

Save Our Forests : specimen letter to Community Councils

Dear

As part of a review into climate change the Scottish Government are proposing to lease at least 25% of Scotland's Forestry Commission estate for 75 years, reportedly to foreign investors. This model has been used in New Zealand and elsewhere but I have serious concerns that this will lead to the effective 'privatisation' of some of Scotland's most valuable forests. The cash made from selling these valuable assets will be at the expense of future years' income and investment, as timber is sold by the private investor and not the government. There is a growing awareness of issues surrounding climate change and forests act as 'carbon sinks' and perform an important role within the biosphere. It is, therefore, only right that the government retains control of timber harvesting and re-planting and not private companies motivated only by profit.

The present Forestry Commission infrastructure has an important part to play in many remote and rural communities in Scotland. The very viability of many small rural communities, their schools and village shops, will be at risk if this privatisation goes ahead. A private forestry company is more than likely to going to run their operations using teams of workers and machinery, who will travel about the country. The plans also will have a worrying impact of forest workers who will no longer be employed by the Forestry Commission but by the private companies leasing the forests. The present conditions of service for workers will go, to be replaced by uncertainty, despite any assurance given. There are also implications for small businesses around Scotland who supply the needs of the forestry industry and its tourist enterprises.

The Forestry Commission was ahead of its time in allowing access to the public and has developed many excellent facilities for visitors and tourists. Whereas the commission positively encourages responsible public access to their woods it is highly unlikely that privatised enterprises will do likewise. This will impact on a whole range of recreational users including walkers, cyclists, bird-watchers and many others. Last year, for example, Glenmore Forest Park, near Aviemore, welcomed 300,000 visitors and its visitor centre entertained 100,000 people.

I will be continuing to fight these proposals in the Scottish Parliament but would also like to draw attention to a web site that has been launched at <http://saveourforests.org.uk>. The site contains a petition and provides the opportunity to generate a letter of objection to the plans. I would encourage you to visit the site, sign the petition and send a letter to the minister. It would also be helpful if you could forward the views of your community council on these plans to me at the address provided.

Best Wishes etc.

