

# Report takes bottom-up view of upland community issues

## MOORLAND FORUM HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS

An expanded role has been suggested for an organisation which has been investigating the problems facing estates, locals and farmers in upland regions.

Scotland's Moorland Forum involves 30 organisations representing the public and private sectors.

It has spent two years gaining a better understanding of community issues at Tomatin, near Inverness, and at Muirkirk, in Ayrshire.

Its report, just published, urges improved communications within the communities and in the way government and its agencies deal with them. But it also touts a new role for the forum in giving it the ability to probe specific areas and issues where there are conflicts and difficulties.

It would then work with communities to find solutions through comparing how they have been resolved elsewhere. This new dispute resolution service, through a moorland forum taskforce, is among the main recommendations as is an idea for communities to discuss their own development plans.

Forum chairman Lord Lindsay said the project had deliberately set out to understand the uplands through the eyes of those who lived and worked in them. That included finding out about the opportunities for them plus knowing the barriers to them developing.

He added: "The report is



GRASS ROOTS: Forum has spent two years gaining better understanding of community issues at Tomatin and Muirkirk

about what real people think. It provides a solid evidence base of ground-level experience and perspectives.

"It will help inform those who are devising or delivering policy and regulations that affect the future of the uplands and the people who live and work in them. It will also usefully complement and contrast with more institutionalised and generic analysis that is often principal source of information."

Lord Lindsay, the chairman of the Scottish Agricultural College and Scotland's last Tory agriculture minister,

said the report showed clearly the need for improved relationships between those living and working in the uplands and others whose work had a direct impact on the areas. Government and private-sector agencies were urged to forge closer links with communities.

The report identifies several issues at Tomatin including renewable energy and how the community can benefit from that. Locals vented frustration at the inability of gamekeepers to secure licences through Scottish Natural Heritage to control

ravens which were having an adverse impact on hilltop nesting birds. They also suggested specific rural development funding to help control ticks in sheep flocks to cut the impact they have on red grouse. Grouse shooting is the main economic activity in the area, accounting for 47 full-time equivalent jobs as well as maintaining 28 hours on nine estates.

Lord Lindsay said government could learn from the report because there were pointers in it about how policies and regulations were seen at ground level and

whether they are helping or hindering upland regions.

He added: "For all, there are clear messages about the need for improved dialogue, collaboration and integration, both at every level and between every level."

Environment Minister Stewart Stevenson welcomed the report's conclusions. He congratulated the team behind it, adding: "The views recorded in this report need to feed into the way that we support and regulate the upland areas of Scotland and we will work with the Moorland Forum to achieve this."