

**DIRECTOR SCOTLAND REPORT****Referendum**

The independence referendum has increasingly dominated public policy over the past months, with considerable uncertainty regarding the future constitutional and organisational landscape. Now that the result is known, we will be working with colleagues across government in the post-referendum period to establish what will happen with key processes such as the review of the Land Use Strategy and the next stage of the ENFOR Directorate review.

**Tree Health**

Helicopter surveys have been completed for 2014, and show only a modest expansion of *Phytophthora ramorum* within or immediately adjacent to the existing management zone. Ariel spraying trials to help develop a 'last resort' treatment for *Dothistroma* needle blight were unable to proceed due to poor weather (insufficient wind) and a lack of helicopter availability. Extensive work by FCS and FRA went into setting up these trials, which will be attempted again next year. Continued surveillance for *Phytophthora austocedrae* has confirmed its widespread occurrence.

FCS has been working closely with Scottish Government to establish a Centre of Expertise on tree and plant health and to start developing a Scottish plant health strategy.

**New SRDP**

The SRDP programme document was submitted to Brussels in June, and we await a response from the European Commission. Meanwhile FCS staff are working alongside SG staff to prepare for the launch of the new programme in 2015. This includes detailed work with stakeholders on option design and grant rates, and intensive engagement with the SG IT development - 'IT Futures'. Embedding staff within Scottish Government is paying significant dividends in ensuring that the forestry scheme is mainstreamed with other SRDP development.

**Community Empowerment**

A Community Empowerment Bill is being drafted for introduction early next year. At this stage, the anticipated impact on FCS is small (mainly relating to changing the definition of eligible community bodies). However, associated work regarding the use of market rate discounts for community purchasers, could have significant implications for the FES re-positioning programme, and accountability for the value associated with the National Forest Estate. FCS is working closely with SG officials to ensure that these implications are recognised and taken into account before final decisions are taken.

## **Land Reform**

A comprehensive and independent review of Land Reform in Scotland was submitted to Ministers in June. The recommendations in the report were wide ranging, covering rural and urban land use. A substantial section on FES and the National Forest Estate was enthusiastic about work carried out to date, and recommended a wider role for FES beyond land use relating to forestry. A recommendation to ensure that all public land is captured in the Land Registry has been accepted by ministers, and will result in a substantial piece of work for FES. Ministers have yet to respond on other recommendations.

## **Brian Pack review of regulation**

A review of regulation of the agricultural sector by Brian Pack proposed over 60 recommendations, one of which related to the way in which land use bodies (including FCS) operate and are aligned in Scotland. The Cabinet Secretary has agreed to look into this further, and it is anticipated that this will progress via a second stage of the work looking at the ENFOR Directorate that reported in early 2013.

## **UKFS Compliance**

FCS commissioned independent work to look at the compliance of existing and legacy grant schemes with UKFS. The evidence from the work, which looked at a broad range of sample schemes, shows that:

- Initial plans submitted to FCS are often not compliant (even when coming from experienced practitioners)
- Very few approved schemes demonstrated non-compliance, and the non-compliance observed tended to be minor.
- Compliance rates increased with the more recent schemes.
- There was very little evidence of a 'gold-plating standard being applied to the approval process.

**Bob McIntosh**  
**September 2014**