

FC SCOTLAND REPORT**Scottish Government Update**

The Scottish Government has now published its Programme for Government and Economic Strategy, which will drive activity across the public sector up to the Scottish Elections in 2016. The three key themes are prosperity, participation and equality – all of which are a good fit with FCS priorities.

Bridget Campbell has now taken over as Director ENFOR, and will take up a non-executive position on the National Committee at the end of March.

Rural Affairs, Food and Environment Board

Following the recommendations of the Pack report, a new board is to be established to drive operational and cultural alignment across rural affairs, food and environment outcomes and priorities. The Board will be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, with the Director Agriculture and Director ENFOR as Deputy Chair. Both FCS and FES will have a seat on this Board, along with other rural delivery bodies. The draft mission for the Board is *to will drive alignment and joint delivery between RAFE organisations; prioritise their efforts to secure maximum public good; and embrace new ways to share or deliver services to customers and communities*. An initial piece of work will be to further address red-tape challenges in agricultural regulation.

Change Management

Work to increase the focus and pace associated with the de-centralisation of shared-services and closer alignment with SG has been undertaken across FCS. The membership and ToRs of the FCSMB have been refreshed and recruitment of change management staff has started. Engagement with SG collaborative initiatives (e.g. around IT developments) has also increased.

Land Reform

Land Reform continues to be a high profile area for the Government, with an extremely tight timeframe for ensuring that legislation is passed during this parliament. Consultation concluded in February, with around 75% of respondents supporting proposals to broaden the role of FCS to allow FES to engage in broader land management activities.

New Forestry Grant Scheme

The new grant scheme is on track to be launched at the end of March. Extensive stakeholder liaison and training and staff workshops have been held across Scotland, with high attendance rates and generally very positive feedback from participants. Increasing new planting rates – especially of more productive woodlands – remains a top priority for the organisation, and it is hoped that the new grant system will stimulate greater planting activity, which is crucial for the delivery of climate change targets.

Re-positioning of the National Forest Estate

Both acquisitions and disposals of land remain challenging – acquisitions primarily because of concerns amongst the agricultural sector regarding the loss of farmland to woodland, and disposals for a range of reasons. There is a small but growing call from NGOs and community bodies for FCS land to be passed on to ‘public interest’ bodies at a discount from the market value, which could set a difficult precedent for protecting the value of the estate.

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