

Consultation on forestry provisions in the Scottish Climate Change Bill

Responding to the consultation

You are invited to respond to the following questions:

These comments are brief personal reflections on the consultation and are not a formal response from my organisation. These comments reflect my experience from working for both Tilhill, Scottish Woodlands and as a Woodland Officer for the FC.

Dave Atkinson – Lecturer for the National School of Forestry – (Newton Rigg) at the University of Cumbria.

1. What are your views on allowing the Forestry Commissioners to enter into joint ventures, with the intention of participating in renewable energy programmes on the national forest estate?

- More thought is needed to identify a range of alternative options and models but broadly I agree with a form of restructuring. Alternatives could include:
- The restructuring of the FC, its estate and operations to create a more business focused enterprise with the aim of being self sufficient and profit generating. Part of this must be the divorcing of Grants and Licence functions, Forest Research and Plant Health from the wider FC Enterprise. The cost of running and providing wider public benefits must be quantified and could be grant aided separately.
- The sale of those parts of the estate providing largely timber to the private sector and a corresponding downsizing of the FC operations and staff. FC eventually to become a smaller organisation focused on its major forest parks, community woodlands and some demonstration sites for industry best practice.

2. What are your views on allowing Scottish Ministers and Forestry Commissioners to offer leases and cutting rights over parts of the national forest estate?

- This is one option but should be considered against wider options.

- More information is needed to quantify the cost of the leases and how these will be let. Presumably the intention would be to generate significant up front payments.
 - The current economic down turn may reduce the value that the private sector are willing to pay for any lease. Any transfer must be timed to coincide with a market recovery.
 - Careful costing and economic analysis will be required to prove that these leases provide a significantly higher return in the short term than would be gained from longer term timber receipts.
 - Any lease must provide long term security to the lease holder and not be so restrictive as to be unattractive to the private sector.
3. What are your views on (i) transferring the proceeds from leases and cutting rights to a not-for profit trust, for investment in woodland creation; (ii) transferring the landlord's interest in this land to a not-for profit trust; and (iii) Ministers stipulating the constitution of such a not-for profit trust.
- (i and iii) The aims and stakeholder membership of any trust must be carefully formulated.
 - The focus must be on high yielding species and timber production if it is to achieve significant carbon sequestration. We should recognize that the UK forest reserve's ability to sequester carbon is declining year on year due to forest restructuring, habitat restoration and increased use of lower yielding species. Any Trust attempting to deliver against all of the currently broad "Public Benefit" policies will be ineffective at addressing climate change issues.
 - The FC must allow the private sector to manage the land in line with current private sector expectations and objectives.
4. Are there other actions which need to be taken, or are there other changes in legislation which need to be made, in order to allow the public and private forestry sector to contribute to Scotland's target of reducing emissions by 80% by 2050? If so, please outline what these are.

- Careful thought must be given to the budget for Grant and Licences. The lease of productive land will increase the requirement for restocking grant unless the lease (and cost of the lease) prevented the lease holder from applying for grants.
- Thought should be given to streamlining and focusing FC operations and grant aid.
- Management grants are largely ineffective at delivering long term public benefit. These should be reduced and more resources directed at woodland creation.
- Grant aid contributions can be reduced and at the same time made more available, there by increasing the private sector contribution.
- FC should examine and closely cost its none profit generating activities.
- Recreation provision must be profit focused. There is little if any case for state subsidised public recreation and tourism in rural areas (community forestry in areas of deprivation is different). Private sector provision of tourism and recreation in the FC rural forest parks should be considered.