

# RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

## FORESTRY AND LAND MANAGEMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL

### SUBMISSION FROM UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

Suggested amendments to the Bill

#### 1. DEFINITIONS

##### a) Definition of 'Sustainable Forest Management'

The term '**sustainable**' is vague in its meaning allowing it to be defined and redefined to suit different circumstances and as such it is difficult to provide a satisfactory definition. Various groups have attempted to define sustainable forest ecosystem management, for example:

- I. FAO (1993)
- II. Helsinki conference of European countries (Anon. 1993)
- III. United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED 1992)

These vary in length and detail; however, it is clear that the more that authors attempt to encapsulate the entirety of their understanding of sustainability, the lengthier and more obscure the definition becomes. While it is easy to adopt a 'standard' definition that is so nebulous that it is difficult to understand far less criticise, a better option is to use a simple, robust and meaningful definition that is easily understood by most people and able to be judged by **objective measures**<sup>1</sup>.

*It is recommended that a simple, clear definition of sustainability should be used as suggested below:*

*Sustainable forest management requires 1) the productive potential of forests to be maintained or improved over time, 2) the supply of timber on a sustainable basis, and 3) continued provision of a range of non-timber benefits.*

##### b) Definition of 'Forest'

Although this may appear to be a pedantic point, there is an uncomfortable mix of the use of the terms 'woodland' and 'forest' in the Bill. The history of this use of dual terms goes back to the mid-1980s. Up until then the term 'forest' was widely accepted throughout the sector and indeed by the general population (and is used almost universally around the world). This changed when the Conservative government of the day proposed to sell off the state owned forests. At that time, the Forestry Commission defended its existence by appealing to the public that forests were really about social and environmental values rather than timber production and the word 'forest', largely perceived to refer to commercial coniferous plantations, was quietly dropped in its publications and other media formats and replaced by the anodyne term 'woodland' (see Cameron, 2011). The downside to this is that there is now a perception that 'woodlands' and 'forests' mean different things and an awkward mix is often used.

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<sup>1</sup> The productive potential of forests over time can be measured and compared using the increment of the forest area; a sustainable supply of timber can be determined by measuring and comparing annual production over a stated time period; and non-timber benefits can be measured and compared by number/area of non-timber benefits present (e.g. specific plant/animal species, plant/wildlife reserves, recreational facilities) over a set time period.

*To avoid potential legal or other challenges regarding the definitions of ‘forest’ and ‘woodland’, it is recommended that an internationally accepted definition should be adopted (from US National Vegetation Classification System, 2016):*

*Forest – 60-100% tree cover (applies to the vast majority of forests in Scotland)*

*Woodland – 25-60% tree cover*

*Parkland/Policy Woodland/Savanna - <25% tree cover*

*To maintain clarity and unambiguity, it is recommended that the term ‘forest’ is used throughout the Bill.*

## **2. FOREST EXPANSION**

Without doubt, the most pressing issue for forestry sector as part of the drive to expand the Scottish economy is the need to for more commercial tree planting. Currently, the area of **commercially productive** forest in Scotland is only around 10% of the total land area (the 18% figure published in FC statistics includes all areas with **>20% tree cover** that clearly contains ‘forests’ with limited tree cover (Cameron, 2015). In spite of a recent upturn in commercial tree planting, there remains an overall loss of productive forest area due to a variety of reasons including the continued loss of conifers on ‘ancient woodland sites’ and the preponderance of non-commercially productive broadleaved planting supported by favourable grants. The implication for the future supply of timber to the processing sector have been well stated (e.g. Cameron, 2015). I largely concur with the views of ConFor with the following statement:

*It is recommended that the Bill must include details of how the Scottish Government will deal with the projected decline in timber production in the next 50 years and the consequential impact on the financial viability of the processing sector and employment prospects in the future.*

The Scottish Government should be aware that while there is support in the current administration for expansion of the commercial forest area, this may change in the future with different politicians with different thinking and potentially radically alternative objectives. The long time-scales associated with the forestry industry require stable, long-lasting government policies that cannot readily be changed on a whim. ***The Bill needs to be robust enough to give it sufficient longevity and stability required by the forestry industry.***

The Scottish Government should also be aware that in the future, with global shortages of industrial roundwood a real possibility in the near future (see Cameron, 2015), Scotland could, with appropriate investment, become a significant **exporter** of timber products (particularly to England) with consequential benefits to its balance of payments. This could be critical should Scotland gain more economic autonomy in the future.

*It is recommended that the planting of commercially productive species must be at the forefront of new planting and restocking in Scotland and a commitment to this needs to be stated in the Bill.*

## **3. RETENTION OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF**

In support of the views expressed by ConFor, the need for experienced forestry staff is vital to manage the public forest land to a high standard and to maintain the objectives set out elsewhere in the Bill. The experiences of former Forestry Commission Wales, now part of Natural Resources Wales, has seen a dilution of qualified professional forestry staff particularly at the higher levels of the organisation that is having serious consequences for the forestry sector in Wales. It is important that there is a clear position of authority heading up the Forestry Division.

*In agreement with ConFor, the establishment of a head of the Forestry Division with the title 'Chief Forester' is strongly recommended. The Scottish Government must clearly state that all foresters have recognised forestry qualifications in accordance with other professional sectors such as engineering.*

#### 4. FORESTRY LAND

The term 'forestry land' is awkward (to be grammatically correct, it should be 'forested land') and I suspect comes from the vernacular expression 'The Forestry' widely used by the general public in the past to describe forests, which were almost universally assumed to be owned by the Forestry Commission. I concur with ConFor that the term 'forestry land' is misleading in the way it is used in the Bill. ***It is important that the descriptor of the state-owned forest land is unambiguous since this could create legal problems in the future.***

*In agreement with ConFor, it is recommended that the term 'forestry land' should be replaced with the 'national forest'. This term leaves no doubt who owns it and what stands for.*

#### 5. DEFINITION OF FELLING

The definition of 'felling' in section 22 'felling means intentionally killing a tree' is asinine. Does one 'kill' a lettuce for lunch? Remember that trees are plants, and like tens of thousands of other plants they have been used by human beings for a wide variety of purposes since the beginning of time. Using terms such as 'killing' are unnecessary and imply negativity.

*It is recommended the following definition, or something very similar, is used:*

*'Felling is the process of bringing down individual trees usually by means of a cross-sectional cut made close to the base of the tree.'*

#### References

**Anon.** (1993) Sound Forestry—Sustainable Development. Ministerial Proceedings of Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, 16 – 17 June 1993, Helsinki. Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Helsinki.

**Cameron A D** (2011) Has commercial timber production become an 'inconvenient truth'? Scottish Forestry 65: 12-16.

**Cameron A D** (2015) Why we need to invest in expanding the commercial forest area. Scottish Forestry 69: 10-15.

**FAO** (1993) Sustainability in a changing world. In *The Challenge of Sustainable Forest Management: Technical Papers*. FAO Rome.

**UNCED** (1992) *Statement of Forest Principles*. United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

**US National Vegetation Classification System** (2016) USNVC [United States National Vegetation Classification]. United States National Vegetation Classification Database, V2.0. Federal Geographic Data Committee, Vegetation Subcommittee, Washington DC. [usnvc.org] (accessed 7 August 2017).

University of Aberdeen  
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