



Rhoda Grant

Regional MSP for the Highlands and Islands

news release

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### MSPs call for Crofter Solidarity to Oppose Ending Historic Bull Scheme

Labour Highlands and Islands MSP Rhoda Grant, together with colleagues Peter Peacock and David Stewart, has called for crofters to stand together, shoulder to shoulder in solidarity, to win a reversal of the SNP government's proposals to end the historic bull hire scheme which improves the quality and price of cattle in the crofting counties.

The Bull Hire scheme allows networks of crofters and townships to join together to hire a bull for their cattle, even in remote areas, at a lower price of hiring a bull privately.

The MSPs have written to the croft grazings clerks on the issues and have revealed a series of Parliamentary questions they have tabled.

Rhoda Grant, herself the daughter of a Wester Ross crofter and who is Labour's acting spokesperson on rural affairs said:

"There is widespread dismay across the crofting counties about the government actually proceeding to end this very valuable scheme.

"The government will need to hear the voice of crofters loud and clear in order to secure a reversal of this damaging decision.

"The Bull Hire Scheme has been around for years and years and improves the ability of crofters to keep cattle economically in remote areas and improve the health and quality of stock.

"That ensures better incomes for crofters, but also keeping cattle also has major environmental benefits. The scheme also ensures all the bulls are over-wintered properly and in safe conditions.

"Bulls are large and potentially dangerous animals and they need special care, particularly in the harsh winters we have in the north.

"Many crofting communities don't have the facilities needed to keep a bull all year round and the bull scheme made perfect sense.

"Ending this scheme could lead to a reduction in quality and top health status and spell the end to cattle breeding in some of our communities after generations of success, and that would be a tragedy."

The MSPs have urged crofters to indicate their concern about the government proposals and are pledged to make representations to Ministers to back the crofters concerns.

They have set up a postcard campaign which is circulating among crofters and an e petition for those with internet access.

Mrs Grant continued:

"We would like to hear from crofters if they share our concern and to help us gauge support to have the government's policy reversed.

"The government have so far failed to spell out the details of what might replace the scheme.

"There are many practical, quality, health and cost concerns crofters have which the government don't seem to understand.

"There are no guarantees that in future crofters will get a bull when they need one.

"The Minister is trying to entice crofters into asking to take on a bull with vague promises that they might get financial support from the rural development programme, but there are no guarantees of that.

"The government are not clear about what will happen when the rural development programme ends, or when a bull needs to be replaced.

"In any event just about every crofter knows it is virtually impossible to get any access to the rural development programme because the government have made that such a mess of the application process.

"The actions we are taking in writing to crofters representatives across the area and in tabling questions are the first steps in trying to build a case to get the Scottish government to think again."

Rhoda Grant's website : [www.rhodagrants.org.uk](http://www.rhodagrants.org.uk)