

Scottish Government Consultation on the Future of Forestry in Scotland

The [James Hutton Institute](#) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Scottish Government's consultation on the 'Future of Forestry in Scotland'. We are very willing to contribute to further discussion over the setting-up and operation of the new structures, and look forward to working with the teams involved.

The following are the responses to the questions under each of the Chapters in the Consultation document.

Chapter 1 –

- **Our proposals are for a dedicated Forestry Division in the Scottish Government (SG) and an Executive Agency to manage the NFE. Do you agree with this approach? Please explain your answer**

The proposals for a dedicated Forestry Division within Scottish Government would facilitate a coordinated approach to tackling multiple national functions and services provided by forests, as well as the international environmental, social and economic challenges to which Scotland contributes (e.g. climate change mitigation), and achieving greater social equality. The proposal for an Executive Agency to manage the National Forest Estate (NFE), with a remit which extends to wider land uses, creates an opportunity for a more holistic approach to the management of public land in Scotland and the delivery of certain public goods.

The new structures should continue to recognize the importance of high quality, translational research to inform both the regulatory and operational aspects of forest land use in Scotland, and the internationally recognized reputation of Forest Research. Therefore, the structure which emerges should continue to enable access by both elements of the research outputs, and active involvement in the co-construction of the research aims.

Many of the decisions that affect forests are currently made at the level of the Forest District by trained, professional foresters. It would be detrimental if there were a diminution of the benefits currently gained from this expertise for management of the NFE whilst the breadth of the responsibilities of Forestry and Land Scotland get established and broaden over time (see response to next question). Similarly, there is a danger of centralising some functions and decision-making relating to forestry that are best undertaken locally or regionally.

There is a risk that the creation of a new structure within Scottish Government will increase transaction costs and reduce the effectiveness of the management of forestry on the ground.

- **In bringing the functions of FCS formally into the SG, how best can we ensure that the benefits of greater integration are delivered within the wider SG structure? What additional benefits should we be looking to achieve?**

We perceive that currently forestry policy makers are in close contact with the needs of the entire industry and in many cases have practical training in it. We view this as a strength of the current governance of the forestry industry, and would wish to see any future mechanism retain effective connections.

Over recent years cross-linking has taken place between policy and regulatory areas (e.g. forestry and biodiversity, energy, soils and climate change). The new structures should be able to capitalize

on these, and offer the opportunity to build on the knowledge and contacts of the staff currently in FCS who, presumably, will take on equivalent roles in the new structures.

It is important that close links should be established between the groups within Scottish Government dealing with forestry and other environmental affairs. This is to ensure that there is no isolation rather than integration of forestry with other wider land-use and related policy issues and *vice versa*. This could be especially important to maintain and develop the good work on agroforestry with agricultural and upland land managers. Important relationships for the new structures to further bed into would appear to be the links with CAMERAS evolve, and whether that or the RAFF Delivery Board can align aims for broader public and private benefits across relevant policy sectors. Links to main research providers could also be strengthened.

- **How should we ensure that professional skills and knowledge of forestry are maintained within the proposed new forestry structures?**

Within the proposals for the FLS, the structures for the tactical and operational management of forestry should be able to remain as currently organised. Forest District Managers and teams are experienced in the delivery of multiple benefits from land, with a focus on the role of trees. These skills and expertise are effective at meeting the multiple needs of forestry and its stakeholders. However, the proposals imply a broadening of the remit of the FLS beyond those of a focus on forestry and its role in the best management of land. Accompanying that is the question of geographic scale and nature of governance, the range of land use types which, progressively, will come within the remit of the FLS, and thus the mix of skills required for FLS staff.

We believe that the breadth of skills and knowledge of foresters have evolved rapidly over recent years to ensure delivery of land management (e.g. Public engagement skills) aligned to contemporary international commitments (e.g. Aichi Targets for Biodiversity). A workforce with such a holistic skillbase is required to ensure successful delivery of the increasing complexity of interlinked expectations for the land, of which the management of forest land can be expected to be the core holding of the FLS for many years to come. Forestry education at some universities is in decline and there is also a need to teach holistic land management (as called for in the RSE Inquiry “Facing up to Climate Change” while not losing expertise and specialisms in forestry.

A strategy could be developed to ensure the availability of contemporary, and visionary, land management skills. This could be vertically aligned through the Curriculum for Excellence (linked to the STEM strategy), to further and higher education, and lifelong learning, with contributions from relevant professional bodies and organisations with remits to translate research into tools to aid land management. This could provide a new Scottish context for the nature and range of skills and knowledge required for leading edge land management, which also have European and international dimensions.

- **What do you think a future land agency for Scotland could and should manage and how might that best be achieved?**

We welcome moves to integrate and advance the joined-up nature of land-management policy across sectors in Scotland. However, the benefits which can accrue should be balanced against the potential, actual, or perceived, loss of voice of one sector over another that could occur.

Forestry Commission Scotland promotes an extensive range of functions and benefits of forestry beyond that of creating a strategic timber reserve. These benefits include access, landscape

diversity, interpretation of the countryside, hiking and mountain bike trails. It has a very strong brand identity in countryside affairs and land management, and is a respected government agency. This has been hard won and achieved by good public engagement activities over many years. It would be desirable to retain the benefits of that heritage and brand identity whilst establishing a new one for the FLS.

As a general approach, FLS should take a systems view of the challenge of managing a key public asset of land in Scotland. As such, its remit should embed social, economic and environmental considerations for the future of land in Scotland, several elements of which are recognized in the proposals out to consultation.

Over time, it is reasonable to assume that the types of land which will be under the management of FLS will expand, presumably extending to areas without woodland. This could, and should, be open to the inclusion of urban land. If that is not in the vision for FLS then the types of land or land uses which are outwith its remit should be identified and made clear from the launch of the organisation.

Questions and comments about bounds of the remit of FLS are:

- (I) Is it anticipated that the remit include the management of land as it undergoes a phase of post-industrialisation?
- (II) Should the FLS take any direct responsibility for managing water bodies as well as land?
- (III) What are the objectives of individual land management units which will be run by FLS? E.g. primarily for the public goods, private goods, or a mix?
- (IV) Will the remit of FLS include active participation in the land market (e.g. to consolidate land holdings for longer term plans of facilitating transfers to community ownership)?
- (V) The management of designated land under (e.g. SSSI), will require consideration of the type of relationships, and governance models, that will be formed with other regulatory authorities such as SNH and SEPA.

The James Hutton Institute will be happy to engage with FLS as it evolves, extending the close working relationship it has with Forest Research and Forestry Commission Scotland (e.g. contracts surveying the soils of the NFE, 410km² between 2013-16; joint research outputs outputs: [Biodiversity and Woodland Ecosystems](#); public engagement activities on contemporary issues such as Ash Dieback at the John Hope Gateway Centre, and associated scientific outputs - Mitchell et al., 2016, How to Replicate the Functions and Biodiversity of a Threatened Tree Species? The Case of Fraxinus excelsior in Britain, *Ecosystems* 19 (4), 573-586). Other topics which can be expected to be of relevance are access to natural resource data, and land manager and community attitudes towards land use and change (to the uptake of woodlands), and relevant research funded through the [Scottish Government Strategic Research Programme \(2016-21\)](#).

Chapter 2 –

- **Do you agree with the priorities for cross-border co-operation set out above, i.e. forestry research and science, plant health and common codes such as UK Forestry Standard? Y/N If no, what alternative priorities would you prefer? Why?**
- **Do you have views on the means by which cross-border arrangements might be delivered effectively to reflect Scottish needs? E.g. Memorandum of Understanding between countries? Scotland taking the lead on certain arrangements?**

We agree with the retention of the cross-border functions listed, namely science and research, tree health, and common codes, and suggest their extension to include cooperation on UK Forest Standards and international forestry policy. This would be in the interests of efficiency and impact.

The James Hutton Institute is a close collaborator with Forest Research on research for Scottish Government (e.g. through ClimateXChange), UK research councils (e.g. tree health), and in projects funded by the European Union (e.g. on landscape). We have a Memorandum of Understanding with Forest Research which formalises collaboration on certain key topics (e.g. tree health), which we continue to enhance to the benefit of both organisations. For James Hutton Institute this may provide a further valuable conduit for the creation of impact from our research (e.g. soils, tree health, waters, cultural services of woodlands) to the management of land in other areas of the UK.

Chapter 3 –

- **Should the Scottish Ministers be placed under a duty to promote forestry? Y/N**

As Scotland has a strategy that aims to significantly increase the proportion of its land surface area covered by woodland then implicitly Scottish Ministers already have a duty to promote forestry, although this may formally rest with Commissioners. Scotland also has legal obligations to conserve existing native woodlands, and the Scottish Government has positions on the role of woodland with respect to mitigation of climate change which Scottish Ministers therefore have a duty to uphold.

However, the promotion of forestry should be in the context of all land uses, and with the ecosystem services with which it interacts. It is one of the key mechanisms for achieving overarching aims of the Scottish Government of investing in Scotland's natural capital and achieving sustainable and equitable economic growth. It is important to strategies for mitigating and adapting to climate change, enhancing biodiversity and improving human health and wellbeing.

- **What specifically should be included in such a general duty?**

As noted above, such general duties regarding forestry are probably already in place under related obligations, such as putting in place measures to ensure policies and resulting targets are met.

- **Recognising the need to balance economic, environmental and social benefits of forestry, what are your views of the principles set out above?**

The principles outlined generally retain consistency with those currently applied by Forestry Commission Scotland and should pave the way to the integration of multiple land-uses under a single umbrella. This would be in line with the overarching goal of the Scottish Land Use Strategy (2016-21) for the coming five years. There could be an opportunity to identify how forestry, and its governance, can contribute to the Rural Land Use Partnerships envisaged in the Land Use Strategy.

However, there is a danger that the needs of small-scale forest owners might not be fully met or recognised under the proposed arrangements. Several such objectives are related to public goods such as recreation, and space for re-connection with nature and associated benefits for human wellbeing, rather than for timber production.

Chapter 4 –

- Are there any likely impacts the proposals contained in this consultation may have on particular groups of people, with reference to the ‘protected characteristics’ listed above? Please be as specific as possible.
- Do you think that the proposals contained in this consultation are likely to increase or reduce the costs and burdens placed on any sector? Please be as specific as possible
- Are there any likely impacts that the proposals contained in this consultation may have upon the privacy of individuals? Please be as specific as possible.
- Are there any likely impacts the proposals contained in this consultation may have upon the environment? Please be as specific as possible.

No response

Additional question:

Do you have any other comments that you would like to make, relevant to the subject of this consultation, that you have not covered in your answers to other questions?

Any moves towards centralisation of governance that emerge as a result of the changes resulting from these proposals should include consideration of mitigating risks of inadvertent negative effects of widening the gap between rural and urban communities.

James Hutton Institute, November 2016