

Further Information

Whilst we support the Scottish Government's attempts to tackle climate change, and believe that the National Forest Estate can play an important role in helping to achieve this, we believe that the proposal to lease land as outlined in the consultation paper represents the biggest challenge to forestry jobs, the integrity of the FC and the sustainability of the Scottish Forestry sector that we have seen for over ten years. Our three main concerns are:

- 1. Loss of Control:** Whilst the proposal is not about selling land, it does involve privatising the management and strategic control of 25% of the estate for 75 years - and that's very important. For example, if you go back 40 years the emphasis in forestry was on large scale afforestation programmes in the west and north of Scotland. But by the 1980s the overall direction had altered to take account of environmental pressures and the growing need to promote recreation and conservation work. Now, we're just at the start of a new shift to look at climate change, but also other issues such as the importance of urban green space to improve the quality of life and social inclusion within towns and cities - and we are still at an early stage of developing renewable energy strategies; commercial scale woodfuel systems, small scale hydroelectric schemes and windpower. So the concern is that 40 years ago, we didn't predict the needs of 20 years ago, and we equally have little idea what new pressures there will be in 20 years time - so privatising the management and control of a large area of Scotland is just as critical as losing ownership.
- 2. Basic sums and economics behind the plan just don't add up:** A sizeable proportion of the Forestry Commission's operating budget is funded from the sale of timber, and that money is used to pay for all of our environmental, recreation and education work. For example in the last year nearly a quarter (24%) of all Scottish children attended an organised School led activity in our woods - 510,000 visits by 569 schools. The Minister has said that these facilities will not be affected, but if the FC loses its income stream because the timber has been pre-sold through a long-term tender then it is very difficult to see how that assurance will be fulfilled. We do know that the shortfall will not be met by the Government.
- 3. The third issue is jobs:** The FC employs some 1400 people directly managing forests in Scotland. Both the minister and indeed the First Minister have both stated that there will be no compulsory redundancies - and that is very welcome commitment by the Scottish Government - but in this instance that commitment only goes as far as the date of transfer of any staff to the private investment company (we are currently awaiting advice on whether or not the Scottish Government's commitment is transferable under TUPE, but at the moment do not believe that it is). Looking beyond the Commission, forestry in its widest sense supports 30,000 jobs across Scotland. One of the many differences between the FC and a private company is that the FC works to support the entire sector, whereas a private company is only responsible to its shareholders.

Based on the feedback received from our members and other supporters our summary position is:

1. The unions support in principle the Scottish Government's attempts to address the issues raised by climate change, and recognise the need for the FC as manager of the National Forest Estate and a leader within the industry to do what it can to support the Scottish Government's agenda on this (and other) areas.
2. We broadly support the need to maximise the National Forest Estate's contribution to this agenda; particularly through greater partnership working, through the sustainable sequestration of additional carbon, through the expansion of renewable energy programmes and through support for promoting sustainable local communities.
3. We are however very sceptical of the plans to release capital through the leasing of management and cutting rights on the National Forest Estate to foreign investment companies. We are concerned at the lack of a viable business model to underpin the proposals.
4. We are strongly opposed to any plans that will result in a loss of good quality Scottish jobs including the TUPE transfer of Scottish jobs to foreign-owned private management companies. Despite suggestions that the proposal to lease management rights over the National Forest Estate may create jobs; in the absence of any viable business case to underpin these suggestions it is our belief that the proposals could result in the loss of several hundred good quality jobs in some of Scotland's remotest rural areas in the forestry, timber processing, recreation and tourism sectors.
5. The FCTU will be responding to the proposals both through a direct submission to the consultation paper and through engagement with MSPs and other key stakeholders. We have already begun to engage directly with MSPs and will continue this process over the coming weeks.
6. We encourage everyone to engage with the consultation process; to respond directly to the consultation and to raise their concerns directly with their constituency MSPs and local councillors.

Data Usage Policy: By signing this petition you agree to our data usage policy. All of the information on this form is required by the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee. The personal details that you provide will be stored in an off-line database. Once the petition has closed, all details will be passed to the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee as part of our submission, but will not be given to any other parties or used for any other purpose. The FCTU is not responsible for the use and management of data once it has been passed to the Public Petitions Committee. Individual name, surname and town/city details may be posted on this website; but address, postcode and country details will remain confidential. If you would like any further details regarding the use of your data or any other information please email us at unions@forestry.gov.uk.