

Fishing in North Assynt

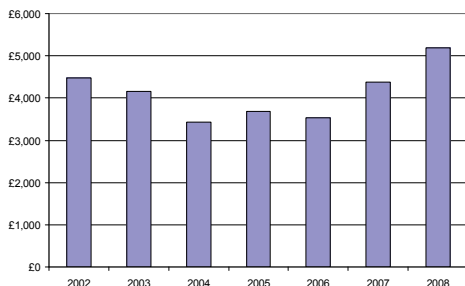
Wild brown trout fishing continues to be popular with visiting anglers. New permits have a return slip allowing visitors to send in their catch details and any comments they might have.

Along with the usual listing in VisitScotland's *North Highland Visitor Guide*, some strategic advertising in publications such as *Trout & Salmon* and *Trout Fisherman* appears to have paid off, with an increase in permit sales. Television coverage such as Nick Hancock's Fishing School series in Scourie may also have contributed to the higher visitor numbers.

After a few lacklustre years, fishing permit sales increased by 24% in 2007 and a further 19% in 2008 to reach £5194 (after 10% commission payable to the sales outlets). Sales at the Lochinver TIC accounted for 45% of the total last year, with the three Drumbeg outlets (Drumbeg Hotel, Drumbeg Stores and Non Macleod at The Rowans) totalling 37% between them.

There has been some very positive feedback, through the return slips, by email,

ACT Fishing Permit Sales (after commission)



letter and verbal reports.

"Nothing over a pound this holiday but there's nowhere I'd rather fish around midsummer. My next visit is booked and I look forward to it".

Bank permits need not be purchased in advance, and cover all lochs on the North Assynt estate. Boat hire is on a first come first served basis, but you can book in advance by contacting the relevant permit vendor. There are no outboards. Some people use their own electric outboards but we do not supply them at present. Some

lochs can be accessed (or nearly) with a 4x4, some are alongside or only a short walk from the main road, but many do involve a walk in. You can be assured of finding a loch to yourself even at the busiest times, especially if you are willing to walk!

Guide, tuition and tackle hire services are available through Calm Millar in Drumbeg (Tel. 01571 833364). Further information is available on the website.

Angling Research Project

An in depth study in the Assynt area of Sutherland, Scotland is being carried out, to explore how angling can contribute to wider community development and provide benefits for residents and visitors.

Substance, a social research co-operative, won a Big Lottery Research Grant for a project entitled: 'The Social and Community Benefits of Angling'. The three-year project will investigate the positive role angling can play for those who participate in it, young people and communities in which it takes place.

The basis of the work in Assynt is to use it as a research case study to provide evidence of the positive role that angling can play in a rural community. There have been some big claims made about angling supporting jobs, tourism, participation, protecting the environment and income to community organisations. However, not much research has been done to explore these issues and little is known about angling's impact in particular rural settings, the different ways in which it involves local people and visitors, how people benefit from it and the ways in which sustainable communities can be helped by its development.

Dr Adam Brown, who is heading the project, said "Assynt provides a great case study for a number of reasons. Work has already commenced and the first of several field study trips took place at the beginning of May". Adam has already spoken to people involved in the organisation of angling locally, including ACT staff, executive directors and some permit vendors, and will be continuing with

interviews through the year.

The project will include:

- Work in conjunction with a range of community organisations including the Assynt Angling Group, Assynt Crofters' Trust and Assynt Foundation.
- Interviews and consultation with staff and volunteers of the key angling and community organisations.
- Interviews with angling visitors and local participants about their experience and benefits from angling, providing market information to the community organisations and a better understanding of the positive roles angling can play.
- Research alongside the Country Sports Tourism Group pilot project developing Wild Trout fishing tourism.
- Postcode survey and digital mapping work with visitors.
- Web-based feedback, comment forms, surveys, blogging and other internet based means of broadening access to the study (see below for website address).
- An economic impact assessment of angling in the area.
- A specific local literature review, including reviews of historical articles, as well as recent initiatives around angling based tourism and community land ownership.
- Other work to:
 - Identify resources for ongoing research that supports the organisations.
 - Explore capacity and opportunities to develop education, volunteering, skills development and other initiatives around angling, particularly for young people.
 - Explore possibilities for developing links with youth inclusion and other socially beneficial angling interventions elsewhere, including the potential for income generation.

This element of the project will provide new knowledge about the role angling can play in wider organisational and community development in rural areas and support the development of initiatives in the case study area of Assynt.

The website is still under construction, but already contains detailed information and is well worth a look.

<http://assynt.anglingresearch.org.uk>

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Sport & Game

Deer Stalking Season 2008/09

Revenue from stalking fees was down 17% to £6900, but with an increase in revenue from venison sales from £1433 to £2370, despite fewer carcasses, overall revenue was down just 5% to £9270.

Venison prices have improved, but the quality benefits resulting from the new larder/chill facility have also helped. Gross profit to the Trust was up 11% to £4078 as a result.

Deer Management – Concerns over John Muir Trust Culling Policy for Quinag

The reduction in fees last season was largely due to the Trust's decision to take a conservative approach in terms of numbers, particularly hinds, in view of the increased culling activities on neighbouring estates.

The Trust remains particularly concerned at the policy of John Muir Trust. Nearly 300 deer have reportedly been killed on Quinag since JMT took over the land in 2005. This is nearly triple the number culled on North Assynt over the same period, relative to area of land (North Assynt figure c.230 on an area 2.5 times the size of Quinag). On its website, JMT claims future plans include *"Monitoring the impacts of grazing of red deer and manage numbers to a level that can be sustained by the carrying capacity of the land"*. Contrary to this, cull levels were increased dramatically as soon as they took over, with targets of 25 stags and 25 hinds in 2006/07, and 45 stags and 45 hinds in the previous two years. The target was not reached in 2008/09, suggesting that there were insufficient numbers on the ground to reach it without taking healthy, young beasts. The latest targets are nearly three times previous years' numbers.

JMT's stated policy on wildlife is ambiguous at best. They say:

"We protect existing wild places so as to conserve their natural processes, and their indigenous animals, plants and soils through land management"

"We renew wild places, where they have been damaged, by encouraging natural processes; and their indigenous animals, plants and soils".

On the JMT website pages on Quinag under the heading *"Why are we here?"* it is stated: *"This purchase reinforces our commitment to the protection of this stunning landscape. It also allows us to oversee a land management strategy for the Assynt area that works closely with the surrounding communities and crofters to look after the land together"*.

This does not reflect our own experience of dealing with JMT. ACT wrote to JMT in March 2007 to express its serious concern

at the potential impact the extremely high level of culling [on Quinag] might have on North Assynt deer populations, and the consequent effect not only on the Trust's income but on local employment. The two page letter concluded by strongly urging JMT to review its proposed cull levels for 2007/08 and beyond, at least until a clearer picture could be ascertained.

JMT wrote back in April. There was no response to the issues raised, although they did suggest a meeting. ACT responded, saying "While we appreciate the suggestion of a meeting between ACT and John Muir Trust, we do not see the benefit of such a meeting unless there is a possibility that our views will be taken into account and the proposed cull level reconsidered". No response was forthcoming, and at a subsequent meeting of the West Sutherland Deer Management Group, the JMT representative admitted there would be little purpose to such a meeting.

Subsequently, partly due to an SNH monitoring report on the Ardvar Woodland SSSI, Ardvar and Quinag entered into a voluntary Section 7 Agreement with the Deer Commission (Scotland). Not wishing to be complicit in the culling policies of JMT, North Assynt declined to sign up to this, and is instead in discussion with DCS regarding a separate "Minute of Agreement", as indicated in the last Newsletter. There have been no major developments with regard to discussions with the DCS, although they have indicated that they would not necessarily be suggesting any increase in cull levels on North Assynt. The Trust takes its responsibility with regard to protection of the woodland and deer management very seriously, however there are other ways to protect native woodlands, such as fencing and various land management techniques to draw deer away from "at risk" areas.

With this in mind, representatives of Nedd Grazings and ACT are due to meet with UPM Tillhill and the Deer Commission to discuss options for management of the part of Ardvar Woodland SSSI which falls into North Assynt (this will be eligible for SRDP funding) possibly in conjunction with a Crofter Forestry Scheme.

A helicopter count of Ardvar and Quinag was undertaken and paid for by DCS in April as part of the voluntary Section 7 Agreement. Bordering parts of neighbouring estates, including North Assynt, were also counted. Results are inconclusive, particularly given that not all the ground was counted, but the density appears to have fallen particularly on North Assynt ground.

A meeting between representatives of John Muir Trust, Ardvar and ACT will hopefully take place during the summer.

West Sutherland Deer Management Group / Deer Commission Scotland

At the AGM of the West Sutherland DMG in April, representatives of the DCS outlined their advice to ministers in respect of various issues relating to land management. These include Closed Seasons, night shooting, the role of DMGs and, of particular relevance, the issue of competence. The implications of what the Scottish Government is proposing in terms of evidence of competence through Deer Management Qualifications are wide ranging, and may apply to individual crofters shooting marauding deer as well as professional stalkers/gamekeepers.

The following is taken from the DMQ website FAQs page:

Do I need to be a "Trained Hunter"

If you consume all the venison yourself from the deer you shoot, you do not need to be a Trained Hunter. At present as the hunter (i.e the person who shoots the deer) you may also sell small quantities, in your local area, without being a Trained Hunter, but this may change. To sell any deer you shoot to a Game Handling Establishment (Game Dealer) you must be a Trained Hunter. Full details of the requirements can be found in the Wild Game Guide issued by the Food Standards Agency.

What is a Trained Hunter?

A Trained Hunter is a person who has sufficient knowledge and skill to identify abnormal characteristics that may indicate that the meat from a deer presents a health risk.

How do I become a Trained Hunter?

DSC1 includes an assessment for Trained Hunter for Large Game only. On completion of DSC1 you are issued with a certificate that is recognised by Game Dealers. If you already hold DSC1, and you familiarise yourself with the Wild Game Guide, you can apply to be recognised as a Trained Hunter via the conversion form.

The Deer Commission has held a "Fit & Competent Register" since 2005. This is currently a voluntary system but is likely to become compulsory.

The Trust's regular stalker is undertaking his DSC1 assessment this summer through UHI Thurso College, going on to DSC2 which is a practical qualification based on a portfolio of evidence.

ACT is looking at the possibility of running assessments on the estate next year for members wishing to obtain the DSC1 qualification.

Two sets of the Deer Commission Scotland's Best Practice Guides, issued in July 2008, are held at the Deer Larder.

The Muirburn Code

The Trust felt it would be useful to provide a summary of information contained in The Muirburn Code.

Source: Scottish Government Publications - Guidance on Safe Burning of Heather (April 2008)

The Code applies to all moorland managers and includes farmers, crofters, shepherds and gamekeepers. The Code forms part of the compliance requirements for Single Farm Payments.

Under the Code, a tenant has the right to carry out muirburn "for the purpose of conserving or improving" the land, but if the lease makes provisions controlling muirburn then the tenant must give the landlord at least 28 days written notice. If the landlord is dissatisfied with the proposed muirburn the landlord must give notice of the grounds for dissatisfaction within 7 days and refer the matter to the Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Directorate for a decision. Representations may be made to the Scottish Government by either party.

THE MUIRBURN CODE—SUMMARY

Points to remember:

- Notify neighbours at least 24 hours beforehand.
- Notify the fire brigade before burning and on completion, each day.
- Erect warning signs if the fires will be close to areas heavily used by the public.
- Assess the weather conditions: are they suitable for burning? The wind speed should not be too strong - normally not above Force 3 (8-12 mph).
- Decide where you will burn in the expected weather conditions. If conditions change, re-assess.
- You should not burn on your own. Carefully brief sufficient people (normally teams of 3) to carry out the planned burning programme.
- At least one person in each team should know the area well.
- No more than two fires should be lit at any one time.
- Health and safety requirements must be met. Stout boots, fire-retardant overalls and face visors (or goggles) should be worn.
- Communications should be available (e.g. mobile phone, radio); it is good practice to have extra people on call to assist if necessary.
- A supply of drinking water and a first aid kit should be available; the water is important to reduce the risk of heat stress.
- Avoid burning near nesting birds or sensitive habitats.

Legal Requirements

By law, burning is only allowed between:

- 1st October - 15th April: below 450m

[1500ft] - extendable to 30th April by permission of the landowner or the Scottish Executive.

- 1st October - 30th April: above 450m [1500ft] - extendable to 15th May by permission of the landowner or the Scottish Executive.
- Notice in writing must be given to the owners and occupiers of adjacent land, not less than 24 hours and not more than 7 days in advance of burning.
- Burning must not start between sunset and sunrise.
- Sufficient people and equipment must be available to control the fire.
- All reasonable precautions must be taken to prevent injury or damage.
- The smoke from the fire must not cause a nuisance.
- If the fire will be within a Site of Special Scientific Interest or other designated site, you must check whether consent for burning is required from Scottish Natural Heritage. Do not burn without such consent.
- An appropriate Health & Safety Risk Assessment must be carried out before burning.

Guidance

- Several plans should be made in advance covering the areas that can be burnt with the wind in different directions. This will aid preparations on the day.
- Before starting, light a small test fire to confirm that the conditions are suitable for controlled burning.
- Fires should be 30m wide and about 150-300m long (~0.5-1.0 ha in size). The size of fire may need to be increased in large areas of long, unburnt heather, especially if grazing livestock or deer are present.
- On heather or grass moors, a mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas should be produced.
- Make sure that there are adequate firebreaks in place to stop the fire; usually these should be 4-6m wide.
- Make maximum use of natural / existing firebreaks such as tracks, watercourses etc.
- Beware of using fires from previous years as firebreaks, unless they are clean.
- Prepare any cut firebreaks carefully. If cut within 24 hours of lighting fires they are more likely to stop a fire. If cut earlier the residue may burn and carry the fire.
- Burn with the wind towards a firebreak, preferably downhill. Burning against the wind, or 'back burning', can be used to create firebreaks.
- Control both flanks of the fire at a desired width, leaving the fire front to move with the wind. It can be useful to have one flank

defined by a natural or a prepared firebreak.

- Make sure one person stays with the fire for at least 10 minutes after it has been put out, to deal with any flare-ups.

To clarify, all of following actions are offences, which could result in prosecution:

- Burning outwith the statutory burning season [Hill Farming Act 1946, s23].
- Burning at night, between 1 hour after sunset and 1 hour before sunrise [Hill Farming Act 1946, s25].
- Leaving a fire unattended [Hill Farming Act 1946, s25].
- Being unable to control a fire or having not made provision for its proper control [Hill Farming Act 1946, s25].
- Causing damage to any woodland [Hill Farming Act 1946, s25].
- Causing damage to neighbours' property [Hill Farming Act 1946, s25].
- Causing damage to a scheduled monument [Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, s2(2)a].
- Failing to take fire safety measures in respect of harm caused by fire. Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, Part 3, s53 & s54.
- Carrying out burning on a Site of Special Scientific Interest, without consent from Scottish Natural Heritage, if burning has been notified as an 'Operation Requiring Consent' [Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, s19].
- Intentional or reckless harassment of birds listed in Schedule A1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- Intentional or reckless damage to the natural features of a Site of Special Scientific Interest [Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, s19].
- Intentionally or recklessly disturbing or destroying the nests, eggs or young of breeding birds [Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), s1, Schedule 1 and Schedule A1].
- Omitting to give the landlord and adjoining proprietors at least 24 hours written notice of the date, place and extent of intended muirburn [Hill Farming Act 1946, s24&25].
- Lighting a fire, or allowing a fire to spread, within 30 m of a road so as to damage the road or endanger traffic on it, without lawful authority or reasonable excuse [Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, s100(c)].
- Creating smoke that is a nuisance to inhabitants of the neighbourhood [Clean Air Act 1993, s17, refers to an offence under the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897].
- Endangering anyone's health or safety, including members of the public [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, s2 and s3, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 S.I. 3242].

Bull Hire Scheme

An independent review group has been set up to look at ways of helping crofters keep or hire bulls in the future. In addition there will be two further changes to the new scheme announced by the Government last year, which will retain a hire element this season and provide facilities for overwintering at the end of the season if required.

The decision to end the current scheme came after a recommendation from the Shucksmith Inquiry. The new review group will have access to that report and previous reports which suggested that the scheme needed to close in its current form but it will be free to draw its own conclusions and to seek information and advice wherever it sees fit. The group will report by autumn 2009 and its underlying aim will be to examine the best way crofters can work together to keep quality livestock in Scotland's remoter rural areas.

Crofters who benefited from the Bull Hire scheme have already

been told they can buy a bull this spring from the Crofters Commission for just £500. The Commission will now invite expressions of interest from crofting groups. But those who prefer not to take ownership but wish to continue hiring a bull from the Commission will have the choice of returning their bull to the Commission for overwintering in 2009.

Announcing the review group in January, Mr Russell said: "I have listened very carefully to the views expressed in Parliament and to the MSPs and others who have made personal representations to me." "Creating the opportunity to look as widely as possible at this issue seemed to me to be the most practical solution and the one which would have the best potential to ensure that the views of all crofters are taken into account.

"Crofters will therefore have the opportunity, via the group, to help decide what should happen. In addition the interim arrangements for the coming year will have more flexibility than had been possible in

our first plans.

"I want to ensure that as much consensus as possible informs the future of crofting so that it can contribute fully to the sustainable economic development of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. I hope what I am announcing today will be seen as a useful step forward."

The Bull Hire Scheme is administered by the Crofters Commission on behalf of the Scottish Government. It is run out of two stud farms close to Inverness - Balrobert and Knocknagael. A number of different breeds of bulls were made available for hire by crofting groups, with the option for those bulls hired to be returned to the stud farms for overwintering. Crofting groups were charged £500 for each hire and also charged a contribution towards transport costs. The number of bulls hired by crofting groups has reduced in recent years, from 194 in 2003-04 to 120 in 2007-08; the last involving 104 groups, comprising approx 430 crofters.

The Committee of Inquiry on

Crofting, an independent committee chaired by Professor Mark Shucksmith, recommended (May 12, 2008) that instead of a centralised facility serving the entire Highlands and Islands, support should be offered for private bull hire to meet the needs only of those areas where this would not be possible without this support. The Scottish Government agreed in its response (October 1, 2008) that the centralised facility was not the best way of maintaining livestock quality and cattle numbers in remote areas and encouraging crofters to work together to create viable cattle operations. The Scottish Government proposed to replace the bull Hire Scheme with new arrangements designed to facilitate private bull hire and to support community ownership in remote areas where the costs of transport or overwintering might otherwise prove prohibitive for crofting communities. New arrangements to mitigate these transport costs are being incorporated into the Scotland

(Continued on page 5)

Sheep Scab Checklist

By Brian Hosie, Group Support Manager SAC Veterinary Services, Edinburgh (SOURCE: SAC website)

Sheep scab seriously affects the welfare of sheep and has a significant financial impact through its effect on the condition of ewes, the growth rate of lambs, damage to wool and reduced quality of sheepskins. Scab mites feeding on the skin surface cause intense irritation to the sheep that results in them rubbing and scratching. The disease is more common in the winter and spring when the sheep have full fleeces. In the autumn/early winter, flock owners should assess their flock's scab status and treat accordingly.

Whenever possible flock owners should co-ordinate any treatment or control measures with their neighbours to gain maximum benefit from their time and effort. This approach is successful in many parts of Scotland where it is promoted by the Scottish Sheep Scab Initiative.

When assessing scab status you should consider:-

- . Is there evidence of scab?
- . Were ALL introduced sheep treated for scab and held in quarantine for 3 weeks?
- . Are boundaries secure - scab and sheep proof?
- . Are neighbouring flocks infected or at risk of infection?

Ask your vet for further advice on whether to treat and the appropriate product to use. The following checklist is included for guidance.

Sheep Scab - The Disease

Sheep scab is the most contagious disease of sheep in Britain today. Mites will survive off the sheep for up to 16 days. Although transmission is usually sheep to sheep; transporters, fence posts used for rubbing, bushes, trees and contaminated clothes and equipment can be a source of infection.

Scab Control

- . Treat all sheep on your farm in the autumn/ winter with a product

approved for scab e.g. long lasting dip or injectables. This is best done when all the sheep can be readily gathered.

- . Co-operate with your neighbours so that all flocks are treated within a period of 2-3 weeks.
- . Maintain effective fencing.
- . Do NOT use pour-ons, jettors or showers to control or treat scab. They are ineffective.
- . Sheep Moved Onto The Farm
For example: bought-in sheep (including rams), sheep returned from market or summer grazing, sheep going to away-wintering, sheep moving on for wintering, sheep returning from away-wintering, stragglers.
- . Assume all sheep arriving on your farm could be infected
- . Check fences and gates before sheep are unloaded
- . Dip with a scab approved dip or inject with one of the injectables
- . Do not mix with the main flock until 2 weeks after full treatment has been completed

In The Event Of An Outbreak

- . Confirm the diagnosis through your vet and local SAC/VLA Veterinary Centre since other skin parasites can mimic scab.
- . In Scotland inform the Scottish Sheep Scab Initiative Helpline (0131 472 4031)
- . Warn neighbours and tell them when you will be treating
- . Alert the suspected source of infection
- . Treat all sheep that could possibly have come into contact with affected sheep or their fields
- . If using short-acting dips or injections, move sheep to a clean area after first treatment
- . When using a non-organophosphorous dip, or when it is possible some sheep have been missed, dip twice, 14 days apart.

For further information phone the Scottish Sheep Scab Initiative on 0131 472 4031 for an information pack. Contact your vet or local farm adviser. See the SAC website:

www.sac.ac.uk/consultancy/veterinary/initiatives/scottishsheepscabinitiative

CROFT RENT

In a change to recent years, rent letters were sent to all tenants last October, including those who already pay by Standing Order. This exercise proved to be worth the extra stamps, with a number of out of date addresses etc. being picked up.

At the time of writing, 12% of 2008 rents are still outstanding. Despite written reminders issued in November, 17% of 2007 rents and 7% of 2006 rents also remain outstanding. Further reminder notices will be issued shortly.

TOWNSHIP DIRECTORS - ELECTIONS

2009: Achmelvich, Drumbeg and Nedd

2010: Achnacarnin, Balchladich, Clachtoll and Stoer

Any queries relating to township elections should be addressed to the Secretary or Administrative Assistant (contact details on page 4).

NEW OFFICE/INFORMATION CENTRE

Having achieved "Amber" status at the end of last year for Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding under Rural Priorities, the formal proposal is nearly complete. The Trust missed the deadline for the February RPAC Meeting, but was advised that there would be a further opportunity for the proposal to be

considered at a second meeting in June. This meeting was postponed but will hopefully be considered at the recently announced meeting in August. If successful, the project should go ahead this year.

Service connection applications have been made and quotations for the building have been obtained. The planning application is for a timber frame building with wood cladding. A log building was discussed as an alternative, but as this would require an amendment to planning and a fresh SRDP application it was agreed to proceed with the existing proposal in the meantime.

BRACKEN SPRAYING

The Trust will be contacting grazings committees shortly with a view to organising co-ordinated aerial bracken treatment on the estate. SRDP funding is available for a Bracken Management Programme (non-competitive, unlike Rural Priorities) and 100%+ recovery of costs should be possible.

Anyone undertaking aerial application of pesticides is obliged to seek consent from Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), the local water authority, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the local authority environmental services, giving the required periods of advance notice.

Bull Hire Scheme (Cont'd from page 4)

Rural Development Programme.

In March, Agricultural Adviser Sarah Allen was appointed to chair the independent review group, which is expected to report to Ministers by November 2009.

Ms Allen is currently part of a rural development consultancy business and provides agricultural advice for Highland Council. She also served on the Crofters Commission for over six years.

The terms of reference for the review Group are as follows:

In the light of the requirements of the EU State Aids regime for agricultural production, and in particular its de minimis provisions, and the resource implications of operating a centralised bull stud, and bearing in mind the view of the Committee of Inquiry on Crofting that support for bull hire should only be made available in those areas where ownership of a bull is impractical and commercial opportunities for bull hire are lacking:

- to investigate practical options to encourage crofters to work together to keep quality cattle of high health status in remote rural Scotland
- to identify those parts of the country where crofting communities would be unable without support to secure the fertilisation of cows at equitable cost
- to consider what type of public support would best help to overcome such disadvantage
- to define the outcomes which any such support should be designed to achieve
- to consider whether, in order to achieve the desired outcomes, support is best provided in cash (by grant to crofting groups) and/or in kind (for example, through the supply of bulls or semen)
- to recommend options to Scottish Ministers by November 2009 to achieve best value from the resources devoted to the interim Bull Hire Scheme

Source: Scottish Government website

ACT Chairman Allan MacRae, who is also Chairman of the North West Cattle Producers Association—has said: "The financial savings of closing the scheme are small, but the wider detrimental effects inflicted against the government's stated policy objectives for rural areas could be great."

In a Parliamentary debate on 21st January, MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, Jamie Stone, referred to the above quote. He went on to say: "I do not support the notion that the Highlands should automatically receive subsidies, but a mark of a civilised society is that more well-off areas support areas that are more economically fragile. For that reason, the cost of the current bull hire scheme—or a future bull hire scheme—is surely justifiable on the ground that it improves the quality of the stock and thereby underpins the local economy. In doing so, the scheme also reduces the amount of public money that people require because it makes local industry more self-sufficient."

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

Scottish Rural Development Programme—Rural Priorities

The fifth RPAC (Rural Priorities Assessment Committee) meeting initially scheduled for June was postponed, meaning that the previously-published deadline for submitted cases of April 14 no longer applied.

The February RPAC was an enormous success with more than £67 million going to around a thousand projects across Scotland, more than the first three RPACs put together. The total allocated in the four rounds to date is £124m. This means that a significant proportion of 2009 funding had already been allocated.

On 7 May it was announced that two further meetings would be held in August and November. £10 million will be made available in 2009 for capital investment across all elements of Rural Priorities, through the August funding round. There will be a further three rounds in each following year.

ACT Meetings 2008/2009

Board Meetings 2009

Monday 18th May
Monday 13th July
Monday 28th September
Monday 16th November

[Executive Committee meetings are held in the intervening months]

Annual General Meeting

Monday 29th June 2009

General Meeting 2009

Monday 14th December

ALL WELCOME

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



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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”.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Drumbeg Village Hall – Extension & Renovation Project

Planning Approval and Building Warrant have been obtained for the project by architects Matheson Mackenzie Ross, Dingwall, on behalf of the Drumbeg Development Association. A Statement of Intent for SRDP funding was submitted earlier this year and amber status achieved. Quotations for the project are now awaited in order to proceed with submission of the full proposal.

The Drumbeg Hall Committee are continuing with fundraising activities in the meantime, with events such as quiz nights, discos and the popular “Crofts” dog show.

New Estate Signs

The Secretary has researched various options for long overdue replacement signs. After the Board agreed on the design and wording, the new signs were ordered and will be put in place this summer at the Strone viewpoint, Stoerhead Lighthouse car park, Drumbeg viewpoint and Glenleraig. A more detailed sign was ordered at the same time for the new Office/Information Centre at Stoer.

** STOP PRESS **

Draft Croft Reform Bill – Consultation Begins

The Draft Bill developed out of the Commission of Enquiry into crofting (more usually known as The Shucksmith Report) has just been released for consultation. The document is available on line at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/05/11145108/0>

This is a consultation paper on the draft Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill 2009. It contains the draft Bill as well as a consultation response form to enable readers to comment on the provisions in the draft Bill

Public meetings are to be held in June, the nearest ones to Assynt being in Inverness (8th), Lairg (9th) and Durness (10th).

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 - Marion Macleod, Polchaple (833245)
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, Braighe Raineach, Culkein Drumbeg (833212)

Township Grazings Clerks

Achmelvich - Ray MacKay, Redbraes (844337)
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 - Mairi MacRae, Springfield (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:

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