

Cross-Party Group on the Wood Panel Industry

Monday 11 March 2024, 11:00am - Via Zoom

Minute

Present

MSPs

Fergus Ewing MSP
Stephen Kerr MSP
Maurice Golden MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP
Emma Harper MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

Alastair Kerr - Director General, Wood Panel Industries Federation (WPIF)
Steve Roebuck - Director EHS, West Fraser (Formally Norbord)
John Patterson - Public Affairs Manager, EGGER UK
Mark Cummings - Managing Director, Invicta Public Affairs
Catherine Wales - Account Manager, Invicta Public Affairs
Iona Yule - Account Executive, Invicta Public Affairs

Apologies

Michael Marra MSP
Kate Forbes MSP
Finlay Carson MSP
Rachel Hamilton MSP
Mark Ruskell MSP
Colin Smyth MSP
Elena Whitham MSP
Jim Fairlie MSP
Ariane Burgess MSP
Karen Adam MSP
Rhoda Grant MSP
Dr Alasdair Allan MSP

1. Welcome from the Chair

Fergus Ewing MSP opened the meeting as Chair of the Cross Party Group. He welcomed attendees and noted apologies.

2. Update on the Delivery of the Scottish Government's 18,000 Hectare Planting Target and Impact of the Proposed Reduction in Forestry Budget for 2024/25

Catherine Wales, Invicta Public Affairs provided an update on the Scottish Budget which saw funding for woodland creation and management through the Forestry Grant Scheme cut by 41% in 2024/25. This amounts to a £31.8m decrease in the budget. Overall, the forestry budget has decreased by 32.4% with each category seeing a decrease.

3. Update on the state of the Wood Panel Industry and Ongoing Issues with Wood Security

Alastair Kerr, Wood Panel Industry Federation, discussed the impact of the budget cuts on the wood panel industry highlighting the long-term detriment this will have on raw material supplies over the long term.

The UK wood panel sector is currently only able to satisfy 65% of the market's demand for its products. The main issue constraining the industry's ambition to supply 100% of UK demand is the limited supply of raw materials. In 2021, the industry consumed 25% of the annual roundwood harvest basket (11.2 million green tonnes) but, with increased availability of the raw materials, wood panel manufacturers would be able to meet the 35% of demand which is currently being satisfied by foreign imports of wood panel products.

4. Discussion and Next Steps

Members discussed ways to highlight the importance of Scotland's forestry industry amongst colleagues in the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government and the public. Members noted that they are acutely aware of the downward trajectory forestry is facing, both physically in terms of planting and the importance it is given by the Scottish Government. Members stated that they were keen to understand why the forestry budget has been reduced and how the Scottish Government could continue to support the forestry sector with a reduced budget.

Next Steps

Letter - The CPG will write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, to reaffirm members' support for Scottish Forestry and the need for increased productive planting to support Scotland's economy. The letter will request a Government Debate.

Media - Write a platform piece for Scottish media to raise awareness of the importance of forestry for Scotland's environment and economy. The article will constructively raise the impact of the budget reduction on Scotland forestry sector and down stream users.

Written Parliamentary Questions - Members of the CPG will submit written PQ's to establish further information about the delivery of forestry in Scotland and breakdown of the Scottish forestry budget.

Motion - CPG Members will submit/ support a motion highlighting the importance of Scotland's forestry sector and the economic and environmental value of planting productive forestry.