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Single Payment Scheme Policy Team  
Area 5B  
9 Millbank  
c/o Noble House  
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Dear Sirs,

CAP Health Check  
DEFRA consultation – Single Payment Scheme

The Hebridean Sheep Society is a small, membership-based organisation aimed at promoting and preserving this small, thrifty breed of sheep for future generations. The vast majority of our members are either small scale farmers, or conservation organisations using Hebridean sheep for environmental management on areas of high biodiversity value. These individuals and organisations do not derive their main income from farming, and therefore the Single Payment Scheme makes a significant difference to the viability of their livestock enterprise.

It has come to our attention that DEFRA is currently consulting on proposed changes to the Single Payment Scheme which could have a far-reaching effect on rare and minority breeds of sheep such as the Hebridean, their keepers, and the sustainability of maintaining such small populations as a viable genetic resource.

We fail to comprehend that DEFRA could consider making any of the proposed changes to the Single Payment scheme whilst failing to include organisations such as the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, the National Sheep Association, the Wildlife Trusts and the Standing Committee for Farm Animal Genetic Resources in the consultation process. It is small-scale sheep keepers and smallholders, effectively the unpaid custodians of the UK's rare and minority breeds, and Conservation organisations who do not derive their main income from farming who are most likely to be affected by the proposed changes. It is these very people that DEFRA has notably failed to include in the consultation process.

In response to the consultation, the Hebridean Sheep Society has undertaken a small survey of our membership to ascertain who will be affected by the proposed changes and in what way. The results of this survey are outlined as follows:

76% of HSS members who responded to the survey currently claim Single Farm Payment.

Of these, 2% claim on less than 1Ha of land, 38% on between 1 and 5Ha, and 60% on over 5Ha.

82% of HSS members do NOT derive their main income from farming.

32% of members who claim SFP feel that the loss of the payment would influence them to discontinue keeping Hebridean sheep.

72% of HSS members undertake some form of environmental management on their land.

24% of these feel that if they were not eligible for SFP, this would influence the way in which they manage their land in a manner that would ultimately have a negative influence on the condition and biodiversity of that land.

As you will observe from the above, a change from a minimum claim size of 0.5Ha to a minimum claim size of 5Ha would have a significant impact on the number of breeders keeping Hebridean sheep. Furthermore, an objective farmer test would exclude the vast majority of Hebridean sheep keepers from the Single Payment Scheme.

The Hebridean Sheep Society therefore calls upon DEFRA and its Ministers to urgently reconsider the current position, which favours 5Ha as the minimum claim size, and to opt for the minimum claim size directed by the EU of 1Ha.

The Hebridean Sheep Society further seeks reassurance that Ministers will not be applying an objective farmer test to claimants of SFP, as this will have a potentially even greater negative influence on our members, our breed, and the genetic resource which this important breed provides.

The Hebridean Sheep Society also strongly urges DEFRA to seek the views of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, the National Sheep Association, the Standing Committee on Farm Animal Genetic Resources and the Wildlife Trusts before any conclusion to this consultation process is reached.

We would ask that you give your urgent attention to the information contained in this correspondence and I await your reassurance that the views of this Society are being taken seriously.

Yours faithfully,

Jeff Moore  
Chairman  
Hebridean Sheep Society

cc: Rare Breeds Survival Trust  
National Sheep Association  
The Wildlife Trusts  
The UK Standing Committee on Farm Animal Genetic Resources.