

Scottish Conservatives call for long-term support for hill farmers

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The Scottish Conservatives have cautiously welcomed the u-turn in funding for hill-farmers announced by Fergus Ewing today.

Earlier this week the Scottish Government published changes to funding for less favoured areas, which stated, "LFASS support will be retained at 80% in 2019 and 40% in 2020".

Speaking in a debate on future rural policy and support in Scotland, Mr Ewing partially reversed this position and instead announced that this funding will remain at 80% of the current level for both 2019 and 2020.

Donald Cameron, Scottish Conservative shadow secretary for the rural economy has welcomed this dramatic u-turn and stated that this goes some way to give hill-farmers some reassurance for the future.

Donald Cameron MSP, Scottish Conservative shadow secretary for the rural economy said:

"The Cabinet Secretary previously this week announced a cut to LFASS payments to 40% of current levels in 2020.

"He was well warned that this would have a catastrophic impact on Scotland's hill farmers and crofters.

"The Chair of the Scottish Crofting Federation, Russell Smith, said just yesterday that 'Reducing the Less Favoured Areas support to 80% of current rates for 2019 sends out a very negative message, but we can live with it but to then cut it to a mere 40% for 2020 will be ruinous.'

"In our amendment to today's motion for debate, the Scottish Conservatives highlighted the serious concern about these reductions to LFASS.

"So under intense pressure the Cabinet Secretary has today reversed his position and that is to be welcomed.

"Hillfarmers will still face a 20% cut over the next few years and that will have serious effects on farmers and crofters in less favoured areas.

"Going forward, the Cabinet Secretary must ensure that those farming on 'less

favourable' land are properly supported.

"Once again the SNP government has been dragged to a sensible funding position kicking and screaming.

"Scotland's farmers deserve a Scottish government that recognises their importance and actively supports the future of hill farming."