



T: 0300 244 4000  
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

By email: netzero.committee@parliament.scot

Edward Mountain, MSP  
Convener, Net Zero, Energy and Transport  
Committee  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

25 March 2025

Dear Edward,

Further to my response of 28 February 2025 covering questions raised at the evidence session on 18 February 2025, I now include relevant information on the following subjects:

- the differences in capital funding between crofts and small landholdings, and
- information produced by Animal Health and Welfare on the disease risk of avian flu.

The Crofting Commission recently published their annual report for 2023-2024 which indicates 21,514 crofts are on the register of crofts for the crofting counties.

Crofters are able to obtain financial support through schemes including the Croft House Grant Scheme (CHG), the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS), as well as the Crofting Cattle Improvement Scheme (CCIS). The Highland and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme (HIVVS) further provides support with veterinary fees.

The CHG scheme provides grants for crofters to enable them to improve and maintain the standards of croft housing. The aim of this scheme is to attract and retain people within the crofting areas of Scotland allowing them to achieve the full potential of their crofts and contribute to community and economic wellbeing. The scheme is not means tested, however there is a selection mechanism to ensure fairness to all applicants and to ensure that the scheme targets those crofters and their families that are most in need.

The CHG scheme can be used towards the construction of a new house and house improvements, including energy efficiency measures. It is a demand-led scheme with four application rounds each year in March, June, September, and December.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
[www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)



The budget for this financial year 2024/2025 is £2.1m. Since 2007, the Scottish Government have approved over £25.9m in CHG payments, helping to build and improve over 1,160 croft homes, almost half of which are located in island communities. There are two grant rates available, up to £38,000 (High Priority Area) and up to £28,000 (Standard Priority Area). All island areas are classed as high priority areas.

CAGS provides grants to crofters to enable them to make improvements to their crofts and help to sustain their businesses. Funds can be used for capital projects, such as the construction or improvement of agricultural buildings. In addition, CAGS supports crofters to complete individual or collective investments to reduce production costs, improve quality, food production, preserve and improve the natural environment and maintain animal welfare standards. Since 2015, over £30.9 m in CAGS funding has been committed, helping over 4,900 crofters with their businesses.

It is a demand-led scheme that is open all-year round with a budget of £3.4m for 2024/2025 financial year. The maximum grant available to an individual is limited to £25,000 in a rolling two-year period. For group applications the limit is £125,000. For those individuals who meet the young crofter eligibility criteria, the grant rate is 80% of the approved costs in less favoured areas. The grant rate is set at 60% for all other crofters in the same areas.

Other support is also available to crofters through the Cattle Improvement Scheme, based at the Scottish Government bull stud farm in Inverness. This subsidises bull hire by groups of crofters, by 50% of the full cost. The scheme supplies bulls to areas where there is no practical alternative means of service readily available and around 3,500 calves are sired annually by SG bulls.

In addition, crofters can access the Highland and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme (HIVVS). This is funded by the Scottish Government to ensure the provision of an adequate veterinary service to prevent and eradicate animal diseases for all animals kept for agricultural purposes and belonging to crofters and others of like economic status, where no other provisions are available on the market. In practice this means that the charges made by veterinary practices to crofters should be no greater than to livestock keepers elsewhere in Scotland, with the difference to the practices made up by the Scottish Government through the HIVSS Scheme. Further information is available here: [Highlands and Islands Veterinary Services Scheme - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/topics/health/veterinary-services-scheme)

Small landholders do not have access or eligibility to any of the grant schemes outlined above.

In relation to the Committee's question on avian flu and game birds, Animal Health and Welfare officials have provided the following information.

It is a legal requirement that any birds showing signs of notifiable avian disease, such as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), must be reported immediately to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). Pheasants are highly susceptible to the HPAI virus, and so during the rearing of gamebirds they are closely monitored, and signs of disease would be easily noticed. If suspicion of such disease is reported to APHA in gamebirds (as with all birds) restrictions are served on the premises whilst the premises is investigated and/or results of tests are awaited, and this includes restrictions on the movement or release of any birds.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
[www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**<sup>™</sup>  
We invest in people Silver



If HPAI is confirmed, disease control zones, such as Protection Zones and Surveillance Zones, are applied around an infected premises, a range of different controls and restrictions are implemented. These include restrictions on the movement of poultry (including gamebirds), other captive birds or mammal carcasses, eggs, used poultry litter and manure. These restrictions also prevent the release of gamebirds.

The requirement for the licensing of gamebird release sites adjacent to Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation, which is undertaken by NatureScot in Scotland, also provides the Scottish Government with the powers to control the release of gamebirds from sites considered to be of conservation concern. The prevalence of HPAI in the local area can be a reason for licences to be withheld. It is important to note that in Scotland, these are specific licences, not a general licence as in place in other parts of GB.

As with all bird keepers (with exceptions) game bird keepers are legally required to register the location of their birds on the Scottish Kept Bird register (SKBR).

Traditionally, the release of gamebirds in GB occurs during months of the year when avian influenza is least likely to be circulating in the environment. However, the 'over-summering' of the virus, predominantly in seabird species, during recent outbreak periods (2021-2022 and 2022-2023), marked a change to the traditional seasonal behaviour of the virus. However, it is still the case that the release of gamebirds in the 2021-2022 season occurred when confirmed outbreaks of HPAI in poultry and captive birds were at their lowest.

However, it is also worth noting that the most recent veterinary risk assessment concluded that: "in the free area in July and August 2023, the overall likelihood of HPAI virus transmission to wild birds from pheasants infected with HPAI virus before release, is high to very high for Anseriformes, birds of prey, corvids, waders, gulls and wild pheasants, and medium for pigeons, owls and passerines, but negligible for seabirds."

This risk assessment was one of three carried out by APHA involving HPAI and game birds:

- [Catching-up of wild gamebirds in winter 2022 to 2023 Risk Assessment](#)
- [Risk Assessment on the spread of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) H5N1 to wild birds from released, formerly captive gamebirds in Great Britain Pheasants](#)
- [Rapid Risk Assessment for spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\) H5N1 from wild birds to poultry from the shooting of wild waterfowl and wild game \(including formerly captive\) birds](#)

I hope the above information on capital grants for crofters and avian influenza and game birds will help answer the questions raised by the committee.

Yours sincerely,

**MAIRI GOUGEON**

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
[www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**™  
We invest in people Silver

