

**NOTES & ACTION POINTS FROM CUSTOMER REPRESENTATIVES
GROUP MEETING
TEAMS Video Conference, Wednesday 31 August 2021**

Attendees: Doug Howieson SF (Chair), Lindsay Bisset SF, Ian Cowe SF (Secretariat), Charlie Taylor Forestry & Land Scotland, James Nott SF, Tom Davies SF, Keith Wishart SF, Keir Smith SF, Jamie Farquhar Confor, Andrew Vaughan ICF, Gordon Gray Stephens Community Woodland Association, Rodney Shearer Confor (Nursery Group), Vicki Swales Scottish Environment LINK, Arina Russell Scottish Environment LINK, Jim Colchester Confor, Harry Wilson RSFS, Mark Hamilton Social Forestry, David Hetherington CNPA, Andy Tharme Scottish Borders Council, Karen Ramoo Scottish Land and Estates, Gregor Caldwell RPID, Ben Law SRUC, Debbie Green NatureScot, Andrew Weatherall Scottish Environment LINK, John Gorman SEPA.

Apologies: Duncan Stone NatureScot, Malcolm Young SRUC.

1. Previous Meeting Minute

Note of the March 2021 meeting was accepted with no changes.

2. Future Meeting Schedule

Dates for future meetings were agreed as:-

9th December 2021

7th April 2022

11th August 2022

8th December 2022

3. Scottish Forestry Staff Changes

James Nott is to become Head of Plant Health – SF is now recruiting for a new Conservator in Grampian.

Neil Murray has been selected as the new Conservator for South Scotland – he will join SF in September 2021.

4. Outstanding Actions

Outstanding actions from the March meeting to be carried over to the Dec 2021 meeting:-

Native Woodland – Discussion: new native woodland creation across Scotland is variable, but regional trials and carbon funding are having a positive impact on the rate of planting in some areas. However, with the low national coverage of native woodland cover, is the current BL/Conifer split in new woodland creation suitable and should the formal target of 3-5k per annum increase as the overall WC target grows?

Action: SF Head of Policy and Practice to be invited to a future meeting to lead further discussion. Also consider if:

Proposal for FGS Sub-group - The rationale for a technical sub-group was agreed, but the group asked for:-

- a balance between the work of the subgroup and the main group, so as not to devalue the input and function of the CRG.

- a review of the ToR for the CRG to add governance and reporting expectations for the sub-group.
- consideration of the need for a person specification for sub-group members.

Action: Review the ToR – amending for the addition of the sub-group.

5. Agenda

SG/SGP Agreement – DH outlined key points affecting the forest industry from the recent SG/SGP agreement for governance, including: -

- Increasing woodland creation delivery to 18,000ha per annum by 2024/25
- A new annual target for native woodland creation of 4,000ha per annum
- Increased funding for FLS to purchase more land for afforestation
- Establishment of a National Register of Ancient Woodland

Other areas of importance were identified as: -

- Urban and peri-urban woodland management for public access
- Increasing natural regeneration of woodlands, especially in National Parks
- Increased woodland creation on land in public ownership
- Implementation of recommendations to reduce deer grazing pressure across upland areas

Multiple group members raised concern that a 4,000ha target for native woodland creation was a step backwards; there is an expectation that a new evidence based target will be agreed in 2022 as part of the new Biodiversity Strategy.

AT highlighted that Scottish Borders were well positioned to deliver any potential pilot studies into landscape scale natural regeneration.

Action (complete): A summary of the SG/SGP Agreement is to be provided with the minutes.

FGS Statistics – LB outlined key FGS Summary Statistics: -

- The 20/21 target for woodland creation was 12,000ha, 11,500 to be delivered through the FGS.
- SF made contract commitments for 13,000ha.
- 10,100ha were delivered, Covid-19 restrictions and prolonged spring poor weather seriously affected planting in early 2021.
- 34% of planting in 2020 was native woodland.
- The WC target for 2021/22 is 13,500ha (circa 13,000 to be delivered via FGS)
- SF have contract commitments of 10,500ha and are working to approve more, with almost 4,000ha submitted but not approved, SF is committed to providing enough contracts to meet the target.

Action: GGS to provide examples of where FGS summary statistics don't match published GIS datasets.

Action: SF to look at how summary statistics are presented – especially in relation to native woodland.

Urban Woodland Management – MH outlined the case for increasing investment in urban woodlands; to increase both urban woodland management and urban woodland creation.

The group membership was generally in agreement.

Agroforestry – GGS highlighted the low uptake of the Agroforestry option within FGS and suggested more needed to be done to meet SG aspirations.

Action: JF – to convene a small working group to review what has been delivered, define what is intended, and propose action to increase uptake.

Action: NFUS rep to be encouraged to attend the CRG meetings.

Future Shape of Forestry Grant Scheme – GGS queried how the CRG can help shape the future grant support for forestry.

DH - updated the work-to-date on the Future Grant Support for Forestry.

Action: Future Grant Support for Forestry to be a standing item at future meetings.

Customer Charter – HW expressed concern that SF's ability to respond to enquiries in a timely manner was decreasing.

Action: DH to highlight concerns to Conservators and revert to HW individually.

Action: SF to consider amending the Customer Charter to set expectations for consultees to WC schemes.

Rising Cost of Deer Fencing – AR raised concern over the increasing cost of materials and labour for deer fencing, and asked if any review of the standard cost would be considered?

The group generally supported the concern raised by AR, as well as a wider need to increase deer management to reduce dependency on fencing.

Following discussion DH confirmed that SF intended to maintain the standard cost at the current rate.

Additional Note from DH following the Meeting

SF recognises that in some parts of Scotland the purchase and supply of fencing materials is proving to be difficult. SF also recognises that wider supply chain issues may be compounding this issue, particularly in more remote areas.

SF expects that some of these timber availability restrictions and supply chain issues will ease over the next few months as part of the normal cycle of timber supply and demand.

In recognition of these challenges, SF will support variation requests to move 2021 woodland creation works to a 2022 claim year for all approved woodland creation contracts involving both deer and stock fencing under the New Native Woodlands Northern and Western Isles option.

This will provide an opportunity for contract holders to seek alternative supply arrangements and to provide time to secure materials in remote areas.

Small Woodland Loan Scheme (item not discussed written update as follows) - SWLS is open for business and customers can opt in via the relevant section on the

Woodland Creation Operational Plan. The [SWLS guidance](#) is live and this will explain the criteria behind eligibility, the value of the loan on offer and how we will recover the loan debt. As of 31 August 2021, only a small number of customers have expressed an interest and no loans have been offered.

Public Register and New Case Types – not discussed – carried over to Dec 2021 meeting.

Pre-app Case Type in Casebook - not discussed – carried over to Dec 2021 meeting.

Restocking on Peaty Soils – DH stated that there is no change to the published guidance on this issue.

Follow-up on Cultivation Guidance – DH stated that there are no changes to published guidance.

DH also highlighted that Conservancies are working with land managers who have 2022 contracts impacted by the guidance to establish if works can be completed this year.

Earned Recognition – not discussed – carried over to Dec 2021 meeting.

6. A.O.B.

This was the last meeting for both James Nott and Vicky Swales. DH thanked JN and VS for their dedication and work with the CRG.

KR suggested there would be benefit to inviting a representative of the deer management groups across Scotland to join the CRG.

Action: DH to review suggestion.

AV recommended the benefit to the group of a shared site visit for a future CRG meeting.

Action: DH to review suggestion.