

Paper 3

Forestry and Woodland in Wales - National Assembly for Wales Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee consultation

I am a professional forester with thirty years' experience, mainly in Wales. I was a Forestry Commission Forest District Manager in Ceredigion, and have also worked on forestry and Common Agricultural Policy issues at Defra in London. I have a PhD in forestry policy, and am currently a part-time Teaching Associate at Bangor University, teaching forestry policy and forest management planning. I am a professional member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters.

The views expressed here are entirely my own.

1) Responding to climate change – coping with climate change and helping reduce our carbon footprint. I suggest that the Committee inquire into:

- a) Current and potential scale of woodland creation and carbon sequestration by natural scrub development at (nil cost) on marginal agricultural land.
- b) The need for more assertive measures to remove conifers from bog habitat to maximise carbon storage in peat.
- c) The carbon emissions associated with cultivation of forest soils at replanting.
- d) Net carbon effects of new afforestation on organic soils.
- e) Whether management of 'neglected' broadleaved woodlands increases or reduces total carbon sequestration.
- f) The extent to which woodfuel is genuinely carbon neutral.
- g) Whether continuous cover forestry maintains carbon stocks more effectively than clearfelling systems (since soil exposure and cultivation are avoided).

2) Woodlands for people – serving local needs for health, education and jobs; I suggest that the Committee consider the following approaches:

- a) Greater involvement of local communities in forest design and management.
- b) A greater role for local authorities, including Community Council level, in management, and legal control of, appropriate Assembly owned woodland.
- c) Whether some Assembly woodland could be placed under control of charitable trusts.
- d) Rigorous objective enumeration of how many forestry and timber related jobs actually relate to forests in Wales and the timber they produce. How can the contribution to rural development be maximised?

3) A competitive and integrated forest sector – innovative, skilled industries supplying renewable products from Wales. The Committee might explore:

- a) Reducing restocking costs on Assembly land:

- i) The likely competitive return on public investment in further rotations of coniferous forest.
 - ii) Inviting the Wales Audit Office to examine the value and returns on restocking investment, compared with 'rewilding' approaches.
 - iii) Whether greater use of continuous cover approaches would improve Welsh forestry finances by using natural regeneration and reducing the cost and overheads of intensive restocking.
 - iv) The Committee might evaluate the balance between; investment in future coniferous timber to support processing jobs, a generation in the future; and the cost of public expenditure in the present.
- b) Reduced regulation of felling and restocking:
- i) Do private owners, who are beneficially thinning commercial crops, need to be regulated by Felling Licences?
 - ii) Are Felling Licence restocking obligations over-prescriptive, could slower regeneration, to international standards of forest cover, be accepted?

4) Environmental quality – making a positive contribution to biodiversity, landscapes and heritage, and reducing other environmental pressures.

The Committee might explore:

- a) Plantation Forestry - The debate about whether exotic plantation forests fully deserve the title 'sustainable', and how they could be more so.
- b) Ancient Woodland Sites - It is twenty years since coniferous afforestation of ancient woodland sites was identified as ongoing habitat degradation (with each year of conifer growth), in need of remedy. The Committee might consider whether more assertive restoration is justified and can be achieved.
- c) "Rewilding"
 - i) Could more biodiverse forests be created by felling of existing conifer forests, generating income for the Welsh finances, followed by inexpensive informal natural regeneration? Is this a win-win?
 - ii) Should a major existing conifer forest be designated for this rewilding?
- d) Could greater use of continuous cover approaches reduce the sometimes deleterious effect of clearfelling in Welsh landscapes?
- e) Could use of pesticides (especially insecticides) be reduced or ended, as in other countries.

5) What are the challenges and opportunities that arise from leaving the European Union?

- a) Reform or reduction in agricultural subsidies may result in managed retreat from less viable agricultural land. This may result in development of naturally regenerating woodland, contributing to woodland creation targets, without public expenditure. The Committee might consider whether regulation of Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition could be relaxed, to remove the perverse effect of farmers being grant aided to plant trees in one location, and required to destroy scrub regeneration in a neighbouring one.

Alec Dauncey
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