Overall response

Scottish Land & Estates wants to see the SRDP support rural development in the widest sense so that rural areas can be supported to become dynamic and prosperous places with growing and vibrant rural populations, buoyant local economies and a high quality environment. From this perspective, the proposals for the next SRDP are disappointing because the impression from the headline illustrative budget is that it effectively supports the status quo rather than providing the platform for proper forward-looking rural development. Rural Scotland will be treading water until we develop a forward-looking strategy (something we lack at present) that seeks to deliver real rural development.

The changing nature of rural areas will only become more obvious if the amount of funding for farming declines in future. Changes to the funding regime will almost certainly lead to industry restructuring with fewer people involved in land management as businesses have to realise increased efficiencies in order to control costs in the context of receiving lower levels of public support. This will mean that the nature of employment in rural areas will have to change and that the Scottish Government has to be prepared for supporting rural areas in different ways. What is needed is some real future scenario planning, with our policies and support regimes aligned to the expected future. We need to be preparing our rural businesses and communities for things to come. But what we are doing at present is simply continuing with the status quo.
However, Scottish Land & Estates acknowledges the changes that are about to take place with regard to direct payments and so reluctantly accepts the need to maintain an element of stability in the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme in the medium term. Scottish Land & Estates believes that it would not be wise to change LFASS at the same time as direct payments because of the potential impact of our farming businesses but also because of the higher risk of administrative problems (we need to make sure that RPID can cope with the changes and avoid the problems that have been experienced in England in recent years). Consequently, Scottish Land & Estates adopts a pragmatic stance and accepts that the Scottish Government should follow the course it is proposing at present, but review the budgets, especially LFASS, in the light of the impact of the changes in Pillar 1, at the earliest opportunity. LFASS is an extremely blunt tool for supporting rural development and needs to be reformed to ANC’s as quickly as can practically be achieved.

It is therefore important that the Scottish Government allows itself sufficient flexibility to move money between budgets in the programme without the need to submit formal programme modifications to the European Commission. Such processes take time and potentially limit the Scottish Government’s flexibility in how the programme is managed.

It is also critically important that we develop a much better evidence base about our rural areas and how they are changing in order to develop a more targeted rural development policy and programme.

Although Scottish Land & Estates acknowledges the need to continue to support LFASS (in order to maintain stability during the period of change in Pillar 1), in the short-term (i.e. from the beginning of the programme) even a small amount of change to the LFASS budget would free up funds that could have a significant impact in other parts of the programme. It is the absolute protection of the LFASS budget for political reasons that creates the difficulties. A small change could have positive consequences for the rest of the programme.

The proposed changes to the structure of the application process are welcome. Scottish Government appears to have listened to feedback on the current programme although the degree to which they will actually solve the problems encountered by the applicant remains to be seen: changing the structure of the process does not necessarily make things easier. While it is important to acknowledge that public expenditure will always come with some bureaucracy, feedback from our members suggests that the current programme has been overly bureaucratic: they are keen to see simpler and easier to access systems.

**Question 1: How would you rate your satisfaction with the budget as a whole?**

There are different dimensions to this question: 1) are we satisfied with the level of the budget; 2) are we satisfied with the prioritisation of the budget; and 3) are we satisfied that Scottish Government is making best use of all available funds?

1) **Level of the budget**

Scottish Land & Estates would like to see an SRDP with a larger budget, but accepts the balancing act that Scottish Government is seeking to perform. Scottish Land & Estates has a broad membership which ranges from farmers who are solely focused on farming, through larger estate businesses that include farming but also wider interests such as forestry, residential property and renewables, to members that are not engaged in farming but who are
running rural businesses. Consequently, our members’ views on the SRDP vary widely. Some, such as those with strong forestry interests, want to see the SRDP budget enhanced so that more funding can be secured to help deliver the targets set out in the Scottish Forestry Strategy. Others would like to see direct support defended because of the importance of direct support in maintaining agricultural production and supporting the farming industry. Others would be looking to the next SRDP to underpin wider rural development and support a wide range of rural businesses. So in responding to the Scottish Government’s proposed SRDP budget Scottish Land & Estates has attempted to take a balanced view. We are not a single issue group that pushes for a specific interest; rather we are keen to secure the widest possible good for rural Scotland as a whole.

The biggest balancing act relates to the relationship between direct support for farmers and rural development support. The historically low levels of funding for rural development in Scotland (coupled with the prioritisation of the UK negotiating position) continue to have a legacy in terms of rural development budget allocation within the EU and so Scotland has had to consider transferring funds from direct support to rural development to ensure that the next programme is adequately funded.

Scottish Land & Estates supported the Scottish Government in its proposal to transfer 9.5% of the pillar 1 national ceiling in order to continue funding the SRDP at something akin to current levels. We did so because while many of our members would have liked the full 15% transfer (and it would have provided more money to fund useful rural development initiatives), it would have also compounded the impact of the change that will be felt by the farming sector. Scottish Land & Estates took the view that the current uncertainties surrounding direct support and the move to area payments warranted a degree of caution in transferring funds because we do not have a very clear picture of the precise consequences in terms of changes to support levels in different places and for different types of businesses. Greater reductions in the Pillar 1 budget could amplify the changes that are going to happen as we move to area payments and so until we know more clearly how these changes will play out we were cautious of suggesting a greater transfer. We did note, however, that the Scottish Government will have the ability to re-visit this decision in 2017, which could represent a useful opportunity to amend the Pillar 2 budget if necessary once the Scottish Government has a much better understanding of the implications of the move to area payments for the farming industry (taking into account the future changes involved in changing LFASS into ANC support).

Given this background, Scottish Land & Estates took the view that the proposal to maintain SRDP funding levels was a pragmatic approach that we support. £1.326 billion is a significant input to Scotland’s rural economy, which we could increase in 2017.

2) Prioritisation of the budget
Throughout the development of the next SRDP the Scottish Government has consistently said that it cannot fund everything and that it intends to target the funding of the next SRDP and its prioritisation is apparent in the budget breakdown, where 80% of the budget is devoted to LFASS, agri-environment measures and forestry. This prioritisation is understandable. Scotland needs to do more to protect and enhance biodiversity and has set woodland creation targets that need support to be reached. Our more remote rural communities, within which farming plays a key role, are also fragile and need support.

However, Scottish Land & Estates is somewhat disappointed at what appears to be a lack of vision for the next SRDP. Scottish Land & Estates wants to see the SRDP support rural
development in the widest sense so that rural areas can be supported to become dynamic and prosperous places that contribute to the economy, but the impression from the headline illustrative budget is that the next SRD effectively supports the status quo rather than providing the platform for proper forward-looking rural development.

LFASS provides an example. Scottish Land & Estates fully acknowledges the difficulties that are being experienced in hill farming. Many hill farming units struggle to achieve profitability and many are invariably dependent on support from government. At the same time, stock numbers continue to decline, raising concerns about losing critical mass and the potential for going past some sort of tipping point which leads to widespread land abandonment. The Cabinet Secretary’s commitment to LFASS is therefore understandable. Yet the extent of the Scottish Government’s vision for our remote rural areas appears to be limited to continuing to pay LFASS to farmers in the hope that it keeps in business those that struggle to farm profitably (although it must also be acknowledged that the majority of LFASS payments do not actually go to the most remote and therefore most needy farmers; they actually go to those on the better ground in the LFA and mirror the distribution of direct support). The largest single element of the SRDP budget will be used to simply continue to support unprofitable businesses in the hope that those businesses stay afloat because of the adverse socio-economic consequences if they folded. There is no analysis of what is required or what else might be funded; just a continuation of dependence on public subsidy. There is little forward thinking that seeks to help the industry in these challenging areas or which seeks to identify the forthcoming challenges and the sorts of innovative support that will help the farming industry change and adapt for the future.

At the very least LFASS (and subsequently ANCs) should be reframed into support for environmentally favoured areas. We should move away from supporting businesses because they are unable to do what others in better locations for farming can do and move towards rewarding those businesses for what they are actually able to deliver to society.

Ultimately, the defence of LFASS, which utilises the largest proportion of the budget, comes at a cost because it means that there are only limited funds for the other parts of the programme which could be more innovative and forward looking. Even a relatively small adjustment to LFASS could free up funds for other areas.

For example, Scottish Land & Estates believes that simply maintaining a flat forestry budget is a missed opportunity. The government has established some very ambitious climate change targets and forestry can play an important part in meeting those targets. The Scottish Government also wants to see sustainable economic growth and forestry is a significant contributor to the rural economy, yet it is apparently choosing to maintain the status quo. Recent figures suggest that the suggested budget of £36m/yr for forestry is not sufficient to deliver against the Scottish Government’s own targets. The figure appears to be more of the order of £45m/yr and so Scottish Government should increase the budget in this important area.

We recognise that the argument for extra forestry funding is not helped by FCS not spending its whole budget in recent years because it implies a lack of interest, but that situation had more to do with a) the difficulty forestry experienced when its support schemes were forced into a programme which was not designed for that sector; b) the vacuum caused by the early closure of the previous forestry grant scheme in 2006; and c) the time required to gear up once again to bring forward forestry schemes. Indeed it looks like FCS will meet its woodland creation target for the first time this year with strong demand ongoing. It should also be borne in mind that the changes in direct support for farming could easily lead to structural changes in the industry that potentially frees up land for planting and it would be
unfortunate if such opportunities were missed because of the limitations in the support regime.

Scottish Land & Estates also has concerns around the suggestion that support for access should be removed. Scottish Land & Estates is disappointed that the Scottish Government would choose to remove the support that helps landowners manage access, not least because the duty to ensure access and appropriate facilities comes about because of one of the Scottish Parliament’s most totemic and high-profile Acts: the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. Since the Act came into force the government has provided support to land managers to help meet their obligations under the legislation. This has been very welcome because it has limited the financial implications of the legislation for those managing the land and it has provided opportunities for those land managers that wanted to make the most of the available funds to enhance facilities and provide better opportunities for the people of Scotland to exercise their access rights. Now, however, the Scottish Government appears to be making a decision that will leave land managers to bear the costs of delivering what is now accepted in Scotland as a public good. The most recent figures provided to the SRDP PMC show that the access options have so far accounted for £3,540,604 of the SRDP budget involving 204 cases. In the context of the programme this is not a huge amount of money. In fact it represents 0.76% of the proposed LFASS budget for 2014-20.

Scottish Land & Estates accepts that with limited budgets choices have to be made, but it is the absolute protection of the LFASS budget that creates the difficulties and it is a protection that may not be warranted given the potential redistribution of area payments (obviously depending on the wider policy decisions that have yet to be made).

Finally, on budget prioritisation, Scottish Land & Estates would strongly urge the Scottish Government to allow itself sufficient flexibility to move funds around without having to take recourse to the European Commission through programme modifications. The government needs to be adaptable and to be able to monitor spend under its different headings and re-prioritise as required without needing to seek permission from the Commission at every stage.

3) Use of all available funds

In this round of reform one of the over-arching changes that the European Commission wanted to see was the greater integration of financial support. To this end the Commission proposed that a Common Strategic Framework be established and that each Member State would enter into a Partnership Agreement setting out how the EAFRD, European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund and European Marine and Fisheries Fund would all work together to achieve an impact on the EU’s 2020 thematic objectives. This is important because it encourages a wider view of how the support regime works to achieve our desired goals.

In this context, however, what seems to be lacking is any comprehensive explanation of how the SRDP relates to the other funding mechanisms and where they can complement each other. Are there any opportunities where regional and social funds can be either used to help deliver some of the wider rural development objectives? This remains opaque and the impression is that the SRDP will run independently from the other funds. While there will be very good administrative reasons why this should be the case, it is not clear to us that Scottish Government have explored all the potential avenues that could make the most of the complementarity of the different funds.
Question 2: Are you broadly satisfied with the new application and assessment process for land-based investments outlined in section 5?

Quite satisfied

Scottish Land & Estates welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has taken on board, and sought to act upon, the criticism of the current programme by seeking to develop a simpler application process. The goal should be that the Scottish Government develops schemes that are simple and straightforward to the extent that applicants are clear about how to apply and what they have to do on the ground, without the need for consultants. We recognise, however, that it is necessary that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure that public money is spent appropriately and that the process is auditable and targeted on delivering the desired outcomes. All these requirements add complexity that we have to live with. We therefore hold out little hope that the proposed changes will actually change much in terms of how the applicant experiences the process, although we can see that the Scottish Government is attempting to find ways of improving things especially around the forms and support.

Scottish Land & Estates is supportive of the removal of RPACs because while the intention was to introduce a degree of regionalisation in the delivery of the SRDP, the reality was that this regionalisation was not delivered. There will still be a need to target funding in certain ways, but this remains unclear.

The intention to introduce a two-level application process with smaller projects going through ongoing approval and larger projects through a national panel does, on the surface, make sense. It seeks to ensure that any large amounts of funding that goes to individual projects is subject to sufficient scrutiny.

There are, however, potential issues which need to be recognised. The first relates to the level of the threshold: £75,000 may be low with the result that the national group have to assess a larger number of applications (we say this without access to the number of applications above this level). The second relates to the way that thresholds can result in perverse behaviour whereby those that may have put in applications above the threshold perceive Level 1 as being easier and therefore alter their plans to fall below £75,000 when their original ideas may have actually delivered more public benefit. Thirdly, it should also be noted that the judging of applications should remain consistent across the threshold. The focus should be on ensuring that those projects that deliver most public benefit should be funded. It is not difficult to envisage a scenario whereby large amounts of funding is delivered under the threshold only to deliver limited public benefit, while some larger projects may be restricted from going ahead because of a lack of funds for level 2 or because of competition within level 2, yet they might still have delivered more public benefit than many schemes in level 1.

On the application limit, the consultation document suggests that ‘to ensure the effective use of funds’ applicants will be limited to a single application under level 1 and a single application under level 2 per year. But this does not seem to be about the effective use of funds; it is more about a political desire to ensure that funding goes to more recipients. While politically desirable, this does not actually relate to the effectiveness of funding. It may be that one applicant could deliver more effective projects than others, in terms of delivering against Scottish Government objectives, but they may be prevented from doing so because of the political desire to see funding spread more widely. The same arguments apply to the level of the threshold.

On the assessment of grant required, Scottish Land & Estates acknowledges that the Scottish Government could make the available funding go further if it is able to vary the level
of support offered, especially in those circumstances where the recipient derives significant private benefit. It will be important to ensure that those making the judgement about the intervention rate are qualified to do so with regard to the project under consideration.

Question 3: Should support for farmers operating in constrained areas be continued through the SRDP?

Yes.

Scottish Land & Estates agrees with the Scottish Government in viewing support for land management in constrained areas as important. It does play an important role supporting the continuation of farming in remote rural areas. LFASS is, however, far from perfect. At the most basic level there are many anomalies that have arisen since the re-basing in 2009 which need to be resolved. More broadly, because of how LFASS payments are calculated the distribution does not actually reflect relative disadvantage. Those on the better land actually receive more support than those in the most disadvantaged areas, which can be hard to justify given the rationale for the support (although the move to ANCs will potentially rectify this).

More generally, the absolute protection of the LFASS budget regardless of changes in direct support, which may actually favour many farmers in the LFA, limits the options for the rest of the programme. Flexibility in the LFASS budget could enable greater scope for the whole of the SRDP. However, Scottish Land & Estates supports the Scottish Government’s caution in terms of moving to ANCs later rather than sooner because of the desire not to be imposing change in Pillar 1 and 2 at the same time. Scottish Land & Estates would strongly urge the Scottish Government to utilise any opportunities for mid-term review to make any changes to the programme and levels of LFASS/ANC support in light of the changes experienced in Pillar 1 and in light of spend in other parts of the programme.

Question 4: How would you rate your satisfaction with the proposals for the New Entrants Scheme?

Quite satisfied. The New Entrants Scheme is but one part of a broader package of support that will be available for new entrants. If all the elements are put together then there appears to be a range of support available to help new entrants. This is positive and Scottish Land & Estates supports it.

Question 5: Should a scheme be expanded to provide capital support to small farms

Yes

Question 6: Is a 3 to 50 hectare range appropriate for defining a small land holding?

Possibly, but a definition based on size alone could potentially allow some intensive producers who are not really the target of the scheme to become eligible. It may be necessary to also consider economic status.

Question 7: Do you agree with the proposal for grants of £500 to be available to assist the establishment of Grazings Committees?

Yes
Question 8: How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals for the Crofters and Smallholders Scheme?

Quite satisfied

Question 9: How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposal for the Agri-Environment-Climate Scheme?

Quite satisfied

The information included in the consultation document on the agri-environment-climate scheme essentially sets out how the Scottish Government intends to refine the existing scheme in order to improve the delivery of the desired outcomes whilst ensuring the most effective use of public money. The key to this is more effective targeting to ensure that public money is spent in appropriate places to realistically achieve the desired outcome. Scottish Land & Estates supports the government in this move.

However, so much really depends on the detail of the measures and the associated payment rates, which have yet to be finalised, and on the detail of greening in Pillar 1 and how that affects farmers’ willingness to undertake further agri-environment activity.

On a general point, in the discussion about the next SRDP people have tended to look at the spend on certain Rural Priorities options which have been widely adopted and questioned whether or not these options are positive/appropriate. The logic appears to be that if an option is popular, and therefore we see large amount of public money being spent on it, it is probably not actually delivering much. This then leads to the removal of those options that would use up too much of the budget. But we believe it is important to reflect carefully on what is happening here.

Land managers are running businesses and will look at agri-environment options and assess the degree to which the option fits with their overarching objectives. Where their objectives and the scheme meet, then there is uptake. There will always be an element of both public and private benefit from these schemes. In fact there probably has to be an element of private benefit for individual land managers to consider doing them (unless they are specifically motivated to achieve the environmental goal). Some of the most popular options under the current scheme have been popular precisely because applicants can see how they will deliver the desired outcome whilst also deriving some private benefit. Private benefit should not be seen as a bad thing because if these schemes are to work they need to be attractive to land managers. If they are not attractive, uptake will be low.

It might be possible to design an absolutely perfect scheme that offers options for land managers that could really deliver an enhanced environment, but if the options are unattractive the government will not necessarily achieve its intended outcome. Those designing the options must therefore not only consider the ecological/hydrological robustness of the option; they must also think carefully about the attractiveness to the land manager. There will almost always need to be a balance between these aspects.
Question 10: It is proposed to support forestry under six main areas as outlined in table 4 below. Please identify whether you agree with these broad areas.

Agree

Question 11: We propose nine woodland creation options with support through standard costs. Should these be included?

Yes

Question 12: Are there any other woodland types that should be supported?

No, but the industry must be able to mix and match the NWC models in the same application to make the best use of sites and the rates could promote the inclusion of productive conifer in overall larger native woodland schemes where site type is suitable.

Question 13: Should the Central Scotland Green Network be allowed an ‘Additional Cost Contribution’?

Yes

Question 14: What is your preferred option for Income Foregone in SRDP 2014 - 2020?

Option 2

Scottish Land & Estates believes that the woodland owners would prefer to achieve the cash flow benefits, and avoid the erosion of real value over time, by accessing payments over the shortest timescale possible. Scottish Land & Estates also believes that the Scottish Government should take any opportunity to minimise complexity. Option 1 draws out the payments over a longer period and Option 3 is more complications; hence Option 2.

Question 15: Do you agree with the range of ‘other support’ for woodland creation?

Yes

Question 16: Should agroforestry be funded through the SRDP 2014 – 2020?

Yes.

The Woodland Expansion Advisory group was created because of the division between farming and forestry interests. The antagonism between these interests is unhelpful to the development of the rural economy and there is a great deal of scope for the clear boundary between these industries to be broken down so that a more integrated approach to land use is developed. Agroforestry is one option that works on this interface between farming and forestry and should be supported. Inclusion of the option will not, however, be sufficient. The success of the agroforestry option will be dependent on wider measures to support farmers and those interested in utilising the measure.
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Question 14: What is your preferred option for the capital programme in SRDP 2014 – 2020?

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have is that the move of forestry support into the SRDP brought with it a change in the orientation of FCS staff. Their role shifted from being one where they helped deliver forestry projects to one that was more about policing the scheme. This is not in any way a criticism of the staff themselves, who we understand are having to do a difficult job at a time when tight public budgets are imposing cuts across the board. It is more about the culture that accompanies the whole of the SRDP, which has been especially noticeable in the forestry world. Our members would like to see a return to the situation where woodland officers were more facilitators than police. We recognise that there are issues relating to audit and ensuring that those making judgements on awarding support are not those who have helped applicants develop the scheme. We also recognise that Scottish Government has itself acknowledged this issue and is keen to move towards a more customer focused approach. This is welcome and we would support Scottish Government in its efforts to change the culture so that applicants are supported rather than kept at arm’s length.

Question 22: How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals for co-operation?

Quite satisfied

Question 23: How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals for Small Business Support?

Scottish Land & Estates wants to see the SRDP support rural development in the widest sense and so we are very supportive of the Scottish Government’s plans to support small rural businesses, although disappointed with the budget allocation which is very small.

The overarching message of the proposed budget is that rural areas are about farming and that to sustain rural society and economy we need to continue to supporting farming. There is obviously a great deal of truth in this because a major change in support regime is likely to be accompanied by structural change in farming that may have consequences for rural communities. But rural areas are about more than farming and we must acknowledge that farming will change and that rural areas will change, which means that the Scottish Government needs to take a wider view of rural areas and support to the rural economy.

£20m over seven years for the whole of Scotland is a very small budget to support wider rural economy and Scottish Land & Estates would like to see this increased if at all possible.

Scottish Land & Estates would also strenuously defend this small budget. We recognise that the Scottish Government will be receiving calls from all sides to increase budgets, but we take the view that the small rural business budget should not be sacrificed. The Scottish Government would be taking a very regressive step if it chose cut this funding.

While Scottish Land & Estates welcomes this support, the focus on start-ups or only on funding those activities that existing business have never previously carried out, the scheme could be too restrictive. There could easily be small businesses that are growing that could have a real positive impact on the rural economy that would be excluded from support. This would be unfortunate.
Question 24: Do you agree with the proposal that we should continue to give significant support to the food and drink sector?
Yes

Question 25: Selection criteria such as those listed above should apply to that support?
Yes

Question 26: Steps should be taken to streamline processes for food companies including a one stop shop for public support?
Yes

Question 27: How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals for Food and Drink support?
Quite satisfied

Question 28: How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals for LEADER?
Quite satisfied.

It is not clear from the consultation document how LAGs developing Local Development Strategies would engage with the private business sector including land managers. This sector could play an important part but LEADER tends to be seen as community focused. Private businesses are embedded in their communities and should be part of the LEADER approach.

Question 29: Do you agree with the range of options being included within KTIF scheme?
Quite satisfied

Question 31: How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals for the Advisory Service?
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Good advice is important and valuable to any business and forward-looking land managers will avail themselves of the necessary expertise in order to inform their decision making. Fortunately one of the strengths of Scottish agriculture is that it is supported by world class research institutes and a strong advice capacity. SRUC, in particular, is a unique institution that is a valuable resource for the industry. The combination of research and advice provided by SRUC is powerful and should be cherished as we move forward.

This is not to say, however, that the advice landscape is absolutely perfect and no improvements could be made. The Scottish Government has identified that gains could be made in terms of the advice provided with regard to improving business performance and productivity/efficiency in farming and with regard to enhancing the delivery of public goods. It is well-established that utilising some funds on advice can enhance the effectiveness of the
wider spend on agri-environment measures i.e. spending some money on advice means that the cost-effectiveness of the rest of the budget increases with better outcomes achieved.

So we probably can enhance our advisory provision and we have the opportunity to do so through the use of European funds. Given this opportunity Scottish Land & Estates supports the Scottish Government’s intention to utilise European funding to bolster our advisory support to land managers.

What remains unclear from the consultation document, however, is a clear picture of what the Scottish Government is proposing. We know that the proposal is to create a Scottish Agricultural and Rural Advisory Service as a Scottish Government hub designed to help farmers, foresters and other land managers improve their economic and environmental performance. We also know that this new hub will have to put out to tender the contracts for the provision of the one-to-one and one-to-many delivery mechanisms and that the hub will be responsible for delivering the Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (inc. Monitor Farms). But what remains unclear is how this new arrangement relates to the existing advice landscape. At present, advice is effectively provided through the market (with some subsidy in specific areas, such as the Whole Farm Review or veterinary support). Land managers pay advisors for their advice. But how does the creation of a government hub, that will attempt to act as a portal for advice, relate to that current market?

There needs to be real clarity about what the hub is seeking to do and how it relates to the SRDP. Is it going to be focused on the SRDP or offering much more generic advice which may not lead to an SRDP application but to simple improvements in business performance? Clarity on this is needed so that it is clear to land managers where this new hub sits and what it does.

It will be important to ensure that the introduction of a new advisory service is done in such a way as to avoid damaging the positive aspects of our current advice landscape (SRUC, for example). It is imperative that the new hub enhances the current advice landscape and does not complicate it.

Question 32: Do you think the tasks set out above are the most appropriate ways for the SRN to add value to the implementation of the SRDP? Please tick the appropriate box in the online questionnaire.
Are there other activities or services you would like to see the SRN provide? Please specify (in the space given in the online questionnaire).

Yes to the list proposed.
One of the unfortunate aspects of rural Scotland today is that the social landscape is riven with division. We have farmers fighting foresters; farmers and foresters fighting environmentalists; landowners apparently at odds with communities or tenant farmers; sporting interests at odds with environmentalists and so on. Different interests tend to coalesce without much interaction, which leads to trench warfare when big issues arise. We retreat into a ‘them and us’ situation rather than looking for consensus. This is unhelpful. We should all be pulling in the same direction and in order to help move us in that direction we should be putting more effort into breaking down the barriers between interests.

It is easy to criticise others when they are distant and we don’t necessarily understand the detail of their view or way of thinking about things. So we need to find ways of enabling
farmers and foresters, for example, to communicate and understand more about each others’ businesses, the challenges they face and the approaches they take. This could take the form of visits, open doors events, walk and talk events – anything that improves communication across conventional divides.

**Question 33:** Do you agree with the proposal to establish thematic working groups as an approach to supporting the Rural Development Programme priorities

Yes

**Question 34:** How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals for the Scottish National Rural Network?

One of the important aspects of the current SNRN was the way that it was very much focused on (or came across as focused on) community; it didn’t really connect with the land manager, the farmer or the forester. It is important that the NRN attempts to speak to all, not just those working in rural capacity building.

There will obviously be close links with the advisory service and the knowledge transfer and innovation fund and it will be important to ensure either that these different aspects of the programme are knitted together or that they are separated with very clear division of responsibility and audience.

**Question 35:** How would you rate your broad satisfaction with the proposals for communicating the new Scotland Rural Development Programme?

Very dissatisfied

The section in the consultation document on communications is poor. The diagram on SRDP communications is generic and does not provide any real information apart from implying that communications about the SRDP will take place through a number of different channels.

It is extremely important that the Scottish Government think very carefully about precisely what is being communicated to whom (audiences). There is a difference, for example, between the communication through the advisory service about the services on offer and the overarching communications about the programme. This complexity of communication needs to be carefully thought through.

The SRDP is important to rural Scotland and it would be unfortunate if it became mired in another overarching public/stakeholder/applicant perception of dissatisfaction/frustration. Scottish Land & Estates believes that communication about the overall programme and within the programme is very important and that Scottish Government must ensure sufficient thought is given to it.