



SCOPING OPINION FOR THE PROPOSED EISG BRACHAIDH EIA FORESTRY PROJECT

Introduction

This scoping opinion has been adopted pursuant to Regulation 15 of The Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017¹ (“the EIA Regulations”). It is based on information available in August 2021 and relates to the proposal to install 18.5 kilometres of deer fence around the Eisg Brachaidh Estate, by Ullapool for, 250 hectares of afforestation.

The purpose of this document is to identify all of the likely significant effects of the EIA forestry project on the environment identified during the scoping process; and determine the level of detail of information required for the assessment, so they can be adequately addressed in the EIA Report.

In accordance with the EIA Regulations the EIA Report must be based on this scoping opinion. To reduce the risk of additional information being requested, which would be subject to further publicity and consultation cycles, applicants are advised to consider all aspects of the scoping opinion when preparing a formal application for EIA consent.

This scoping opinion has been adopted following consultation with Scottish Environment Protection Agency, NatureScot, Historic Environment Scotland, Highland Council, as the statutory consultation bodies and with Assynt Community Council, Coigach Community Council, Inverkirkaig Common Grazings, West Sutherland Deer Management Group, Ramblers Scotland, Mountaineering Scotland, Scottish Canoe Association, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Assynt Foundation, Inver and Kirkaig Fishings estate and Inverpolly estate, whom we considered likely to have an interest in the proposed EIA forestry project.

In adopting this scoping opinion we have taken into account:

- a) the specific characteristics of this particular forestry project;
- b) the specific characteristics of forestry projects of the type concerned; and
- c) the environmental features likely to be affected by the forestry project.

In adopting this scoping opinion, Scottish Forestry are not precluded from requiring the applicant to submit additional information in connection with any EIA Report that may be submitted pursuant to the application for EIA consent.

Specific issues to be addressed

Pursuant to Regulation 6 of the EIA Regulations, the EIA Report submitted in relation to the proposed EIA forestry project must address the following specific issues:

Landscape

Because of the sensitivities of the Assynt-Coigach landscape, a more in-depth Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and a Wildland assessment is required. Specifically, such a landscape assessment should refer to the Special Qualities of the Assynt – Coigach NSA, the Landscape Character and the Description of the Inverpolly – Glencanisp Wild Land Area.

- Visual impacts and mitigation considering vegetation change, tracking and fence marking.

Biodiversity – Designated sites

The EIA should quantify and evaluate the potential significant effects of the proposals on all of the SSSI SAC and SPA features and qualifying interests, both within and out with the proposed enclosure. There is a need to ascertain the proposal will not adversely affect site integrity of the SAC. This information

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/113/contents/made>

should be presented in a way that will enable us to complete a Habitats Regulations Appraisal and an Appropriate Assessment of the impacts on all designated features/qualifying interests. NatureScot can provide further information on qualifying interests.

Biodiversity – Other

The EIA Report should quantify and evaluate:

- Impacts of fence and tracking of fence on breeding birds-disturbance and fence collisions
- Impacts on fence and tracking of fence on EPS and fisheries-disturbance, sedimentation and fence collisions.

Biodiversity, and Population and Human Health – Deer

The EIA Report should include a comprehensive Deer Management Plan that includes:

- The current deer numbers and usage of the site;
- Impacts on deer movements and displacement, specifically in Lochinver and on neighbouring owners and crofters;
- Compensatory cull and methods to achieve and maintain deer density required for regeneration;
- An evaluation of the impacts on deer welfare.

Population and Human Health – Public Access

The EIA Report should fully understand the nature and extent of the current use of the site and assess the potential impacts of the project on users including walkers, kayakers and fishers.

Cultural heritage

The EIA Report should identify the location of any archaeological features that may be impacted by the project and describe protection measures.

The EIA Report should also discuss:

Description of the forestry project

The EIA Report should include detailed maps that accurately reflect the operations identified within the application for EIA consent and be at an appropriate scale.

Cumulative impacts

Potential cumulative impacts with other existing, consented or planned (known) deer fencing that may be relevant to this project.

Alternatives

A description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the applicant, which are relevant to the proposed EIA forestry project and its specific characteristics; and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects.

The effectiveness of the proposal.

There remains uncertainty as to whether the project can successfully achieve its objective of woodland regeneration in the presence of livestock and wild deer. The EIA Report should include clarification of current grazing cattle and sheep and how this will be impacted.

Preparing the EIA Report

Applicants are encouraged to maintain regular contact with Scottish Forestry throughout the EIA process and preparation of the EIA Report, to discuss progress and when necessary to seek advice prior to applications being submitted.

Prior to formal submission, we will accept a draft copy of the EIA Report to ensure all the issues have been adequately covered. High resolution PDF versions should be provided. We recommend that printed copies of the EIA Report are not prepared for consultation until we advise you to do so.

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations stipulates the information that must be included in an EIA Report, summarised below. In the event of an EIA Report being void of this essential information, we reserve the right not to accept the application for EIA consent.

Non-technical summary

This should be written in simple non-technical terms to describe the various options for the proposed forestry project and the mitigation measures against the potential adverse impacts which could result.

Site description

A description of the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment (the “baseline scenario”) and an outline of the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the forestry project as far as natural changes from the baseline scenario can be assessed with reasonable effort on the basis of the availability of environmental information and scientific knowledge.

Description of the forestry project

The description of the proposed forestry project in the EIA Report should comprise:

- Information on the site location, design layout, and scale of the project;
- A description of the physical characteristics of the project;
- A description of the main characteristics of the operational phase of the project; and
- An estimate of the type and quantity of expected residues and emissions.

Site selection and alternatives

A description of the reasonable alternatives (for example in terms of forestry project design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the applicant, which are relevant to the proposed forestry project and its specific characteristics; and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects.

Methodology used in assessing all impacts

A description of the forecasting methods or evidence, used to identify and assess the significant effects on the environment, including details of difficulties (for example technical deficiencies or lack of knowledge) encountered compiling the required information and the main uncertainties involved.

Description of factors and likely significant effects associated with the forestry project

A description of the expected significant adverse effects of the forestry project on the environment specifically population, human health, biodiversity, land, soils, water, air, climate, material assets, cultural heritage and landscape. The description should cover the direct effects and any indirect, secondary, cumulative, transboundary, short-term, medium-term, long-term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects of the forestry project.

Mitigation

A description of the measures envisaged to avoid, prevent, reduce or, if possible, offset any identified significant adverse effects on the environment and, where appropriate, of any proposed monitoring arrangements, covering both the construction and operational phases.

Summary statement of the significant impacts

The significance of unavoidable/residual impacts for each environmental factor.

References

List the sources of information used for the descriptions and assessments included in the EIA report. The EIA Report must also state the relevant expertise or qualifications of all those involved in collating, assessing or presenting technical Information.

Further guidance is available in the guidance booklet Undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment in Forestry. <https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/environmental-impact-assessment/applying-for-consent>

22/09/2021