

**Written comments from Moray Estates Development Company**

As Managing Director of Moray Estates I have prepared both written submissions and given oral evidence to the RACCE Committee at Holyrood. As a Director of Scottish Land and Estates I was also involved in the preparation of written evidence for that organisation and gave oral evidence to the RACCE Committee on its behalf. In both cases submissions / evidence has been related to Agricultural Holdings and Land Reform Legislation.

**Written Submissions**

As a general rule I find consultation documents produced by the Scottish Government to be of a high standard. They tend to set out the issues clearly and ask clear direct questions whilst providing opportunity for wider submissions if relevant. Information is well presented and interpretable. The consultation documents, being well structured, assist in providing a structure for any evidence. Whilst I can imagine this is primarily done to assist those analysing responses it is of clear assistance to the resposdee. It is of course impossible to know how much impact, or notice, is taken by Government of evidence / submissions.

**Oral Evidence**

My experience of giving evidence to the RACCE Committee is a little more mixed. On the positive side the process of invitation and attendance at Holyrood is well organised and accessible. There has also been clear direction as to the issues the committee wishes to focus on that day.

I have attended Committee sessions where both sides of the 'debate' are in attendance and also where the entire industry has not been and thus one side of the on-going debate is presented. In each case the mechanics of the session have been well managed by the chairs. What has been less positive has been the sense that the committee is, on occasion, going through the motions and in some cases is not that interested in taking on board the evidence being given or occasionally not being particularly interested in understanding why the position being presented has been taken.

I accept that in the case of both Agricultural Holdings and Land Reform the evidence I have been giving has not been supportive of the proposed government policy position. However I was far from alone in some evidence sessions in expressing grave reservations about the likely impact and effectiveness of the policy proposals and there seemed a general disinclination to take on board views which were contrary to government policy. This was particularly the view under the SNP majority administration where the role of opposition politicians had been diminished. I fully respect the right of government to set policy. However I think committees have a responsibility to probe and test those policy positions even if their political inclination is to support them. I did not always see evidence of this. The impact will be poor quality legislation that may well not achieve its objective. In some circumstances it will have exactly the opposite effect to that intended despite warnings to the committee during evidence.

Andrew Howard

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