



# Scotland's Land: One resource, many uses

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# Research perspective

- Senior social researcher at the James Hutton Institute.
  - Research interests: land governance, land reform, and sustainable development in rural areas; international comparative land policy.
  - Project lead: [Scotland's Land Reform Futures](#) (PI) – Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme 2022-27
- Recent research focus: Scottish Government commissioned research on the [‘social and economic impacts of green land investment in rural Scotland’](#); report to be published December 2023.





# Outline

- Introduction
- Key challenges
- How can proposed Land Reform Bill and policy address these challenges?
- What are the tensions and trade-offs?
- How can we best use our land to meet our ambitions to underpin food security, maintain sustainable communities, and meet our climate and biodiversity targets?



# The role of land tenure

- How does our system of **land tenure** in Scotland support or inhibit the goals we need to meet (e.g. including climate and nature crises, food security, ensuring sustainable communities, overcoming inequalities and achieving a just transition)?
- **Land tenure:** *“the terms and conditions on which land is held, used and transacted, within a particular system of rights and institutions that govern access to and use of land”* (Reale and Handmer, 2011 in [Beingessner, 2023](#)).



# Key challenges (1)

1. A lack of **transparency** and **accountability** in how land is owned and management:
  - Lack of access to integrated land data (Matthews et al., forthcoming)
  - Limited communication regarding land management plans.
- **SLC Community Engagement Survey – 2022 findings:**
  - 25% of community respondents reported that they had **little or no understanding** of how decisions relating to land are made in their area (down from 35% in 2019);
  - 63% of community respondents did not think that their views have **much of an influence on significant land use or management decisions.**



# Key challenges (2)

## 2. Scale and concentration of private landownership; and rising land prices:

- Undermining goal of diversity of landownership?
- Challenging land access by communities and new entrant farmers
- Decision-making of individual landowners has greater influence and impact





## Key challenges (3)



3. Achieving the ‘**just transition**’ in Scottish land and “*account[ing] for the current injustices associated with land use in Scotland, and the wider challenges faced by many rural communities*” ([Scottish Government, 2021: 34](#)):
  - Rise in land purchases by companies and investors due to perceived natural capital market.
- Key challenge: how to ensure that **rural communities and the Scottish public benefit fairly** from resulting increases in land and natural capital value, as well as **encouraging private investment** to bridge the ‘nature finance gap’ (estimated: £20 billion)?

# Land Reform in a Net Zero Nation



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- Scottish Government consultation: '[Land Reform in a Net Zero Nation](#)' published July 2022 and closed 30th October 2022; new bill by end 2023.
- Proposals new duties on classified 'large-scale landholdings':
  - Legal duty on owners to comply with the **Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement** and associated codes/protocols.
  - Mandatory publication of a '**land management plan**'.
  - A '**Public Interest Test**' for the sale and purchase of large landholdings, as well as **pre-sale notification** for community right-to-buy.
- Other proposals:
  - A '**Land Use Tenancy**' (i.e. to permit tenants to undertake other land uses in one tenancy, e.g. woodland management, peatland restoration, etc., as well as agriculture).
  - The possible introduction of a requirement that those seeking ownership of large landholdings are registered in an EU member state or in the UK for tax purposes.







# Possible tensions, trade-offs and policy contradictions

- Challenges relating to **landownership scale**:
  - Unintended consequences of thresholds.
  - Need to incorporate considerations of landownership concentration.
- **Markets and government funding** challenging diversity of ownership (and other land reform) objectives:
  - New landowner and investor actors seeking security of Scottish land investment and Government funding.
  - Need to ensure that meet net zero goals, as well as enhance biodiversity and social benefits from land.



# Carbon positive land use in Aotearoa New Zealand

- Reported 50-60,000 ha of farmland converted to forestry per year.
- Key driver: NZ Emissions Trading Scheme and favourable conditions of commercial forestry; growth of 'carbon farming'.
- Impacts on farming and rural communities include loss of farming employment, outmigration of farming families, and decline in secondary services.
- Current policy review (e.g. ETS) and policy development through partnership working approach.
- New Zealand example a valuable illustration of the challenges surrounding a 'just transition'.



## Land Capability for Agriculture *Adapted by Climate for 2050*

The Land Capability for Agriculture classification presents detailed information on soil, climate and relief in a convenient form for all those involved in optimising the use of land resources.

The classification ranks land on the basis of its potential productivity and cropping flexibility, determined by the extent to which its physical characteristics (soil, climate and relief) impose long term restrictions on its agricultural use.

### THE CLASSES

Class 1. Land capable of producing a very wide range of crops with high yields  
Class 2. Land capable of producing a wide range of crops with yields less high than Class 1.  
Class 3. Land capable of producing good yields from a moderate range of crops.  
Class 4. Land capable of producing a narrow range of crops.  
Class 5. Land suited only to improved grassland and rough grazing.  
Class 6. Land capable only of use as rough grazing.  
Class 7. Land of very limited agricultural value.

### THE DIVISIONS

Classes 5 and 6 are not sub-divided for this map.

Brown I, Towers W, Rivington M, Black HD (2008) Influence of climate change on agricultural land-use potential: adapting and updating the land capability system for Scotland.  
Clim Res 37: 43-57. <https://doi.org/10.3354/cr00753>

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World Ocean Base

# How best can we use our land to meet all our ambitions? (1)



Develop land use plans according to risks and opportunities arising with climate change; key considerations:

- How does land tenure interact with climate change risks?
- How can land management and land use mitigate for and adapt to climate change?
- How can we ensure land management does not prioritise carbon sequestration over other natural capital that enable ecosystem function?
- How can we better integrate food production and nature restoration?



# How best can we use our land to meet all our ambitions? (2)

- Explore and implement **new forms of land governance**:
  - Learning from other countries where models such as **land cooperatives** and **land trusts** are more common (as described by [Beingessner, 2023](#)).
  - A need for government intervention in land market?
  - **Community Land Accelerator** under development by Crown Estate Scotland and Scottish Land Commission.





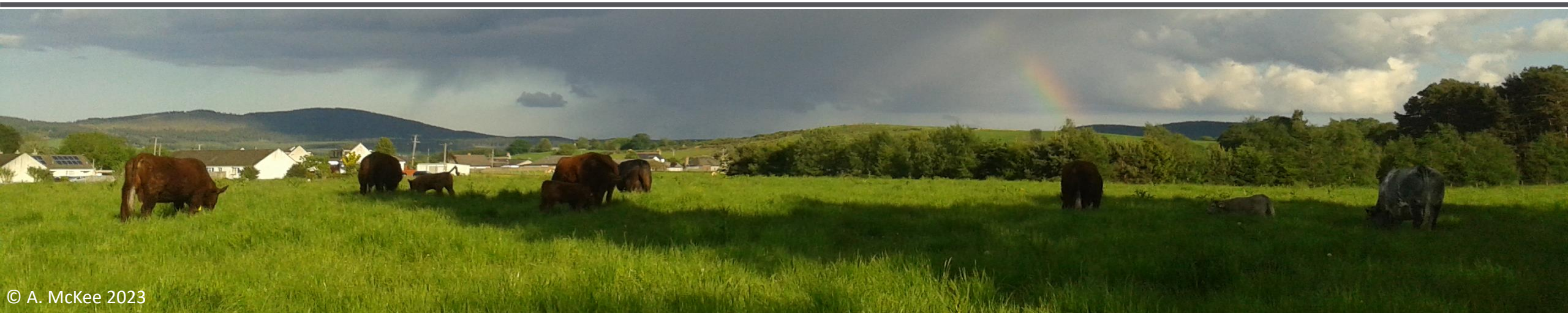


# How best can we use our land to meet all our ambitions? (3)

- Ensure more **democratic processes of land use decision-making**:
  - LRRS: ‘there should be meaningful collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land’.
  - Need to (re-)develop cultures of ongoing dialogue; lost due to landownership change or historical social hierarchies.
  - Revised private landownership governance structures involving community representation.
  - Frequent open meetings between landowners and communities to share updates, plans, concerns, and opportunities.

# Aligning land use visions

- **National and local conversation** about our land use vision.
- Defining the ‘**public interest**’ and **reconciling national interests with local level** sustainable development.
- How do **rural community needs** (i.e. housing, connectivity, local food production, renewable energy, etc.) align with goals of those **who own and control** our land resource?
- A difficult **balance of public and private interests**; critical to overcoming inequalities and achieving multiple objectives.





# Thank you very much for listening!

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Tarland Community Garden, Aberdeenshire

