

# **New-look board announced by Scottish Land Commission**

## **Former MSP and SNP President, Michael Russell, has joined the Scottish Land Commission as Chair**

The Scottish Government announced the appointment of the new Chair and two other new members to the Board of the Scottish Land Commission.

Michael Russell replaces the outgoing Andrew Thin, while Dr Craig Mackenzie and Professor Deb Roberts have also been appointed as Commissioners.

Mr Russell, served as a Scottish Government Minister and Member of the Scottish Parliament at various times between 1999 and 2021. He has had long-term involvement in the topic of land reform, and was Environment Minister from 2007 to 2009.

He said: “I am honoured and excited to be appointed as Chair of the Scottish Land Commission after an independently scrutinised competitive recruitment process.

“Land is a vital resource for every citizen of our country and how we share it, care for it, and use it is a key issue at the heart of Scotland’s continuing story.

“I am strongly committed to a process of land reform which ensures that all communities benefit from this national asset and that it contributes to our sustainable well-being as a vital part of the process of building a fair and equitable Scotland.”

Michael was a member of the Scottish Parliament Committee which scrutinised the Land Reform Bill in 2015, and an MSP for the South of Scotland Region for two terms before being elected in 2011 to serve the constituency of Argyll and Bute.

He retired from representational politics in 2021 but remained SNP President until 2023. He is the author of seven books and has worked as a columnist and commentator as well as a television producer and director and founded the Celtic Music Festival. Mr Russell was also a part-time Professor in Scottish Culture and Governance at the University of Glasgow and is the trustee of several charities.

He added: "The first Chair and Commissioners, appointed as a result of the 2016 Act, have done a superb job and created a huge resource in terms of research and positive practice and helped to develop a strong staffing base with an enviable reputation for openness and fair dealing.

"Andrew Thin has led the organisation with dedication and enthusiasm and I am very aware of the legacy to which I and the new Commissioners will have to live up as they learn from those still in office."

Andrew Thin was appointed as the first Chair of the Scottish Land Commission in 2016 and has led the organisation through its establishment as a new public body and since. Andrew's leadership has brought challenge and openness to the Commission's approach, developing clear recommendations for changes in law and policy as well as a strong focus on culture change in responsible land ownership.

Michael Russell is joined by Dr Craig Mackenzie and Prof Deb Roberts who replace the outgoing Megan MacInnes and Professor David Adams.

Craig is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh Business School who brings over 20 years of experience in investment management, combining financial and sustainable

investment roles.

Over his career, he has shaped good practice standards on corporate environmental and social responsibility, serving on advisory boards for the Global Reporting Initiative. As an academic, he founded the Centre for Business and Climate Change (now BCCaS) at the University of Edinburgh and helped launch carbon management and climate finance MSc programs.

Dr Mackenzie's PhD is in behavioural finance and he has published papers on sustainability and corporate responsibility. He said: "I am excited to join the Scottish Land Commission as a Commissioner and look forward to using my financial and standards-setting experience to contribute to more sustainable and equitable land use and development. Scotland's landscapes hold immense potential, and I am eager to play a role in helping to achieve it."

Professor Deb Roberts is Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Science at the James Hutton Institute.

Professor Roberts trained as an agricultural economist and, before moving into her current position, her research focussed on understanding how agricultural and environmental policies affect economic development and social well-being in rural areas. She holds an Honorary Chair in Real Estate at the University of Aberdeen.

She said: "It is a huge honour and privilege to be joining the Scottish Land Commission as a Commissioner and to have the opportunity to build on the progress made by my predecessors.

"The importance of land for Scotland's economy, environment and society has never been clearer and we are at a critical stage in the Land Reform process. I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues in shaping Scotland's land policies for the benefit of all."

Hamish Trench, Chief Executive at the Scottish Land Commission

said: “We’re delighted to be welcoming such a breadth of experience to our board.

“Of course, it does mean that we have to say goodbye to Andrew, Megan and David – who have been incredibly valuable to the Commission during their time here and made significant leadership contributions over the last seven years.

“It marks another key milestone for our work as a Commission though, and we’re looking forward to the fresh thinking and knowledge the new board members will bring in shaping land reform.”

The Scottish Land Commission is a public body established on 1 April 2017 by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 and wholly funded by the Scottish Government to advise on changes to law, policy, and practice. The Board of Commissioners sets the strategic direction of the organisation and is supported by a team of staff based in Inverness.

These appointments will be for five years and will run from 01 February 2024 to 31 February 2029 and are regulated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner.

Michael Russell’s appointment is part-time and attracts a remuneration of £279.52 per day for a time commitment of 48 days per financial year.

Deborah Roberts and Craig MacKenzie’s appointments are part-time and attract a remuneration of £224.48 per day for a time commitment of 24 days per financial year.

Michael Russell, Deborah Roberts and Craig MacKenzie do not hold any other public appointments.

All appointments are made on merit and political activity plays no part in the selection process. However, in accordance with the original Nolan recommendations, there is a requirement for appointees’ political activity within the last five years (if there is any to be declared) to be made public:

Michael Russell was MSP for Argyll and Bute from 2011 – 2021

and a Member of the SNP from 1974 – 2023. He was Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations from 2018 – 2020 and Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, Europe and External Affairs from 2020 – 2021. Michael Russell was formerly President of the SNP from 2020 – 2023.

Deborah Roberts and Craig MacKenzie have had no political activity within the last five years.

The Scottish Land Commission is an executive non-departmental public body established on 1 April 2017 by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016. The Commission is led by a Board of Commissioners comprised of five Land Commissioners and the Tenant Farming Commissioner, who are appointed by Scottish Ministers. The Board of Commissioners was chaired, until 31 January 2024, by Andrew Thin, and from 1 February 2024 by Michael Russell, and is supported by a team of staff led by Hamish Trench, the Chief Executive.

The role of the Scottish Land Commission is to advise Scottish Ministers on an ongoing programme of land reform. In addition, it provides leadership for change in culture and practice, conducting a programme of engagement, producing guidance and supporting good practice in land ownership, management and use. The Tenant Farming Commissioner also has a range of statutory powers and has a vital role in improving relationships between tenants and landlords.

The Commission published their Strategic Plan 2023 to 2026, in September 2023, which sets out their key priorities over the next three years with a focus on people, power and prosperity. The Strategic Plan reflects the commitments on land reform in successive Programmes for Government, is consistent with the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, and supports work to deliver a green and inclusive economy and meet climate change targets.



Mike Russell PHOTO The Scottish Parliament