

# The winds of change

Significant changes are nothing new in forestry; think of Maggie Thatcher's government in the 80ies effectively prohibiting Forestry Commission to carry out new planting, suggesting that it was the job of the private sector. Then there was the 1988 Lawson budget removal of schedule D taxation from forestry. But these days, change is happening more rapidly and constantly. My ex MD Matthew Rivers gave Tilhill senior managers the chance to challenge the Board. As a senior manager I was then apprehensive as to what the board were going to ask us to do! Matthew came up with just one thing - "embrace change in our lives as it is here to stay". That was the first time I realised that change was usually good.

There is significant change in our industry just now - the balance between the private and state sectors is changing - conifer timber production is a good example.

This has significant implications in terms of operational activity, with the private sector having now higher levels of felling, restocking and new planting. From the 'Forestry Facts and Figures 2015/16' for the UK the state sector have planted 700ha and the private sector 4800ha - in fact I would suggest that the private sector will have carried out more or less all the new planting and that is where the expertise - operationally and cost efficiencies - lies. This then creates tensions when in the MacKinnon report we read that over 60% of Woodland Officers are not chartered and over 25% have been in post for less than three years.

Positive change comes when issues are recognised early - we have seen a great example of collaboration in the formation of the Conifer Tree Breeding Co-operative where Forest Research, private and FC nurseries and seed collectors, together with forest management companies and end users have grabbed the initiative to secure the investment that the public purse has invested in conifer and in particular Sitka spruce breeding. New



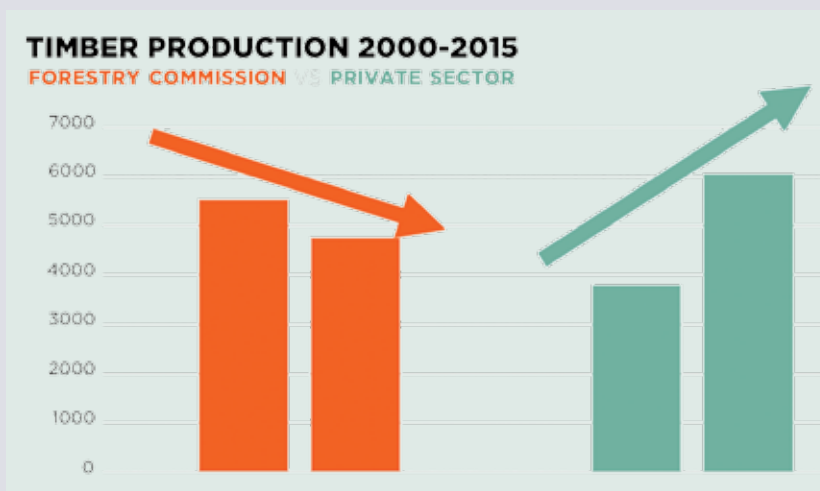
**TIM LIDDON**

ways of doing things are not always bad!

More change needs to happen to ensure public assets that have been created for the nation are managed for the nation. FC seed orchards have traditionally provided most of the seed for restocking. In 2003 FC stated that "Our plant and seed supply branch will make at least 50% of all the marketable improved Sitka spruce seed available to the nursery trade from each collection year". We hear that this does not now appear to be happening. Perhaps it is time to put these assets into an independent body to ensure that they are managed to optimise seed production for the nation so that despite devolution all timber producers can continue to produce and expand the nation's assets which delivers nearly £2bn to the economy every year, and sustains almost 80,000 jobs.

Embrace in change and let's grow the industry and overcome the challenges and grab the opportunities ahead.

Tim Liddon is Forestry Director at Tilhill Forestry Ltd



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