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Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
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Ministerial Foreword - Forestry in Scotland is a sector that we can be justly proud of.

1 - Introduction and Rationale for Providing Grant Support for Forestry

1. Do you agree that grant support for forestry should continue to be improved and developed as a discrete scheme within the overall package of land support?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Without grant support crofters are highly unlikely to plant trees. The upfront capital costs preclude involvement even through grazing committees where costs are shared. The support is critical in persuading crofters to forego income from livestock to allow for areas being allocated to trees. There needs to be a benefit from woodland planting which marginally exceeds livestock keeping covering for the additional responsibility and paperwork in managing the project. It is new and extra work for the grazing clerks and committees.
A pre final claim assessment of common grazing application areas would be useful to ensure the approved area and that planted by the contractors matches. There have been occasions where they did not, and the penalty system was very problematic for the grazing committee and shareholders making schemes uneconomic.

2. Are there any changes that would allow for better complementarity between the forestry and agriculture funding options?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The potential for silvopasture /agro forestry is increasingly recognised although more research is required to establish the optimum system for hill and moorland. For crofting the common grazings area of 550,000 hectares is becoming less manageable for the diminishing number of younger active crofters. The planting densities for woodland schemes hitherto mean absolute protection from grazing animals, essential for establishment of the trees. It may be possible to devise a transitional grant scheme which would allow for the introduction of acceptable livestock in a plantation with support moving from forestry to agricultural sources. This could be more attractive for larger crofts with better land and no common grazing as well as the grazing's committees.
Woodland enclosures can be planned to assist with managing livestock on the common grazing but this may not always be the most economic layout for the tree planting, an uplift in support where this is undertaken would be beneficial.

2 - Forests Delivering for Scotland's Climate Change Plan

3. How can the support package for forestry evolve to help tackle the climate emergency, to achieve net zero, and to ensure that our woodlands and forests are resilient to the future climate?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Expanding the hectarage being planted or regenerated seems to be the best contribution to carbon capture. Publicising the planting can help in raising awareness of the benefit of woodland development in relation to the climate emergency and attract others to make land available. It also helps to justify the public investment in forestry.
Ensure the species planted are suitable for the location and preferably not monoculture.
Enhancing the grant rates and payment mechanisms to avoid the need for borrowing to achieve establishment are particularly important in crofting. It is very difficult to borrow finance in connection with croft land.
Conditionality with other support schemes will increase interest in tree planting. Making it easier to see the contribution to the climate emergency from the woodland would also be helpful. The link between woodland development, peatland restoration, carbon sequestration and the global warming effect should be more clearly demonstrated.

4. Private investment through natural capital and carbon schemes can make a valuable contribution to climate change. Do you agree that the grant support mechanism should have more flexibility to maximise the opportunities to blend private and public finance to support woodland creation,

Yes

Please explain you answer in the text box.:

The potential seems promising at present but looks problematic on tenanted croft land and therefore common grazing. Historically the complexity of multiple funding sources has created a consultant's charter and discouraged crofters from being involved.
If a system by which generous funding was provided through government agencies with the agencies taking the risk and burden associated with collecting the private finance, it would be more attractive.
At present the most secure system for crofter involvement in carbon trading is through the landlord led section 19A, Schemes for Development, of the

crofting act. It would assist in the take up of woodland and carbon trading options if a simpler partnership arrangement with landlords could be created or identified.

5. How could the current funding package be improved to stimulate woodland expansion and better management across a wide range of woodland types, including native and productive woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Encouraging crofters to invest time and money in projects is at its most successful when provision is made for assignation of the grant (direct payment to contractors) and standard cost options with realistic rates of support are included.
Beyond that, many of the answers to the previous questions apply in this regard.
To improve management of existing woodlands it may be helpful to develop skills transfer training in rural areas, short course provision with instructor development for existing professionals already resident in the area.

6. Do you agree that it should be a requirement of grant support that woodlands are managed to ensure that they become more resilient to the impacts of climate change and pests and disease?

Yes

How can the grant scheme support this?:

Ensuring there is provision for training in woodland planning and management as part of the support packages would be essential along with access to specialist advisors. The insistence of a basic qualification in woodland management for applicants could help but may slow the uptake of grants due to the availability of the training across all rural areas and islands. This could impact negatively on the islands as has been previously recognised through the provision of woodland advisors and enhanced grant rate schemes through the Croft Woodland project in targeted areas. This practice should be continued.

3 - Integrating Woodlands on Farms and Crofts

7. Which of the following measures would help reduce the barriers for crofters and farmers wanting to include woodland as part of their farming business? Please select all that apply.

Better integration of support for woodland creation with farm support mechanisms, Knowing where to get reliable advice, Clearer guidance on grant options, Flexibility within options, Intervention level, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

Guidance and financial support for ensuring the most advantageous business structure is in place for woodland development. This may be critical if the interaction with carbon trading is to assist in woodland development. The standard system of grazing regulations and grazings committees managing croft land may not be robust enough for the long term and higher value aspects for private carbon investors.
Continuing the Forestry co-operation grant will help with developing local schemes to suit a variety of potential applicants and terrains for FGS or its successor. This could be extended to include business structures.

8. Establishing small woodlands can have higher costs. What specific mechanisms would better support small scale woodlands and woodland ownership?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

In the past areas up to 5 hectares have been considered small and the minimum area of 0.5 hectares could represent a large percentage of the in by land area of many crofts.
Allowing crofters to aggregate applications and claims across several crofts could be helpful. The details of how that could work for the individual crofters and the management of the application and subsequent supervision of the woodland would need further consideration.
The standard cost support on fencing helps but does not incentivise a woodland as much as the larger scale planting.
Enhanced payments for specific environmental benefits could be useful where habitat is being expanded or created for particular other species or to create continuous wildlife corridors.

4 - Forests Delivering for People and Communities

9. How can forestry grants better support an increase in easily accessible, sustainably managed woodlands in urban and peri-urban areas?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Crofting areas have few defined urban areas and even peri-urban is rare. However, there are increasing numbers of non-croft residents and regular visitors who often wish to be involved in the activity on the land. They can be a source of labour and finance for local initiatives. Their inclusion in the creation and management of woodland may be seen as beneficial, raising their awareness of the climate significance of the woodland and discouraging damage and misuse. Grant support for the setting up of a community group including landholders and other locals could help.
A good provision for footpaths and interpretive signage seems likely to be beneficial.

10. How can grant support for forestry better enable rural communities to realise greater benefits from woodland to support community wealth building?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The annual payments for managing the woodland are likely to remain the main benefit for most crofting situations. Where the complexity of the contracts and limitation of the risks can be addressed to the satisfaction of the parties there may be a significant financial gain from carbon trading. How the income from this source is distributed then becomes an issue as it is currently uncontrolled and could readily be taken out of the community by those who are not resident locally.
Using the grants to improve the environment and help fight the climate emergency can be used to enhance the image of an area which may benefit crofters delivering services to tourism. Assistance with interpretive signs and promotional material would be useful if built into an application in areas where tourism was a significant element of the local economy or could become so.

11. How can the forest regulatory and grant processes evolve to provide greater opportunities for communities to be involved in the development of forestry proposals?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Crofting townships can be seen as communities in themselves and specific mechanisms to allow them access to grant support for management and planting are already useful and should be maintained. The extra cost arising from the administration and consultation requirement for a community application should be recognised in the grant structure.
In regulatory terms landholders could be obliged to consult other resident community members regarding planting proposals. Plans which include wider community involvement whether practical or financial could attract enhanced funding. This would be particularly important to cover extra cost of consulting outwith the normal landholding group. Interaction with other interest groups should also be encouraged and rewarded.

12. How can the forestry regulatory and grant processes evolve to ensure that there is greater transparency about proposals and the decisions that have been made on them?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

We would suggest that application documentation is made available in a similar way to planning applications with a message going to the many local social media networks to encourage residents to view the proposals. If funding and time are available larger schemes should be presented at a local open day type event with woodland and other appropriate expertise on hand to explain the plan and benefits.

13. Forestry grants have been used to stimulate rural forestry businesses by providing support with capital costs. Do you agree that this has been an effective measure to stimulate rural business?

Yes

a. How could this approach be used to support further forestry businesses?:

This practice should continue, and the provision of interest free loans may also be very helpful and less costly overall.
It would be particularly useful to link these support mechanisms to the repopulation and avoidance of depopulation initiatives, focussing support on younger entrepreneurs if possible.

b. How could this approach be used to support further skills development?:

It seems logical to link capital investment with suitable operation and maintenance training, perhaps supply companies can be paid to host training for their new customers.
Sponsorship of a training for trainers system could also be considered, this would support a network of community based expertise for future utilisation and create additional income for those who are recognised trainers.

14. How could the FGS processes and rules be developed to encourage more companies and organisations to provide training positions within the forestry sector?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Modern apprenticeship and Developing Young Workforce participation could be recognised as a positive feature for companies aspiring to carry out grant assisted contracts.

5 - Forests Delivering for Biodiversity and the Environment

15. The primary purpose of FGS is to encourage forestry expansion and sustainable forest management, of which a key benefit is the realisation of environmental benefits. How can future grant support better help to address biodiversity loss in Scotland including the regeneration and expansion of native woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Finding reliable and economic ways to assess the changes in biodiversity seems critical for this to be developed and incentivised.
Alongside this is the need for more people to be skilled and available to carry out the assessments. Payments for adding species is an option.

16. Herbivore browsing and damage can have a significant impact on biodiversity loss and restrict regeneration. How could forestry grant support mechanisms evolve to ensure effective management of deer populations at:

Landscape scale?:

More careful integration of woodland development plans across estate and landholding boundaries could be improved through the deer management groups.
Training more people to be able to reliably identify deer damage on a regular basis would help in negotiations between landholders and agencies.
It seems possible that an independent assessor would be best.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Ensuring the person responsible for the small-scale land area has the expertise to monitor and record species present would help. Including target species to support which are suitable for the location in the planning stage and linking to a payment may be worth considering.
The encouragement of collective management across multiple small scale close or contiguous land areas is potentially useful for encouraging biodiversity. Extra payments where neighbour cooperation is a feature of a plan should be considered.

If you wish to make any other relevant comments, please do so in the text box below.

Please add your comments here.:

All the responses are based on croft land both individual crofts with no common grazing or the often smaller crofts with significant associated areas of common grazings.
The suggestions and comments are aimed at finding ways to encourage the crofters and their associated landlords to consider more tree planting and climate friendly management of existing woodland.
We recognise that complimentary to the forestry grants and rules there may also be a need for new legislation and policies for crofting, these are being considered taking account of climate emergency factors.

About you

What is your name?

Name:
Crofting Commission

What is your email address?

Email:
info@crofting.gov.scot

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:
Crofting Commission

Scottish Forestry would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

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We may share your response internally with other Scottish Forestry policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Forestry to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

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