

**From:** Jonathan Hall  
**Sent:** 02 November 2016 13:18  
**To:** Claudia Rowse  
**Cc:** Mark Wrightham  
**Subject:** RE: Any views on scoping an Upland Vision?

Claudia, Mark

A bit of a scatter gun approach, but here's a response nevertheless. 'response' probably isn't the right term, more my rambling thoughts rather than an official NFU Scotland position.

- It is evident that the multi-functional nature of land use (activity) associated with Scotland's uplands, together with increasing and diverse expectations, often remains at odds with the invariable single interest, sector specific nature of many current and recent rural policy measures applied across Scotland. Public policy in relation to agriculture, forestry, natural heritage, access and recreation, and planning, to name but a few, has influences on almost all of Scotland's uplands.
- Much of the policy that has a bearing upon Scotland's uplands lacks any real or meaningful integration, let alone any explicit recognition of what the 'uplands' are and their values. Yet there is clearly an overlap of interests and actions in terms of uplands land use, management and expectation.
- Policy influences on the wide range of activities that take place in Scotland's uplands are no different in principle from those affecting land use elsewhere. In short, public policy in relation to land use is generally derived from the view that market forces cannot be left to their own devices if it is in the wider public interest to secure public benefit.
- It can be argued that this is particularly the case in the context of Scotland's uplands, where so much of what happens operates at little or no economic margin and there is no recognised market for many of the outputs from uplands activities. Consequently, successive governments and their agencies have intervened to ensure that the social and environmental benefits from active management of Scotland's uplands continue. Equally, the width and depth of public policy in relation to Scotland's uplands clearly highlights the increased expectations and demands currently placed on a wide variety of upland landscapes across Scotland.
- Through livestock grazing, the uplands provide a livelihood for farmers and crofters, as well as significant habit and species management. Where Scotland's uplands are actively managed, they are capable of sustaining many direct and indirect jobs. In addition, many upland areas are managed for conservation and amenity purpose, which also attracts benefits for local communities.
- In many situations more traditional farming, forestry and field sports interests continue to jostle with more contemporary conservation, access and renewable energy issues. In the absence of any clear strategy for the future of Scotland's uplands, the fear is that legislative and policy changes may only fan any flames of discord, or at very least cause more friction.
- This has created the impression, at least over recent decades, that there is no coherence in current policies affecting Scotland's moorlands. Each policy prescription is decided in response to a perceived problem or a perceived opportunity. In meeting the public interest in either, policy makers have not

necessarily had to consider the implications for other public interests that are not immediately related.

- Uplands management can no longer be seen only in the context of single interests, where debate regarding interaction has often polarised opinion. Changing agricultural policy, not least decoupling, may well have caused land use change at the financial or physical margin. Woodland expansion and renewable energy are already the subject of Scottish Government targets. Likewise, access provision and landscape planning will continue to have their influences.
- It could therefore then be argued that what is required for Scotland's upland is a framework that allows land to be managed for the greater good. Driven grouse shooting, red deer stalking and sheep farming ought to sit comfortably with each other, as well as conservation interests, biodiversity targets and amenity, but only if no single interest is elevated to exclusivity. The future of Scotland's uplands, from any perspective, will be short lived if a single interest demands exclusive rights of management.
- It is evident that there is no explicitly defined 'uplands policy' in Scotland. Moreover, the perception of existing policies in relation to the uplands depends entirely on the objectives of the individual, whether they be land manager and/or land user.
- Traditional upland land uses and new rural interests ought to be neither conflicting nor incompatible. Sporting interests and sheep grazing, whatever their visual and environmental impacts, may be losing their economic and social primacy in many moorland areas. However, the active management associated with such land uses provide the platform upon which a range of biodiversity, conservation, recreational and tourist interests can be built.
- It is inevitable that for many of Scotland's uplands activity can no longer solely revolve around agriculture and sporting management. However, agriculture at least still continues to attract the lion's share of public support and occupies the focus of many rural policies. Therefore, in the pursuit of more integrated uplands policy, it is important that the existing situation is not simply dismantled but rather developed more fully.
- It will be in the interests of Scotland's uplands to continue to focus some policy attention on the viability of land-based businesses as engines of rural prosperity. Upland interests will not be advanced by broad common denominators of policy, which do not fit the realities and priorities of particular interests or locations – despite the shortcomings of existing sectoral policy approaches.
- It is more important that any future policy initiatives with an uplands dimension do not contradict one another and which collectively add up to a greater sum than the individual parts. This is clearly not the case in either the wider policy context or existing policy framework that Scotland's uplands currently finds themselves in.
- Scotland's uplands are a national asset. Their maintenance and enhancement will continue to be dependent on the continuation or resumption of viable land management. At the same time, in more marginal areas farming is becoming less and less profitable by the year. Forestry and field sports face their own uncertainties, with consequences for local incomes and employment, rural communities and their environment. The financial viability of many traditional rural businesses and enterprises is under threat.

- This raises the prospect of, all things being equal, seeing such upland areas revert to more and more extensive land use with declining management inputs most notably working capital and labour (investment and jobs). This may prove to be economically sensible and profitable, but it is unlikely to yield a comparable level of environmental benefits or local multiplier effects as current or traditional practices do. Therefore, a simple option of dismantling existing land use through rapid and significant policy change should be considered unsustainable in the context of Scotland's uplands.
- The quest for sustainable uplands must be an integral part of any policy development in relation to such landscapes and land uses. Policy makers could also encourage more contemporary land use in uplands whose primary purpose could be recreation or the environment. At the same time, and often in the same place, in situations where agricultural activity is essential to the maintenance of that upland landscape and its ecosystems/biodiversity land managers will continue to require positive incentives beyond market returns to deliver current public benefits.
- The social dimension of Scotland's uplands cannot be overstated either. However, there exists no current specific dimension of rural policy that highlights this importance despite the current political climate. This is clearly a failing of existing policy in relation to upland land use and could well be viewed as one reason why the uplands continue to play the Cinderella role with regard to the allocation of public funds to bring about benefits that can be appreciated across society.
- If anything can or should be done to address policy shortcomings in connection with Scotland's uplands, then a clear understanding of how an array of policies currently influences existing management and land use is necessary. Only then can consideration be properly given to possible revisions to, or introduction of, policy to provide a more coherent basis upon which management in any regard offers some benefit to the collective interest in Scotland's uplands. There's a need for a new approach to positively influence the management of uplands through opportunities now being presented by significant changes to the existing framework – not least life in a post-Brexit era.
- The current collection of policy measures affecting Scotland's uplands has not been constructed to form a consistent whole. Rather, each measure has been directed to individual purposes. Remedying the inconsistencies will not be easy. Also, any solution will be challenged by future policy priorities. Therefore, the subject needs to be revisited regularly.
- The policy challenges ahead might include: The economic vulnerability of agricultural activities; the need to underpin conservation through productive activity (conservation activities in themselves are unlikely to be fully funded from the public purse); Rural demography, and in particular, the lack of younger people employed in land-based occupations; Afforestation, albeit at a lesser pace (and with a different emphasis) than in the recent past; The drive to increase renewable energy generation; Overgrazing in particular places from combinations of agricultural livestock and of wild animals, especially deer.
- However, the priority at this time is to agree and articulate the full range of current public and private interests in Scotland's, and gain consensus for a set of general policy objectives in relation to the uplands. Only then can uplands issues be explicitly recognised in the design of future policy delivery vehicles, as they themselves attempt to better integrate a wide range rural land use interests. Explicit

principles for sustainable uplands management need to be built into all policies that have a direct or indirect impact on Scotland's uplands. Whilst it is evident that a host of policy levers have influenced uplands management over recent years, and decades, but future policy developments could generate even greater positive impacts.

- The rhetoric of policy change inevitably echoes sentiment regarding the need for integration. However, there remains the possibility that ongoing policy change that directly and indirectly affects Scotland's uplands may do little or nothing but retain the status quo, or even put further pressures on key land uses in the uplands.
- That said, with greater policy and practical consideration, in the current political context, there is a distinct opportunity right now to tailor current and future policy influences to deliver lasting benefit for Scotland's uplands and underscore their real value even more.

I probably haven't answered a single one of the questions posed, but I hope I've offered some thoughts that may be of interest. Use or discard as you see fit.

Thanks

Jonnie

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