



CRC 04/09

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Public views sought as rural watchdog says uplands deserve an upbeat future

An official inquiry into the challenges and opportunities facing England's upland communities advanced a stage further today (Wednesday 11 February) when Dr. Stuart Burgess, the Government's Rural Advocate and Chairman of the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) announced a 'call for evidence'.

The call delivers on a commitment made last year, to draw attention to the current harsh realities of upland life and highlight what these significant parts of England will need if they are to carry on serving the rest of the country as food producers; landscape, wildlife and heritage protectors; tourism and recreational resource; and as stewards of biodiversity, water and soil.

In calling for evidence, Dr. Burgess said: "High hills and moorland occupy a little under a fifth of England but they, and their communities, are vital to the health, economic prosperity and quality of life of many millions of people across the country as a whole. They face challenging times, however, so the CRC has pledged to hold an inquiry to determine how the nation can best equip upland communities to secure their economic prosperity, and provide sustainable benefits for all.

"We want the call for evidence to bring in views, ideas, and first-hand experiences, from local people, businesses, visitors and wider beneficiaries. We will then look at the contributions as part of our wider consultations and use them to inform a report going to the Government this Autumn, recommending how to give our uplands a more promising future. In addition, the inquiry team will be gathering information and evidence from all corners of England, and beyond, including at a range of regional meetings.

Support for the inquiry has already been committed by the Country Land and Business Association (CLA), the leading membership organisation for owners of land, property and businesses in rural England.

President Henry Aubrey-Fletcher says: "We welcome the CRC inquiry and call on the upland communities within England to tell their story, explaining the situation they face today and their aspirations for the future. The CLA believes passionately that our uplands must be managed by people who know how to look after these fragile environments. Their activities generate and maintain the textured landscape and rich biodiversity so valued by the public.

"Rural businesses and the related rural communities are vital to the future of our upland areas in protecting the environment, developing the rural economy and passing on the skills the next generation will need to continue this way of life. The cost of failure is too great to contemplate in terms of environmental degradation and the loss of communities. The CLA believes the CRC inquiry is an excellent opportunity to get the voice of the uplands heard."

The need to hear the voice of the uplands is echoed by Dr. Burgess: "Living and working in sparsely-populated places such as Exmoor, Peak District, Pennines and the North Yorkshire Moors is rarely as romantic as outsiders like to dream. It is tough at the best of times, and has been made even more so of late because of animal disease, flooding, reduced access to essential services, and the general downturn in the economy. Yet with so many aspects of our life and lifestyle relying on good upland management, we need to let upland communities know that we understand their issues and hopes and want to find ways to help."

More...

Comments can be made any time up to 30 April by completing a short questionnaire on the CRC's website: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/uplandcommunities/overview or by writing to: Uplands Inquiry, Commission for Rural Communities, John Dower House, Crescent Place, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 3RA.

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For further information contact Chris Wynne-Davies on 01242 534070

Notes for editors:

1 Uplands in England occupy around 2.2m hectares, about 18% of the total area of the country. They are found mainly in the north, the south west and along the border with Wales. Upland hills and moors contribute 17% of England's agricultural land and are an important source of food and animal by-products (including wool and leather). Their scenic riches, heritage and remoteness attract many visitors, both from within the UK and beyond. The way the land is used is important for biodiversity and the management of natural resources, such as rainfall and soil. For more information, see: www.defra.gov.uk/rural/uplands/default.htm

2 The CRC was established in April 2005 and became an independent body on 1 October 2006, following the enactment of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006. The role of the CRC is to provide well-informed, independent advice to Government and ensure that policies reflect the real needs and circumstances of people living and working in rural England. We give particular focus to tackling disadvantage and economic under-performance.

We have three key functions:

- advocate: the voice for rural people, business and communities;
- expert adviser: providing evidence-based, objective advice to Government and others; and
- independent watchdog: monitoring and reporting on the delivery of policies nationally, regionally and locally.

Further information about the CRC and its work can be found at: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk