

Important update

on the corruption at FISA

As a result of a recent election, FISA have a couple of new Directors. Andy Newbold and Iwan Lloyd-Williams have joined the board, and I have a feeling they won't get long to settle. Given the brutal nature of FISA's politics, it will be interesting to see if they'll be able to usher in a new era of openness and accountability – or will it remain business as usual? The board already has enough peddlers of deception, evasion and waffle, so it will be interesting to see what impact, if any, this new blood will have.

In case you're wondering, I did throw my hat into the ring yet again, but this time I was prevented from standing because I had not submitted a couple of documents on time. I should point out that I had submitted my nomination within the correct time frame and this had been accepted, but there were some additional criteria that I failed to meet, so my latest attempt at ensuring contractor representation on the FISA board stalled on the grid, despite my pleadings for the mercy of the Steering Group.

Mind you, 'rules are rules' it was pointed out to me. True enough, but I couldn't help thinking back to the chairman's election of April 2021, the details of which were widely reported in the *Forestry Journal*. For those of you who have forgotten, this was a contest between Calum Duffy and Brendan Burns. Both had submitted their applications within the stated time frame and had been officially informed that they were the only two candidates. However, when the ballot papers were issued, they had been joined by a third candidate, Simon Hodgson. Missing the deadline wasn't an issue in that instance and it serves to remind us that we should not be taking any lectures on rules from Simon Hodgson.

Anyway, back to the update. You will recall the FCA allegations that Simon Hodgson was not eligible to stand in any of these elections and that he has just assumed the position of Chair by the use of deception.

FISA holds the documentation necessary to prove or disprove such an allegation but FISA's CEO, Gillian Clark, has steadfastly refused to share them. Despite the efforts of a couple of FISA's own directors to get her to do so, she has stuck to her guns. This blind loyalty to her boss sees her completely compromised. Simon Hodgson has made good use of his trusty CEO, regularly leaving her to take the flak whilst he hides behind the couch. What kind of leader is that?

Anyway, it's lucky for the FCA that these documents no longer matter. We can categorically state that Simon Hodgson was not eligible to stand, nor even vote in these elections and, what's more, he knew it. Despite the FCA asking Simon Hodgson to respond to these charges personally, he continues to ignore all correspondence, presumably in the hope that this will save him having to tell an outright lie on the record. He was given ample opportunity to put these matters right at the time but chose not to. He has since compounded this dishonesty by embarking on another campaign of deceit. With the assistance of Gillian Clark, and possibly others (I have my own thoughts on that), he launched another attempt to deceive people into believing that he has the right to be in the position. This strategy is highly dependant on other people lying for him and comes with huge risks to all those involved. When you start to weave such a complex web of lies and deceit, you need a good memory to pull it all off. This plan also seems to be predicated on an assumption that we contractors have sawdust for brains and that we wouldn't be able to see through it.

Most of the above information, and lots of other shocking revelations, have been in the public domain for some time, having been presented to the industry by the *Forestry Journal* in September last year. The allegations were so serious, people were asking why there was no response from FISA.

The FCA is now able to report FISA's response.

The company has now altered its constitution to ensure that no member, even the FCA, will have the right to access any of the company's documents again. This right was enshrined in FISA's original constitution but has now been completely removed. Presented as a 'minor tweak' to the constitution by Gillian Clark, the new constitution has been designed to remove the rights of the ordinary member, and will have the added benefit of preventing proper scrutiny of the past activities of the current chair and CEO.

The FCA was never given free access to any of these documents, being constantly obstructed by Simon Hodgson and Gillian Clark, both of whom knew that this would be a disaster for them personally. Such obstruction was illegal, but not anymore, thanks to these changes. The constitution is a powerful document and despite Hodgson and Clark's decision to persistently ignore the old one, you can be sure the new one will be enforced to its fullest extent.

Now that we know that Simon Hodgson does not subscribe to Rishi Sunak's vision of 'integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level', we need to establish what standards he does employ in his business dealings. What standard of conduct should we expect from a man who is both the Chairman of FISA and the Chief Executive of Forestry & Land Scotland? Is a bit of old-fashioned honesty too much to ask for? What can we expect from those who fail to adhere to such a basic, if somewhat idealistic concept?

Does it even matter? Are you quite happy to work with/for someone you don't trust? Sadly, many of us are forced into such an environment because business can be like that, but it's not a situation we would endure from choice. It's hard enough to make a living without constantly worrying about getting stitched up by someone you do business with. Sadly, this happens all the time because you can't

keep your guard up forever. Trust is central to good business relationships and without it, sooner or later, you'll fall prey to someone who lacks the morals to resist taking advantage when the opportunity arises.

When the poor ethical standard demonstrated by their superiors permeates down through an organisation, you'll soon get to a point where no-one with any integrity wants to be there. You'll then find the organisation filled with a high percentage of low achievers who never have to take responsibility for their actions, or inactions, and are never held to account. We can see the FLS business model mirrored across FISA. No transparency, and with formal complaints ignored in the hope that the complainer just gets fed up and goes away. It usually works, resulting in many serious issues going suppressed for years and nothing ever being done about them.

FISA is absolutely dependant on unpaid volunteers to make it function; such individuals – at least the kind we are looking for – don't stick around in such a place for long. Why would they? That's why FISA has an astonishing rate of turnover amongst its volunteers.

Luckily, the truth always comes out for those who are patient enough to wait for it. The FCA will continue to press for the answers to the many other questions posed over a number of years. Now that the malpractice that took place during these elections has been dealt with, we can turn our attention more fully to the FISA finances. With every question on that subject being ignored, we can start to shine a bit more light into that dark corner.

It's time for FISA to look for a new Chair and Chief Executive. It has to do so without delay. If dishonest leadership was a quality that was going to deliver safety improvements, then we would have had them by now.

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“Is a bit of old-fashioned honesty too much to ask for?”