

Finlay Carson MSP,
Convenor – Rural and Island Affairs Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Scottish Budget 2025-26

Dear Finlay,

We write on behalf of the thousands of members from both Confor and the Woodland Trust Scotland to you as Convenor of the Rural and Island Affairs Committee ahead of deliberations on the Scottish Budget for 2025-26.

As we have expressed to you and to the committee we were shocked and disappointed by the significant cut to the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) budget administered by Scottish Forestry; a cut amounting to £32m, or 41% compared to the 2023-24 FGS budget.

We recognise that all parties worked towards a common goal of increasing planting last year and our members were pleased to see that we achieved more than 15,000 hectares of new forests created in Scotland during the 2023/24 planting period. This included a healthy conifer component of 8,720 hectares, alongside 6,320 hectares of broadleaf planting. This is particularly relevant when we note that across the UK, a total of 20,660 hectares were planted - 4,550 in England, 640 in Wales and 430 in Northern Ireland.

Our two organisations have different views and priorities on many areas, but we are united in our conviction that the Forestry Grant Scheme is the “bread and butter” funding for woodland creation and restoration in Scotland, and that the budget should be increased. It is clear that when the funding is there, woodland creation occurs, and when funding is cut, woodland creation drops off rapidly.

It is clear that when the funding is there, woodland creation occurs, and when funding is cut, woodland creation drops off rapidly. This is not just simple question of economics, but highlights a wider problem of damaged confidence of the many people involved in supply chains. The Scottish Government tacitly recognised this fact when it revised its 2024-25 woodland creation target from 18,000ha to just 10,000ha mid-year in the First Minister’s Programme for Government Statement in September 2024, following the unexpected budget cut announced in December. The UK is once again the second largest importer of wood products in the world after China. This was also a disappointing lowering of ambitions at a time when national and international efforts to tackle the climate- and nature crises need to be redoubled, not weakened.

We have seen what can be achieved when the private and public sector work together towards a common goal, both our organisations hope that the Scottish Government recognises this reality and finds the additional funds required to secure a target of 14,000 ha of new planting next year.

Following COP 29 it is clear that national and international efforts to tackle the climate- and nature crises need to be redoubled, not weakened. The Scottish Government was clear in the aftermath of the FGS budget cut in December 2023 that its decision to cut the FGS by 41% was a result of a significant reduction in capital funding from the UK Government. This year however has seen a significant uplift in the capital budget in real terms and we believe the Scottish Government should use the opportunity of its 2025-26 budget to restore funding to the FGS, and we ask that MSPs and committees scrutinising the budget, and helping to shape it, take account of this

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Goodall
Chief Executive
Confor

Alastair Seaman
Director of Scotland
The Woodland Trust