

advantages and at the moment we are in at the sharp end of industry. We should not this week be trying to promote forestry, but have programmes in the bag. However we are already finding at this time of year, as Donnie Williamson was saying, the signs are extremely bad.

*Roger Carr (Chairman)*

Thank you, I will take one more point from the floor.

*David Goss (Forestry Consultant)*

I would like to point out that we are getting a double consultation process at the moment. The schemes which are approved under FGS and went right through the consultation process are now going back under WGS following a change of ownership. There is a double consultation—it costs the taxpayers twice as much and it delays things right through and probably postpones some of this year's planting.

*Roger Carr (Chairman)*

The Minister will have the last word and we have to move on.

*Lord Sanderson*

First of all, I do sympathise, Mr Williamson, with your problems. I was in business once and overnight I lost half my income because I was on commission, and because of a take-over in the textile industry and I know very well the position that you face when there is a change as dramatic as the budget brought about last spring. What I would like to say to you, as indeed I had to say to the White Fishermen yesterday, what the Government wants to do is to ensure that there will be an industry for the future. It may be painful in the short term but what I would say to you is that, and I know you will be doing this, you will be looking at every avenue you can to enable you to stay in business and give people in forestry the employment, which you have given. I do feel that tough decisions, at times, have to be taken and I do feel, as has been spoken of already, that the tax changes which came about last March were inevitable. Quite apart from that, I do believe that if you are to support a Government that believes that people are better able to look after their own money and to invest their own money than have Governments invest it for them, then you will understand the thrust that the Government is thinking in this area, and so I sympathise with the short term considerations which you have to face. I have faced it myself, it's very painful, but I am still here; you will be still there, if you've got a business, I am sure of that.

Now as to the questions which have been raised by the speaker on behalf of Economic Forestry Group and that he says there is absolutely no chance with the price of land ex arable of getting reasonable amounts made available. I don't think he is quite right in saying that the only place you can find it is in the North East of Scotland. There are other parts of Scotland, down the hill, which I do feel offer prospects for planting and which the Government would support. I have no doubt that this is something that you will want to talk to the Forestry Commission about as Forestry Authority. I do recognise that, and I was hearing this last year, because farmers were very upset that the price of land had fallen through the floor. I do understand that you have to compete for land just like anyone else, if you wish to plant trees on it. What I do think, however, is that there will be land which is suitable for planting; there will be people, for various reasons, that will want to buy that land and I think that to take a gloomy and pessimistic view as you do may not in fact be justified in the long term.

*Roger Carr (Chairman)*

Minister, thank you very much indeed; thank you again for your speech. One message I am sure we have all got is that the rules have been re-written; we are going to have to live with them, but we've got a Government that is prepared to listen or a Minister that is prepared to listen. One of the flaws that has been pointed out is the availability of land and our next speaker, Professor Dent, the Professor of Agriculture Resource Management, School of Agriculture at Edinburgh University is going to address that problem for us.