



The National Trust
for Scotland

**BALMACARA ESTATE
TRADITIONAL
CROFT MANAGEMENT
SCHEME
2012**



1. Introduction

The Balmacara Estate is owned by The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and is situated at the western end of the Lochalsh peninsula and extends to c.2,500 hectares. Approximately 75% of the estate is under crofting tenure with 83 registered crofts in eight crofting townships. Crofting activity has remained at a relatively high level in the area with the majority of in-bye croft land being worked in some manner. Traditional crofting agricultural practices, defined here as extensive rotational cropping and the rearing of cattle, are most prominent in the townships of Drumbuie, Duirinish and Plockton. The prominence of cattle within these townships bucks the trend that can be seen across the Crofting Counties where sheep have become the predominant form of livestock and cattle numbers have declined. Similarly, the levels of cropping and cutting of hay, and to a lesser extent silage, have also declined, probably in part as a result of the decline in cattle numbers.

Whilst the current crofting situation on the Balmacara Estate may appear to be relatively healthy, the NTS is concerned that this may change in the coming years. With current proposals for change to crofting legislation, that might see an increase in movement away from crofting agriculture towards other uses of the land, and ongoing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), there is a serious threat to the continuation of these small-scale agricultural units. The NTS values very highly the heritage value of these crofting townships, both in terms of the rich cultural aspects and in terms of the resultant biodiversity and landscapes. If there is a downturn in the levels of these traditional activities there will be an attendant impact on these important cultural and natural heritage assets.

So against this background the NTS resolved to attempt maintain and protect these important cultural landscapes and their attendant biodiversity by supporting and encouraging the continuation of these traditional practices through a combination of measures set out in a new Traditional Croft Management Scheme. The scheme was introduced in 2006 and was a great success with 15 crofters taking part. Numbers increased to 20 crofters in 2007 and based on the experience of the first two years it has been decided to continue the scheme. This document sets out the details of the scheme, including the broad aims, the priority areas of concern and measures to address these concerns, and the administrative procedures for the running of the scheme.

2. Aims & Objectives of the Scheme

This scheme recognises that there is a wide range of subsidies and support available for agriculture in the United Kingdom, but it is also the view of the NTS that many of these subsidy and support systems are not well designed to encourage the continuation of crofting agriculture. Many of the problems faced by crofters, such as the small scale of their operations, remoteness, unfavourable ground and climatic conditions, etc. are not dealt with effectively by these systems. Many of the schemes are highly prescriptive and administratively burdensome, especially when one considers the scale of the operations involved. Management prescriptions are frequently designed for national priorities that appear to focus on encouraging mainstream intensive farmers into more environmentally friendly agricultural practices. While this is clearly a laudable and beneficial objective nationally, the NTS has concerns that some of these broader prescriptive approaches can lead to operations that do not take into account adequately the requirements of each site. Thus, this scheme aims to overcome some of these issues to deliver a relatively simple approach to supporting the key elements of traditional crofting, i.e. retention of cattle and rotational

cropping. It is the NTS' view that if these key elements of crofting are adequately supported the other aspects of the landscape, environment and cultural heritage will generally look after themselves. Therefore, the broad aim of this scheme can be expressed in fairly simple terms as follows:

Traditional Croft Management Scheme - Aim

To encourage the continuation of traditional crofting practices on the Balmacara Estate as a means of ensuring the protection and enhancement of the increasingly rare croft landscapes and associated species and habitats and the strong cultural identity associated with crofting.

This relatively simple statement can be further broken down to more meaningful and specific objectives that reflect the range of measures that the NTS intends to employ to achieve this broad aim. The two core elements are simply the encouragement of rotational cropping and retention of cattle. For this scheme rotational cropping entails the growing of a mixture of crops, not necessarily in the same year but preferably with some element of rotation from year to year. Typically those crops might include potatoes, turnips, cereals for winter feed (e.g. peas, oats, barley, etc.), hay and/or silage. This rotational system ensures that the land is kept in good condition and fertility levels are maintained and pest species are kept under control. The scheme is also concerned with developing the linkages between keeping cattle and the growing of crops for winter feed. Therefore, it is intended to integrate a link within this scheme as part of the encouragement for the retention of cattle. In addition to these linkages, the NTS would ideally like to see an increase in the amount of species-rich hay meadow within the areas that are cropped for grass. Currently, within the townships of Drumbuie, Duirinish and Plockton, approximately 30% of the in-bye land is cut for grass of one kind or another. Of this 30%, the majority (17%) is cut for silage. Approximately 8% is species-rich meadow (cut for hay or silage) and 6% is cut for hay (not species-rich). Ideally the NTS would like to see the proportion of species-rich meadow to increase as this has obvious biodiversity benefits. However, it is recognised that this will incur additional costs to crofters and so measures are included to support this. In terms of cultural heritage, recognition is given to the more traditional practice of growing hay as opposed to silage and measures are included in the scheme to support the extra costs associated with this.

In summary the specific objectives of this scheme are as follows:

Traditional Croft Management Scheme – Objectives

- ***Encourage and support the continuation and development of traditional rotational cropping in the townships of Drumbuie, Duirinish and Plockton;***
- ***Encourage and support the retention of cattle within these crofting townships;***
- ***Foster the strong link between the retention of cattle and the cropping of croft land;***
- ***Encourage the expansion of species-rich hay meadows and the preference of hay production over silage;***
- ***Ensure that such support and encouragement is delivered in an administratively efficient and flexible manner.***

3. Specific Incentive Measures

This section provides details of the specific measures that the scheme will employ to encourage rotational cropping, the retention of cattle and the expansion of species-rich meadows.

3.1. Rotational Cropping

The scheme will make payments to crofters who undertake to carry out cropping activities on their croft. These payments will not affect their entitlement to other subsidies and support measures. Varying rates will be paid according to the type and areas of crops being grown but as shown in the table below.

<i>Traditional Croft Management Scheme Cropping Payments</i>	
• Potatoes	£520/ha
• Turnips	£520/ha
• Cereals <i>(if this includes an under-sown grass crop half the grass crop payment for the following year may be paid in advance)</i>	£420/ha
• Grass Crop <i>(payable after harvesting)</i>	£200/ha
• Hay Premium <i>(payable on top of the grass crop payment if hay is produced)</i>	£100/ha
• Species-rich Premium <i>(payable on top of the grass crop payment and/or hay premium)</i>	£100/ha
<i>All payments are annual and subject to confirmation of area, although a minimum payment of £50 will be made for each crop of potatoes, turnips or cereals.</i>	

These payments have been calculated according to estimates of the actual cost of production for a crofter in the west highlands. The costs take into account allowance for seed, fertiliser, lime (if required), ploughing, harrowing, FYM application, harvesting, reseeding and fuel plus they account for the value lost from the area taken out of pasture and the value of the crop itself. For the grass crops a basic payment is made if the crofter grows a grass crop, e.g. silage. If the crofter cuts that crop for hay, as opposed to silage a premium of £100 per hectare is payable. If the grass crop is deemed to be species-rich a premium of £100 per hectare is payable. To qualify for the species-rich premium the crofter must delay cutting until after 1st August. This will allow the various floristic species to set seed before being harvested. The premium payment recognises the potential loss of productive value of the crop and the risk of loss or damage to the crop from the weather. Therefore, if a crofter grows a species-rich hay crop, they would qualify for the £200 basic grass crop payment plus the hay premium and the species-rich premium, totalling £400 per hectare. Hence, grass crop payments can range between £200-£400 per hectare according to the type of crop produced. The payments for other crops, i.e. potatoes and/or turnips will be subject to a maximum area of 0.25 ha each per croft. This is to avoid whole crofts being turned over to production of these crops that would lead to a reduction in the diversity of the overall crofting system within any given township. Areas that have been used for one of the three main crops cannot be used for the same crop the following year in order to avoid over-cultivation of small areas of ground. However, there will be a minimum payment of £50 for each crop of potatoes, turnips and cereals. If a crofter plans to grow more than one of any of these crops than the area required

to entitle them to a payment of this minimum sum, e.g. 0.96 hectares of potatoes, then the pro-rata sum will be paid for the area cropped.

3.2. *Retention of Cattle*

Under the existing CAP support mechanisms crofters can receive support for rearing cattle within Pillar 1 – the Beef National Envelope, implemented as the Scottish Beef Calf Scheme. These payments amount to £75 per calf, for up to 10 calves, and then £35 per calf thereafter. It has been estimated that the actual cost of rearing these calves is considerably higher than this within the crofting context and so the scheme aims to assist with these additional costs linked to undertaking some cropping activity as well. This condition reflects the NTS's desire to underpin the traditional linkages between the rearing of cattle and the production of winter feed on the croft. These links are a central element in the traditional crofting system and the long-term sustainability of crofting agriculture. Crofters will qualify for assistance towards the retention of cattle on the following basis:

Traditional Croft Management Scheme Retention of Cattle Payments

Payments will not specifically be based on numbers of cattle retained, but will focus on the additional costs. Thus, the crofter and NTS will negotiate a payment according to various factors including the number of cattle being reared, the crofter's souming, any specific requirements of the croft business and any environmental issues that might be relevant to the rearing of cattle.

For the purposes of guidance only it is anticipated that payments will range from £125 - £250 for a typical crofter with five cows and who is committed to undertaking at least two elements of the rotational cropping regime. Payment rates will be at the higher end of this range where a crofter is attempting to grow all their own winter feed.

All payments are annual and subject to confirmation of numbers.

Retention of Cattle Payments will only be made to crofters who have agreed to produce some element of cropping on their croft. The payment will be subject to confirmation that the agreed crops and other commitments have been produced.

Crofters will not be eligible for payment for cattle beyond the number they are entitled to under their souming.

4. **Monitoring**

As part of this scheme the NTS will undertake a range of monitoring work to ensure that the scheme is delivering tangible benefits consistent with the overall aim and specific objectives stated earlier. This work will include the continuation of recording the actual land use patterns within the three townships with the purpose of measuring any trends in the levels of activity or the emphasis on specific aspects of that activity over a period of years. In addition to this the NTS will undertake a breeding and wintering bird survey of the three townships as a means of illustrating the wider biodiversity benefits of maintaining this important traditional land use. Also, given the special incentive to crofters to improve the species-rich elements of their hay meadows the NTS will undertake a monitoring regime to establish in a qualitative and quantitative manner the levels of diversity in these meadows. This will most likely be done by means of a random, or fixed, quadrat survey recording the range of species present within the meadows and their respective distribution over a period of years. Given the specialist nature of this work it is anticipated that this will be contracted out.

5. Administration Procedures

Given the frequent criticisms of existing, and previous, government incentive schemes for being overly bureaucratic and time consuming and inflexible, it is essential that this scheme makes the administration simple and that it reflects the needs of the individual crofter. Therefore, the scheme will operate on the basis of an annual agreement between the NTS and the crofter and is entirely voluntary. Prior to the season it will be agreed what crops and cattle are going to be kept and the appropriate payments calculated. The agreement will set out clearly the conditions that will apply to any payments, according to the descriptions set out above, and the amounts and timing of such payments. The agreement will be capable of amendment by agreement at any point in time during the season, although payments will only be made once the agreed outputs are achieved. **A deadline for applications is being introduced, after which any applications will not be considered unless there is sufficient funds to cover the required payments, at the sole discretion of the Trust. In 2012 the deadline for applications will be 5:00 pm on 20 July 2012.**

The standard procedure will normally involve the crofter producing a map (based on a blank map supplied by the Trust) showing the proposed areas of each crop, plus details of any cattle being kept, by the deadline set out above. The Trust will then produce an agreement and map showing the agreed cropping areas and livestock numbers. This will also set out the eligible payments anticipated from the scheme. Once this has been agreed and signed the crofter is free to undertake the activities throughout the season. If at any time the crofter wishes to amend the agreed outputs, they can seek a further meeting with NTS staff to amend the agreement accordingly. Therefore, for example, if a crofter chooses to opt for a silage crop, but part way through the season decides to change to a late-cut crop, it should be possible to apply for the additional species-rich premium if sufficient notice is given. Normally two weeks notice should be sufficient to negotiate and agree an increased rate of payment. In the case of a change whereby the crofter might be eligible for a reduced payment, no prior notice is required since the payment will be made according to actual results. During the season, NTS staff will check on progress and make particular note of any harvesting dates and methods that may be relevant to hay and/or species-rich premium payments. Once the season is over, and all crops have been harvested, a meeting will be arranged on site to agree the actual outputs and NTS will make the appropriate payment to the crofter for the work actually undertaken.

The standard procedure for completing an application to this scheme is shown in Appendix I.

6. Future of the Scheme

The Scheme is intended to continue for a five years from 2012 and it is anticipated that most applications will be set up on an annual basis.

Appendix I

Traditional Croft Management Scheme Administration Procedures



