

# Community Woodlands Association

Abriachan Nurseries, Loch Ness-side, Inverness IV3 8LA  
Tel / fax : 01463-861424 E-mail [Margaret.Davidson.cllr@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Margaret.Davidson.cllr@highland.gov.uk)

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26<sup>th</sup> February 2004

Kenny Murray,  
Forestry Commission Scotland,  
231 Corstorphine Road,  
Edinburgh EH12 7AT.

Dear Mr. Murray,

## **REVIEW of LAND MANAGED by FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND (FCS)**

The Community Woodlands Association Scotland (CWA) warmly welcomes this review. We regard this as one of the most important national forestry consultations for many decades, and are pleased to be invited to express our organisation's views.

In addition to providing responses to the questions posed in the consultation, we have taken the opportunity to note our concerns surrounding the consultation process and our hopes for the follow-up. We also outline our vision for the forests and people of Scotland, and note the principles which we consider should inform this consultation and its outcomes.

We hope that this consultation signals the start of a process of inclusive partnership working, which will achieve significant benefits at a local and national level. The CWA wishes to play a full part, and accordingly offers its services as a partner in the post-consultation process.

In this regard, we look forward to developing a fruitful relationship.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Davidson

Chair, Community Woodlands Association

## **REVIEW OF LAND MANAGED BY FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND**

### **OBSERVATIONS ON THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

- We are concerned that the overall approach of the document was more that of a consultation on what the Forestry Commission wishes to do, rather than an open discussion of the best way forward to develop and manage the national forest estate into the future.
- We are concerned with the length of time allowed for considering and responding to such an important document – a document which has the potential to set in train some fundamental changes in FCS land management practice. The framework within which these changes might take place, the public consultation mechanisms, and decision making fora all need to be extensively discussed and considered, and a broad consensus achieved.
- The composition of the working and steering groups is remarkable for a lack of community representation, and we assume that the gender imbalance is merely an oversight which will be rectified at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **THE COMMUNITY WOODLANDS ASSOCIATION VISION**

The Community Woodlands sector shares a collective vision for the future of forestry in Scotland. Our members all wish to see the growth of forest cover in Scotland, and a greater level of involvement of people with their forests, through economic, social and environmental activities.

We look forward to a more mixed pattern of land ownership of Scotland's forested land. This will include community ownership, joint ownerships, leased land etc. The national forest will be managed at a local level using models such as concurrent partnerships, joint ventures, leasing and lease back being common along with pooled and aligned budgets.

We believe such arrangements will release much latent energy within communities, and will catalyse a rich mixture of economic development, social engagement, improved habitat and access. These outcomes will have significant value at a local and national level. Forests will become well tended and well loved. Scotland will be known for its forests on a world scale and they will be a cause for national pride.

This vision is based upon a stable timber base, produced from mixed forests with greatly increased continuous cover.

### **PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING OUR RESPONSE**

Our response takes as starting point the following principles :

- Wider public benefits need to be derived from Scotland's public forests.
- There should be a presumption in favour of local management of public forests.
- Local situations require local responses and solutions.
- Rural and urban situations should be accorded equal weight.
- Solutions need to be sustainable for the long term.

We address each in turn :

#### WIDER PUBLIC BENEFITS

There is an assumption throughout the consultation document that wider public benefit is best delivered by FCS through their management of the public forest estate. We do not consider that this is necessarily the case – for example community woodlands are becoming a proven means of delivering wider public benefits. We believe that this assumption should be the subject of an open discussion on the best way forward for the development and management of the national forest estate.

Local communities are already proving their ability to develop the woodlands and forests they control to the benefit of all. A huge increase in local use is accompanied by use by the wider public, a most encouraging broadening of the age and social range of users, delivery of health benefits, and the exploitation of appropriate local development potential.

In addition, communities are well placed to attract funds committed to a range of improvements in the forests. Local people are often well placed to deliver these wider public benefits, either under their own effort, or in partnership with FCS, other agencies or NGOs.

#### LOCAL MANAGEMENT

There is an unspoken presumption throughout the review that future management of the state owned forests will be very much business as usual. The CWA believes that there should be an evolution into different management models, incorporating greatly improved governance, accountability and transparency.

#### LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Local solutions should be based on a well founded national strategy. However, we recognise that each forest and the surrounding community are unique, and accordingly we consider the approach taken should engage the local community, in both definition and action, in a way which reflects and addresses the local situation.

#### RURAL AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The CWA is very supportive of additional developments around our cities and towns. However, we do not consider that these should take place at the expense of developments in remote or rural areas. We believe that all communities, from the largest to the smallest, should have equality of access to woodlands.

We are concerned that the concept of selling remote and unprofitable forests has not been fully thought through. We believe that every forest and woodland in Scotland has latent potential. In the more remote areas there is a very real prospect of developing local forests to the area's economic benefit, for instance as a tourist attraction and source of timber and other products which can be processed locally. Some communities have both the determination and capability to undertake such an approach, and some communities have already turned "unprofitable" forests into tremendous local and national assets.

It would be regrettably short sighted to sell off such forests for short term, relatively insignificant financial gain, when they have such potential to provide great local and national benefits in the future.

The CWA was pleased to be asked to attend workshops and become involved in the consultation process of the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Woodland Partnership. We believe

there should be a central role for community groups in leading and delivering this project. All such projects need to be underpinned by a framework for community involvement at all levels.

#### SUSTAINABLE LONG TERM SOLUTIONS

The Scottish Forestry Strategy and many other FC documents talk of the 3 legged stool of social, environmental and economic developments in forests. The approach of the consultation regrettably breaks up that image of a stool and considers each of these aspects in their own respective silo. To bring about a truly sustainable long term solution, each of the aspects needs to be considered in the light of the others, and implications and trade-offs identified and acknowledged. Acceptance of this would lead to significantly more “joined-up” planning and delivery.

## **REVIEW OF LAND MANAGED BY FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND**

### **RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

#### **QUESTION 1**

We believe the Vision Statement should be re-written : **“Scotland’s national forests will benefit everyone, playing a major role in sustaining vibrant, healthy communities, enriching environments and creating wide-ranging opportunities for economic development.”**

#### **QUESTION 2**

FCS will need the co-operation and help of communities to deliver this aspiration. FCS should inform and support communities, facilitate involvement and remove the organisational obstacles that currently prevent this happening more widely. A sustained change of culture within FCS will be required to foster the conditions necessary for this to occur.

Local management should have clear governance, accountability and transparency. Success would be best measured by undertaking both self-evaluation and a community-led audit.

#### **QUESTION 3**

The concept of “surplus” forests needs to be removed from land sales. All public forest land should be negotiable for communities. The gauge must be long-term public benefit at the local level, and not just the national level.

The criteria that would trigger sales of the type proposed are very important. They should be discussed and drawn up by a wide stake-holder group. Decisions would need to be informed, validated and accountable, as would the process of arbitration.

#### **QUESTION 4**

FCS should continue to seek to provide new opportunities for recreation across the country. Each community – whether it is considered rural or urban – deserves such attention, and much can be delivered working in partnership with local people.

Priorities should not be based on population numbers, but rather on local need and potential for delivery to the wider public good. We welcome proposed developments to increase recreation provision for the Central Belt, but consider that this should be in addition to continued expansion of provision for the rest of the country, and not at the expense of remote or rural areas.

#### **QUESTION 5**

We agree that there is a need to plan and deliver environmental projects on a landscape scale but such projects need to involve a wide range of stakeholders (including other landowners and communities), and be considered on an individual basis, rather than determined centrally as “flagship projects”. Ideally this process should be integrated at a local level within the Community Planning process.

Landscape and environmental development should be fully integrated with recreation and production. When resources are to be directed there needs to be wider public and community buy-in and sanction.

#### **QUESTION 6**

FCS should aim high with its environmental aspirations, and seek to deliver these in partnership with other public bodies, communities, private sector and NGOs.

A good place to start would be through the adoption of a more diverse silvicultural approach in the nation's forests.

#### **QUESTION 7**

Ambitious, imaginative projects will come from good community / FCS partnerships.

#### **QUESTION 8**

The nature of FCS's role in timber supply poses some problems. Whilst supporting downstream employment and stimulating capital investment are laudable objectives, they are only achieved at present with a level of net loss which private operators would find impossible to sustain.

The dominant production model of low-intensity silviculture, designed to maximise yield and capital returns, minimises forest employment and local benefit.

Guaranteed levels of FCS production regardless of market price distorts the market for private (including community-led) forestry, reducing income from harvesting and presenting a disincentive to management. This in turn raises doubts about long-term forecast of softwood availability presented in graphical form on p17 of the consultation paper.

#### **QUESTION 9**

We believe that the national forest estate, with significant resources and holdings widely dispersed through rural and peripheral areas, is uniquely placed to contribute to sustaining and developing local economies, and that this contribution should be a major objective of future FCS management.

The silvicultural changes outlined in our response to Question 11, which imply a greater variety of forest employment and a wider range of timber produce, should provide important opportunities for local business development.

In addition, small land sales or leases should be made available to those – including individuals, community groups, self build groups or registered social landlords - who can demonstrate the ability to construct quality accommodation with materials mostly found *in situ*. This approach is also well suited in areas where it is uneconomic to haul the harvested timber long distances.

FC should review and remove some of the restrictions that have prevented their participation in joint ventures, franchising and joint ownership.

### **QUESTION 10a**

We recognise that the geographic distribution of FCS holdings is currently far from ideal for effective delivery of many of the benefits now demanded of forests, and accept that evolutionary change in the estate is both inevitable and desirable.

We believe that changes to the size and distribution of the estate should be based on two principles :

1. Disposals and acquisitions should be based on local demand, rather than imposed strategically, from the top down.
2. Whilst this will inevitably lead to regional differences – some regions having a net disposal, some a net acquisition – the processes should be independent. One region should not be developed at the expense of any other.

### **QUESTION 10b**

We believe that land should be added to the national estate when such action is demonstrably in the local and national public interest. Such purchases should be subject to transparent criteria developed with the approval of a wide range of stakeholders.

We would like to re-iterate that one area of the country should not be developed at the expense of any other.

### **QUESTION 10c**

This is a difficult area which requires considerably more thought. We believe that the disposals practice up to the present, based on FCS' identification of "surplus" land, should be reformed. Hasty sales of forests can further add to the present distorted land ownership patterns across Scotland. Sales of FCS managed forests have not been popular, and it is unclear how the disposals practice to date has maximised public benefit.

Future sales should be subject to community consultation, and based on the ability and commitment of prospective owners to carry out sustainable forest management and to deliver wider public benefit.

### **QUESTION 11**

Timber production requires careful planning at a national, regional and local level. It should remain a major objective of national forests, but there should be fundamental changes in the methods used to achieve these objectives.

Future timber production should be concentrated on sites capable of production of high quality softwood and hardwood sawlogs. This will require employment of more intensive silvicultural methods and a wider range of tree species than is currently the case.

A range of options should be available for second rotation management of areas considered unsuitable (e.g. because of poor soils, or high exposure) for intensive silviculture and production of quality timber. These should include conversion to native broadleaves by restocking and/or natural regeneration; minimal intervention, allowing natural processes to take their course; and in certain cases, removal to enable restoration to natural non-forest habitat.

In the long term, the net effect of these changes, if the forest area remains constant, would most likely be a significant reduction in the annual volume of timber harvested. However, we

would argue that the higher quality of timber harvested, and the greater intensity of management, would not necessarily reduce either the value of the yield, or the level of employment supported.

This greater diversity of management would also benefit the recreation and biodiversity value of the estate.

#### **QUESTION 12a**

A challenge fund for special projects might be useful, particularly if it were a simple lower value award similar to the “Awards for All Scheme”. Any such funds could be supported by larger amounts of funding drawn from the Scottish Executive, or Europe e.g. the HISTP scheme in the Highlands.

#### **QUESTION 12b**

We strongly oppose this proposal.

#### **QUESTION 13**

FCS needs to audit and review the manner in which it participates in partnerships. This should be carried out by an independent organisation or consultancy.

The new “community partnerships” that are seeking to deliver urban forestry developments must have a strong and wide membership including the community as an equal partner and perhaps in a leadership role.

#### **QUESTION 14**

This is a very mixed group of examples and the delivery of each needs to be considered separately.

With regard to rural housing, a significant contribution could be made to meeting the housing need in many communities, through sales or lease of small parcels of land to individuals, community groups, self build groups or registered social landlords.

Health promotion is already a by-product of community involvement and the development of recreation facilities.

Where FCS is involved in renewable energy schemes, such as wind farms, which will bring in substantial rents or income streams, there should be well publicised policies in place that ensure that community gain is generous. It is our view that FCS should always seek to develop renewable energy in partnership with a local community. This way both parties can share planning, risk and reward. If, however, for some reason, such a partnership is not formed, at the very least FCS should, in addition to the renewable developer, offer planning gain to nearby and affected communities.

We believe that the Scottish Executive should recognise the role of **all** forests (FCS & private) in delivering its wider priorities and provide financial support accordingly.

#### **QUESTION 15**

We believe that as a nation we need to develop a greater sense of national pride in our forests. Promotion and publicity can widen awareness of opportunities, and greater

involvement by communities will increase the sense of ownership, but a great deal needs to be done to increase the overall quality of the national forest estate to ensure that it fully meets the multiple objectives and benefits which it is capable of delivering.

FCS should work with politicians to help them understand the potential of the national forest and the considerable and growing achievements of both the private and community sectors.

#### **QUESTION 16**

We would draw a distinction between structural and organisational issues, and estate management. There is scope for rapid change regarding structural and organisational issues, which include the disposals policy and FCS partnership working. On the other hand, in estate management, the nature of forestry dictates gradual and evolutionary change – change which does not sit easily with the desire for short term results. The full benefits of the review will only be realised in around fifty years' time.

#### **QUESTION 17**

We suggest that attempting to express the vision by such means would prove a waste of time and money. A top-down, strategic mapping exercise would inevitably act to homogenise regional diversity, and pre-empt both local consultation and innovative proposals arising from local and regional partnerships.

We would argue that where landscape planning is undertaken it should be carried out with wide consultation with all stakeholders and not confined to the land managed by FCS.

#### **QUESTION 18**

The Community Woodlands Association promotes the interests of local communities *and* the wider general public. We see no conflict of interest, and believe that community woodlands are a benefit to everybody.