

Sandy Cumming CBE, chief executive  
☎ +44 (0)1463 244204 ☎ +44 (0)1463 244351  
✉ sandy.cumming@hient.co.uk



Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

26 January 2009

Liz Kirk  
Forestry Commission Scotland  
Silvan House  
231 Corstorphine Road  
EDINBURGH  
EH1 7AT

*Dear Liz*

### **Consultation on forestry provisions in the Scottish Climate Change Bill**

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) welcomes having the opportunity to contribute to this consultation exercise. HIE is the economic and community development agency for the north and west of Scotland, an area incorporating just over half the Scottish land mass, including around 90 inhabited islands. We have extensive experience working with community groups and organisations with an interest in land ownership and management, including a number specifically involved in forest management and timber harvesting.

Increasing the powers of Forestry Commission to allow it to engage directly with other public, private or third sector partners to develop renewable energy projects on the national forest estate could generate a significant number of new and creative projects across the country. In addition to private sector developers looking to take forward large scale projects it is likely that a range of community groups will also look to the Commission as a key partner in helping them achieve their own local aspirations. We see very good opportunities for delivering community benefits, including equity shares, through development of renewable energy schemes.

The proposed offer of lease or cutting rights over parts of the national forest estate would require rigorous appraisal to ensure that the wider socio-economic and environmental benefits provided under the current management arrangements are not affected in any way. Forest Enterprise operates in the public interest and has an excellent reputation for providing access and recreation facilities which are beneficial to local communities and the wider economy. Management practices such as Continuous Cover Forestry and the creation of forest trails and public facilities greatly enhance the experience available to locals and tourists in the National Forest Estate. We feel that a private lessee would be unlikely to provide such benefits. Furthermore, in the current economic climate the revenue generating potential of this proposal may be less lucrative than initially expected.

In our experience local community groups are very well placed to act as custodians of strategic assets such as forestry estates. They work to strike an appropriate balance between the economic, social and environmental impacts the forests have in some of the most remote parts of the country. In order to maximise the benefits forests have in rural Scotland consideration should be given to offer any leasing arrangement to an appropriate community body in advance of seeking interest from the private sector. The direct and indirect economic benefits coupled with the wider



equity impacts are likely to be greater if management remains local to the assets themselves.

It is important to consider the broad impact the forestry sector has on the economy and environment of rural Scotland and to ensure that any change to the current arrangements would build on and increase those impacts in a holistic manner. Any adverse effects on security of supply to the timber processing sector resulting from changes in managing arrangements should be carefully assessed before being introduced.

If you would like HIE to expand on any of these points please get in touch

*Yours sincerely  
Sandy Blinning*