

From: Scott Muir [ScottMuir@thinkpositive.co.uk]
Sent: 13 November 2008 08:53
To: liz.kirk@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Subject: Consultation on Forestry Provisions in the Scottish Climate Change Bill

Dear Ms Kirk

I have read the paper on the Forestry Commission web site with interest, as a Scot who returns regularly to see family, as a business person and, primarily, as a complete cynic when it comes to the dark art of politics and, in particular, the ability of politicians to hide one dangerous subject within a seemingly innocuous, indeed, positive and well supported, cause. - It happens regularly within my industry and it pervades every aspect of business and social life in the UK today. This attempt has been spotted and I sincerely hope that, it is clearly explained to the electorate what the full ramifications of the bill could be and why it is so important, to all of us!

From what I can make out, there is only one real end result required by the Scottish Government and that is, to liquidate the assets of the Forestry Commission and to continue to draw revenue in the form of rent from third parties. At the same time, they are going to be absolving themselves from any responsibilities (and costs) associated with running such a massive undertaking. There is nothing in the paper that seems to clearly indicate that the Scottish Government wants to do anything about climate change or anything else, if there was, it would be being shouted about from the roof tops! No, what they want to do is sound as if they are doing something positive, for political reasons!

The questions posed at the end of the paper are interesting but, question 4 particularly worries me, in that, the way it is worded seems to suggest that, what is proposed is a done deal and that this is just an opportunity to find out if some quick thinking, like minded, idiot would be good enough to tell the Scottish Government of any other ways that they could milk the asset for any more cash than already foreseen. It is really more of a statement than a question.

Added to that, there are a load of questions arising from the paper, which it does not even attempt to try to answer. For example:

1. What gives the Scottish Government the right to "sell" the forests of Scotland to the highest bidder? - It's not their forest in the first place - it belongs to the people of Scotland!
2. Who in their right mind thinks that reducing Scotland's emissions by 80% by 2050 is possible? If the population carries on growing in the same way as it has over recent years, demand for energy for industry and business, recreation and housing has got to rise - substantially. I can perceive the possibility that emissions might not rise, through more widespread and efficient use of renewable energy but, to be reduced by 80%? - I don't think so! Still, at least if a third party fails, it is no fault of the government!
3. Not for profit organisations do not, in the long run, work. However, if the parameters under which it is expected to work are laid down by politicians and civil servants (with no experience in business and with no experience of "proper" budgeting) then, it has absolutely no chance of working. We already have an excellent vehicle for managing the forest in place - it's called the Forestry Commission! Why not expand their remit and take their shackles off to allow them to prove that they can do everything required, and save the set up costs of yet another "jobs for the boys" organisation. - Yes, I know it means that when they fail they are still a government organisation and therefore can't absolve all responsibility for failure away from government but, by then, who will remember or care anyway?

4. What guarantees would there be that new woodlands would actually be created by the "not for profit" organisation? Who would be responsible for ensuring that facilities would be extended to the new areas to the same, or higher, standard as are currently in place? Come to that, who would become responsible for ensuring existing woodland facilities were maintained? - The Forestry Commission have been doing the job, successfully, for years. - If this magnificent facility, currently owned by the Scottish people, is not maintained to current standards, then the government will, rightly, be blamed!

5. What is going to happen to the Forestry Commission? Should all their employees be out looking for other jobs or are they safe? Why not say that their jobs and conditions of employment are safe - publicly!

6. If there is a considerable increase in forestry production, what will the impact be on timber prices? Following on from that, what will be the effect of lower prices (or higher prices) be on those working in forestry at the moment or in the future?

7. If climate change is such a big issue for the Scottish Government, why is the government trying to divest itself of the largest single, anti-global warming, asset it has to use at it's discretion? Putting the responsibility for this onto the shoulders of some quango is, frankly, political cowardice, for which, only 90 years ago, they would be shot!

This must sound like a rant for the Forestry Commission but, it is not! All it is, is an attempt to raise a voice against what is, quite honestly, just one further example of a profligate government, desperate for new ideas to raise new money, (not cunningly) disguised as a politically correct act, effectively for the cameras. It must not be allowed to happen, ever!

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