

Minutes of the First Annual General Meeting of Scottish Rural Action

1.30 p.m. Friday 6th March 2015

Salutation Hotel, Perth

Attending

Members:

Angus Hardie
Maggie Gordon
Amanda Burgauer
Niall Smith
Christine Hutchison
Grace Craigie

John Saich
Lorna Murray
Mags Russell
Michael Gallagher
Patricia Jordan
Patrick Haynes

Richard Briggs
Scott Walker
Graham Fraser
Gordon Methven
Dorothy Dahl
Peter Dahl

Directors and Members:

John Hutchison (Chair)
Sandy Brunton
Vanessa Halhead

Observers:

Emma Cooper
Francesca Harding
Alistair Prior

Lorraine Macrae
Lee Haxton
Nicola Hill

Diane Anderson

Agenda

1. Welcome

John Hutchison welcomed all to the first Annual General Meeting of Scottish Rural Action (SRA) and introduced his fellow Directors, Sandy Brunton, Vanessa Halhead, Angus Hardie and Maggie Gordon. John gave thanks to the three retiring Directors who were not present, Scott Simpson, Naomi Bremner and Norman MacAskill.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Sarah Skerratt
Frieda Morrison
Norman Macaskill
Christiane Valluri
Gill Lawrie
Angela Williams

Eleanor Mackinnon
Vic Thomas
Jan Banks
Simon Brooke
Nic Jones
Andi Holmes

Joanna Coghill
Tracey Reilly
Claudia Beamish MSP
Jon Hollingdale

3. Chair's Report

John Hutchison reported to the members on the activities of the year as follows:

The idea of a Rural Parliament came from Europe where other countries have had a Rural Parliament for over 20 years. Vanessa Halhead and others had investigated this idea and proposed it be adopted in Scotland. After stakeholder consultations, a commitment was made to holding a Rural Parliament in the SNP Manifesto at the 2011 election and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs Mr Lochhead announced that a Rural Parliament would be taking place in 2014.

The working group that had been progressing the idea until late 2013 then formed this company in order to be independent from Scottish Government and to be able to raise funds. Some members of this group became the first six members and directors of Scottish Rural Action. Soon after the first two members of staff were appointed and later the balance of gender, location, age and interests on the board was addressed with the co-option of three new directors.

John explained that the national event in Oban convinced the board of the appetite for a Rural Parliament and a rural movement. Communities want more powers and are willing to accept more responsibilities. The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Mr Russell, talked about the idea of co-creating and co-deciding. This approach is more than a partnership.

SRA was able to undertake the national event thanks to our sponsors, Scottish Government, Caledonian MacBrayne who have committed to a second sponsorship in 2016, Argyll & Bute Council and Highlands & Islands Enterprise amongst others.

Since Oban SRA has not been idle. An Extraordinary General Meeting was held where the memorandum of association was amended to allow other people to become members and enable us to hold our first election. SRA has prepared reports from the event and a Tactical Plan to outline how the recommendations from the Rural Parliament will be taken forward. Meetings have been arranged with Scottish Government, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and the Environment Committee and the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy.

On behalf of the board John expressed thanks to the staff team who have worked very hard over the past year and especially in Oban, Emma and Francesca.

The Chair also thanked the Directors who have retired. Jon Hollingdale who retired at the start of this year and Norman MacAskill who retired as part of the one-third of Directors who have to stand down each year. Their experience and skills will be greatly missed.

He also thanked the co-opted Directors, Naomi Bremner a Buffalo farmer living in Orkney, Scott Simpson from the Scottish Youth Parliament and Maggie Gordon also a farmer from Dumfries & Galloway who joined us in the middle of last year. He indicated that there is likely to be a discussion with the Scottish Youth Parliament about co-opting another MSYP to the board.

John explained that Vanessa Halhead, Sandy Brunton and himself had elected to remain on the board of Directors to ensure some continuity but would stand down in due course. He also thanked them.

The national event brought with it a great deal of good will towards the Rural Parliament but he emphasised that a great deal of work has still to be done and still need to assert ourselves. It is intended to recruit a Policy Officer this year to help with that task. While we continue to be ambitious for our Rural Parliament we need to earn support and earn respect. We have a big ongoing task ahead and, similar to those who work in the environmental or conservation fields, our task will never be complete.

Securing our immediate future involves submitting a funding application to Scottish Government to invite their support. A venue for the 2016 Rural Parliament needs now to be identified and he

encouraged those present to consider this. CalMac have committed to sponsoring the Rural Parliament again in 2016 and we thank them for this. John was initially concerned that an in-land location would not suit them, but of course they have two audiences, those who live on the islands and those who do or could visit the islands.

Lastly, the Chair explained that the board will be looking at governance and potentially forming finance and personnel sub-committees. The board will also be looking at how it does business, structural matters, the role of the Advisory Forum, how SRA works at a regional level.

He explained that he was not planning to be the Chair at the time of the 2016 Rural Parliament and will therefore need to choose an appropriate time to stand down. The board needs to give some thought to when this would be and who should be the next chair. In the meantime he apologised for his failings and thanked all for their support.

4. Financial Report

Emma Cooper, National Coordinator, reported on the financial position of the organisation. Scottish Rural Action has not yet reached the end of its first accounting year. The financial year end is 31st March 2015.

The total income from January 2014 – February 2015 was £279,417 and expenditure for the same period was £236,411.

Scottish Rural Action currently has sufficient reserves to cover its staffing and other obligations beyond May 2015.

5. Appointment of Independent Examiner

It was recommended by the board of Directors that Wylie & Bisset LLP be appointed as the accountants for Scottish Rural Action. This was approved by the members.

6. Appointment of directors nominated by members

The single transferable vote election process was explained. John Watt had submitted his approval of the process and results in his capacity as the 'scrutineer' of the election. The four candidates who received the required quota of votes were: Maggie Gordon, Angus Hardie, Amanda Burgauer and Niall Smith. The Chair extended his commiserations and thanks to those who were unsuccessful yet, without whom, an election would not have been possible.

The full results were circulated to members present. The retiring Directors were thanked and the new Directors welcomed to the board.

7. Any other business competent to the AGM

No other matters were raised.

8. Conclusion of meeting

John Hutchison thanked the members and observers for attending.