

## **UPDATE ON WOODLAND EXPANSION AND CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION DEVELOPMENTS**

### **Purpose**

1. To present to the National Committee for comment an update on recent developments on woodland expansion as a tool for climate change mitigation at a UK and Country level.

### **Background**

2. At both a GB and a Country level we have given a high profile in recent months to the role of trees, woodland and timber in helping to address climate change. The messages have been aimed at both an International and a domestic audience and have covered forestry's potential contribution to both climate change mitigation and adaptation.
3. To help support both the mitigation and the adaptation strands we have worked with Forest Research to ensure that research efforts are focused on our immediate policy needs. A key recent research output that is supporting the mitigation strand are the carbon abatement numbers produced for various 'woodland creation' scenarios. These have been produced using a carbon-modelling tool, which includes a whole cycle analysis. This encompasses the wider Green House Gas (GHG) impacts, including those from soil, forest operations and also end use assumptions.
4. We are now able to use these carbon numbers to present the abatement impact for different forestry policy options. Crucially these options can be compared with 'competing' policy options, through devices such as 'Marginal Abatement Cost Curves'. These curves set out the potential scale of each mitigation option and their relative cost effectiveness.
5. This paper is not intended to communicate in detail the nuances of UK and Devolved Administrations responsibilities in respect of Climate Change Policy. Essentially the UK Government signs up to targets and principles internationally, and as long as the Devolved Administrations are taking forward policies to deliver their share of the targets there is little discussion. In reality, both the Welsh and Scottish Governments have gone further with setting their own targets which, if delivered, should comfortably contribute to the UK level framework.

## **Recent Developments**

6. The 2006 Scottish Climate Change Programme set a forestry carbon saving target for 2010 and 2020. The twin strategies for achieving the target are woodland creation [at 10,000 hectares/annum] and woodfuel. Rapid uptake of woodfuel in Scotland means that the 2010 target might be met but that without improved delivery of the woodland creation target, then the 2020 milestone will be difficult. Despite this, the Scottish Government is considering an increased woodland creation target of 15,000 hectares/annum due to the potential wider benefits and cost effectiveness of this policy option.
7. The UK Government published its Low Carbon Transition Plan in June. As well as establishing a framework for the whole UK, this plan set out the specific programme level measures for England. The role of forests is highlighted very positively and the drive to leverage in private sector funding to help create an additional 10,000 hectares of woodland for 15 years is supported.
8. The Welsh Assembly Government is currently consulting over its programme level proposals for its own Climate Change Strategy. The Consultation ends on 2 October and it is planned to finalise the Strategy by the end of the year. We have been able to provide some advice and content for the proposals contained within the Consultation document. There is information setting out the potential impact from woodland creation as a policy option. However the only target explicitly mentioned is our own corporate target to establish 1500 hectares of woodland over the next 3 years from our baseline funding.
9. A key GB level development that might help underpin delivery of the targets in England and Scotland, as well as any higher targets set for Wales in due course, is the development of the Code of Good Practice for Forestry Carbon Projects. This Code, also currently out to consultation, aims to provide a credible framework for those wishing to invest in domestic forestry carbon projects (woodland creation). This would be part of the voluntary contribution towards climate change mitigation and is therefore designed to give confidence to the individual and corporate investor, motivated by social responsibilities. There is some evidence that the current 'unregulated' carbon offset environment for domestic forestry is deterring investment. This is the private sector finance for woodland expansion alluded to in the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan.

## **Issues & Next Steps**

10. Through membership of our Minister's Land Use Climate Change Group we are well placed to provide advice and evidence for the final programme for this part of the Climate Change Strategy. The Group is working on a report for the Minister and we hope that the following issues will be reflected from a forestry perspective:
  - WAG has already set an increase in woodland cover at a national level for a range of benefits, as an outcome within *Woodlands for Wales*.
  - That land use change [agriculture to woodland] at both a farm and regional scale has the potential to help the agricultural sector reduce its emissions.\* There is

some evidence and some policy analysis that suggests the impacts on agricultural production might be modest at worst, if well integrated proposals are developed.

- Well-targeted land use change to woodland also has the potential to increase delivery of other ecosystem services including biodiversity, water management and soil carbon sequestration.

\*Agricultural emissions at a devolved level are a higher proportion of total GHG emissions, as policy responsibility is entirely devolved

11. The DRAFT report at Appendix 1 has been prepared primarily to provide supporting evidence for the process described in paragraph 10.

### **Financial Implications**

12. There are clearly financial implications of the issues discussed in this paper. However this paper is provided for briefing purposes and the relevant financial issues are best considered through the processes described.

### **Risk Analysis**

13. As with the financial implications, the risks will be considered as part of the wider policy process described i.e. via the development of the Climate Change Strategy.

### **Communications**

14. This briefing is intended to help communicate the process by which we are helping to provide advice and evidence to support the role of woodland expansion as a tool for climate change mitigation. If the evidence is used to develop a more significant woodland expansion programme in Wales then a more detailed Communication Plan will be required as part of the delivery mechanism.

### **Recommendation**

15. The NC is asked to note and comment on the content of this update.

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