

Report of the Simplification Taskforce

Dec 2019



January 2020

1. Background and introduction

The Simplification Taskforce was set up to consider some of the responses submitted to the Stability and Simplicity consultation from June 2018 and build on the views of internal and external stakeholders. To explore ways of simplifying the regulatory landscape associated with agricultural activity and in particular the interaction between customers and the Agriculture & Rural Delivery Directorate within Scottish Government.

Views were gathered from internal stakeholders, including staff within Agriculture & Rural Delivery Directorate and added to the relevant responses from the Stability and Simplicity consultation to identify common themes as a starting point for the Taskforce.

We first met in December 2018 and established a 12 month period within which to consider the information available and issue a report with recommendations.

The Taskforce has focused on improvements to the current system of administering CAP payments as well as regulatory requirements whilst recognising the constraints to change based on the current EU regulatory landscape. Whilst we have focussed on the period up to December 2020, the structure around future policy thinking has developed since the Taskforce was set up and there are now two further groups considering future policy post 2020. The 2021-2024 Policy and Delivery Coordination Group (an internal group), and the Post 2024 Farming and Food Production - Future Policy Group (primarily external members).

The approach taken by the Simplification Taskforce was twofold:

- in the first phase many ideas for simplification were gathered from staff involved in designing and delivering our existing grant, subsidy and regulatory landscape. That generation of ideas provided suggestions for future policy thinking and these suggestions have been fed into the 2021-2024 Group and Future Policy Group referenced earlier. The Taskforce has considered what can be achieved within regulatory constraints in the period up to the end of 2020 and what principles for future delivery might be established
- following that initial phase of ideas gathering, we engaged directly with external Taskforce members using those ideas in conjunction with analysis of the responses to questions 13 and 17 of the Scottish Government's Stability and Simplicity consultation

- a total of eight meetings were held between Scottish Government Taskforce leads, the external Taskforce members and subject matter expert groups from within Scottish Government

For reference, questions 13 and 17 of the Stability and Simplicity consultation were:

- Q13 - Would you support a simplified approach to scheme use of map information or to the land mapping system and, if so, do you have views on where the main opportunities for doing so would lie?
- Q17 - Are there specific issues you think the Simplification Taskforce should prioritise for review?

From these two consultation questions and feedback from staff, the following themes were identified and taskforce subgroups were set up to work with the Scottish Government's subject matter experts on the following topics:

- interpretation of guidance
- mapping (including land inspections)
- inspections which are non-land, and penalties
- forestry grants

All sub-group meetings were held between April and May 2019 with outputs and recommendations shared with the rest of the Taskforce.

A further sub group looking at what other EU countries do in relation to current regulatory requirements was also identified. However this subgroup was dependent on output from the other subgroups to try and focus activity. In terms of time we have not been able to focus enough resource to look at the approach in other EU countries. However as a principle, learning from the approach taken in other countries is one we would wish to consider in future.

The Taskforce viewed simplification in the form of:

- simplification of policy
- simplification of process
- simplification of understanding

We have experienced significant challenge in relation to what can be simplified in the short term in relation to policy and process due to current EU CAP regulations. We also acknowledge that many of the ideas gathered related to longer term policy ideas.

But the principle of thinking about simplification under the categories above has been established. It is also worth noting that by identifying simplifications, this can also in itself be considered as or lead to improvements, whether that is for customers or staff.

2. Headline recommendations

The following sets out the headline recommendations of the Taskforce. Annex 2 provides some further summary information on the wider range of activities considered as part of the Taskforce.

Recommendation 1 – Improved mapping

A new Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) tool will be introduced to customers which will address concerns raised by stakeholders and staff. It will allow interaction with various layers of data and provide customers with the ability to amend mapping data online. This will improve the understanding of customers and staff with a more accurate and readily accessible set of data to allow businesses to submit updates to maps quickly and accurately, allowing for more accurate applications for payments.

Recommendation 2 – Mapping Stability during Single Application Form (SAF) window

This is a recommendation that a deadline for the submission of land mapping changes by customers should be considered to allow changes to be submitted by customers and then actioned by the Scottish Government prior to the opening of SAF application windows. The aim being improved stability of mapping data during the submission and processing periods for customer applications.

Recommendation 3 – Penalties

This is a recommendation to explore an extension of the provision of guidance and warning letters where errors are discovered for the first time at inspection rather than imposing financial penalties immediately on discovery, as is required under the current CAP compliance regime in some circumstances. In addition, whilst we move more focus to guidance and education around the requirements of schemes and other regulatory requirements, the proportionality of penalties should also be reviewed.

Recommendation 4 – Inspections charter (all inspections)

A recommendation to explore providing a system that gives customers the tools to self-assess whether they comply with regulatory and scheme requirements. An example of this could be a proposal where this evidence of regular self-assessment could mitigate errors and potential penalties identified during formal inspections.

Recommendation 5 – Standardise capital grant rates

It is recommended the grant rates and specifications for standard cost items across all schemes currently available to customers be reviewed and, where possible, amended to ensure consistency.

Recommendation 6 – Improve EU appeals processing performance

A recommendation to improve the performance of appeals processing and increase learning from EU appeal cases to improve transparency and ensure better outcomes for customers and staff. It should be noted we have already commenced work on this by refresh training and instigated improved monitoring of appeal results.

Recommendation 7 – Improve understanding

The taskforce recommended improvements be made to communications with customers to raise understanding of requirements, both scheme specific and regulatory. Research should be undertaken with end users to better understand the needs of customers and consideration be given to increasing the use of technology to communicate (such as short tutorials and explanatory videos).

We also note that more detailed analysis of forestry grants has been undertaken along with colleagues in Scottish Forestry and customer representative groups in a separate forum and details of that work will be available separately to this document.

3. Next steps

The Taskforce and its subgroups have made a significant contribution to the themes raised. The current Taskforce format has completed its purpose and we have asked members, where they are willing, to act as a sounding board for progress on simplification as we move into formulation of new policy in the future.

We have already implemented, or will implement, actions around recommendations 1, 6 and 7 with further analysis required on recommendations 2, 3, 4 and 5 to better understand the impacts on the customer and internal processes. The further work needed would include business impact analysis to establish feasibility, practicality, staff resource demands and cost-versus-benefits to the customer.

It is worth reiterating that the output from the Simplification Taskforce has been fed into the 2021-2024 Group and the Farming and Food Production Group to ensure that the clear principles established by the Taskforce are taken into consideration in future policy development. Further analysis and work of the Taskforce recommendations will be incorporated within those work programmes in line with their delivery time scales.

Douglas Petrie
Simplification Taskforce Lead

Marcus Mackenzie
Simplification Taskforce Project Manager

Annex 1 – Taskforce members

Internal

Ian Davidson	Head of Agriculture Policy Division – to March 2019 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplification Task Force Project Joint Lead
Douglas Petrie	Head of Area Offices & Head of Agricultural Profession <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplification Task Force Project Joint Lead
Marcus Mackenzie	Simplification Task Force Project Manager

External

Kirstin Williams	SAC – Farming Opportunities New Entrants Group; Starter Farmer near Huntly
David Lawrie	Chair of the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs; Farmer
Jonnie Hall	NFUS – Director of Policy
Hamish Lean	Shepherd and Wedderburn – Specialist in Agricultural Law
Gail Watt	Morton Fraser – Agricultural Law and Rural Property Team
Donald McKinnon	Scottish Crofting Federation – Director; Young Crofter
Robert Fleming	2017/18 AgriScot Scotch Beef Farm Of The Year. Nuffield Farming Scholar in 2015
Jennifer Struthers	SAC Manager – Lanark Office. Farm Advisory service; farms beef and sheep in partnership with husband
Anne Rae MacDonald	Farmer and ex-RPID staff; Member of the Women in Agriculture Task Force
Sion Williams	Farm Manager, Buccleuch Estates
Claudia Rowse	SNH
Aimee Budge	Monitor farmer; young farmer, Shetland
Malcolm Morrison	Forestry Expert – Jarrah Forestry Ltd

Annex 2 – Simplification Task Force themes

The output from the work undertaken by the Task Force, Subgroups and from internal ideas cover a wider range of aspects including simplification ideas and internal improvements to Scottish Government processes.

Land Inspections

Inspections improvements/Simplification ideas have focused on the following:

- robust mapping on electronic systems allows us to reconsider and reduce our physical land based checks
- review our requirements for land eligibility for soft and hard features
- planning – more efficient prioritisation
- process – remove non-value add activities
- training – Timely and adequate
- communications – communicate best practice, identify barriers
- consideration of the change of notification period for inspections from unannounced (0-3 hours) to 24 hours minimum to be referred to the 2021-2024 Policy/Delivery Coordinator Group. Further options could be considered following Brexit decision

Mapping

- the new mapping system (Land Parcel Identification System – LPIS) to support area based payments, will enhance and simplify the customer experience when applying for CAP support
- the major enhancement the customer will notice is access to a new Geographical Information System (GIS) Viewer and will also give the customer the ability to submit new land changes online
- new LPIS viewer will show Inspection layers which will provide better access to that information
- when map changes are identified by review of new information we will complete the necessary map updates and inform the customer and request they review the changes to confirm they are correct
- we will ensure a customer's map information is kept up to date and accurate for any future CAP scheme application and claim processing
- Scottish Government is committed to ensuring mapping data in future is stable and up-to-date for future SAF windows and working to continuously improve year-on-year
- to avoid making un-necessary future deductions, the communication around the new LPIS will encourage early mapping changes prior to the SAF window. The recommendation from the Task Force however was to have a cut-off date for the submission of any land changes

AECS

- training – adopt/standardise best practice, blended learning approach adopted
- communications – share best practice, develop internal co-ordinators network
- guidance – review and improve accessibility incorporating a modern digital approach with screen capture instructional videos

- Scottish Government will endeavour to make the AECS management prescriptions simpler to understand in future scheme years
- Scottish Government will consider development of pilot agri-environment schemes for the years beyond 2020
- continue to liaise with Scottish Natural Heritage to ensure joined up approach to further AECS improvements

Interpretation of guidance/appeals

- refresher staff training undertaken for all involved to ensure consistency
- improve delivery of the management of appeals process to ensure consistency of approach and timescales for both the appellant and Scottish Government

Non-land inspections and penalties

- new Livestock Inspections System introduced in 2019 providing early streamlining of inspections process. The main benefits will be seen by inspectors but any streamlining can have knock on benefits for livestock keepers (although limited at this stage)
- improve compliance, whilst at the same time look at whether penalties are proportionate and can we do things differently
- RPID to work with producers to support better understanding of compliance
- improve inspections procedures for better customer experience
- Scottish Government to review animal inspections and traceability as far as record keeping is concerned and ensure that no requirement goes beyond that necessitated by law
- investigation of the benefits of an 'Inspections Charter' with checklists for all types of inspection. Encourage self-inspection (using checklists) on a regular basis to record activity. Could help inspections process for customer and Scottish Government

Communications

- Scottish Government taking forward a wider improved communications project looking to simplify understanding by making better and clearer use of:
 - letters
 - communications log
 - checklists
 - guide sheets
 - blended customer guidance including extensive use of [screen capture instructional videos](#) – fully endorsed by the Task Force
 - communicate best practice
 - enact user research

Applications

- recommendation that all applications move to online only where there is an online option, with RPID support where needed

Grant rates

- standardisation of capital grant rates whilst taking into consideration remote/island area concerns. To be referred to the 2021-2024 Policy/Delivery Coordinator Groups

Policy/scheme Implementation

- increased use of pre-approval visits for Pillar II schemes where time allows in future years thereby improving understanding of and support for Pillar II schemes
- investigate standardisation of grant rates and specifications for capital items across schemes

Forestry Grants

- separate paper to be produced but main points for action as follows:
 - barriers and potential solutions have been identified
 - streamline and provide application support/consultation for small woodland schemes.
 - improve FGS payment performance.
 - wider promotion of FGS to farmers/crofters



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