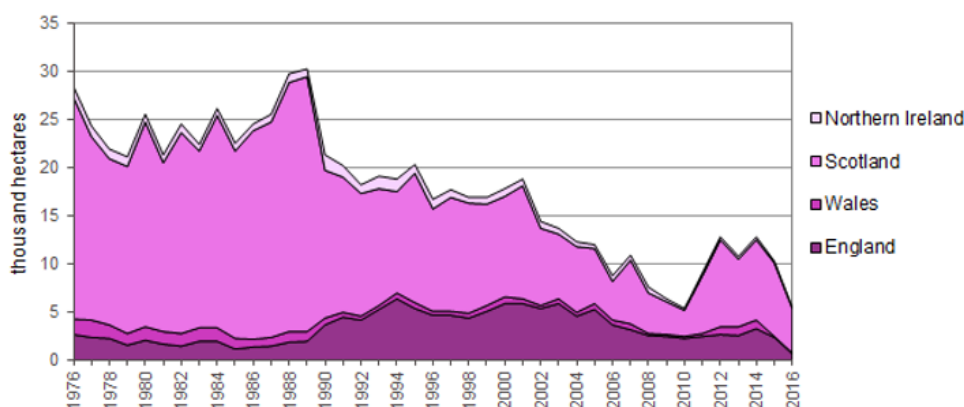


**RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE
SUBMISSION FROM CONFOR
THE DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN (RPP3)**

**Progress to date in cutting emissions within the sector/sectors of interest
and implementing the proposals and policies set out in the RPP2:**

1. Progress on the forestry targets set in RPP1 and RPP2 have been patchy.
2. In RPP1 (2010) “the Scottish Ministers [...] pledged to plant 100 million trees by 2015 [...] To achieve [this...], the planting rate will need to increase towards 10,000ha/yr. [...] Looking ahead, it may become appropriate to increase planting rates towards 15,000ha/yr.” (7.53-4)
3. RPP2 (2013) lowered ambitions, on the basis that the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group (WEAG) had failed to identify enough land for planting. WEAG “recommended that the focus of activity should be on creating 100,000 hectares of new woodland between 2012 and 2022, [...] 10,000 hectares per year.”
4. Woodland creation levels did rise to 9,000ha in 2011-12, justifying optimism that the 10,000ha target would be achieved and maintained. However, as the graph below (Forestry Commission, *Forestry Statistics 2016*) shows, woodland creation

Figure 1.6 New planting in the UK, 1976-2016



has fallen back to only 4,600ha in 2016.

5. In addition, it should be noted that the Canopy Cover Report¹ showed that woodland 'in transition' (clearfelled and not yet restocked) had risen from 97,100ha in 2006 to 204,700ha in 2015. This is a large area. It can be counted for, in part, by management delays between harvesting and replanting. However, it is important that the Scottish Government establishes what the statistic means in the context of Scotland's forest as a carbon sink. As a first step, any outstanding areas 'in transition' on the National Forest Estate should be replanted as early as possible.
6. The proof of concept research programme exploring the viability of Scottish softwood in timber panel construction systems (RPP2 9.5.16) was delivered successfully; however, this research will only deliver in terms of carbon reductions if it can be made commercial.

The scale of reductions proposed within their sector/s and appropriateness and effectiveness of the proposals and policies within the draft RPP3 for meeting the annual emissions targets and contributing towards the 2020 and 2050 targets:

7. Confor warmly welcomes the new commitment to a target of 15,000 hectares per year new planting in RPP3, and to increase the use of Scottish wood products in construction from its current level of 2.2 million cubic metres to 2.6 million cubic metres by 2021-22 and 3 million cubic metres by 2031-2.
8. It is clear from the Scottish Government debate on Forestry in the Scottish Parliament (24 January) that there is cross-party consensus to deliver greater tree planting and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Connectivity is committed to hitting these ambitious targets. The strong focus on forestry in the speech to parliament a week earlier by the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land also testified to this commitment, while the REC and ECCLR committees also appear very supportive. Moreover, it is clear that the

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[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Preliminary_estimatesofthechangesincanopycoverinBritishwoodlandsbetween2006and2015.pdf/\\$FILE/Preliminary_estimatesofthechangesincanopycoverinBritishwoodlandsbetween2006and2015.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Preliminary_estimatesofthechangesincanopycoverinBritishwoodlandsbetween2006and2015.pdf/$FILE/Preliminary_estimatesofthechangesincanopycoverinBritishwoodlandsbetween2006and2015.pdf) p.45.

ministers and committees are well-informed as to the barriers which have prevented previous RPP targets from being delivered.

9. Confor is optimistic that the targets of 10,000ha rising to 15,000ha will be met if this commitment is sustained. As Fergus Ewing said “We are putting in place all the necessary components for success: funding, appetite, process, innovation, land, skills and political will.” We welcomed the Scottish Government’s commissioning and acceptance of the Mackinnon Report on why targets had been missed, and the practical proposals made to address this.
10. Confor is delighted that the potential for the greater use of timber in construction has been identified. Off-site timber construction can play an increasingly significant role in providing the tens of thousands of warm, high-quality and sustainable homes that Scotland needs.
11. There are, however, important areas of concern which should be considered in the final draft:
12. **Restocking and restructuring:** The restocking and restructuring of forests is not mentioned in RPP3. However, failure to understand the scale of the issue and to tackle it effectively could begin to undermine the gains achieved from new woodland creation. The final draft should include:
 - A policy to ensure felled areas are restocked within less than 5 years, and the ‘backlog’ of restocking on the National Forest Estate is caught up.
 - The policy of compensatory planting to ensure that woodland lost to development or conversion to other habitats is effectively in place.
13. **Sufficient funding:** We would refer to the words of Edward Mountain MSP in the Forestry debate on 24 January: “Grants for costs for the establishment of forestry need to be in the region of £4,500 per hectare. Simple maths suggests that, to achieve a target of 13,000 hectares per annum, the budget should be in the region of £59 million. If the new target of 10,000 hectares per annum is accepted,

the budget will need to be £45 million. The fact is that the figure that has been set aside for planting in the 2017-18 budget is £40 million.”

14. **A focus on planting:** The Forestry Commission (FC) has a wide remit and has not always focused sufficient energy on delivering the planting targets. The FC’s response to the Mackinnon report has been welcome, and it is vital that the FC works in partnership with the private sector through Confor to ensure the correct tools are in place and the focus on meeting the targets is retained.

The appropriateness of the timescales over which the proposals and policies within the draft RPP3 are expected to take effect:

15. We welcome the enormous ambition for forestry and timber displayed in RPP3.

16. We are confident these targets can be met within the proposed timescales if the current cross-party consensus remains, the FC focuses on delivering the target in partnership with the private sector and appropriate measures are in place to engage positively with the farming community and other land managers. A key component will be maintaining momentum in planting levels year-on-year, as yo-yoing planting rates create problems for the industry and particularly for the nursery sector.

17. **The extent to which the proposals and policies reflect considerations about behaviour change and opportunities to secure wider benefits (e.g. environmental, financial and health) from specific interventions in particular sectors:** Forestry delivers multiple benefits, and through the UK Forest Standard, every forest is designed to provide a combination of all of these benefits.

19. It provides rural jobs, not just in forestry but in timber processing from sawmills to off-site timber house construction.

20. It is good for the wider economy by producing a home-grown valuable product we can use or export.

21. It is good for sustainable development by producing a natural, renewable pollution-free material which can replace everything from steel to plastic.
22. It improves upland water management, helping to reduce flooding and restore uplands damaged by grassland drainage improvement.
23. It provides tremendous recreational opportunities for our communities through walking, wildlife-watching, cycling and more high-octane pursuits like mountain bike trails and Go Ape.
24. It is good for wildlife, by diversifying upland habitat and particularly benefiting iconic species like Red squirrel.

Confor
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