

USING FORESTS TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE – Questions & Answers

4 November 2008

Q: Why is the national forest estate so important for climate change?

The national forest estate is nearly 10% of Scotland's total land area, and over a third of Scotland's forest area.

Globally, emissions from deforestation account for 18% of green house gas emissions. We must be sure that Scotland's national forest estate is an exemplar in terms of sustainable management of existing forests.

The Scottish Government has ambitious targets for renewable energy and a recent evaluation suggests that there is considerable potential for more renewable energy developments on national forest estate

New woodlands can help mitigate climate change through long-term storage of carbon.

Q: Isn't there a lot happening anyway?

Yes. However, the danger is that some opportunities are being missed. For example:

- A more strategic approach to renewable energy developments could accelerate progress and increase financial returns to the taxpayer.
- We are currently falling behind the 10,000 hectare per year target for woodland creation – this is serious because this programme aims to store an additional 1.2 million tonnes per year of carbon by 2050. The scope for woodland creation on the national forest estate is constrained by lack of funding – and so current progress is heavily dependent on uptake of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) grants.

Q: What are the new opportunities/options?

The Minister will be looking for ideas, but these could include:

- Using joint ventures as a basis for a strategic approach to renewable energy development on the national forest estate.
- Looking for innovative ways to stimulate, and pay for, further creation of new woodlands, including leasing out of management rights.

Q: Won't forestry expansion cause other problems?

No – as long as it is done properly.

FC Scotland has recently published a discussion paper on woodland expansion in Scotland suggesting that, after taking account of constraints (e.g. the need to avoid soils with high carbon content, important conservation habitats or prime agricultural land) 650,000 hectares is achievable.

There are also tried and tested ways to ensure that we plant “the right trees in the right places” (e.g. indicative forestry strategies and consultation on individual proposals).

Q: How is the review being undertaken? Will there be a consultation?

A consultation paper is issued today (4 November 2008) and welcomes new suggestions, as well as comments on specific proposals. The closing date is 27 January 2009. FC Scotland staff will be encouraged to contribute ideas. (You can access the consultation paper on the FCS website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/fcsclimateconsult)

In making decisions on the way forward, Ministers will have the benefit of consultation responses as well as advice from officials.

Q: Why do we need specific provisions in the Climate Change Bill?

There are constraints in the current forestry legislation. For example, the Forestry Commission is unable to enter into joint ventures, delegate management functions to third parties, or lease land for forestry purposes. Making provisions in the forthcoming Climate Change Bill could allow these constraints to be overcome.

Q: Why can't we use the SRPD Rural Priorities grants to promote woodland expansion?

This is an important incentive – and the SRPD has allocated over £23 million per year for woodland expansion. But the level of activity depends upon uptake – and this is slow.

Q: Will there be new money?

No, but we will examine ways to release some of the capital tied up in the national forest estate (around £850 million), while safeguarding public benefits that people throughout Scotland enjoy so enthusiastically.

Q: Why has Climate Change suddenly become so urgent?

There is a growing awareness that we must pursue every possibility in the fight against climate change – and the national forest estate is a significant resource available to us.

Q: What will be the impact on timber production?

In the long run, woodland creation will increase timber production. Meanwhile, it will be important to ensure continuity of raw material supply to the wood processing industries.

Q: What will be the impact on recreation?

It is important to safeguard existing recreational opportunities and – where it makes sense – create new ones.

Q: What will be the impact on conservation?

Any renewable energy development proposals will be subject to Environmental Impact Assessment and planning procedures, in the normal way. More generally, it will be important that the national forest estate continues to meet the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard (and of course legal requirements).

Q: What will be the impact on Forestry Commission staff?

It is too soon to say what (if any) impact there will be, but some of the options to be looked at may have implications for staff. If that proves to be the case, we will operate in accordance with Forestry Commission's commitment to its staff, as set out in the *People Strategy* and associated corporate policies. We will also ensure that the Trade Unions and staff representatives are consulted.

FC's People Strategy can be found on the Intranet, by following this link:

http://alpacorn.forestry.gov.uk:7777/portal/page?_pageid=33,284577&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

Q: Will this have an impact on the Forest District Review?

The FD Review will continue, as its focus is on increasing operational efficiency. This Climate Change consultation is part of a continuing process to secure value for money from public assets and will help to make the most of the capital value of the national forest estate.

Q: Are the unions involved?

Yes, the Minister is meeting the TUS on 4 November to discuss the announcement.

Q: Who can I talk to?

Please talk to your line manager, in the first instance. If he or she cannot provide answers, please send your questions to: climate.change@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

We will publish regular updates of Questions and Answers on the FCS Intranet and also for notice boards.

Q: How can I get more involved?

As an individual you can participate in the consultation process by sharing your views on the proposals. It is important to hear as many views as possible and to encourage new ideas. The consultation is on the FCS website at:

www.forestry.gov.uk/fcsclimateconsultation and you are invited to respond by 27 January 2009.

Q: What happens next?

We will be setting up further meetings throughout the Autumn to gather your views and respond to questions, so watch out for further details.

In terms of the consultation, once they have considered the results, including the wider options review, Ministers will make an announcement about the way forward (probably in spring 2009).

**Bob McIntosh, Director Scotland
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