Written submission from Peter Whitfield BSc (For) FICFor

I have indicated the areas within the draft Bill to which my comments refer, using those areas identified in the committee's call for evidence.

**Land reform**

I wish to comment on the proposal in the draft Bill aimed at establishing a Scottish Land Commission.

Given the intended wide remit assigned to the Land Commission, I suggest that expertise and experience of forestry matters should be a requirement for Scottish Ministers to consider when assessing eligibility for appointment of members to the Commission. The Bill as drafted makes no provision for this (Part 2, sections 8 & 9).

Forestry is a long term sector; political and public agendas change rapidly with changes in governing parties, funding and other trends. It is essential that the new Land Commissioners acknowledge forest management as a long term process.

Forests cover 18 per cent of all Scottish land and nearly 30 per cent of all actively managed land in Scotland. Forests enhance landscapes, encourage biodiversity, and play a significant part in delivering ecosystem services and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Forestry, including woodworking and timber, presents an opportunity to create more jobs, deliver investment and drive economic growth to enrich rural communities at the same time as providing very significant environmental and social benefits.

A 2006 study by the Centre for Economic and Business Research showed that the forestry and wood processing sector contributed around £1 billion annually to Scotland's economy, employing 40,000 people directly and indirectly. Confor has calculated that around £50m of new investment is being put into Scottish forestry and wood-using businesses every year.

Forestry is a vitally important sector for Scotland's long-term environmental, economic and social health. I consider it essential to the success of the new Scottish Land Commission that its membership includes individuals with current experience of the forestry sector.

**Part 4 - Engaging communities in decisions relating to land**

Part 4 of the draft Bill states that Scottish Ministers must issue guidance about engaging communities in decisions relating to land which may affect communities.

I believe that there exists a high level of public consultation in the forestry sector at present. I would want to ensure there is no overlap or replacement of existing forestry regulation and practice in terms of community engagement with that proposed in the draft Bill.

**Part 5- Right to Buy Land to Further Sustainable Development**

I note that there is no definition within the draft Bill of "sustainable development" in relation to Scottish land.
Productive forestry can generate significant income to rural communities across Scotland, as well as generate significant environmental benefits. Forestry and wood is, by its nature, a long term sector, and any definition of 'sustainable land development' to be used in relation to this legislation should take this into account.

The Scottish Government should take into account the need for increased new woodland creation and associated wood processing capacity when it defines 'sustainable development' in the context of this draft Bill.

I would like clarification on how sustainable development will be defined - specifically how it will impact on different priorities or objectives of forest owners. For example, a forest may appear to be remaining in an inactive state for some years, as is the case where no 'thinning' (the selective removal of trees) is happening, or when some trees are left unharvested as long-term landscape retentions under a recognised Forest Certification programme. Would such "inactivity" still meet the requirements of "sustainable development"?

**Core path access**

The draft Bill gives local authorities responsibility for reviewing core path plans in order that the core paths continue to give the public reasonable access to the countryside throughout their area.

I welcome the obligation for local authorities to consult with landowners when reviewing Core Path plans. I would wish to see local authorities working with forestry and wood processing companies to address safety issues for in-forest haul routes that may cross or be situated near core paths routes, and this change to the legislation should make that aim easier to achieve.

It is important to ensure these new provisions do not impact adversely on the ability of the forestry sector to carry out harvesting operations and to close paths temporarily as and when required to protect the health and safety of the public and those working in the sector.