

# Case Study: Common Grazings at work



Halladale Common Grazing has a history of managing the Common Grazing for the benefit of the peatlands and the numerous designated sites on which it lies.

The Common Grazing has an experienced committee and has been successful in applying for agri-environment schemes for several years. This has helped provide income for repairs and maintenance.

Halladale Common Grazing is in the parish of Farr, in the north east Sutherland lying 14 miles west of Thurso. The common which is part of The Flow Country is split into two distinct areas by Halladale River and the surrounding area Strath Halladale. Crofts lie between the river and the common grazing.

The common is dominated by two large areas with some smaller common fields behind the crofts. The west side covers over 3000ha and the east just over 4000ha. With the smaller in-bye fields the common grazing covers an area of over 7040ha which is predominately moorland. Of this area 5710ha is part of several designated sites including East and West Halladale SSSI and Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA, SAC and Ramsar.

Currently there are 16 individual shareholders with 33 crofts having a share in the common. The soumings vary with each croft but in total there are soumings for 196 cows and 2588 sheep. As seen in other commons there are vacant shares.

The common grazing is used for the extensive grazing of livestock with the Estate retaining the deer stalking, fishing and shooting rights.

As the area is extensive the native breed of North Country Cheviots are favoured by the crofters.

Halladale Common has been regulated since before the early 1960s, with some records dating back to the 1920s that reference the common.



The current common office bearers have nearly 50 years experience between them. Chairman Derek Mackay has been at the helm for over 14 years and Clerk Sandy Murray has been in position for nearly 35 years. In addition to the office bearers there are seven committee members.

**“Shareholders and the climate benefit from the management.”**

An Annual General Meeting is held every three years. The shareholders present and any apologies received at the meeting from the committee and then the Chair and Clerk are elected.

On average the common meet every 4 months to discuss business unless there are assignments, sub-lets, apportionment applications, decrofting etc. The meetings are held in Halladale Hall (unless a site visit is required).

Prior to each meeting all resident shareholders receive a copy of the previous meeting minutes which include a financial statement. All financial payments require two authorised signatures.

The common have managed the grazing for the benefit of the peatlands since their designation as SSSI in the 1980s. Initially the area was managed by the Common Grazing Committee in conjunction with the landlord under the Peatland Management Scheme. Then the Committee managed the common under a Rural Priorities Contract and now is managed under an Agri—Environment Climate Scheme contract.

To further improve the peatland the common grazings have worked with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and under the LIFE peatland scheme to block drains.



The committee have worked with the landlord and secured funding from CAGS to fence areas to exclude deer from the crofts and apportionments. Under Crofter Forestry and Forestry Commission 7ha has been managed as woodland regeneration.

These are native species on small areas throughout the area.

Members of the grazing benefit from being members of HISHA, QMS Crofting Group Assurance and the bull Hire.



Being a constituted grazing has allowed the committee to have control over the grazings and ability to enter schemes which in turn has gained access to monies for maintenance and improvements.

The common plans to further benefit the peatland by participating in the Peatland Action Plan. The Scottish Government have recognised that peatlands are one of the most effective ways of locking in carbon and offer a clear nature based solution to the climate crisis. The Peatland Action Fund supports on the ground restoration activities. The common have plans to block ditches which will increase water levels, allowing peat building mosses to re-establish.

The true worth of peatlands are becoming increasingly recognised as stores of carbon and important in the tackling of climate change.

For further information about Common Grazings including information on administration, insurance, muirburn and sheep stock clubs, head to [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot) or contact us on 0300 323 0161.

