

# Fewer sheep, more trees

Committee on Climate Change calls for radical change in land use



The latest report by the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) reminds Government of the urgent need for a steep step change in land use in the context of climate change and recognises the need to reduce grazing land in favour of woodlands. The farming lobby and environmental groups are opening up to the discussion. This could be the tipping-point in persuading the UK Government that it must take real action in pushing tree planting up the policy agenda.

A series of previous reports on climate change have identified forestry as a “simple, low-cost option” to making a significant impact on targets – as the climate change debate shifts from simply reducing emissions to taking carbon out of the atmosphere (see *FTN August, p6/7*).

New report brings spark of hope However, translating positive calls from expert bodies into action remains a challenge. Yet the latest CCC report, *Land Use: reducing emissions and preparing for climate*

*change*, seems to move things forward in two significant ways:

**1 Focus on land use**

This is a specific report about land use and climate change, and really gets into the nitty-gritty detail of how things need to change on the ground.

**2 Increased support for land use change**

A range of voices are coming in behind Confor and other forestry organisations and supporting the need for fundamental change.

The report clearly states that some land currently used to produce food needs to be converted to woodland, and specifically recognises that one of the drivers for this is to create sustainable timber homes.

*“The incremental changes seen in the past to how we use land is not enough. There is a window now to have a more radical policy. There are government plans to increase planting rates, but the plans have not been funded and to date the targets have been missed.”*

**Chris Stark, CCC chief executive**

Confor chief executive Stuart Goodall said: “This independent, expert report reaffirms, yet again, that we need to get seri-



**Decisions need to be made quickly**

The UK’s goals for addressing climate change are unlikely to be met without fundamental land reform. Proposed new UK laws on agriculture and the environment means there is now a one-off opportunity to define a new land strategy.

Source: *Land Use: reducing emissions and preparing for climate change*



ous about planting more trees if we are to meet our commitments to mitigate climate change.

“Climate Change is regularly held up as the greatest existential threat to our planet and our way of life and I would encourage the CCC to be even bolder in its reports and recommendations until the UK Government recognises its responsibilities and takes them seriously.”

### Forestry and farming: working together

Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) is working increasingly closely with Confor to develop the concept of land use change. Last year, Prof Davy McCracken of SRUC spoke at a Confor conference about sheep and trees in the context of integrated land use and farm forestry. The exchange of expertise was reciprocated when Confor’s Eleanor Harris gave a lecture on forestry to SRUC students this October and participated in the panel discussion at SRUC’s Land Use Conference on 28-29 November. Recently, Andrew Lacey and Malcolm Young of SRUC’s SAC Consulting joined Confor’s Wood Supply in Scotland Campaign to work with Scotland Manager Jamie Farquhar on promoting timber-growing to Scotland’s livestock and arable farmers.

Confor will continue to press its case that planting trees offers a real opportunity to diversify farm incomes, improve the welfare of livestock and create a more sustainable, long-term business.

## Support from vocal environmentalists

The environmental lobby is also starting to throw its weight much more strongly behind tree planting as a way to address climate change in a quick, meaningful and cost-effective way - and to address the issue of competing land uses head-on. Campaigner George Monbiot said the report was “timid and inadequate” and Friends of the Earth’s Guy Shrubsole agreed that the CCC needed to go much further. Shrubsole’s call to double forest cover echoes the debate organised by Confor at Labour conference in September, *Should the next Labour Government aim to double tree cover to tackle climate change?*

*“Roughly four million hectares of uplands is used for sheep, yet sheep account for just 1.2% of our diet. Allowing trees to return to a significant portion on this land has a far greater potential for carbon reduction than the puny measures proposed in this report.”*



**George Monbiot**

*“We need to reforest far more of Britain than the government’s current puny tree-planting targets - going beyond what this report calls for and doubling forest cover [from 13 to 26% across the UK] to lock-up carbon and help prevent floods.”*



**Guy Shrubsole**

## Channeling anger into action: time for clear commitments

With support for a significant increase in tree planting growing to tackle climate change, Confor’s attention will turn to how to actually make a difference.

“We have seen some welcome developments - including the opening up of the narrow applications window and the appointment of a Tree Champion,” said Stuart Goodall. “But the evidence base - and the clamour for action to increase tree planting and home-grown timber use - is growing by the day. It’s time for clear commitments.”

The long-term commitment contained in the Government’s 25-Year Environment Plan means planting 7500ha per year in England to 2042 - but the latest statistics show that barely 1000ha were planted in 2017-18.

The CCC report sets a minimum baseline target of 20,000ha in the whole of the UK by 2020 - and 27,000ha by 2030 - which means more than doubling (by 2020) and tripling (by 2030) the 9000ha planted in 2017-18 - more than 80% of which was planted in Scotland.

“The Scottish Government has set clear and unambiguous targets and linked them to policy objectives,

*“The long-term target is nothing more than an aspiration on a page. What we need are specific annual targets, with a robust and clear pathway to meet them.”*



**Stuart Goodall, Confor CEO**

especially climate change,” said Mr Goodall. “In 2018, there is a strong prospect that the 10,000ha target will be met. That target rises to 15,000ha annually by 2025 and we can see the pathway to achieve that.

“What we need now is the UK Government - and the Welsh Government - to put in place robust and meaningful targets too, to show it is serious about forestry and timber - and therefore serious about climate change. Confor and the industry looks forward to working with new Forestry Minister David Rutley MP to identify these targets and what processes need to change to meet them. Scotland has shown that political will, collaboration between the public and private sector and tangible, short-term actions can make a real difference.”

### FTN WEB RESOURCES



CCC report *Land Use: reducing emissions and preparing for climate change*  
Report: *Eskdalemuir - A comparison of forestry and hill farming; productivity and economic impact*  
Confor report: *Farm Forestry*  
[www.confor.org.uk/ftnweb](http://www.confor.org.uk/ftnweb)