RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

FORESTRY AND LAND MANAGEMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM PATHS FOR ALL

Summary

- We support the devolution of forestry governance and policy to Scottish Ministers.
- The guiding principle should be that publicly owned land should be managed with the public good as its main priority.
- There should be a general duty to promote and facilitate wellbeing through outdoor access, recreation and active travel on all publicly owned land to support Scottish Government objectives on physical activity, health and the environment.
- The framework put in place must retain and enhance the work that has been done in making woodland more accessible to a wider range of people.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission. Our comments are limited to those aspects that have direct relevance to the work and objectives of Paths for All.

1. Does the Bill achieve its aims and are you in favour overall? Is there anything else that you feel should be included or excluded from the Bill?

Overall, we support the devolution of forestry governance and policy to Scottish Ministers.

There is a good case for further devolution of forestry and we support a fresh look at the governance of the Forestry Commission Scotland. Forestry is an important industry and land use in Scotland and this should be reflected in the priority that it is given by the Scottish Government. In achieving this it is important that expertise within the FCS is not lost.

We have welcomed the FCS approach to multipurpose forestry and the promotion of physical activity and the health benefits derived from forests. We have worked with FCS on a range of relevant projects. Forestry policy should not just focus on the economy but also on social and environmental outcomes. We believe it is important that any structural change should ensure that work on outdoor recreation and health is retained and enhanced as this is of huge importance to people.

The guiding principle should be that publicly owned land should be managed with the public good as its main priority. The public good should not be solely economic but encompass multiple benefits such as ecosystem services, recreation and biodiversity.

As drafted the duties to promote sustainable forest management and sustainable development are currently upon on the Scottish Ministers, not all public bodies. These duties could be placed upon all public bodies – which would include including delivery bodies such as Forest Enterprise Scotland and its successor organisation (Forest and Land Scotland).

Likewise, the duty for Sustainable Forest Management only applies to the National Forest Estate – to provide wider benefits the Bill should create an equivalent duty for private forest owners.
2. What are your views on the Bill’s statutory requirement to produce a Scottish Government Forestry Strategy based on sustainable forest management?

We welcome the duty to prepare a Scottish Forestry Strategy but there is a need for clarity on how stakeholders will be engaged in this.

In addition to the duties on sustainable forest management, we consider that there should be a general duty to promote and facilitate wellbeing through outdoor access, recreation and active travel on all publicly owned land. This would support Scottish Government objectives on physical activity, health and environment and particularly the National Walking Strategy, the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland and the Long-term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland.

3. The Bill will provide new powers to Scottish Ministers over subjects such as tree health and the ability to conduct research. What are your views on these powers?

We consider that it is important to retain a research capability and that this should encompass research into the social benefits of forests and woodlands to provide an evidence base for decision making.

4. The Scottish Government's intention is that the Bill should provide greater flexibility and wider powers in relation to land management, with a focus on sustainable development. The Bill also contains provisions regarding compulsory purchase. How do you feel this will work in practice?

We welcome the desire to have more flexible land use on the public estate – which should encompass improved wellbeing through access and recreation.

It is important that the Forest Enterprise approach to promoting access is not lost – it generally offers much wider and more welcoming facilities (paths, signs, etc) than private forestry.

5. The Bill will update the regulatory regime and enforcement powers for felling and restocking trees. Do you feel it is fit for purpose?

No comment

6. Do you have any comments on the bill in relation to human rights or equalities?

It is important that the framework put in place retains and enhances the work that has been done in making woodland more accessible to a wider range of people. In terms of reducing inequality it is important that more people should have the opportunity to benefit from the wellbeing benefits that this offers.

These opportunities should be as close as possible to where people live and work. Unless social forestry is clearly identified as a priority in the face of the Bill there is a real risk that this could be lost.
Background

Paths for All is a Scottish charity founded in 1996. We champion everyday walking as the way to a happier, healthier Scotland. We want to get Scotland walking: everyone, everyday, everywhere.

Our aim is to significantly increase the number of people who choose to walk in Scotland - whether that's for leisure or walking to work, school, the shops or to a nearby public transport hub. We want to create a happier, healthier Scotland where increased physical activity improves quality of life and wellbeing for all. We work to develop more opportunities and better environments not just for walking, but also for cycling and other activities, to help make Scotland a more active, more prosperous, greener country.


Paths for All
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