

FORESTRY IN THE WIDER RURAL CONTEXT

Douglas Greig, Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department

- Useful to look back before looking forward. During second half of 20th Century, focus for forestry (as agriculture) was largely production - orientated. This has now broadened out, recognising the wider contribution of these primary industries to the rural economy, communities and the environment.
- Has been said (as broad generalisation) that in the 19th century people looked to the free market for solutions; in the 20th century they looked to government intervention; while at the start of the 21st century the tendency is to look at community action. This outline would seem to fit forestry, with the removal of timber import duties during the 19th century and very significant investment by government during the 20th century. Already good examples of community/forestry interaction.
- In the post industrial economy of the future, the government will increasingly see its role as being a purchaser of public goods - both environmental and societal. Also seeks to make rural businesses efficient and to promote economic efficiency generally in the primary sectors.
- In post devolution Scotland the rural dimension has more importance than ever. It is a political fact of life that a very high number of MSPs have a proportion of rural constituents. There is a Cabinet sub Committee on Rural Development, chaired by Ross Finnie and including key Cabinet Ministers, that seeks to promote a joined up approach to policy, across all Scottish Executive policies. This requires recognition of the needs of rural areas in both the formulation and implementation of policies (including health, education etc). The approach is described in more detail in "Rural Scotland - A New Approach".
- No doubt that forestry can play its part in contributing to the Executive's wider objectives for rural Scotland - helping to strengthen the rural economy, providing opportunities for jobs, enhancing the quality of life and sustaining and making the most of our natural and cultural heritage.
- Course has been charted by the Scottish Forestry Strategy. Being implemented through the new Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme, the Scottish Forest Industries Cluster and a range of other initiatives. The outcome of the Forest Devolution Review will also help improve the way in which the public forest estate can be managed to help achieve wider rural objectives.