RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

FORESTRY AND LAND MANAGEMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM DWP HARVESTING LIMITED

As the North of Scotland’s independent timber harvesting co-operative, we welcome this opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Bill and comment on behalf of our Members as follows:-

Regulation
If Scottish Ministers are serious about promoting forestry, our key message is: free things up. Reduce the burden of over-regulation. Simplify. For example, cut out the plethora of detail on number of stems, stem size, proportion of tree species etc. in felling licence applications and cut down the hoops and hurdles for timber transport fund applications so that much needed investment in rural infrastructure can be undertaken on country roads. The emphasis in the Bill on the regulation of felling etc (some 16 pages out of 30), is clear evidence that a change of heart is called for!

So we would like to see a commitment to regulation with a light touch in the Bill.

Promotion
The primary aim of the Bill is to promote Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). That being so, every opportunity should be taken to do this and the Scottish Ministers should be given a duty (and not merely powers) to promote SFM through education and awareness raising.

Prior Notification (PN)
Prior Notification is an obstacle to market which in our view is not necessary and does not achieve any worthwhile purpose as the fact remains that a forest track simply has to be upgraded to a road suitable for timber lorries or sustainable forest management is not possible. If these tracks are not upgraded, opportunities for rural employment, supply of Scottish timber to market, landscape and habitat improvement and all the benefits that everyone is becoming better aware of cannot be realised.

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Timber transport
Having a fit for purpose roads for timber lorries is a fundamental requirement of SFM. We would like to see a duty on Ministers to upgrade the rural road network and to support the work being done by timber transport groups.

Commitment to expanding forest cover
We should like to see Ministers well stated commitment to new woodland creation included as a duty in the Bill.
Co-operation
We were disappointed to find no reference to co-operation in the Bill. A duty on Ministers to promote co-operation should be added.
There is opportunity, for example, for greater co-operation between the public, private and voluntary sectors through crossover processes. For example, power to provide advice under 14(2) is noted but a vice versa power to receive advice from outside persons could benefit NFE and lead to innovative management. This idea is addressed in part, but only in part, through Ministers’ powers to delegate functions to community bodies.

Compulsory Purchase
We share the concerns of others that wider compulsory purchase powers would be counterproductive to SFM in creating an atmosphere of uncertainty, even mistrust, that would be contrary to the aims of the Bill.

Felling
We repeat our call for a simpler, slicker, quicker, fit for purpose licensing system. It should be made clear in the Bill that the existing exemptions, for example for trees in a garden or churchyard, shall continue.

We share the concerns of others over the definition of felling. This requires better clarity.

As regards 24, in our experience utility companies and FCS have not always seen eye to eye over felling permissions for trees on or adjacent to overhead powerlines. The new system should be transparent and easily understood. Where trees are to be felled to safeguard electricity supplies, an application should be exempt from the public register.

Under 27 (8) (a) powers should be subject to giving reasonable notice.

Plant Health
Effective border controls are essential to the well-being of our forests. Advantage should continue to be taken of Great Britain being an island and we are concerned that plant health functions may cease to operate on a UK level. Australia (a large island) and New Zealand are examples of countries that take an approach and effectively.

Research
Forest Research has an international reputation for the quality of investigation undertaken into the wide range of factors that influence the growth, stability, habitat, landscape and health of forests. It would be a tragedy if this centre of excellence, vital to Scottish forestry, were to become a casualty of this legislation. The great value of the interaction between research workers at Roslyn and Alice Holt should not be underestimated and we would like to see this co-operation sustained, which is best done as a UK agency as at present.

General Powers
In 61 these responsibilities are fundamental to the aims of the Bill. They should therefore be duties on Ministers rather than powers. In particularly it should be recognised that the aim of promotion of SFM requires that awareness of SFM has to be developed through promotion and education so that advantage taken of the better understanding there now is of forestry as a land use and the wood fibre supply chain.