

**NOTES & ACTION POINTS FROM CUSTOMER REPRESENTATIVES
GROUP MEETING
TEAMS Video Conference, Wednesday 26 November 2020**

Attendees: Brendan Callaghan SF (Chair), Ian Cowe SF (Secretariat), Chris Stark SF, James Nott SF, Keir Smith SF, Keith Wishart SF, Jamie Farquhar Confor, Andrew Vaughan ICF, Karen Ramoo Scottish Land and Estates, Gordon Gray Stephens Community Woodland Association, Rodney Shearer Confor (Nursery Group), Duncan Stone NatureScot, Vicki Swales Scottish Environment LINK, Arina Russell Scottish Environment LINK, Jim Colchester Confor, Harry Wilson RSFS, Malcolm Young SRUC. Gareth Phillips SF (Part)

Apologies: Charlie Taylor Forestry & Land Scotland, David Hetherington CNPA, Andy Tharme Scottish Borders Council, Mark Hamilton Social Forestry, Gemma Cooper NFUS, Robert Morris SEPA.

1. Introduction

JF thanked Douglas Wright (SF Retired) for many years of service to the Customer Reps Group – this view was supported by all group members.

Outstanding Actions:

- Cultivation Guidance – no change from March 2020 position – awaiting results of further analysis from Forest Research. The guidance will not be published without further review from the CRG.
- Restocking Stocking Density – SF to draft additional guidance.

2. FGS update and progress towards WC targets

FGS Statistics – **BC** summarised the circulated FGS summary statistics, noting:-

- SF is very busy processing applications – in 2020 SF has approved woodland creation at the same rate as during 2019, despite Covid-19.
- There are 13,107ha of woodland creation approved for the 2020 claim year, which puts the sector in a good position in relation to delivery of Scotland's climate change targets.

JC/AR/VS queried the regional split of conifer/broadleaves – highlighting north/south differences. Discussion:-

- Should BL targets increase with increase in national planting target and should this be discussed in more detail at a future meeting?
- 30% of conifer schemes are not planted with conifers and more is being done to manage for multiple benefit – e.g. peatland restoration.
- Can stats include a year by year option split for each conservancy?
- Can the stats include analysis on funding by size class?

H&P / Nursery Support – SF secured an extra £1.55m for this option in 2020 – this has been fully committed.

JF wished to record thanks for these efforts and asked if additional funds will be available in 2021? **BC** – tentatively confirmed SF is working to repeat this in 2021 – but nothing was agreed/finalised as yet.

Workload Pressure – **BC** highlighted SF continues to prioritise approval of woodland creation applications and claims processing.

MY/HW stated concern that processing is slow. **AV** highlighted the need for regions to highlight pressure points in other work areas, e.g. SPHNs, LTFP etc.

CS outlined SF efforts to increase resource through recruitment of 3 technical specialists working on complex casework that are due to start in Jan 2021.

CS highlighted that all applications for woodland creation should follow the [Applicant's Guidance](#) – this will assist SF in managing workload pressures.

CS outlined an increase in unauthorised felling, with 39 restocking directions issued across Scotland during the pandemic to tackle the issue.

BC/KW encouraged applicants to query long delays in case processing and stated SF will attempt to better triage work and inform applicant's where there will be delays.

SF to consider how it could better promote the available guidance.

3. Arrangements for FGS Post Dec 2020

BC - FGS is to continue on with minimal change – there is considerable work on-going in the background to prepare, customers should hopefully see no affect.

The Stability & Simplicity programme has not progressed since the last CRG meeting – the group will come back to this subject at a future meeting.

Carbon Funding – **BC** highlighted the growing opportunity to combine carbon funding within grant supported schemes in the future.

Land Parcels – **BC** discussed the requirement for FGS to continue to operate to the same EU regulations, albeit under Scottish legislation, for the scheme to function and that there is no change proposed at present to the use of Land Parcels Identifiers in FGS applications – however SF is exploring with RPID how the post Brexit position may allow changes to the rules relating to forestry, including the use of Land Parcel Identifiers. **JF** welcomed this news, and expressed the need for significant change to simplify this area of work.

4. Felling Permissions and Forest Plan Update

CS highlighted an increase in the number of Long Term Forest Plans that will expire/require renewal over the next 3 years – rising from 50/year at present to over 200/year in 2024/25.

P. ramorum management – **CS** informed the group that a review is underway, due to make recommendations on amendments to best practice by the end of December 2020. More details will follow in due course.

5. UKFS Compliance

CS provided details on UKFS Compliance work in 2020 – with 16 cases – 2 of which were appealed, with one upheld. The register of cases is not yet available on the SF website but is due to be launched in 2021.

VS – reaffirmed the importance of having a system in place to investigate UKFS compliance issues.

6. Update on SF Forestry Development Projects - GP

Earned Recognition

- Changes made to entry requirements to be in line with Chief Forester Regulations
- Looking to launch a pilot of the scheme in 2021

Loans

- Still under development - significant delays due to COVID-19
- Provisional launch spring/summer 2021

New WC walkthrough guide

- Supplementary walkthrough guide – does not supersede core WC application guidance
- Launched 18th November at AgriScot
- Well received by both Forestry and Agri Communities
- Acts as a walkthrough and central point of information for land managers with little forestry expertise
- New 5ha small woodland ops plan launched alongside

Woodland Creation SF Pre-application IT System

- Assist in SF casework management
- Under development with launch expected in late 2021

7. AOB

GGS is looking to liaise with group members on how Rhododendron funding works in Scotland and how it could be done differently.