Mackinnon Report: implementation update

Background

The Cabinet Secretary accepted the recommendations of the report in December 2016 in principle, and tasked Forestry Commission Scotland with implementation. James Nott (Conservator for Grampian Conservancy) was appointed as Project Manager and a high level delivery plan was published on 25 January 2017 featuring 21 recommendations. These have been grouped into work streams, each of which is intended to produce specific outputs to deliver benefits for the woodland creation process.

Update on progress (December 2016 – April 2017)

Below is a summary on the action to implement the recommendations.

Since the report was launched, there have been many meetings where industry and interested parties have discussed the report and its findings. Where possible FCS representatives, have attended these meetings to listen to comments and take on suggestions.

We have also been carrying out other work in parallel which is directly relevant including:

- organisational change – preparation for the anticipated completion of devolution of forestry by establishing new arrangements in Scotland.
- new legislation – input into the process for developing new Scottish legislation which will underpin a substantial proportion of Conservancy work
- discussions with large investors – initial scoping work to explore a new geographically targeted approach involving public, private and community investment.
- IT and systems – crucial for delivering many the desired improvements.

Delivery Reference Group meetings

The Delivery Reference Group has met twice. The first meeting assessed and approved the work stream approach; raised the importance of culture change as an issue, and added 'transparency' to the three key principles of 'trust, empowerment and

proportionality' which were included in the report. Of particular note is that whilst supporting the intended outcome of work stream three (approval processes), all members raised concerns about the accredited agent model, and felt that alternatives should be explored on a longer timeframe than proposed in the report.

At the second meeting, progress with initial deliverables were discussed; a more detailed action plan was shared, discussed and supported, and the issue of culture change (for FCS, the sector and stakeholders) was explored in more depth, to develop a shared understanding of positive and negative behaviours and cultures, which can be used to judge progress.

Implementation of the recommendations

The recommendations have been grouped into six work streams:

1. pre-application and consultation process
2. EIA processing improvements
3. approval processes
4. management Information and targets
5. promotion, training and public information
6. potential large regional project (to be taken forward as part of a wider project on stimulating woodland creation)

Key work to date has included:

- refining the delivery plan, and identifying critical priorities for action (particularly regarding staffing and IT) (all work streams)
- working with stakeholders to start developing better guidance and training for applicants on how to achieve positive pre-application discussions with stakeholders. (w/s 1)
- increasing the thresholds for EIA screening (implementation and training to follow). (w/s 2)
- improving management information on approval times and pre-application schemes (w/s 4)
- initial drafting of new processing agreement (w/s 1 and 2)
- monthly publishing of data on submitted and approved schemes, and average approval times (w/s 4)
- review of website and development of new hard-copy leaflets (w/s 5)
- a brief review of progress for the SRO is being commissioned from Jim Mackinnon. (all work streams)

Conclusions

The work stream approach has been well-received, and provides a good mechanism for managing and communicating the actions being taken. In addition to the work streams, culture change is seen as an additional key priority.

There has been clear progress on four of the six work streams – particularly in relation to EIA thresholds; agreements with statutory bodies; processing agreements and management information

The delivery group has asked that work stream three is progressed over a longer timeframe, and considers more options for earned recognition beyond the accredited agent approach suggested in the report. This is awaiting the identification of resource and a suitable lead.

Underlying IT systems and associated processes are crucial for delivering many the desired improvements. FCS is currently scoping this work and identifying necessary resource.