

## Tree planting in the UK - Westminster Hall Debate - Scotland

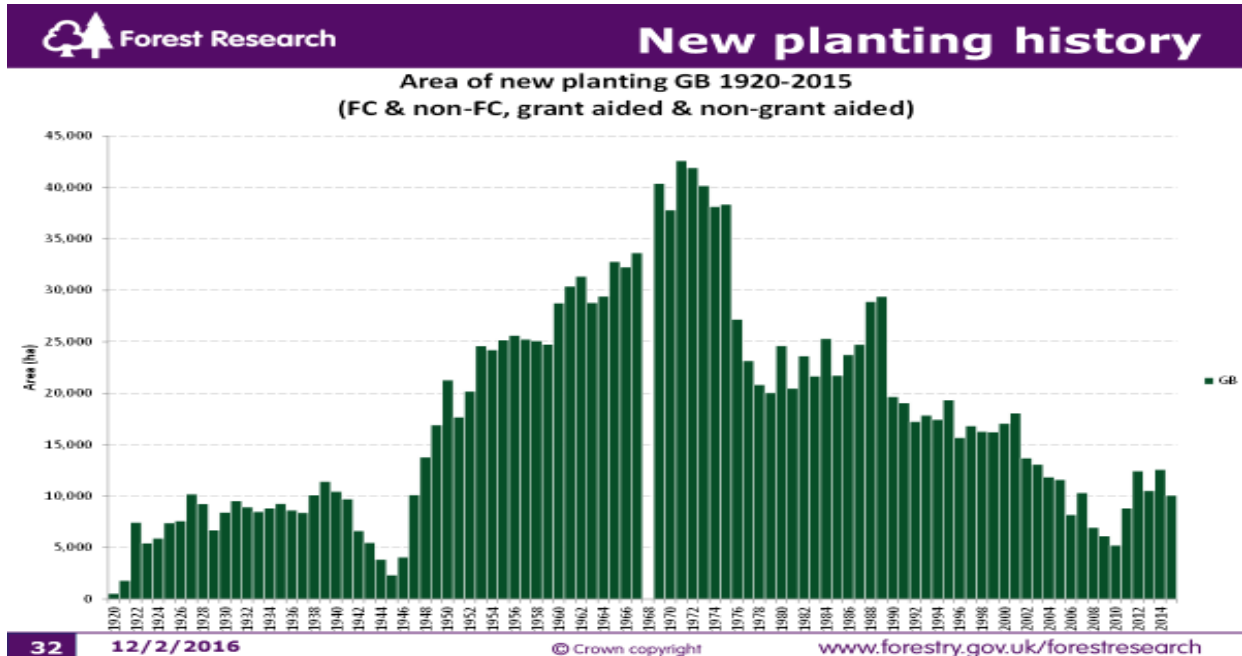
7 December 2016

### Introduction

This note has been written for Scottish MPs ahead of the Tree planting in the UK Westminster Hall Debate to be held on Wednesday 7 December, secured by Chris Davies MP. This note sets out Confor: Promoting forestry and wood's (Confor) position on tree planting in Scotland and complements the briefing prepared for MPs by the Commons Library, considering new planting only rather than the restocking of harvested woodland sites.

### Background

Scotland has the highest percentage of woodland cover in the UK, at 18% of its land area. This is predominantly productive softwood forest – 74% of woodland, with the remainder being principally native woods. There is limited potential for growing quality hardwood in the north. The history of planting in the UK is influenced by what has happened in Scotland, since there has been more suitable land here for expansion of forestry, in particular for softwoods:



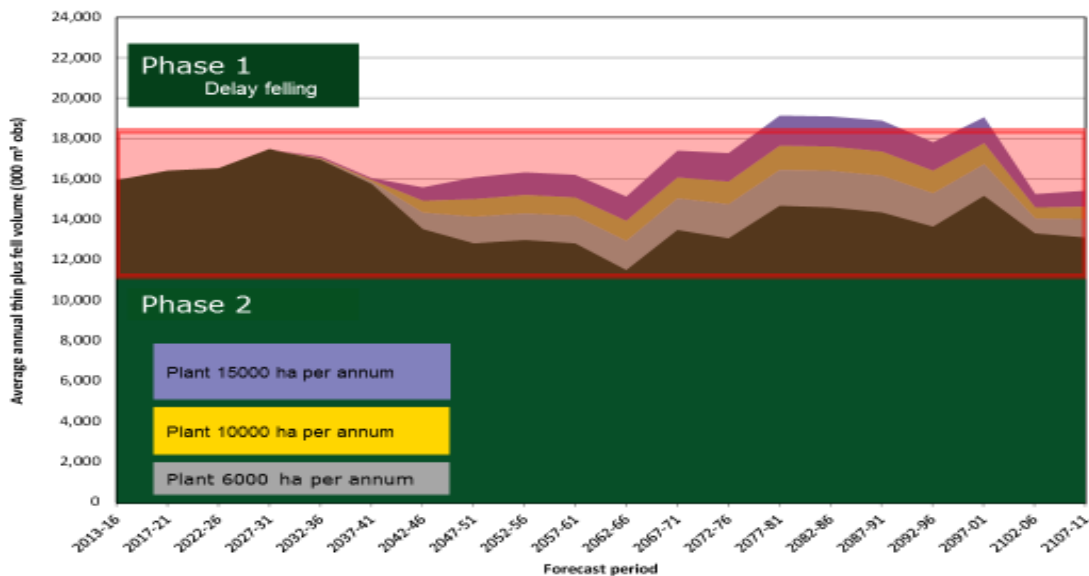
The creation of the Forestry Commission in 1919 with the principle aim of rebuilding a strategic timber resource after WW1 saw the NFE (National Forest Estate) grow steadily, with a further resurgence of planting after WW2, supplemented and then overtaken by planting by the private sector as grants for woodland creation became more attractive from the 1960s onwards. Private investment was sustained until the tax changes of 1988, but has steadily fallen off since. Although the above picture is a UK one, the vast majority of this new woodland creation was carried out in Scotland. The small rise in planting in the

last decade has been nearly all native woods in Scotland, influenced by generous grants for that type of woodland, combined with the type and quality of land that came available during that period – and against a background of high direct subsidy payments for farming which discouraged change of land use.

### Today's needs

As a result of the increased plantings up until the 1990s we have one of the UK's and Scotland's great business success stories, with investment into and development of a world leading modern sawmilling and processing industry situated in northern Britain, fed largely from Scotland's softwood resource. The UK still imports 80% of our woody product needs, but our industry has grown the market share of home-grown timber by 3-times in the last 15 years. It is still hungry for feedstock, but is worried by the looming dip in availability of roundwood in 30 years' time:

## Forest Research 30 years of mitigation



The above UK forecast from Forest Research shows the potential to mitigate that “dip” in supply through different levels of annual tree planting. We must take action now to secure the industry's position, and prevent the need to import more timber to satisfy demand.

Scotland has a target of 100,000 hectares of new woodland creation (NWC) in the decade to 2022, of which approximately 60% should be productive. This target is a refinement of the vision of the 2006 Scottish Forestry Strategy of increasing to 25% woodland cover by 2050, and came out of the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group (WEAG) process in 2012.

We are well behind that target, especially of commercial crop, and now need to plant over 13,000 hectares for each of the next six years to catch up – nearly 10,000 hectares of which should be productive softwood. Scottish Government anticipates that the private

sector will deliver most of this, but the budget through the 2014-20 SRDP will finance only half of this new planting. More is needed if we are to succeed.

New woodland creation (NWC) and restocking after clearfell are totally different things, and should be considered separately. The target of 100,000 hectares of NWC of which at least 60% is productive, was agreed to by the industry on the basis that achieving this would go some way to fill in the coming dip in supply. But this was on the assumption that restocking was proceeding more or less immediately after felling, and that productive softwood would normally be replanted after a conifer crop is harvested. Neither has happened, and the extent of this has only recently become apparent with the issue of a report from Forest Research on canopy cover change in the last 15 years. There are various reasons for this – compliance with UKFS, biological control of weevil, the influence of higher grant rates for crops other than spruce, etc. This means the need to increase NWC of productive conifer crops has become even more urgent.

The demand for NWC is its highest level for over a decade – Forestry Commission Scotland are in discussion with agents about schemes totalling 18,000 hectares, 2,300 of which are approved and another 4,000 have been submitted for approval. We cannot afford to lose this momentum, and need the budget available to meet our planting target - £59m per annum and an increased sum to catch up with restocking. This means doubling the Scottish forestry budget to about £70m. And equally important is that we cannot afford to go into a period of uncertainty of future availability of funds on account of Brexit. NWC schemes take months, even years to bring through scoping, consultation and finally to approval.

### **Further information**

For more information on tree planting in Scotland please contact:

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If your question relates to tree planting in the UK as a whole please contact:

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