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Sent: 13 November 2008 15:14
To: liz.kirk@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Subject: Scottish Climate Change Bill

Question 4 - Other Actions

The Scottish Government has set welcome and ambitious targets for woodland creation in an attempt to provide some mitigation towards climate change and increasing renewable fuels. These targets seem to command widespread support both from within the forest industry and from the public at large.

Against this background however rules regarding the eligibility for Farmland Premium under the new Rural Development Contracts, Rural Priorities have been tightened, when compared to the old SFGS. Land which has not been actively farmed for the last 3 years is no longer eligible for Farmland Premium. Furthermore, although the wording is not clear, it would appear that the definition of a farmer has also changed to include only those who derive more than 25% of their total income from agricultural activities in Scotland. While for the more intensively farmed areas of Scotland these restrictions are perhaps not particularly problematic large swathes of the Highlands and Argyll are now effectively excluded from this additional planting supplement. This is proving to be a significant barrier in bringing forward woodland creation schemes in these areas.

Most of the larger landholdings in these areas have significant scope for new woodland planting, particularly for native woodlands but also non-native productive conifers but as the sheep industry has contracted dramatically over the last twenty years there are relatively few genuinely active agricultural units left and large expanses of abandoned unimproved hill land.

What does not seem to make much sense is to further reduce agricultural activity by targeting subsidy for tree growing solely at the remaining agricultural land when there are vast tracts of other land available for woodland creation. If we are seeking to bring an economic balance to these fragile areas then woodland creation should surely be encouraged on land which is otherwise economically inactive. Perhaps as an alternative to Farmland Premium a Climate Change Premium could be offered for planting unimproved hill land where this does not compromise environmental and biodiversity objectives

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