

NEWS RELEASE
Scottish Tenant Farmers Association
Culmailly Farm
Golspie
Sutherland
stfa@tfascotland.org.uk
angusmccall@aol.com

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LOCHHEAD SAYS NO TO MORE DE-REGULATION IN TENANCIES

At a meeting with directors of the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association on Tuesday 13th January, Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead reaffirmed the Scottish Government's commitment to properly regulated tenancies. He allayed tenant fears that the government would introduce freedom of contract into the letting sector.

Tenants had been deeply concerned at calls recently being made by landed interests for further de-regulation in letting land in the immediate wake of a statement in December 2008 by the Scottish Cabinet Secretary that he wished to see more flexibility in the lengths of tenancy leases. In speaking to STFA directors, Mr Lochhead clarified that flexibility did not mean a move towards freedom of contract in letting land; that he recognised the value of the existing structure of 1991 tenancies; he had no intention of de-regulating the sector and was looking towards modernising some of the conditions governing succession which currently exist.

Chairman Angus McCall said that STFA understood why the government was ruling out any extension of right to buy legislation and it now remains to be seen whether or not any more land will become available to be let now that the main excuse for not doing so has been removed.

STFA Directors instanced large areas of Scotland which had previously been farmed and were now either lying idle or let on short term licence. "We are entering an era where food security is becoming increasingly important and we know that there is land in Scotland which could sustain tenanted farms and make an important contribution to food production, the maintenance of the environment and to rural communities. Whilst the property rights of the individual must be respected and protected, there are compelling public interest arguments for ensuring that areas of land are brought back into food production reversing the current contraction of the tenanted sector of Scotland and providing opportunities for new entrants"

STFA stressed the importance of retaining the integrity of existing 1991 secure tenancies as the reservoir of farming businesses from which the bulk of new entrants into farming will emerge. According to Scottish Government figures over 80% of rented land (1.6m ha) is under secure tenure. STFA considers it vital this area of land remains within the tenanted sector and has asked the government to ensure a smooth transition from one generation to another so the rightful heirs can succeed into their

family tenancies without having to fight costly legal battles as has been the case in the past.

Speaking after the meeting, Chairman Angus McCall said; “We hope we have convinced the Cabinet Secretary today not to throw the baby out with the bath water. The hard fought rights of tenants since WW11 must not be compromised to appease the profit driven landed sector.

“It is well recognised that a lack of regulation has brought the current UK economy to it present state and the last thing Scottish agricultural policy for tenants needs is the boom and bust mentality. Common sense must prevail.”

For further information contact:

Angus McCall

01408 633275

07767 756840