

Scottish Environment LINK Meeting Note

Stakeholder meeting with Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary re farming and forestry

15th April 2010

Background

On 18th March, the Scotsman carried a piece about a forthcoming round-table meeting, called by Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead, between representatives of the farming and forestry industries to discuss how Government's forestry planting targets could be met. No environmental interests were invited initially. Following intervention by The Woodland Trust and LINK, two places were secured for LINK representatives.

The meeting took place on 15th April 2010.

Attendees

For LINK, the meeting was attended by Jonathan Hughes, as a LINK trustee and Vicki Swales as Convenor of the Sustainable Land Use Taskforce.

Around the table, were representatives of the NFUS, SRPA, National Beef Association, Scottish Cattle Beef Association, National Sheep Association, Tenant Farmers Association, SAC, Confederation of Forest Industries, UK Forest Products Association, Forestry Commission (Bob MacIntosh).

The meeting was chaired by Richard Lochhead and Roseanna Cunningham attended for part.

Key issues

Richard Lochhead opened the meeting and said that given overlapping and sometimes competing policies and targets for land use his aim in calling this meeting was to discuss how conflict could be reduced and progress made in meeting forestry targets in ways that would be beneficial to the farming sector.

Bob MacIntosh, FC gave a short introduction outlining the background to the forestry targets as contained in the National Forestry Strategy and the Climate Change Delivery Plan. The aspirational target is to increase forest cover from the current 17% to 25% by 2050 i.e. an additional 650,000 ha of land planted with trees. Under the CC Delivery Plan, the key milestone is to increase planting rates to 10,000 –15,000 ha/year by 2015 and to sustain that rate thereafter to maintain the levels of carbon sequestered in trees and soils. The point was made that 10,000 ha is not a big new or unachievable target and such planting rates had been achieved between 1970 and 2000. Climate change is just one justification for planting trees; biodiversity, access and recreation, soil erosion prevention etc are others. The aim is for multifunctional forests and for a mixed land use pattern with forests/woodlands interspersed throughout the landscape. Given that planting is unlikely to take place on premium agricultural land or should not occur on sites of high nature conservation value, it is marginal land and hill ground where most new planting could potentially take place. Indicative Forest Strategies set out where forestry might be appropriate and there is consultation on proposals as well as EIA requirements in some situations. The sector is also subject to standards and certification is growing. The Land Use Strategy is the process by which objectives and priorities for land use should be aligned.

An open discussion followed and most organisations around the table spoke. In broad terms there was actually very little disagreement. Key points raised were:

- A general consensus that what we need are 'the right trees in the right places'
- Farming interests, including NFUS, not opposed to tree planting and it may offer new opportunities for farmers including if carbon markets develop.
- Main concerns are around returning to the kind of planting seen in the past i.e. large scale conifer plantations of poor design and location, loss of hill farms to forestry reducing opportunities for new entrants to farming, tenant farmer issues
- Farming and forestry are only two land uses – we need to look at land use in the round and consider the range of goods and services that land provides and promote multifunctional land use. The Land Use Strategy is the place/process to do this.
- There needs to be consideration of what the planting targets mean in reality on the ground and some kind of sensitivity mapping for forestry.
- Trees are not the only means of sequestering carbon and greater attention needs to be paid to the carbon storage that can be achieved through other forms of land management. Peatland restoration is as important and we actually need to remove some trees from areas where they should never have been planted.
- Funding streams need to be looked at e.g. SRDP doesn't really help development of small-scale woodland and there are disparities between support for agriculture and forestry. (The meeting didn't really get into a discussion of agricultural subsidies and how these may disincentivise or work against woodland expansion which is likely to be a more contentious subject – I raised the point about the Pack Inquiry into CAP reform being relevant here)
- Agro-forestry may have potential and is technically possible in Scotland
- Farmers don't necessarily see themselves as foresters or woodland managers which is partly cultural but is also a skills and training issue and there needs to be investment in these areas and appropriate advice and support
- Confor made a case for better integration of land use – farming and forestry – in practice but this needed better integration of policy and Government departments in order to really drive this forward.

NFUS and Confor proposed to meet again to follow up from this meeting and to see how the two sectors could work better together in future. Lochhead welcomed this.

Lochhead had to leave before the end of the meeting but summed up a few points before doing so including:

- The need for analysis of funding streams
- The role of the LUS in establishing priorities and setting objectives
- Issues around the carbon balance of different land uses and the need to consider these
- The need to learn lessons from the past and avoid the mistakes made in the forestry sector
- Skills and education are a key component of moving forward