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Advising London about crofting

The Scottish Government will continue to be responsible for agricultural, environmental and rural development decision-making following Brexit. There is, however, the likelihood of some common UK frameworks being established around these policy areas. How rigid or flexible these frameworks end up being will determine how much future Scottish Government policies will be able to differ from the rest of the UK.



It is therefore very important that policy-makers and politicians in London are aware of the challenges - and opportunities - facing agriculture, the environment and rural communities in Scotland. It was this that prompted myself and colleagues from SRUC's Rural Policy Centre to spend a day in London last month. In the morning we provided a briefing to some members of both Houses of Parliament, and finished the day with a full afternoon of discussions with senior policy officials within Defra.

At both meetings, my colleague Steven Thomson drew on the findings of a report that he, and Andrew Moxey of Pareto Consulting, conducted for the Highlands and Islands Agricultural Support Group. The report, "Post Brexit Implications for Agriculture and Associated Land Use in the Highlands & Islands", is available on the SRUC website and if you have not yet read it I would urge you to do so.

Highlighting the economic fragility of hill farming and crofting across the Highlands & Islands might make uncomfortable reading for some. But the report also emphasises that the distinctive environmental and cultural characteristics of the Highlands & Islands region, together with the exposure of its dominant agricultural land use to Brexit-induced pressures, provides a compelling case for distinctive and targeted policy interventions.

The extent to which appropriate support is actually forthcoming post-Brexit will be a test of political commitments to the economic, environmental and social conditions of the region. But it will also reflect how well the case can be made to the public for supporting hill farming and crofting.

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