

Timeline of Scottish Land Reform: 1997 - 2017

In the U.K the model of community land stewardship - and land ownership - is most advanced in Scotland where devolution in 1999 has enabled successive Scottish Parliaments to drive forward a land reform agenda aimed at modernising Scottish property law and at creating new opportunities for communities in a devolved Scotland.

Timeline:

- 1997: The Land Reform Policy Group was established in the UK Government Scottish Office to develop recommendations for land reform measures that could be implemented by the new Scottish Parliament to “remove the land-based barriers to the sustainable development of rural communities”.
- 1999: Scottish Parliament established
- 2000: Legislation was introduced by the new Scottish Parliament to abolish Scotland's feudal land tenure system, a draft land reform bill was introduced and the Scottish Land Fund was created to assist rural communities to purchase land.
- 2003: The Land Reform (Scotland) Act created a legal framework for land access and introduced the community right to buy. This allowed communities with populations of up to 10,000 to register an interest in land, providing them a first right of refusal should the owner put the land up for sale, provided a representative community body could be formed to undertake the purchase.
- 2012: The Land Reform Review Group was established to enable more “to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land” and “promote new relationships between land, people, economy and environment”. Its findings, published in the 2014 report [“The Land of Scotland and the Common Good”](#) recommended policies to modernise and diversify land ownership in Scotland and encourage sustainable development and led to the Community Empowerment Act, the Land Reform Act and the establishment of the Scottish Land Commission.
- 2015: The Community Empowerment Act extended the Community Right to Buy to communities of any size, including those in urban areas. It also introduced a new community right to buy land that is abandoned, neglected or causing harm to the environmental wellbeing of the community, even where the owner does not wish to

sell. Scottish ministers may compel a landowner to sell to communities with a registered interest, if they deem the sale likely to contribute to sustainable local development. Community bodies were also given the right to request to purchase, lease, manage or use land and buildings held by Scottish public bodies.

2016: The Land Reform Act introduced the '[Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement](#)', setting out the Scottish Government's objectives for [land reform](#), and established the [Scottish Land Commission](#) to take forward the land reform process (see below). The Act also introduced the Community Right to Buy for Sustainable Development, permitting Scottish ministers to compel landowners to sell if the sale will further sustainable development in the area.

2017 The Scottish Land Commission was established review the impact and effectiveness of any law or policy, recommend changes to those laws or policies, and to gather evidence, carry out research, prepare reports and provide information and guidance.

This legislation has been underpinned both by a Scottish Land Fund which, in various iterations since 2001, has provided funding to communities to purchase land, and by an infrastructure of support organisations such as [Highland and Island Enterprise](#) and [Community Land Scotland](#).

Community purchases have ranged from extensive estates in remote areas such as Knoydart, to crofting estates, to woodlands close to communities that are bought primarily to protect and enhance local amenity.

A range of research has been undertaken to evaluate the economic and social impacts of community land ownership. These include:

- [Monitoring and Evaluating the Effects of Land Reform on Rural Scotland: a Scoping Study and Impact Assessment](#) (2008)
- [Community Land Ownership and Community Resilience](#) (2011)
- [Impact Evaluation of the Community Right to Buy](#) (2014)
- [Pilot Study of Social Impacts of Community Land Ownership](#) (2015)