

# **REVIEW OF LAND MANAGED BY FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND – CONSULTATION EXERCISE**

## **REPORT**

PUBLIC MEETING HELD AT - **OBAN**

VENUE/DATE: **REGENT HOTEL, ESPLANADE: 19 JAN. 2004**

ORGANISER: **KEITH MILLER**

MEETING CHAIR OR FACILITATOR: **JOHN GRAHAM**

WORKING GROUP REPRESENTATIVE: **ALAN HAMPSON**

ATTENDANCE FIGURE: **52**

## **ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK SHEETS**

NUMBER OF COMPLETED FEEDBACK SHEETS: 23

Female: 50%; male: 50%

Age:

a. under 25?	4%
b. 25 – 35?	22%
c. 35 – 45?	22%
d. 45 – 55?	22%
e. over 55?	30%

Distance travelled (Number):

a. under 10 miles?	38%
b. between 10 and 25 miles?	22%
c. between 25 and 40 miles?	22%
d. between 40 and 55 miles?	9%
e. over 55 miles?	9%

Was the meeting worthwhile?

a. Definitely worthwhile	25%
b. Quite worthwhile	70%
c. Waste of time	5%

## **COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED VISION**

- Should recognise value of forests as educational resource. Furthermore, if FCS is working to benefit communities they need to educate people so they can enjoy the forests on an informed basis – there appears to be no mention of this in the Consultation Document.

## **SUBJECTS THAT WERE RAISED DURING MEETING OR ON THE FEEDBACK SHEETS**

- Wind farm development: appears to contradict environmental objectives; how can Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) talk about enriching natural environment when FCS land is used for building industrial windfarms? Windfarms may also create hazards for neighbours; doubt about powers of FCS to make land available for wind farms; call for national strategy on siting of windfarm developments. Development of windfarms part of Scottish Executive renewable energy policy, and all developments on FCS land subject to full scrutiny through planning process.
- Partnership and community involvement: how can this help on west coast? Need to link with local economic development. Should consider possibility of leasing parcels of land in individuals where this would create local economic activity. FC staff should be more proactive, rather than reactive, in encouraging community involvement. Important to recognise the fact that (unlike other short-term initiatives) FC can offer a long-term relationship with communities. FC should be able to offer leases to communities. Community consultation should be a main priority.
- Community ownership – could deliver enhanced benefits over private and public ownership – but there is a long process involved in ‘skilling up’ a community to do this – they need support to get there. Concern about how communities secure reliable, professional advice: fears about unscrupulous operators within the forestry industry – if a community buys a forest and is subsequently misled by an adviser what can it do? Noted that Institute of Chartered Foresters can insist on professional standards, but anyone can claim to be a forestry adviser: communities will need to take care about who they appoint as advisers.
- Creating a more local focus: employ more local foresters; process more timber locally; employ young people locally; provide information locally, eg about forest management priorities. Fears that FCS will withdraw from Mull/Morvern; but it provides important benefits to local communities, both directly and (eg) through tourism. Danger of forcing urban values onto rural communities.
- Timber transport: value of using access across FC land for transport of timber from private forests where this can reduce timber traffic on public roads; should be better communication with local communities over timber transport plans.

- Funding: danger of this review creating expectations that cannot be funded; FC should have same incentives as private sector to encourage (e.g.) planting of native woodland; current community work relies heavily on voluntary efforts by FC staff; non market benefits should be properly valued and recognised; opportunity to realise funds through sale of more “commercial” forests, but funds should be used for (eg) recreation and conservation work on public forest estate. FCS has difficulty accessing grants. Lots of potential but impossible to deliver under current resources. Big discrepancy between private and public forestry. In danger of leading people on with promises in this document. Much community project work done by goodwill of staff rather than injection of extra resources.
- Biomass: need to do more to exploit potential of wood as a fuel, including planting of short rotation coppice. Can FCS look into increasing use of biomass? Coppiced trees could perhaps be used to create local jobs and increase habitats: may be preferable to windfarms as a means of generating renewable energy, because less intrusive. A lot of work in recent years to develop technology but still not really taken off in UK: need to learn from other countries e.g. Austria.
- What is policy on deer control? How does FCS avoid conflicts with neighbours’ interests? Costs of managing deer are high (£240/beast): the aim was originally to protect trees, but now it is balancing carrying capacity of land with level of deer populations. Overall about 70,000 deer shot in Scotland per annum (FCS shoot 26,000), but the population is still growing. Questions raised about adequacy of Deer Commission for Scotland’s powers. There seem to be too many deer and more needs to be done. FCS tries to manage estate on good neighbour basis, working with neighbours. Possibility of widening scope to allow more people to shoot deer, but fears about safety and welfare issues.
- Social housing: use of the estate for affordable social housing is a good idea. Need to work closely with planners, and to be pro-active rather than reactive. Encourage use of timber in house building.
- How does FCS safeguard health and safety of near-neighbours as well as its own staff – what are measures taken to exercise duty of care, eg with respect to infrasound risks of wind turbines. Noted that health and safety issues taken very seriously, with risk assessments from planning stages onwards – operational site plans identify hazards and precautions taken: the law sets out clear legal responsibilities.
- Disposals: concern about suggestion that areas might be sold in rural Scotland to fund initiatives in urban areas. Urban forestry initiatives should be funded separately by Scottish Executive. Concern over scale of disposals – selling to large forestry organisation doesn’t change much! Public money still given in grants for them to manage land. Public liability / commitment to maintenance is an issue for private owners. Worry about impact of sales on islands and remoter areas. Key routes on haulage networks would also need protection.
- Forest structure: FCS should be clearer about balance between sitka spruce and native woodlands/open space. Need to look ahead: sitka is a legacy from the past century. Sitka Spruce still being planted/restocked with a commercial view in mind – but balance is changing – FCS should be clearer about this and look

toward native/open space. Avoid losing flexibility. Restructure at time of harvesting: avoid early cutting to waste. Respect historical reasons for past planting practices. Danger of making decisions on short-term basis.

- Biodiversity: FCS should show way through demonstration projects. But do not (eg) fell beech simply because is non-native.
- Pace of change: should be evolutionary, though scope for some radical changes at local scale. Do not change for change's sake.

***As part of this Consultation exercise, public meetings were held in seven venues in different parts of Scotland during the second half of January 2004. Afternoon meetings were held in Oban, Dingwall, Newton St Boswells and Inverurie. Evening meetings were held in Dundee and Glasgow. A "drop-in" meeting, lasting from 3pm until 9 pm was held in Newton Stewart. This report summarises the points made and issues raised at the Oban meeting; similar reports are being produced for the other six meetings.***