

Review of the Scottish Forestry Strategy

Analysis of Responses to the 1st Public Consultation

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Scottish Forestry Strategy was first published in 2000 with a commitment to review its priorities within five years. In June 2005 a Consultation Paper was produced with the broad aim of finding out what people think are now the really important issues in Scottish Forestry. There were 174 responses submitted during the 12-week consultation period, 69 from individuals and 105 from organisations. These responses were analysed by Forest Research. A further 15 responses arrived too late to be included in the analysis but were, nevertheless, still considered along with the views expressed at the five open Public Meetings.

Broad Conclusions

A number of central themes were evident in the responses received during the first consultation phase.

The importance of quality forest management was highlighted repeatedly especially with respect to ensuring 'fit for purpose' forestry in relation to the many 'competing' factors which can effect forest suitability. Striving for and achieving quality silvicultural management was highlighted irrespective of whether commercial timber production, social benefits or environmental goals were the primary (stated) management aim. At the landscape level this incorporated appropriate site-species selection coupled with consideration of landscape aesthetics as a means to elucidate the appropriate extent of forest cover in Scotland. Where future commercial timber production was addressed responses voiced concern regarding the long-term sustainable output of softwood timber at current levels of planting.

The potential utilisation of the Scottish forest resource was another central theme, and suggestions were tabled from across the entire spectrum of response categories. Utilisation of the existing and future timber resource highlighted new developing opportunities for forestry in energy creation, fuel substitution, and the production of low carbon materials. Differences of opinion were apparent between stakeholders when scale and delivery of such opportunities were discussed: for example, whilst almost all submissions highlighted woodfuel as an important emerging market local small scale schemes, minimising transportation were envisaged by some whilst improved timber transport for access to centralised markets were cited by others. The opportunity to add value to forest products was noted often with a view to addressing niche markets and/or capturing local markets where products are more competitive due to reduced transport costs.

Forest access and use was seen as a very important component of Scottish forestry in the 21st Century. Many facets of environmental and social justice were voiced with respect to forest access with an underlying theme that a 'living forest culture' should be promoted through education of the wider populace such that the multitude of non-tangible benefits that forestry currently provides would be better realised. These

include benefits to the health and mental well-being of the nation, increased community 'ownership' and use of the resource and improved tourism opportunities. Often the suggested target audience for educational initiatives were the very young.

The potential impact of forestry for protection was another central theme. 'Protection forestry' encompassed ideas including the alleviation of flooding through riparian zone management, as a means to minimise carbon loss and impact upon the rate of global climate change, and maintenance of existing resources for biodiversity conservation.

In order that the multiple benefits that forestry provides to the nation are realised and delivered in an open, integrated and appropriate manner across the Scottish landscape it is apparent that continued and renewed efforts are required by those involved in its management. The promotion of partnership working between the regulatory land-use sectors was often cited, with specific opportunities identified in the near future that present an ideal vehicle for such integration (e.g. Land Management Contracts). It was also seen by many as essential that all targets within a revised Forest Strategy for Scotland should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related. The successes (and failures) of the new strategy will then be clearly defined and the benefits that forestry provides will be open, demonstrable and accountable. The clear identification of public benefit and value will ensure sustained support for Scottish forestry. To rise to this challenge the continued development of skills and competencies, to assist the delivery of the strategy, will be a central priority.

A clear statement that encompasses the intent that should be at the core of the new strategy was proposed by the North Highland Forest Trust, namely "We need to promote a new image of a vibrant industry that includes timber production as a major sector but not as the key forest benefit."

Detailed Responses to questions

Answers to the 22 questions in the Consultation paper have been analysed. Key themes were evident relating to the three pillars (social, environmental and economic) of sustainable forest practice, as highlighted below:

Social

- Continued efforts to improve community engagement.
- Initiatives to support and develop local business (e.g. local wood processing, woodfuel, tourism).
- Efforts to promote a 'Living Forest Culture'.
- Continued support for the Woodlands in and Around Towns (WIAT) initiative.
- Facilitation of affordable housing initiatives.

Environmental

- Forest Habitat Networks (as forestry's tool for an integrated scheme for the delivery of SAP's, HAP's and BAP's).
- Maintenance and restoration of ancient woodland sites.
- Protection forestry.
- Initiatives to support and develop local business.
- Carbon forestry.

Economic

- Utilisation (e.g. woodfuel, timber manufacturing, non-timber forest products, renewables, transport).
- Quality (of the management and of the product).
- Add-Value (through research) and Realise-the-Potential (through an environmental economics approach).
- Maintaining the future resource.
- Initiatives to support and develop local business.

Next Steps

The responses received from this first consultation will help FCS draft a revised Scottish Forestry Strategy (and an associated Environmental Report).

A second public consultation will then be held in the early part of 2006.

A long-term vision for Scottish forestry should be identified and promoted within the revised Strategy.