

Participants

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Tim	Baynes		Scottish Land & Estates Moorland Group
John	Gillies		Crofter, Raasay
Jonathan	Hall		NFUS
Alistair	Hamilton		SRUC
Ronnie	Kippen		SGA
Colin	Shedden		BASC Scotland
Apologies			
Malcolm	Younger		Islesman Ltd (representing RICS)

1. Welcome and Introduction

- The conference call was restricted to 60mins.
- The aim was to get views about the proposed approach to be adopted in the response to the Invitation to Tender for the review of the Muirburn Code.

2. Outline of the Invitation to Tender

- The response to the ITT is due by 12:00 on 15 December.
- The end date of the contract is 31 August 2016, when the new Code will be ready for publication.
- There are concerns about what is being asked:
 - There is limited reference to the recommendations contained in the report from the Critique Phase,
 - The form of the revised Code is not clear from the ITT,
 - There is no reference to cutting as a management tool (this will be included in the review),
 - There is no requirement for a formal public consultation, and
 - Proposals are required for promotion of the Code during the development phase and after publication.
- Discussion:
 - The latest version of the Code was produced after the enactment of the WANE Scotland Act 2011.
 - The willingness of the Government to accept proposed changes to the ITT remains to be seen. The changes will be sold as providing a way to achieve a better outcome.
 - It was agreed that the revised Code should be made relevant to everyone.
 - In supporting the recommendation for a practitioner focus for the revised guide, NFUS provided a reminder of the role that the Code plays in cross-compliance.

- Farmers have a limited understanding of muirburn practices and there is a need for the revised Code to improve knowledge; to maximise benefits from the revised Code, it needs to be practitioner-friendly.
- In crofting areas where there is no livestock there should be a requirement to manage the vegetation to reduce the risk of damage from wildfire.
- Muirburn is not a cross-compliance issue until it has been carried out.
- There is no immediate threat of areas of rank heather becoming ineligible for support payments in Scotland (as is the case in Northern Ireland).
- The drive for re-wilding in some areas is not seen as a threat to muirburn. The revised Code should cover muirburn for all purposes, including areas where it has been decided that muirburn should not be carried out, or postponed for a time.

3. Promotion of the Code

- Workshops during the development of the code and events after publication are an option.
 - This would involve asking stakeholders to concentrate on muirburn issues during the summer.
- A better option might be to produce a draft version of the Code and then to take this to stakeholders / practitioners during the 2016-17 muirburn season.
 - Lessons learned & feedback could then be incorporated into a final version.

4. Review of the Report from the Critique Phase

- a. We reviewed the key issues from the critique phase report.
- b. Support for the recommendations in the report was confirmed.

5. The Proposed Project Plan

- Some development from the plan set out in the ITT was supported.
 - The changes are not intended to challenge the Government's position or to be more expensive.
 - The aim is to get the best value from the available funding.
 - The first strategic aim for the review is to support well-managed muirburn.
 - This will only happen if practitioners understand the provisions included in the Code and have ownership of them.
 - The Code must be seen to be relevant to practitioners.
- Structure of the revised Code

- The proposed approach from the Critique Phase is for the code to be a Practitioners Guide supported by additional guidance to provide targeted information.
 - This was strongly supported during discussion.
- It will be important to capture views of stakeholders / practitioners as part of the review process
 - One aim should be promotion of the review process
 - This can be started over the summer
 - To road test the revised Code, demonstration events / attendance at other meetings can take place in the muirburn season
 - More people are likely to engage with discussion about muirburn during the season.
 - Demonstration events would be a good way to spread best practice.
- Communications
 - The SRUC fire training programme can be used as a way to reach practitioners.
 - It will be possible to use the NFUS branch network to circulate information. – platform for information exchange – demonstration events
- In crofting areas:
 - There is a lack of knowledge about muirburn and the current regulations.
 - There are opportunities to promote the use of modern muirburn techniques / equipment.
 - Restrictions on burning close to forestry, due to the risk of escaping fires is a issue in some parts.
- Financial
 - It is accepted that budgets will be tight, but the starting point will be the budget outlined for this phase of the work in the Critique Phase report.
- Timing
 - A later completion date for the contract will be proposed to allow the post-publication activity to take place as part of the review process.
- Membership of the Muirburn Group
 - The membership of the Muirburn Group was discussed.
 - Is there enough practitioners input?

- Should there be an input from the renewables sector.
 - SG–RPID should have an input
 - They provide information to Crofters & Farmers –
 - Point of contact - Ian Davidson (Ag Development, SG Crofting Estate)
- It is expected that number of members and the reach of the Group will increase with time.
- The aim of the Muirburn Group is to act as conduit for information about the review process to the networks of the members.
- Planning Group members were requested to volunteer to join the Steering Group.

6. Next Steps

- a. Develop the project plan and submit as part of the tender response.
- b. The proposal will be to prepare a practitioners guide to be at the centre of the revised code with links to other information, supported by additional guidance.
- c. Work up several funding options for discussion with the Scottish Government.
- d. Keep planning group informed of developments

7. AoB

- a. A report on the September muirburn trial will be obtained
 - i. Information from the trial will provide useful input to the review .
 - ii. Trial fires in September at Garrows as part of the trial showed little difference to other areas.
- b. Fire Groups are one of the topics for additional guidance. A role for a fire group is to establish records of people and equipment across the area covered by the Group.
- c. Recently, leaf blowers had been introduced as effective equipment for managing muirburn in ‘normal’ fire conditions (for example a fire in a heather grass mix).
 - i. This might be useful information to share as part of the revised Code.
- d. The review process could seek to provide information about where to buy muirburn equipment, for example heather beaters, or the material to make them.