

## **ROSEANNA CUNNINGHAM, ENVIRONMENT MINISTER WILD HARVESTS OF SCOTLAND CONFERENCE, 16 APRIL 2009**

Ladies and gentlemen I am delighted to join you here today at your non-timber forest products conference. It is great to see so many people from the whole spectrum of the forestry world here to discuss this important and growing part of the Scottish economy.

To the uninitiated, non-timber forest products may sound like a misnomer. However, when some of the facts associated with these products are revealed, their significance in a global context is quite astounding.

In many parts of the world, these products still play an important biological and social role in local food systems. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, it has been estimated that:

- 80% of the population of the developing world use NTFPs to meet some of their health and nutritional needs
- Several million households worldwide depend heavily on NTFPs for income
- The estimated total value of world trade in NTFPs is approximately US\$1.1 billion.

Recently the importance of NTFPs is being rediscovered.

Forests are being valued not simply for their timber, but as intricate systems capable of sustained generation of a great diversity of resources and services. NTFPs have substantial environmental, economic and cultural impacts.

As Minister for Environment, I am delighted to see that this rediscovery is not just something that is happening in the third world, but is rapidly becoming an integral part of Scotland's rural life and an important part of forestry in Scotland.

Recent research has estimated that these important national resources could be worth up to £20million a year – and that the sector still has potential to expand. This has been demonstrated by the steady growth in turnover of Scottish NTFP businesses in Scotland over the last decade.

Surveys have indicated that within Scotland, 24% of the population has collected NTFPs within the previous five years, with that figure reaching 31%, or nearly one third of the population, in northern Scotland.

At a Great Britain level, some 18% of the population has gathered NTFPs within the past two years. These findings reinforce and highlight the popularity of woodland product gathering. At the same time, the downward pressure on timber prices and the related need to diversify the economic base of rural areas has led woodland managers and policy makers to consider NTFPs as potential sources of revenue and rural development opportunities. This is an important aspect of sustainable forest management, which places an emphasis on managing forests for a broad range of values and uses.

In Scotland, over 200 different NTFPs derived from plant and fungal species are collected. More than half of these are food products, including mushrooms and berries.

In addition, NTFPs have a special place in the cultural life of rural Scotland. Knowledge about the different products, and how to collect them in a sustainable and responsible way is often handed down through the generations.

For many people, both rural and urban, they represent an important connection to the land, and its history and culture. A tour guide from Selkirk was asked to explain what NTFPs meant to him. He said, *'I think it keeps you in touch with your roots. That's what I think about that. It keeps you in touch with where we all came from, you know.'*

And of course, these native plants and fungi are also part of the rich natural biodiversity of Scotland.

In the last few years, as recognition of these benefits has led to growing numbers of people wanting to enjoy them, guidelines have been produced to provide advice on responsible management and collection. It's also important for the sector to speak with a collective voice.

I am very encouraged to see a range of diverse businesses from across Scotland getting together to discover their common interests and raise the profile of the sector. I welcome the steps you are making towards the formation of a trade association, and it is equally important that you have a clear framework to operate within.

To date, there has been no clear policy for this important and expanding area of the rural scene. If this sector is to flourish we need to ensure that these resources are managed in a sustainable way and that everyone recognises and respects their rights – and their responsibilities.

I am therefore pleased to be able to announce today a new policy for NTFPs in Scotland.

The new policy sets out

- How the Commission will manage the sustainable harvesting of NTFPs on the National Forest Estate
- The relevant legislation to allow landowners and collectors to know what is expected of them, and
- Some principles and guidelines for the sustainable management of NTFPs in Scotland.

This policy guidance from the Commission is a welcome first step in protecting this important resource for present and future generations, and I urge you to read it.

NTFPs are a natural resource, which, if properly managed, will add hugely to the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of our nation.

I hope that you have found today's conference both stimulating and worthwhile. I am delighted to have been able to share some of it with you, and regret that I am not able to stay longer. However, I look forward to seeing continued growth in interest and economic activity in your sector in the future.