

Sustainable landscapes in a land reformed Scotland

Edinburgh Forests & Sustainable Landscapes Network
02/04/2025

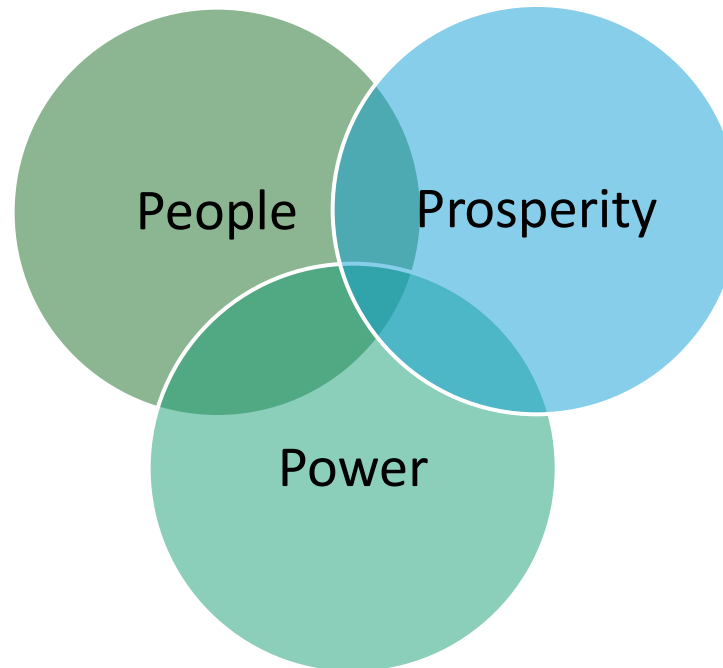
Aims

- Introduce Scottish Land Commission
- Why land reform matters
- Your views!

Introduction

Scottish Land Commission

“The ownership and use of land supports thriving people and places.”



The Commissioners

- **Appointed by Scottish Ministers**
- **Five Land Commissioners**
 - Empowered to investigate and advise on any matter relating to land
- **One Tenant Farming Commissioner**
 - Specific remit to improve relationships in the tenanted sector
 - Empowered to issue Codes and Guides, and investigate breaches

Policy Team

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Policy and Practice Lead



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Where do we stand right now?



Land Market Reporting

Annual insights and data reports

- Vital to understand what's happening
- Calendar year

Insights

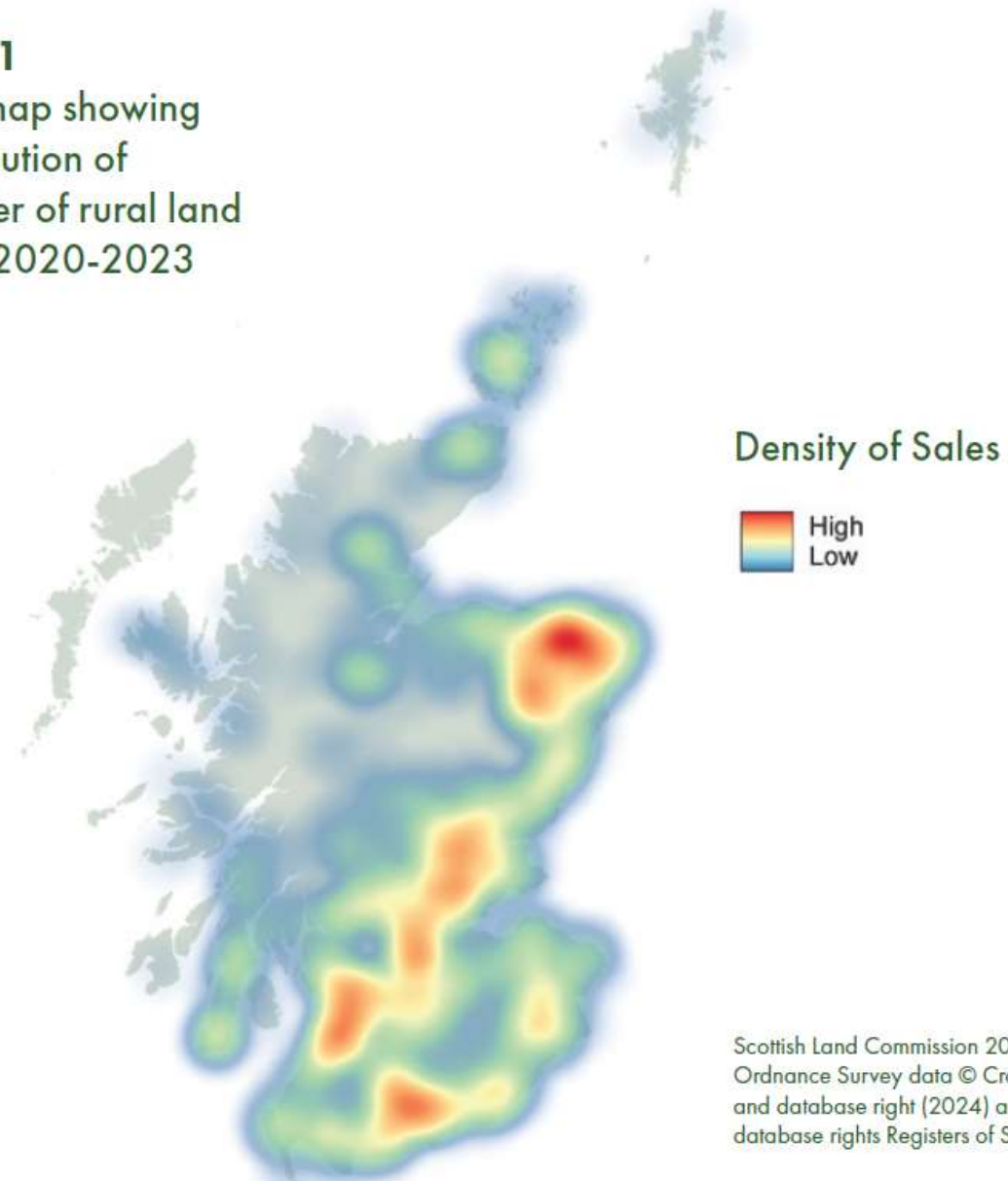
- Views and experience of Agents

Data

- Registers of Scotland transactions



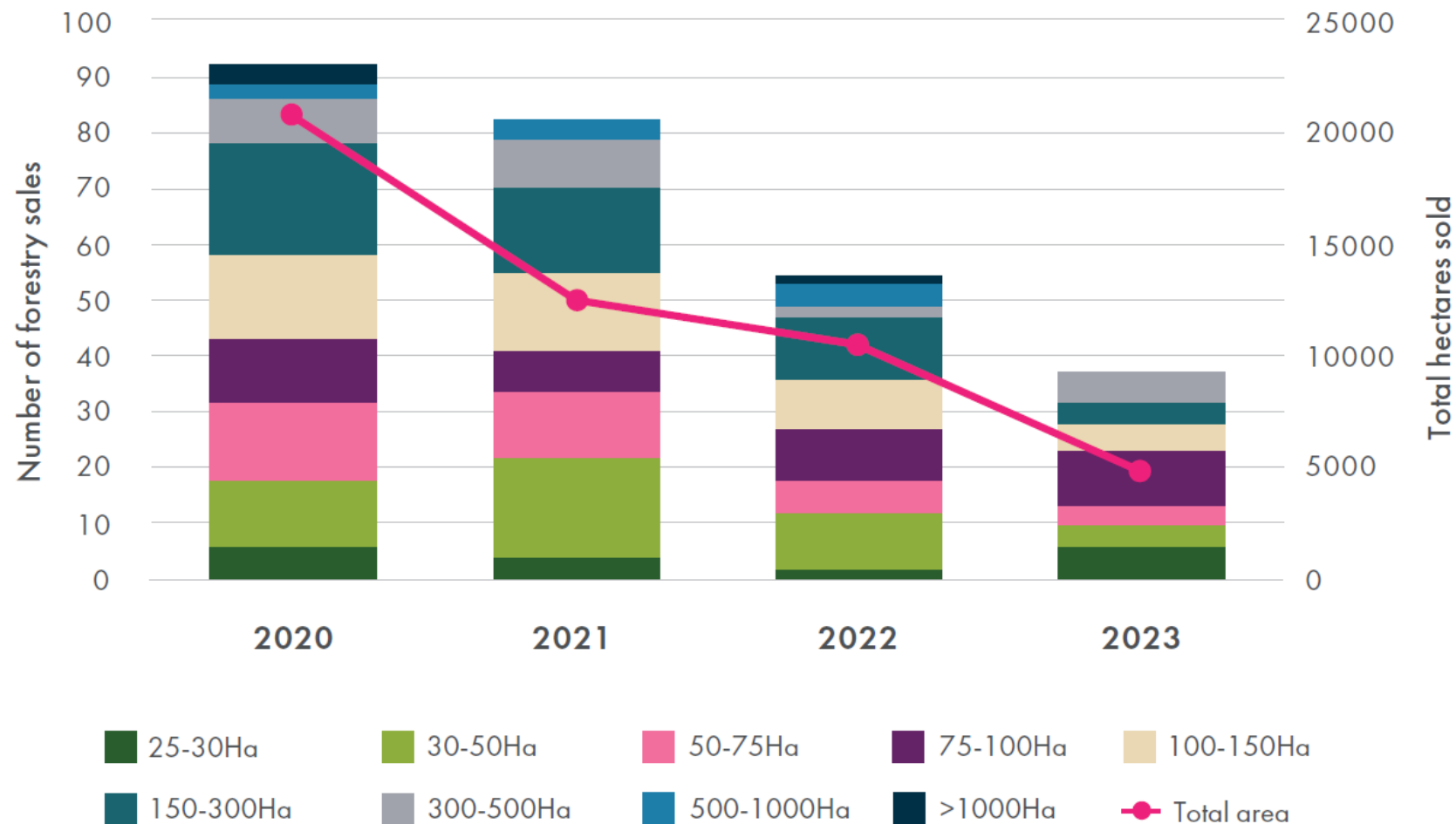
Map 1
Heatmap showing
distribution of
number of rural land
sales 2020-2023



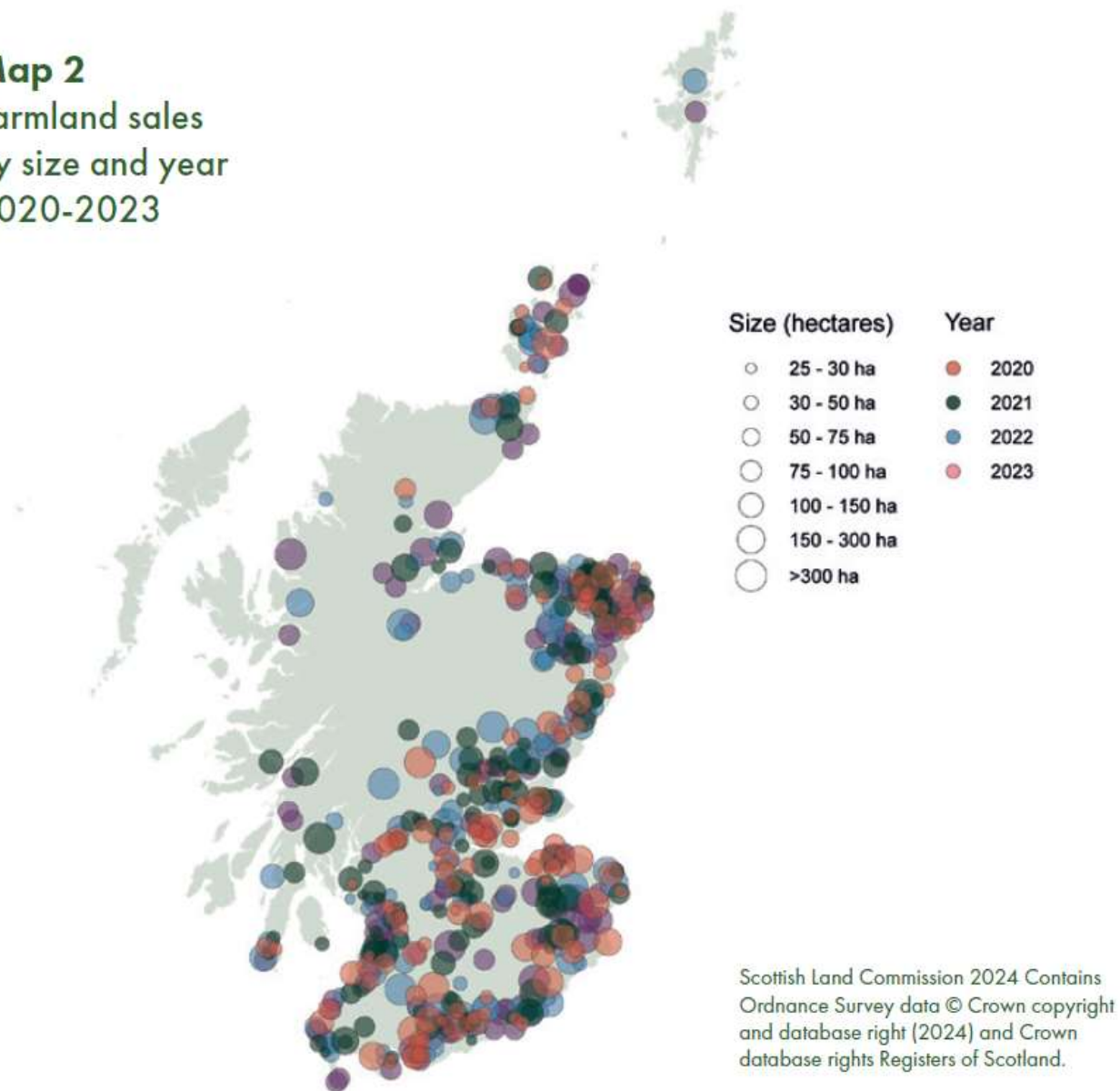
Scottish Land Commission 2024 Contains
Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright
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Forestry in Retreat

Figure 9 Number and area of forest sales 2020-2023



Map 2
Farmland sales
by size and year
2020-2023



Vast majority of land sales are < 500ha

Table 4 Number of rural land sales by size threshold

Size [hectares]	2020		2021		2022		2023		Total	
<500	223	91.8%	247	95.4%	219	93.2%	188	94.5%	877	93.7%
500-1000	9	3.7%	8	3.1%	10	4.3%	6	3.0%	33	3.5%
1000-2000	3	1.2%	1	0.4%	2	0.9%	2	1.0%	8	0.9%
2000-3000	3	1.2%	2	0.8%	2	0.9%	0	0.0%	7	0.7%
>3000	5	2.1%	1	0.4%	2	0.9%	3	1.5%	11	1.2%
Total	243	100%	259	100%	235	100%	199	100%	936	100%



Land values

Land values by sector

- Farmland: Average per/ha farm values have risen each year (£15,152 in 2023)
- Forestry: Average per/ha forestry values peaked in 2021 at almost £22k
- Estates: Average price of estate rose to £4.5M in 2023

Net financial value if the UK

- Net financial value of the UK is £12.2 trillion (2023 ONS UK national balance sheet)
- Land has consistently been a large element of that: £7 trillion (2023, land and improvements to land)



Land Market Insights

Influence of Global/Macro-Economic Factors

- Speculation, Inflation, Hedging, etc. Reinforces just how open and vulnerable the Land Market is to external forces

Natural Capital/Carbon Reality Check

- Speculation, uncertainty, government/public sector not ready

High Price and Fast Pace of Transactions

- Particularly for farmland, favours cash buyers and agent client lists

Off-Market/Private Sales

- Around one third of farms and forests, and half of estates, limits market participation
- Semi off-market

Consolidation

- Farmland consolidated by neighbouring farms, or sold to a small number of forestry companies or natural capital investors

Scale & Concentration

Major area of public unease

- Research uncovered serious issues
 - local economic opportunities;
 - agricultural productivity;
 - local housing needs;
 - community and social cohesion;
 - the natural and built environment
- Key issue is power and control
- Not about scale per se
- Parallels with monopoly policy





Why does this matter?



Market Power

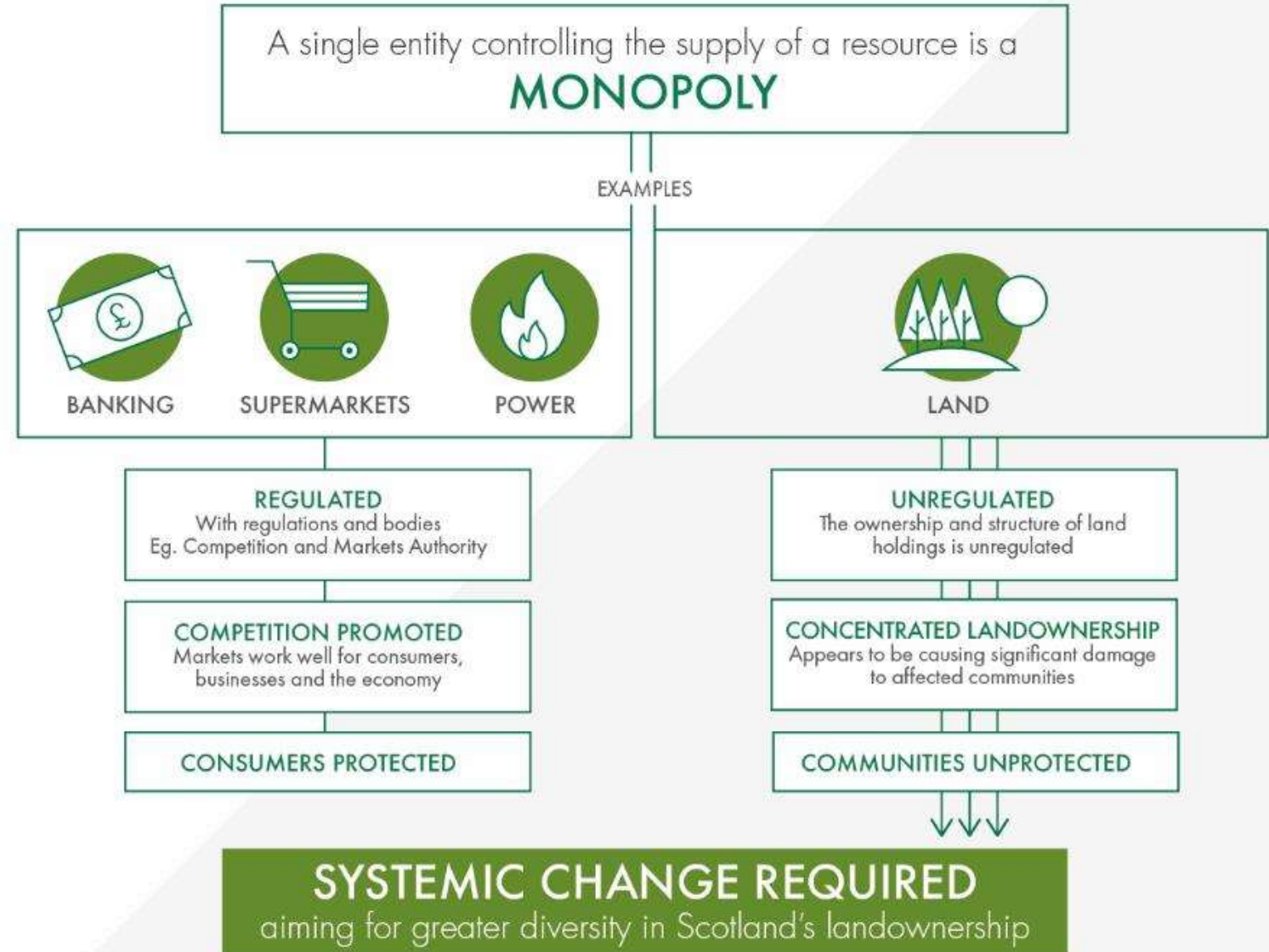
Local monopolies?

Disadvantages mostly relate to the concentration of social, economic and decision-making power, not simply the scale of landholdings.

This has parallels with monopoly power.


Limited participation in decision making and concentration of power

Most disadvantages of Scotland's landownership relate to concentration of power, not the size of landholdings



Scale & Concentration

Recommendations

- Public interest test for significant land transfer
 - Requirement for a management plan
 - Statutory Land Rights and Responsibilities Review
 - Promoting more diverse private ownership to help achieve land reform objectives
 - Local engagement in land use change
 - Encouraging landowner leadership and good practice
- 



The Land Reform Bill

Draft Provisions

Land Management Plans

- Transparency mechanism requiring community engagement
- Not an operational plan

Prior Notification of Sale

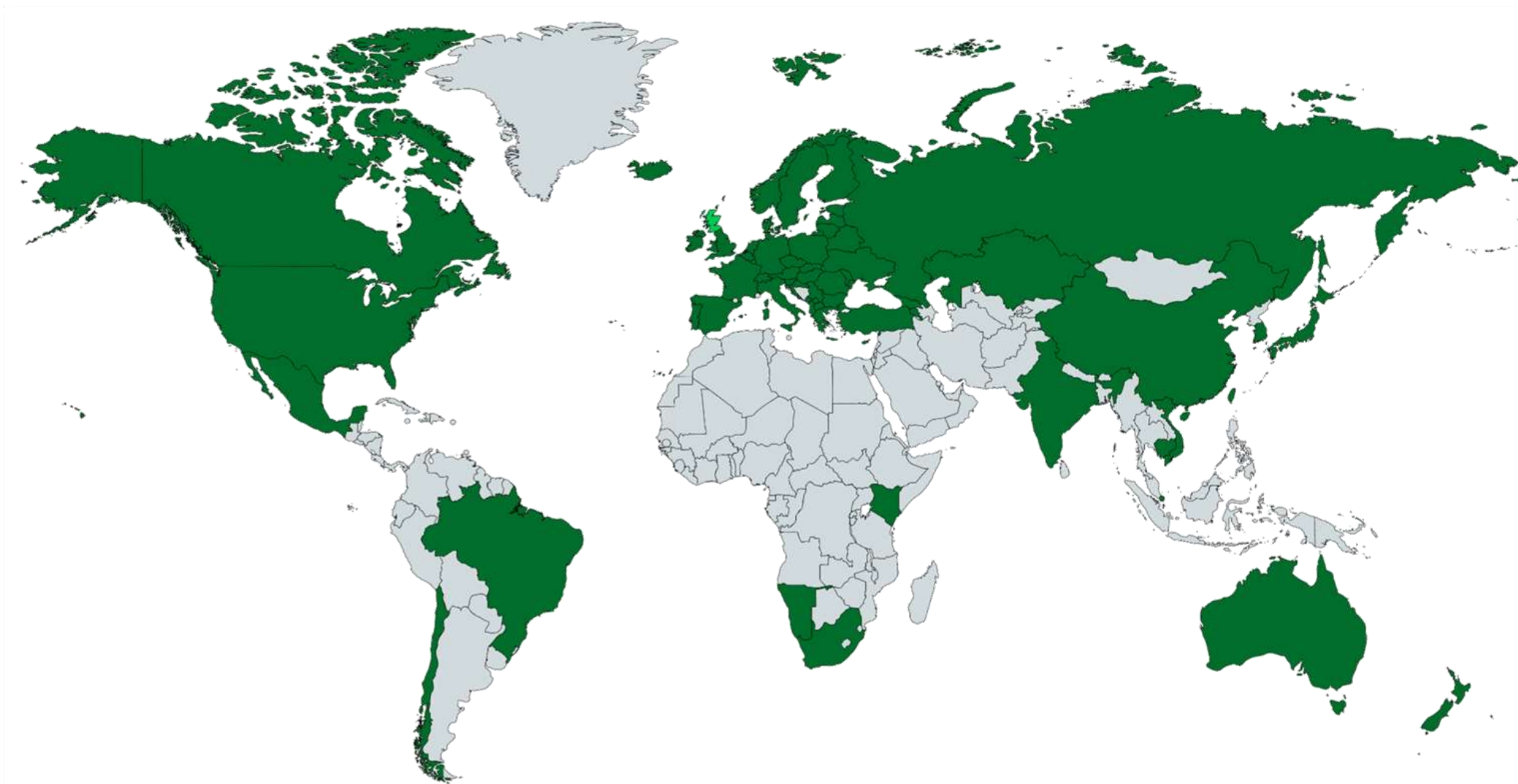
- Gives public notice of intended sales
- Provides new opportunities for market participation

Transfer Test

- Considers the effect of the landholding on community sustainability
- Land can be lotted if helpful



International Research



Common Themes

Governance (Ownership) Structures

- Partnerships, Collective/Cooperative, Hybrid, Tripartite
- Transparent and accountable

Local Governance

- Municipalities
- Empowered, accountable, and leading

Land Use and Planning

- Carries legal weight, Zoning





Land Governance

How

- process of decision making
- the structure and rules to be followed

Who

- identifying where the power to make and enforce a decision

NOT about the decision itself

- the Rules of the Game, not how it's played!



Why Governance?

Directly addresses Concentration of Power

- Power over decision making affects social, economic, and environmental outcomes
- Unlock effective participation and unblock local economic development

Change the Conversation

- ~~Ownership vs Use~~
- Build bridges, recognise interdependence

Key to a just transition

- A process that must be undertaken in partnership with those impacted by the transition
- New investment is already seeking new structures

Key to delivering public, community, and private value from natural resource management



Governance Principles (CLES research)

Organisational purpose

A clearly defined, well considered purpose

Future proofing

Taking a long-term view and incorporating organisational flexibility

Creative use of law and policy

Innovative use of existing tools can be the key to unlocking new opportunities

Transparency

The type, role, rationale and purpose of the mechanism, and its governance should be transparent from the outset

Internal democracy

Inbuilt and clear structures to enable accountability

Local voice

Building in channels to enable, enhance and engage with local communities to ensure mechanisms are responsive to local needs



“

If you treat people like consultees,
they'll behave like consultees.

If you only give them the ability to
object, don't be surprised when
they do object.

”

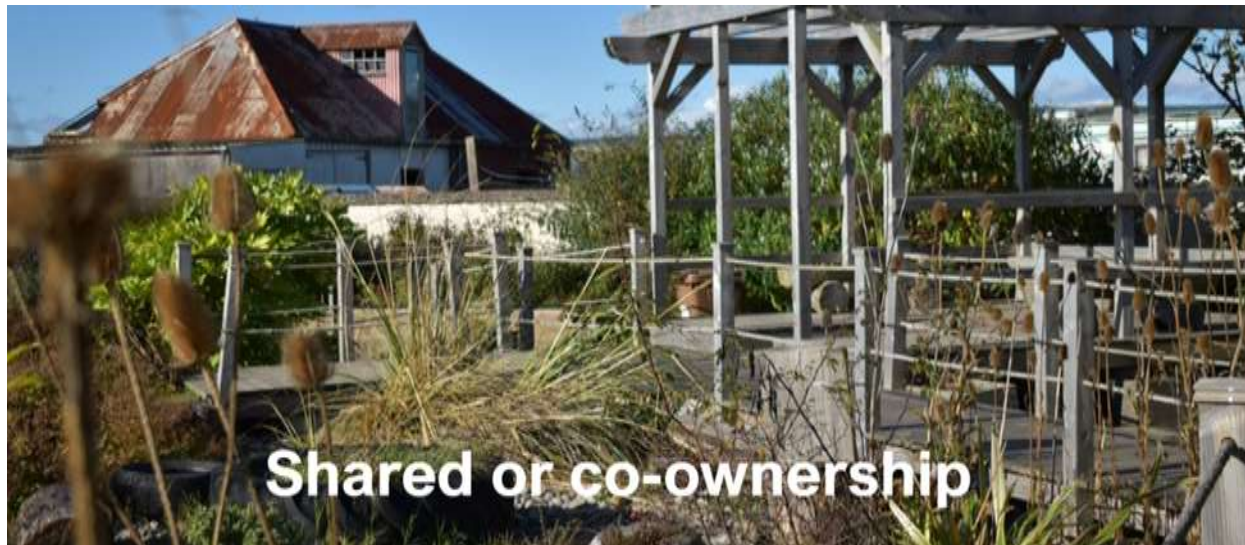


What Next?



Landscape collaboration

- Different models of collaboration
- Regional Land Use Partnerships



Seven Lochs Wetlands, Scotland's largest urban park



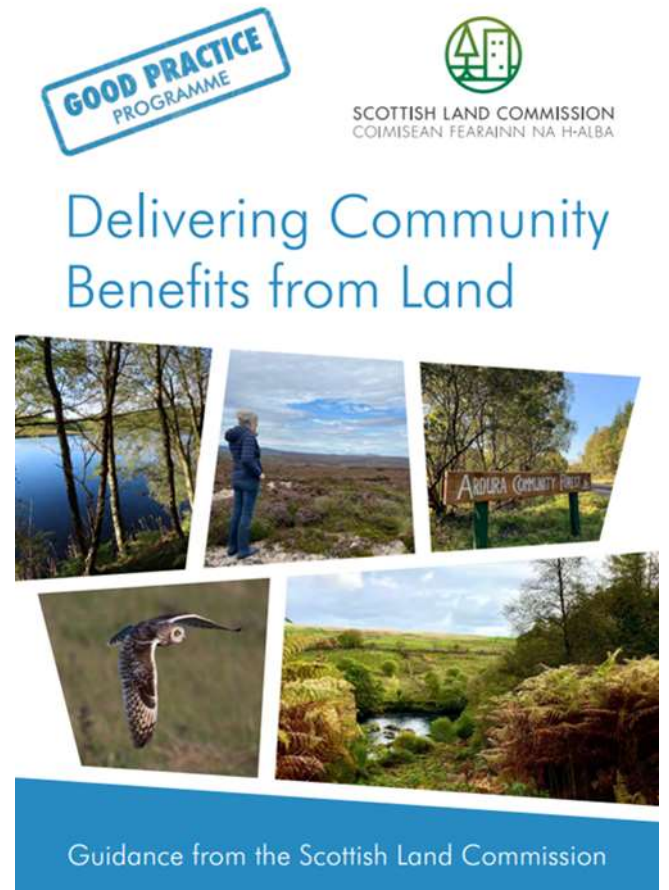
Benefits

- ✓ Reduces risk
- ✓ Agile funding
- ✓ Responsive to local needs



Delivering significant land use change

- Community participation and engagement
- Delivering community benefits from land
- Building capacity:
 - ✓ Good Practice Programme & Advisers
 - ✓ New! Natural Capital Advisers



Tax and fiscal reform

- Scottish Government's Tax strategy & budget 2025-26
- Working with Scot Govt to explore options
- Opportunity for increasing the role of land in the tax system
- Key issues:
 - ✓ Data
 - ✓ Ownership and use
 - ✓ Existing taxes & fiscal levers



Conclusion

- Ownership, collaboration and engagement are key for landscapes to be truly sustainable in the long-term and ensure everyone benefits.
- Our work offers some ways of doing this.
- We want your views!

Provocation.



“

Land reform isn't really about land at all – it'll happily do its thing without us. It's really about people, changing behaviour, culture, and relationships over the long term.

”