Chairman's Report to the AGM of the Forestry Contracting Association, 2025

Contractors are facing difficulties that have been caused by those who control the industry. As you will no doubt be aware, harvesting has been hit by a decrease in demand for the end product. Some are escaping the worst effects, but there is no doubt this is going to have a lasting effect on many. However, it is the systems used, as much as the market, which is exposing Contractors to what will likely turn into big losses. Huge harvesting contracts are still being placed despite the lack of markets. Contractors are delivering on their part, but without payment. They are simply cash flowing sloppy and exploitative timber buying markets. Sadly, by continuing to do this they are unwittingly perpetuating the problem, much to the delight of those so able to take advantage.

FCA attempted to set up some cross organisational talks to look at these problems. We had a meeting with Andy Leitch at Confor, but this was a complete waste of time. To be kind, his reaction could best be described as a 'Gallic shrug', but at least Andy had the balls to meet us; unlike some.

In our efforts to gather information to evidence the claims being made, we asked Forestry & Land Scotland for details of all roadside stocks. They refused to provide any information on standing sales but stated that their direct production monthly figures haven't shown any differences, sitting consistently at 140,000 cubic metres over the last 5 years. My instincts now bolstered by their outrageous refusal to co-operate with us, suggests that the standing sales figures will tell a different story. We have submitted an FOI request for the data, which should not be unreasonably withheld.

At the other end of the chain, those reliant on the public sector for establishment work, or for grants to support woodland creation are having to face up to the fact that the public sector is broke, even if admitting it publicly is the last thing on earth they will ever do. Years of mismanagement by politicians and civil servants alike, are now coming home to roost; and not just in forestry. And as it always does, the pain to correct it all will be felt by the ordinary working person. Now everybody in the country can strap themselves in for a difficult ride and this isn't going to be short term pain either.

Whilst FLS and Confor continue to stonewall the FCA's attempts to improve the lot of forestry contractors, I have to mention that this is the most common problem we face when trying to reach resolution to member's problems. I can think of numerous complaints we have worked on where the initial response from the company was one of denial, often including bare faced lies. Once we disprove all their fakery, they just adopt the 'shrug' and a do your worst a challenge, knowing that none of us can afford the legal fees to take it any further. It's bloody obscene, I know, but that's the way life is. Those with all the power will abuse it; end of story. Finding a way of changing this is indeed the Holy Grail and still worth pursuing, however the odds are stacked.

Despite the corporate thuggery that goes on all around us, the FCA is run honestly and, thanks to our loyal members, remains financially sound with a good balance sheet. A copy of the annual accounts is attached for your approval. Turnover has increased from last year, with a modest increase in subscription income. However, this has also been swollen due to bank interest received from an investment account. There was a total profit in this year of £9,316, after taxation (2023 was £6,119). Costs have also risen, as they have for everyone, and the productions costs of the FCA News is our single most costly item of expenditure. Membership numbers now stand at 332, a modest increase of 8 from last year.

This is my chance to thank all the activists who help support the organisation and a particular thanks to the Directors who have to put up with me. Sincere thanks to you all. I hope you can make it to the AGM this year.

If you can't make it along, please consider giving me a call with your views on these matters.

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