

RURAL AFFAIRS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S DRAFT LAND USE STRATEGY
WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM CONFOR

A draft land use strategy (LUS) for Scotland - the forestry perspective

ConFor represents forestry and wood-using businesses from nurseries and growers to wood-processing end users.

An integrated land use strategy will be something new for Scotland. However, the concept of integrating forestry into Scotland's rural areas is not new to forestry, as we have the Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS), backed up by regional Indicative Forest Strategies (IFS) and Forestry & Woodland Strategies, which all influence on a spatial basis what is delivered on the ground in woodland terms. In addition, the SFS has the only land use target in Scotland – of increasing woodland cover to 25% by the middle of this century.

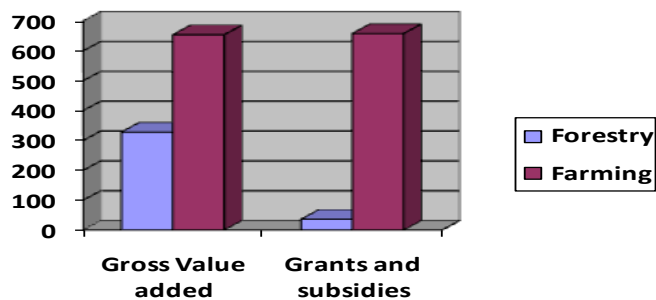
This first draft LUS is a good start. However, it lacks some clarity because, whilst it sings the virtues of existing land uses and underlines the importance of the three pillars of a sound economy, a healthy environment and sustainable communities, it fails to fully face up to the challenge that these are often competing interests. For a LUS to be meaningful, that strategy must indicate where preferences will be given to certain land uses, and acknowledge that not all land will always deliver every objective.

Having said that, the emphasis on moving towards a low carbon economy is welcome, and forestry is well placed in land use terms to deliver this aim. What the LUS has so far failed to recognise is that we are presently **losing** productive woodland area, and that urgent action is needed to re-invigorate the planting of softwoods to serve Scotland's very successful sawmilling and timber processing industries. ConFor is calling for an urgent focus on delivering:

- 9,000 ha of new productive softwoods, each year to 2020;
- This will increase the area under forest by less than 1.5%.

Failure to do this will threaten hundreds of green jobs and miss a major opportunity to create hundreds more, as well as locking up 3.6 million tonnes of CO₂ – please refer to our recent publication “Scottish forestry at the crossroads” at <http://www.confor.org.uk/NewsAndEvents/Default.aspx?pid=305&id=0>

Achieving this modest target will represent true optimisation of land use, and will reflect the real value for money for Scotland that forestry provides:



There are barriers to achieving this change in land use, and the LUS should be more robust in stating it will address these barriers. In particular the LUS should state that there will be a presumption in favour of woodland expansion on suitable land, in particular where forestry can be a positive choice for land owners and avoiding the most productive land for food production. The LUS does say at 4.3 a) that (Scottish Government) will “identify more closely which types of land are best for tree planting”. The forest industry already knows this; however current agricultural support mechanisms need to be adapted to provide a level playing field for planting trees. Wood prices and forest values are rising, making forestry more attractive.

At the same time the LUS should give a commitment to complete the update of all old style IFS to modern Forestry & Woodland strategies – this will aid and inform stakeholders and the public alike on where woodland expansion will be most favoured at a local level.

The LUS should address the high burden of bureaucracy surrounding the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and the regulation of the forest industry in general should be eased. This should include a commitment to establishing a forestry deregulation task force – which could have relevance to other land uses as well, to their benefit and that of Scotland’s productivity generally.

Transport of rurally produced goods, especially timber, to market is vital for sustainable and successful businesses. The LUS fails to give this proper recognition. Much of the rural roads infrastructure is simply not fit for purpose in the 21st century, and therefore ConFor fully endorses the recommendations from the Timber Transport Forum that Scottish Government should, in the LUS:

- Consider the investment in rural transport infrastructure required
- Support the continuation of the Strategic Timber Transport Fund and similar measures to ensure there are sufficient resources at the local level to provide infrastructure for a resilient, dependable supply chain for home grown timber (and other rural goods)

Finally the LUS does not marry up to any implementation plan. Most rural land uses, forestry in particular, require long term vision, commitment and investment. There is an inherent weakness in a LUS which is automatically subject to 5 yearly review, as is required by the Act. It would be better to have a mechanism of an implementation plan which was subject to review and monitoring at appropriate

intervals, rather than the LUS itself. And no LUS will work unless there is a commitment to a better delivery mechanism than the current SRDP, which has been a nightmare for the Scottish forest industry.

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