

## **Land Reform (Scotland) Bill 2025**

### **Community Land Scotland response**

Community Land Scotland welcomes the passing of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> November. This is a step forward for land reform legislation in Scotland. For the first time the state can proactively intervene in land sales and break up large landholdings if deemed to be in the public interest, such as helping to address depopulation, and if necessary for community sustainability.

When vast tracts of land are owned and managed for private profit our local communities and our wider society and economy do not see the benefits that they should. We have an established alternative model in Scotland – community landownership. This model secures local economic development, local democracy and revitalises our local areas. This Bill, if utilised fully by the Scottish Government, should support community ownership and help break the power of large private land monopolies.

While we welcome many of the mechanisms within the Bill, we must also recognise that it does not go far enough to meaningfully intervene in the land market and change the fundamental inequality of landownership in Scotland. Difficult but important decisions to assess incoming buyers and routes for changing existing landownership have been avoided.

Nevertheless, the ‘lotting’ provisions, the ability for Ministers to break up large landholdings, are one of the most potentially impactful interventions within the Bill. However, Ministers must feel empowered to use these provisions and break up land monopolies. Similarly prior notification mechanisms will introduce blanket transparency on land sales from landholdings over 1000ha, an important step forward for increasing oversight and knowledge of land transactions in Scotland. This mechanism will also provide communities with an opportunity to pursue purchase of these landholdings through a quicker and hopefully smoother path into Community Right to Buy. These are relatively technical tweaks, but they should have a considerable impact upon communities’ knowledge of the land transactions around them and provide routes into ownership.

The introduction of Land Management Plans (LMPs) for landholdings over a 1000ha is also very welcome. Communities, tenants and crofters will have to be consulted on the LMPs, and their engagement will have to inform the plan. If these obligations are not met, then a maximum £40,000 fine can be imposed. LMPs will also intersect with environmental obligations, such as deer management and the need to restore biodiversity.

At Stage 2 we welcomed the alignment of key thresholds at 1000 hectares across measures such as the prior notification of sale, the transfer test and for Land Management Plan (LMP)

provisions. We also recognised the introduction of recurring fines of up to £40,000 for breaches of LMP obligations and an onus placed on landowners to ensure community engagement informs the plan - all important steps toward ensuring the credibility and enforceability of the legislation. These important developments at Stage 2 have been maintained through to the Bill passing. We should all recognise the importance of Parliament and the Scottish Government not bowing to pressure from powerful landowning interests. We hope this resolve from the Scottish Government is maintained as the inevitable threats of legal challenge arrive from powerful landowners and their representatives who seek to scare the Government into inaction.

Arguments for the status quo will always be made by those who hold the land and power, but these arguments are tired and ignore clear evidence. The United Nations have explicitly encouraged member states to pursue policies and legal frameworks which avoid the concentration of landownership.<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Land Commission have research showing that concentrated landownership increases inequality and is bad for growth.<sup>2</sup> Scotland cannot move toward being a fairer, more just and equitable society until we break the hold of a tiny number of people, corporations and funds owning so much of our natural resources.

During all stages of the Bill, it was made clear by many stakeholders that this legislation is only a step in the journey of land reform in Scotland, and a bigger, bolder and more structural land reform programme will be needed in the next Parliament. Future legislation will need to provide further scrutiny over existing landownership, explore taxation to deliver land reform objectives as well as establish a public interest test on buyers of land in Scotland, as was much debated during the passage of this Bill.

However, we also need to ensure that the legislation we have in front of us can be as impactful as possible. It will be vital that the provisions within the Bill are enacted speedily, and the extensive guidance associated with the legislation is produced as a matter of urgency. Parliament needs to see if the mechanisms within the legislation deliver the land reform outcomes intended. We can then start to address the considerable challenges that concentrated private landownership are creating in rural Scotland.

More people and local communities owning land in Scotland will ensure that more democratic and more resilient decisions about land management are made. This will enable more of the people of Scotland to be involved in the significant land use change which is needed in coming years to address the multiple crises of climate, biodiversity and growing inequality.

---

<sup>1</sup> [g2300035.pdf \(un.org\)](#), p.9.

<sup>2</sup> [5dd7d2d0d7022\\_infographic-web.pdf](#)

## About Community Land Scotland

- Community Land Scotland was established to provide a collective voice for community landowners in Scotland.
- We have 140 member organisations across Scotland, ranging from community landowners of major crofting estates in the Western Isles to inner city community hubs in diverse communities.
- We believe that we cannot create a more socially just Scotland without addressing the issue of concentrated land ownership, with the growth of community land ownership a key part of developing a more diverse land ownership pattern
- We believe that communities should have the opportunity to lead development in their areas and an important way of achieving this is the democratic ownership of local land and assets.
- We are a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. We are members of the [International Land Coalition](http://www.international-land-coalition.org), which seeks to support community land rights and land reform movements around the world.

**Contact:** Dr Josh Doble [josh.doble@communitylandscotland.org.uk](mailto:josh.doble@communitylandscotland.org.uk) Mobile: 07940 993 555