paid their rent to do so at the earliest opportunity. Please contact Joanne or Kirsty if you have any queries.

TOWNSHIP DIRECTORS - ELECTIONS

2008: Culkein Drumbeg, Culkein Stoer
Clashnessie, Clashmore/Raffin and
Torbreck

2009: Achmelvich, Drumbeg and Nedd

2010: Achnacarin, Balchladich, Clachtoll
and Stoer.

Any queries relating to township elections should be addressed to the Secretary or

Administrative Assistant (contact details on page 5).

NEW OFFICE

An amended planning application has been submitted, with the location nearer to Stoer Hall with an extension to the existing car park to benefit both buildings. The possibility of some sort of small scale renewable energy system is being investigated. The project should be suitable for SRDP funding.

PHOTOCOPYING

The Trust is about to acquire a second hand copier with an A4 feeder/sorter facility. It can also copy A3 size, which is useful for maps etc. If anyone requires maps/plans to be photocopied for crofting applications etc. please contact Joanne or Kirsty. Prices for bulk jobs on request.

QUAD BIKE

As previously reported, the Trust purchased a new quad bike and trailer last year for deer carcass extraction.

A rear mounted sprayer was also purchased, and it is planned that members will be able to hire the equipment for bracken spraying. Hire fees/deposit for the quad are under discussion. Details of arrangements will be displayed locally in due course, with contact information and hire prices.

Sport & Game – Deer Larder

After numerous setbacks and delays, the new Game Larder at Culkein Drumbeg is nearly complete. Electricity and water service connections are in place, and the electrician and



plumber are expected to finish shortly.

An application for Food Premises will then



be sent in to Highland Council Environmental Services.

The larder will be ready to use as soon as the appropriate licenses are issued.

There will be an official opening in due course. It



has been a long drawn out process but we are nearly there at last!

The next step is to progress the plans for producing and marketing local venison.

Sport & Game – Fishing

Permit sales were up 24% last season, returning to levels of 5 years ago after a few years of lower totals. The addition of Drumbeg Stores to the list of vendors had a positive impact overall, and continued targeted advertising in Trout & Salmon and Trout Fisherman appears to have been successful in attracting new visitors. The fishing leaflet is due to be reprinted this year, with some updates to reflect recent changes such as boat locations.

Reach 80% of households in North Assynt - and further afield - through the ACT Newsletter Notice Board

Welfare of Animals During Transport

Due to the changes in EU legislation that came into force on 5th January 2008, anyone involved in the transportation of livestock in connection with an economic activity may need to have a certificate of competence, or face a £5000 fine and/or 6 month custodial sentence. The penalties for not having the correct certificate will not be enforced until the end of May 2008 (extended due to lambing). *The Regulation applies to all those involved with the transport of live vertebrate animals in connection with an economic activity. For example: livestock and equine hauliers; farmers; and commercial pet breeders.*

The Regulation does not apply to the transport of animals: where the transport is not in connection with an economic activity; transport to or from veterinary practices or clinics under veterinary advice; where the animal is an individual animal accompanied by its owner (or other responsible person) and is fit for journey; or where the animal is an individual animal accompanied by its owner (or other responsible person) and is fit for journey; or where animals are pet animals accompanied by their owner on a private journey.

Lantra Awards are offering two assessments to cover the new rules; Short Journeys, a journey over 40 miles and under 8 hours in duration, and Long Journeys, a journey over 8 hours.

The Short Journey award would be required for a trip from Assynt to Dingwall.

To register for further information on these courses and to find out where your nearest Lantra Awards training provider is based, you can either fill out the registration and enquiry form on the Lantra website www.animalsonthemove.co.uk or tel. **024 7641 9703**

Further information on the legislation is available from DEFRA..

WE MAY BE ABLE TO RUN ASSESSMENTS HERE, IF THERE ARE SUFFICIENT NUMBERS. PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH KIRSTY IF YOU ARE INTERESTED (contact details on page 4).

ACT Meetings 2008

Board Meetings

- 19th May
- 2nd July
- 22nd September
- 17th November

[Executive Committee meetings are held in the intervening months]

Annual General Meeting

- Mon 30th June 2008

General Meeting

- Mon 8th December 2008

ALL WELCOME

Please contact the Secretary or Administrator if you have any comments on the Newsletter and/or if there is anything in particular you would like to be included in the next issue.



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E-mail: secretary@assyntcrofters.co.uk

www.assyntcrofters.co.uk

ACT Mission Statement:

"To manage the Estate in such a way as to conserve and advance the social and economic livelihood of the communities, and to foster, preserve and improve the natural environment".

PETITION FROM SCOTLAND'S SHEEP FARMERS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION CALLING FOR COMMON SENSE ON SHEEP ID

The NFUS, together with the Scottish Farmer, has launched a sheep tagging petition, focusing on the current double tagging rules and threat of individual recording.

The petition calls on the European Commission to:

1. Remove the current requirement to double tag low-risk sheep, in particular home-bred ewes.
2. Scrap plans to individually identify sheep and their movements. Any future sheep ID and movement recording system must be on a batch basis.
3. Review the cost-effectiveness of EID prior to considering implementation.

Those wishing to sign the NFU Scotland/Scottish Farmer sheep tagging petition can do so in a number of ways:

1. Go to www.thescottishfarmer/sheeptaggingpetition and fill in the relevant details
2. Send a text message from your mobile phone to 80011 starting the text with the word "NFUS" followed by your name and town. (texts will be charged at your standard network rate)
3. Call the dedicated NFU Scotland telephone number on 0131 472 4015 and leave a message with your name and town so you can add be added to the list.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Drumbeg Village Hall – Extension & Renovation Project

Planning permission was granted earlier this year for alterations and extension of the Village Hall in Drumbeg. This includes the addition of a kitchen, toilets and storage, as well as upgrading of the main hall.

Having been turned down for Lottery funding, which was very disappointing, the group is now looking at SRDP (Scottish Rural Development Programme) funding.

Various fundraising events have been held locally over the past few years, and the sum raised to date stands at some £10,000. A big thank you goes to Mhairi MacKay and Kathryn Matheson, who climbed three munros last year and raised over £1000 in sponsorship.

ACT Directors, Office Bearers & Grazings Clerks – contact details

Executive Committee:

Allan MacRae (Chairman)
Donnie Macleod (Vice Chairman)
Ray MacKay

Supported by:

Ian Colston (Secretary to the Board) (855345)
Joanne Murray (Administrative Assistant) (855298)
Kirsty MacLeod (Crofting Administrator) (855212)

Township Directors

Achmelvich - Ray MacKay, Redbraes, Achmelvich (844337)
Achnacarnin - Iain C MacKenzie, The Gate (855241)
Balchladich - Ian A MacKenzie, Bordan, Balchladich (855315)
Clachtoll - Bob Cook, 132 Clachtoll (855301)
Clashmore & Raffin - Issie MacPhail, 204 Clashmore (855297)
Clashnessie - Roddie Kerr, Hill Cottage, Clashnessie (855359)
Culkein Drumbeg - Janice Macleod, Achloist (855228)
Culkein Stoer - John Morrison, Cnoc Uaine, Culkein (855331)
Drumbeg - Donnie Macleod, 340 Drumbeg (833256)
Nedd - Anne MacCrimmon, Crithinn, Drumbeg (833237)
Stoer - Durrant Macleod, Hillhead, Lochinver (844206)
Torbreck - Allan MacRae, 83 Torbreck (844335)

Co-opted Directors

John MacKenzie, 307 Culkein Drumbeg (833258)
Hugh MacRae, Cagarabh, Culkein Drumbeg (833212)

Township Grazings Clerks

Achmelvich - Margaret Macleod, The Shore (844393)
Achnacarnin - Iain C MacKenzie, The Gate (855241)
Balchladich - Ian A MacKenzie, Bordan, Balchladich (855315)
Clachtoll - Graham Gordon, Briar Cott., Lochinver (844607)
Clashmore & Raffin - Issie MacPhail, 204 Clashmore (855297)
Clashnessie - Kenny MacKenzie, 1 Canisp Road (844487)
Culkein Drumbeg - (acting clerk) Mairi MacRae (833243)
Culkein Stoer - John Morrison, Cnoc Uaine (855331)
Drumbeg - Anne MacCrimmon, Crithinn, Drumbeg (833237)
Nedd - Emily Ross, Nedd (833225)
Stoer - Ishbel Macauley, Ard na Mara, Stoer (855214)
Telephone numbers in brackets (STD code 01571)

Email contacts:

Secretary: secretary@assyntcrofters.co.uk
Administrator: admin@assyntcrofters.co.uk
Croft Admin: croftadmin@assyntcrofters.co.uk