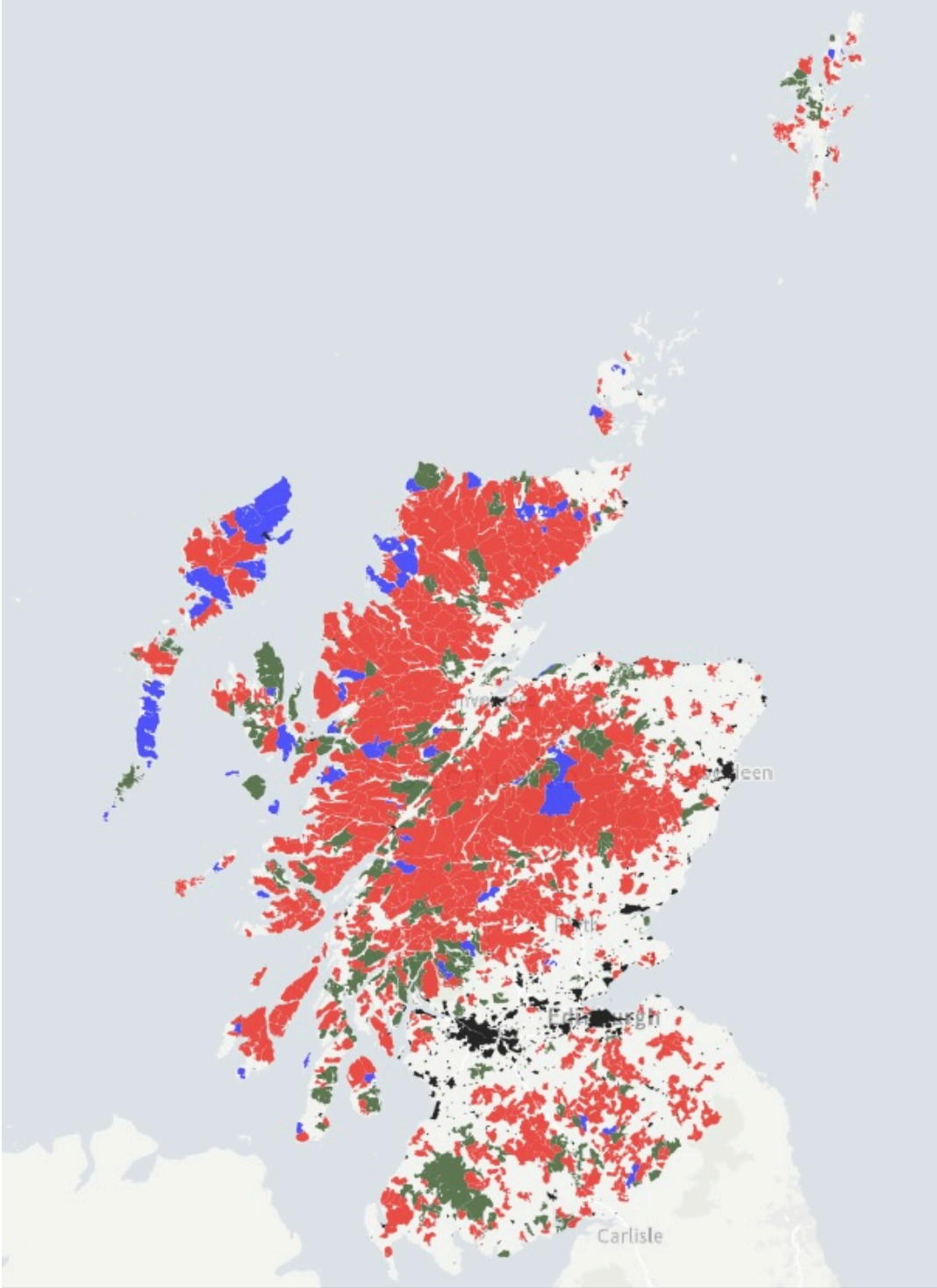


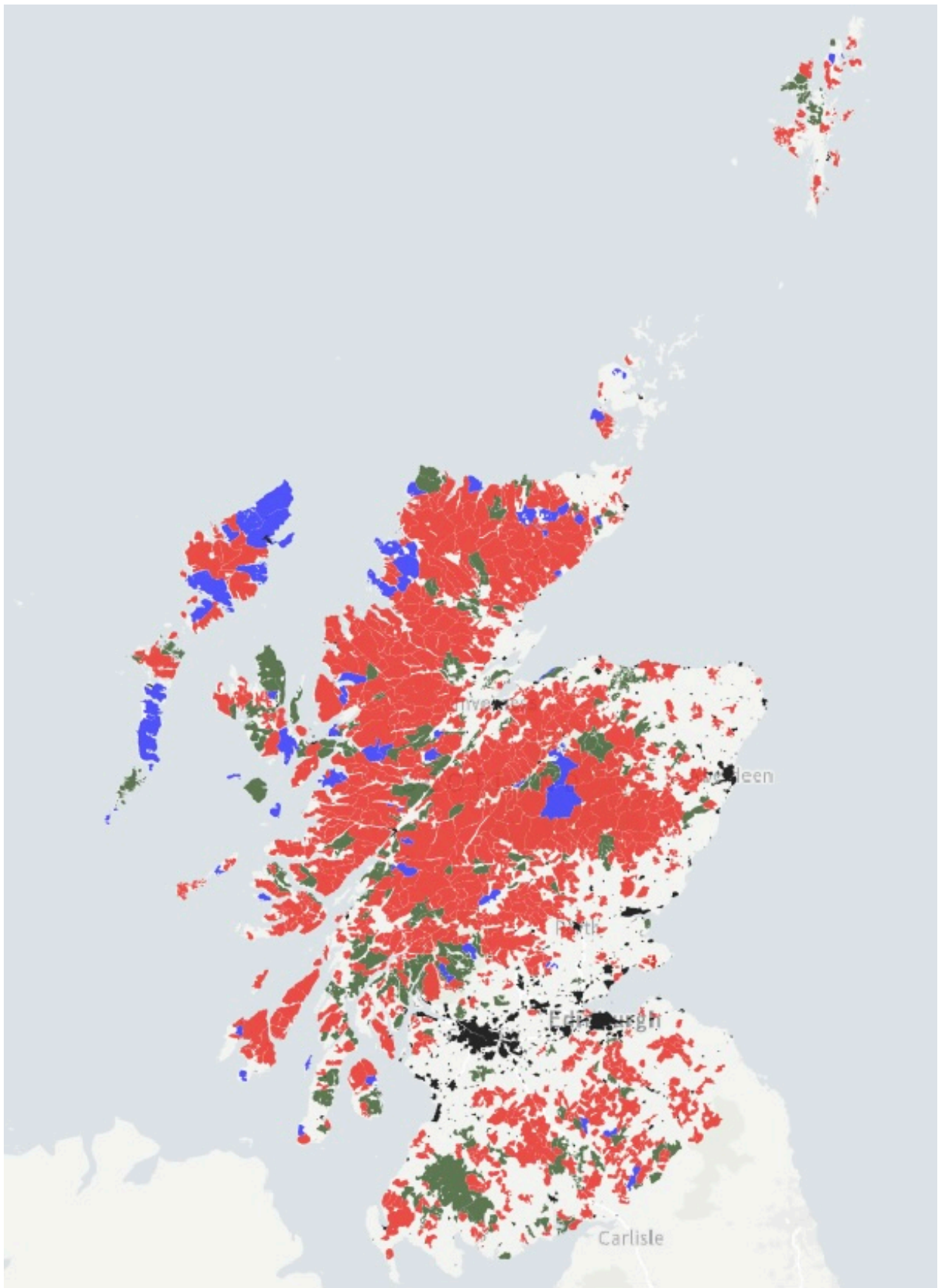
# Land Reform (Scotland) Bill

Analysis of landholdings in scope



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MAP showing landholdings >1000ha. Red = private land. Blue = not for profit landowners (NTS, RSPB, community bodies etc). Green = public sector. Black = urban settlements > 500 population.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament by the SNP/ Scottish Green coalition government in March 2024. Currently (January 2025), it is undergoing scrutiny at Stage One of the Parliamentary process by the Net-Zero, energy and Transport Committee.

The Bill contains a number of provisions relating to the land market, land use and agricultural tenancies. The focus of this report is two mechanisms introduced by Part I of the Bill. The first is a duty on large landowners to engage with communities and prepare a management plan and the second is a duty to give prior notification of sales of any part of a large landholding so that community bodies have the opportunity to register an interest in the land and Ministers have the opportunity to consider insisting that land is sold in lots rather than as a whole.

As currently set out in the Bill the, management plan duties apply to all landholdings greater than 3000 hectares (ha) and the prior notification duties to all landholdings greater than 1000 ha. A slightly modified threshold applies to inhabited islands.<sup>1</sup>

The Scottish Land Commission have advised Ministers that the threshold for the land management plan provisions (3000 ha) should be aligned with the prior notification threshold (1000 ha) and that both should apply to all landholdings above 1000 ha.<sup>2</sup>

This report presents an analysis based on data from the [www.whoownsscotland.org.uk](http://www.whoownsscotland.org.uk) project which has identified the ownership of 74.4% of rural Scotland (as at end January 2025) plus a further 6% of land where landholdings are known but ownership has not yet been determined.

Given the extent of land accounted for by the project and that fact that research focussed on the larger landholdings first, it is considered that there are few if any landholdings greater than 500 hectares in extent that are not included in the 6300 landholdings that have been identified, of which 3700 are published and have full ownership details attributed.

This report thus presents a detailed analysis of the landholdings proposed to be within the scope of Part I of the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill.

## METHODOLOGY

The definition of a large landholding in the Bill is a landholding that is contiguous. It also provides that distinct parcels of may form a composite landholding where different parts are owned by persons who are connected in ways set out in the Bill.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report, an analysis of the particular islands threshold (which includes any landholding which cover more than 25% of an inhabited island) has not been carried out. A number of islands are affected, notably Muck and some islands in Orkney and Shetland,

<sup>2</sup> See [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/678f5a14adbb\\_Advice%20to%20Ministers%20LRB%20Part%201%20Jan25.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/678f5a14adbb_Advice%20to%20Ministers%20LRB%20Part%201%20Jan25.pdf)

The Recent advice from the Scottish Land Commission recommends that the current requirement for contiguity should be amended to allow landholdings which would not be in scope because of a linear feature such as a road or railway line should, instead, be in scope (See Figure 4). The analyst presented here presumes that this reform is made and adopts a reasonably generous interpretation of it. Due to time constraints, the analysis does not include any landholdings that form the modified island threshold.

In order to identify all of the landholdings above 1000 ha and 3000 ha, the data from the [www.whoownsscotland.org.uk](http://www.whoownsscotland.org.uk) project was analysed as follows.

Firstly, all landholdings exceeding the thresholds were extracted where they formed a single or composite landholding. Each was then analysed to check that the landholding was contiguous. Where they were not, the parcels less than 1000 ha in extent were discarded.

Secondly, all landholdings smaller than 1000 ha were analysed to identify those owned by the same connected persons. Where these could be assembled into contiguous landholdings greater than 1000 ha, they were added to the final dataset.

The following examples illustrate some of the ways in which the definitions of qualifying landholdings are reflected in real life.

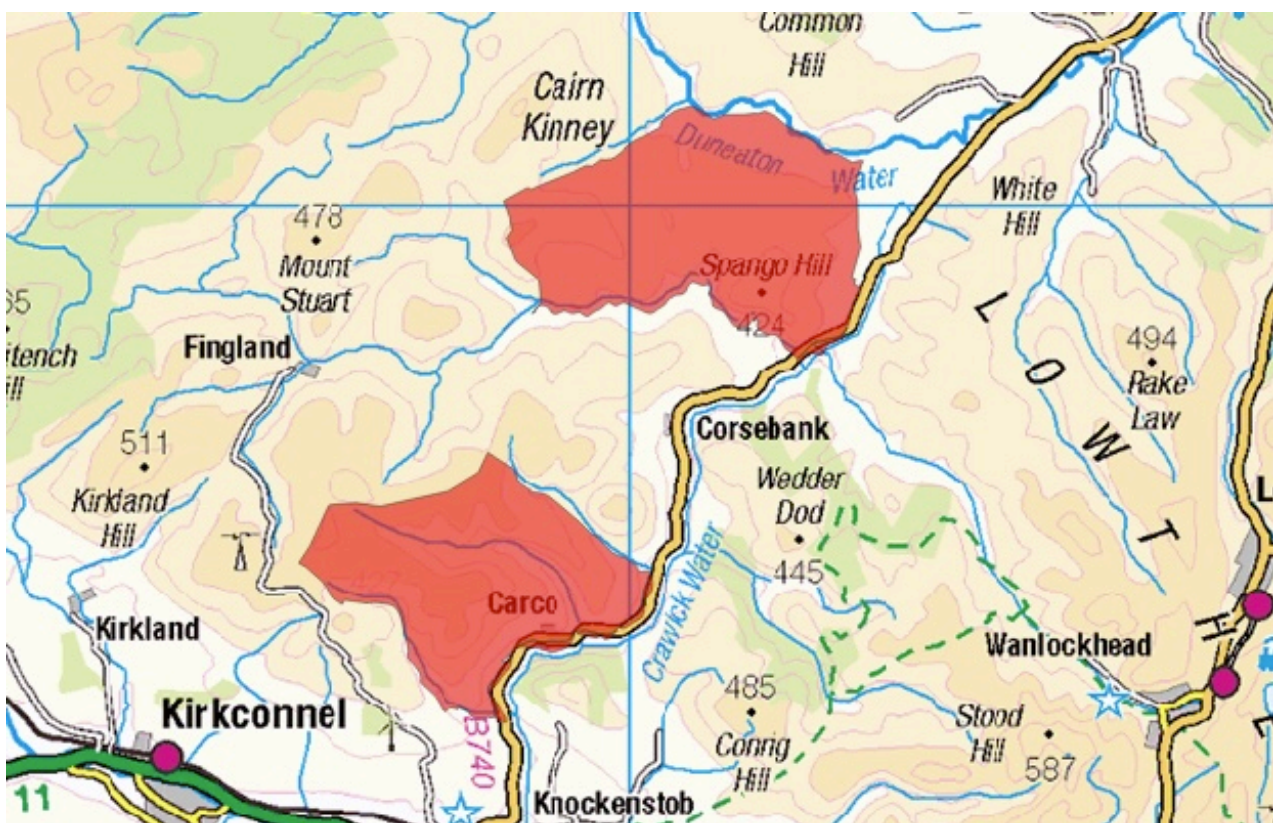


Figure 1. Part of a landholding excluded from scope

Figure 1 shows two parcels of land owned by the same owner. The northern one is 1153 ha in extent and is in scope but the southern one is 915ha and is thus not in scope.

Figure 2 shows the 175 landholdings of Gresham House Ltd. owned in nine separate Scottish Limited Partnerships but where Gresham House is the General Partner and thus exercises all the power of ownership. Its ownership extends to 56,227 hectares making it the third largest landowner in Scotland. Landholdings in scope under the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill need to be contiguous, however, and this only 10 of the 176 are individually in excess of 1000 ha and thus in scope (16,090 ha or 28.6% of the total landholding. None are larger than 3000 ha.

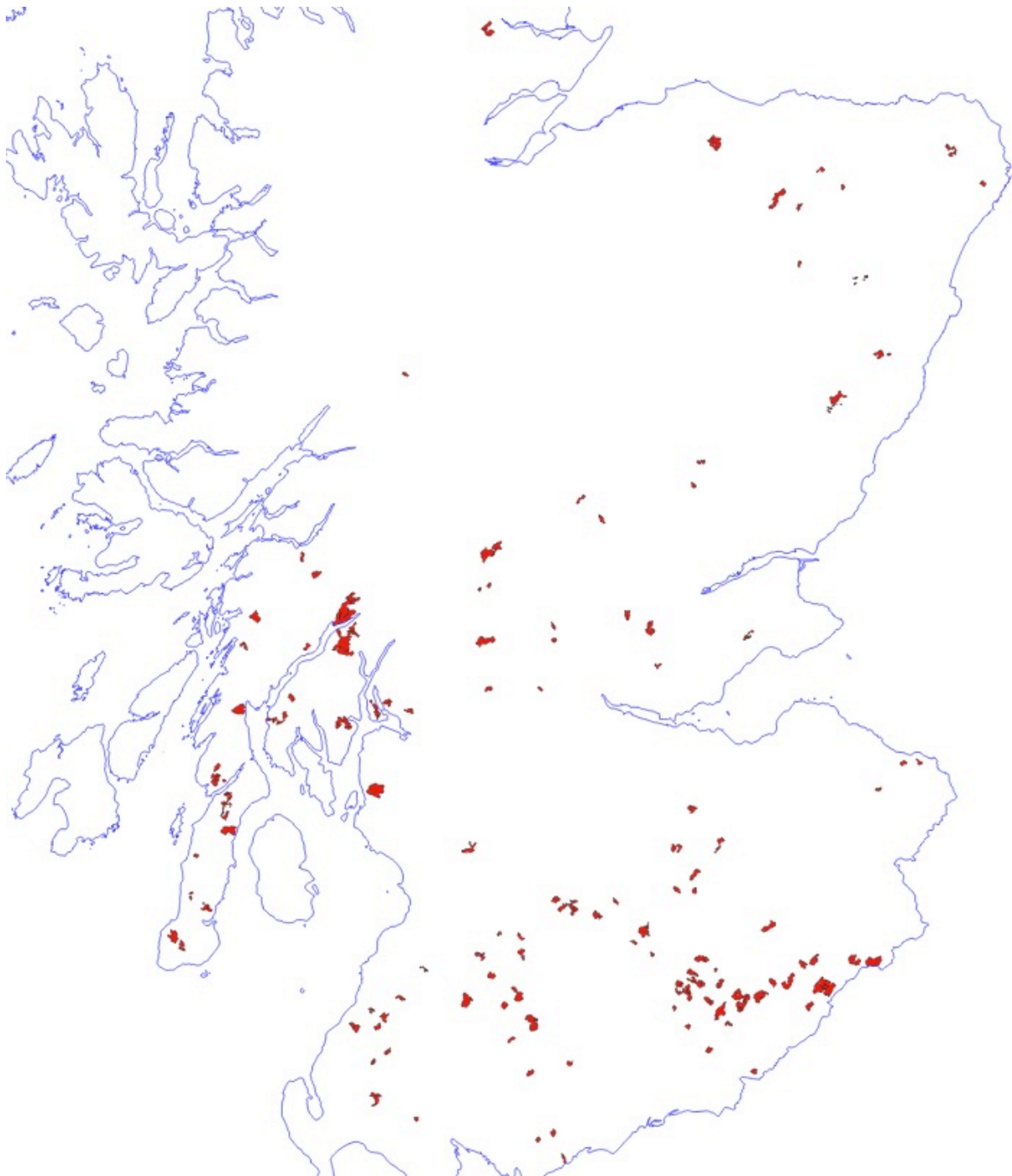


Figure 2. Landholdings owned by Gresham House Ltd. partnerships

Figure 3 illustrates a landholding in Caithness which, despite being in excess of 1000ha is not within scope due the contiguity requirement as the estate consists of disparate parcels, none of which is in excess of 1000ha.

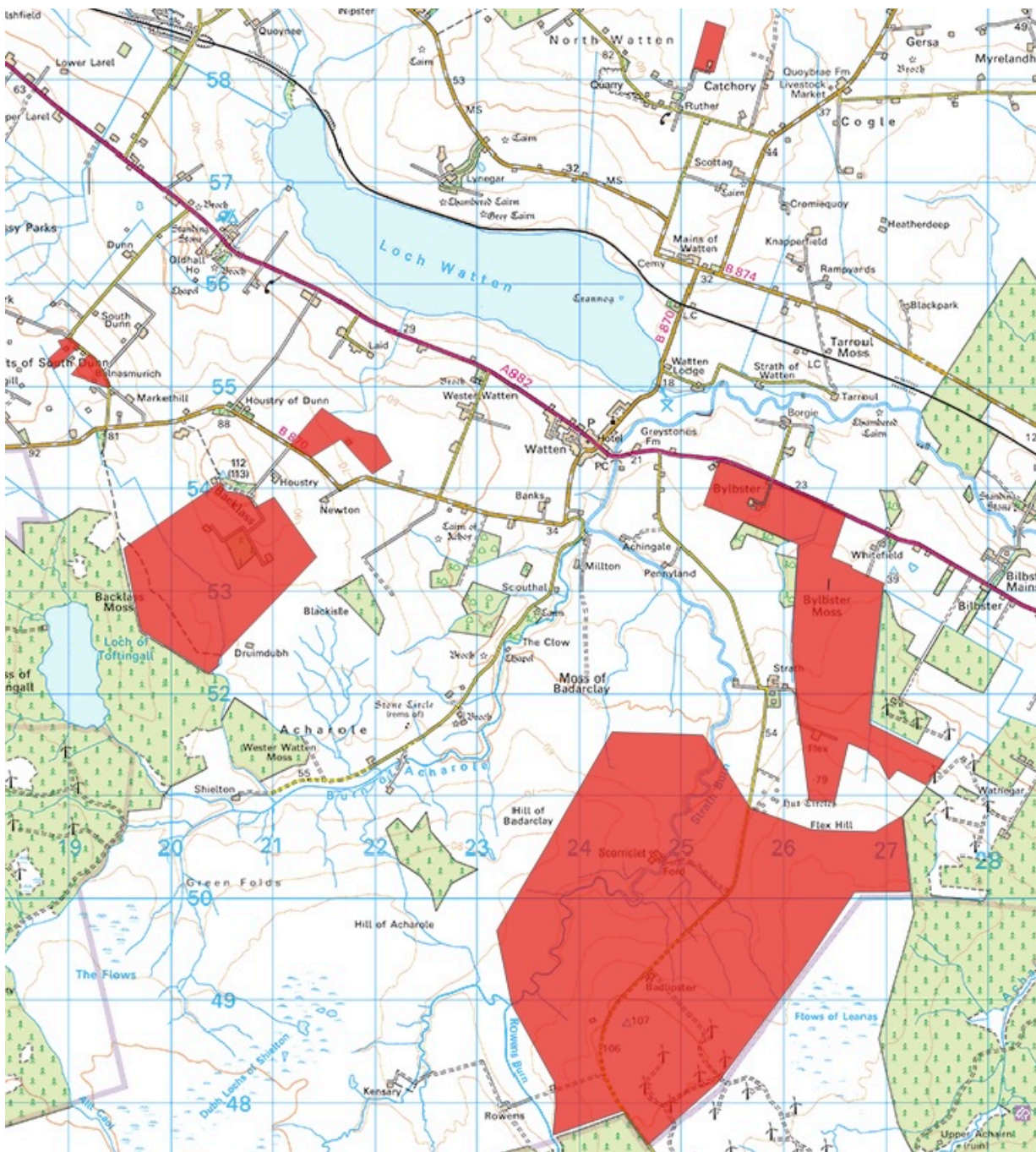


Figure 3. A landholding outwith scope despite being over 1000ha in extent.

Figure 4 illustrates a landholding that is crossed by a number of minor roads. The solum of minor roads such as these are often owned by the neighbouring landowner even although they have been adopted by the local Roads Authority. In many cases it is difficult to determine ownership. Nevertheless, if the minor roads illustrated are in separate ownership from the estate shown, then the landholding is not in scope as the Bill stands. As mentioned above, however, I have included such landholdings in this analysis.

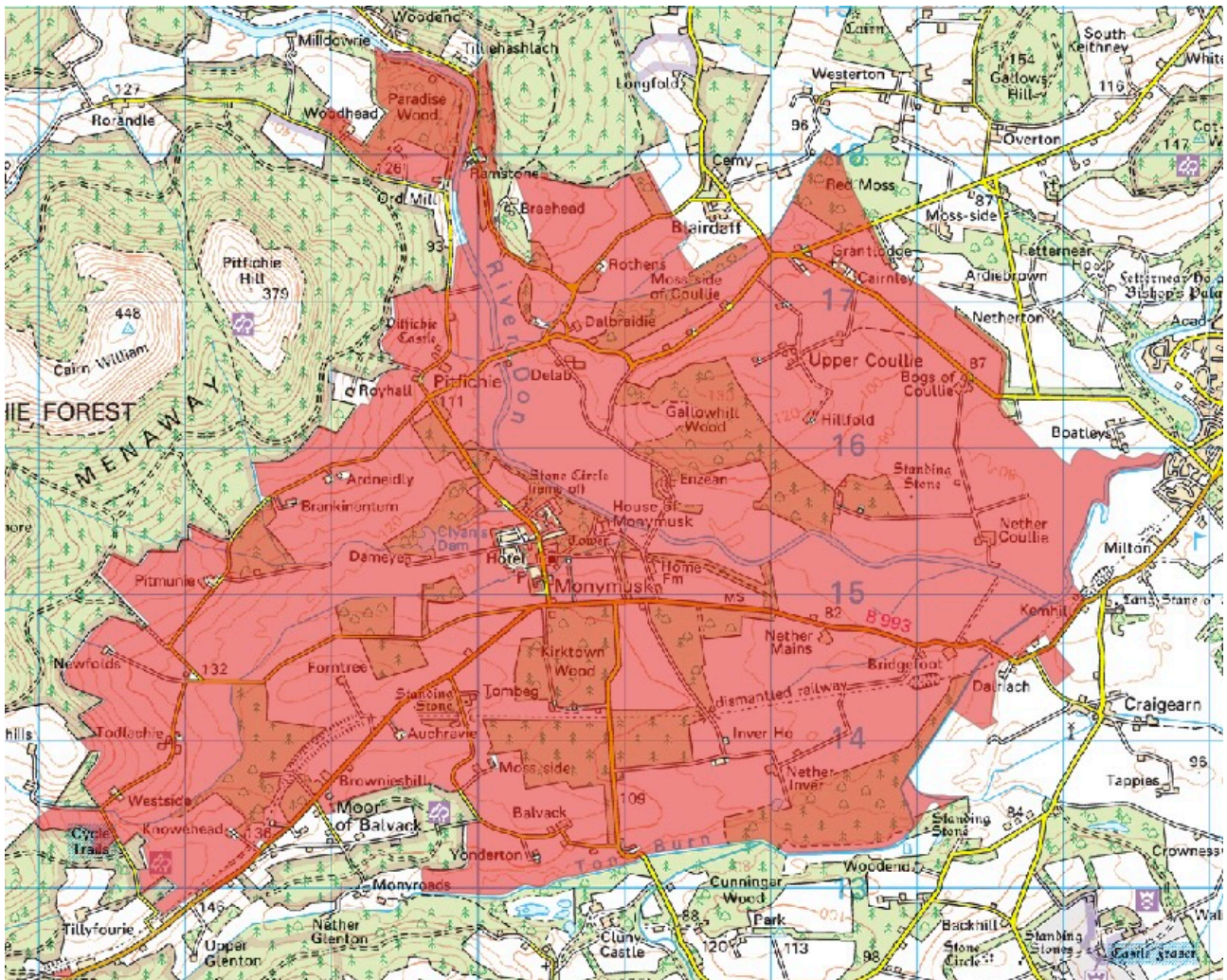


Figure 4. A landholding >1000ha which may not be contiguous depending on the ownership of the minor roads.



## RESULTS

The analysis of the data shows that there are a total of 1054 landholdings in scope (assuming linear features such as roads and railways do not count in relation to contiguity). These cover a total of 4,634,058ha or 58.8% of Scotland (see Table 1) This compares well with the estimate contained in the Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA) which is 1066 landholdings covering 4,320,000ha or 55% of Scotland.<sup>3</sup>

Landholding Type	No. > 1000ha	Extent (ha)	% of Scotland (1)
Public	150	742,988	9.4%
Private	842	3,515,957	44.6%
Not for Profit	62	375,113	4.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,054	4,634,058	54.8%

(1) Based on extent of Scotland above the Mean High Water Springs

**TABLE 1 Extent of landholding >1000ha**

Table 2 shows that of the 1054 landholdings greater than 1000ha in extent, there are 446 that are over 3000ha covering 3,606,291ha or 45.8% of Scotland. BRIA has 414 covering 3,220,000ha.

Landholding Type	No. > 1000ha	Extent (ha)	% of Scotland (1)
Public	74	613,407	7.8%
Private	342	2,671,490	33.9%
Not for Profit	30	321,394	4.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	446	3,606,291	45.8%

(1) Based on extent of Scotland above the Mean High Water Springs

**TABLE 2 Extent of landholding >3000ha**

The impact of the continuity rule is that many landholdings in Scotland that consist of more than one parcel of land across the country will be excluded from the scope of the legislation. Table 3 highlights an illustrative number of landowners whose landholdings fall into this category and shows the extent of them that will be in scope of the legislation. The percentage of landholdings in scope ranges from 99.7% for Wildland Ltd to 0% for the Swedish investment company, Greengold Timberlands 1 Ltd.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.gov.scot/publications/land-reform-scotland-bill-business-regulatory-impact-assessment-bria/>

Landholding	No.	Extent (ha)	No. >1000ha	Extent >1000ha (ha)	% of land in scope
Wildland Ltd.	12	88,415	11	88,116	99.7%
National Trust for Scotland	24	74,083	11	67,146	90.6%
Buccleuch Estates	19	64,905	12	61,714	95.1%
Gresham House	175	56,227	10	16,090	28.6%
Foresight Group	29	13338	2	5,610	42.1%
Church of England	11	8,282	1	2,399	29.0%
Greengold Timberlands 1 Ltd.	10	2310	0	0	0.0%
Scottish Ministers	2000	728,189	122	618,206	84.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	2,280	1,035,749	169	859,281	

(1) Based on extent of Scotland above the Mean High Water Springs

**TABLE 3 Examples of some of the many multiple landholdings in Scotland**

Finally, Table 4 shows public landholdings that are in scope.

Landowner	No. holdings >1000ha	Extent (ha)
Scottish Ministers	122	618,206
Crown Estate Scotland (1)	6	39,047
Scottish Natural heritage	8	28,483
Scottish Water	6	21,974
Shetland Islands Council	2	17,410
Ministry of Defence	3	12,151
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	2	3,988
Inverclyde Council	1	1,729
<b>TOTAL</b>	150	742,988

**Table 4 Public landholdings in scope**

(1) These landholdings include one large foreshore holding in Dumfries-shire at Caerlaverock. It is unclear whether the definition of “land” in the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill includes the foreshore or not.