

The Crown Estate needs to be more accountable

✘ Rural Affairs and Environment Secretary Richard Lochhead held talks with the Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, to discuss accountability of The Crown Estate Commissioners in Scotland.

Mr Lochhead said:-“I had a constructive meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland, at which we agreed that greater transparency and accountability for The Crown Estate in Scotland was needed. We have agreed to work closely together on how this can be achieved. To help take this forward, The Scottish Government will be sharing a paper setting out our proposals on how this can be achieved.

“There is a growing consensus that a review of The Crown Estate in Scotland is needed. Post-devolution it is an anomaly in that Crown Estate Commissioners – who manage the seabed up to 12 miles from shore as well as the foreshore along with a number of large inland estates – are not accountable to Scottish Ministers or the Scottish people.

“In the coming weeks we will look to consult widely on the legislation that may be required to ensure that the communities of Scotland benefit from the exploitation of our natural resources. The Crown Estate is the only public body that currently accrues a direct benefit from offshore development. While we work well with Crown Estate Commissioners, change is needed so that the people of Scotland see real benefits from our offshore renewables.”

On Monday Mr Lochhead will meet with the convenors of six Highland and Islands local authorities to hold discussions on The Crown Estate.

Research from the Offshore Valuation Group, published in May

2010, found that Scotland's total offshore energy resource is estimated at 206 Gigawatts. By harnessing around a third of that resource, offshore renewables capacity could reach 68 GW by 2050, which would provide a net value in terms of electricity sales estimated at £14 billion.

A UK Treasury Select Committee report in March 2010 recommended that a concordat or memorandum of understanding between The Scottish Government and The Crown Estate is needed to consolidate the working relationship and highlighted the need for Crown Estate Commissioners to greatly strengthen their management within Scotland.

The 2009 Calman Report acknowledged evidence from local authorities and others calling for The Crown Estate to be devolved to enable Crown Estate Commissioners to be made more accountable and to help ensure that Scottish assets are managed in Scotland's interests.