

Even though FCTU were very satisfied that forestry legislation was omitted from the recent Queen's Speech we have to ask why the Westminster government was so lacking in its commitment to pursue a legislative course of action that would have enabled the Woodland Policy Statement to possibly become a Bill.

This government has also failed to provide a commitment to stakeholders who have demanded an exemption for the Public Forest Estate in England within the Infrastructure Bill currently being debated in the UK parliament.

Why has the coalition decided to do nothing in relation to either of these two important issues? Many stakeholders were disappointed that the Queen's Speech ignored forestry and that the recommendations of the Independent Forestry Panel have equally been ignored.

We are now onto the third Secretary of State at DEFRA and perhaps it is this merry go-round that brought the much heralded woodland policy to a standstill. Or is it that the Cabinet still sense some unease from not only union members but other important stakeholders and are not prepared to risk losing votes in the run up to the General election in 2015?

Union members in the FC are still supportive of the current mandate to see a fully integrated, sustainably resourced and evolving FC which can deliver what the public want without the need for the outrageous cost of setting up a new organisation and placing in jeopardy the very much cherished name and brand that is the Forestry Commission.

At this time FCTU are preparing a paper which will outline how union members see the future of the FC and the value of retaining our strength of integration but realistic in developing better ways of working and delivering not only what our customers want but supports the forest industry in timber supplies, employment potential and bolstering rural economies. Our FC will deliver high grade research that brings scientists and foresters together to better understand and defend us from pests and diseases and to bring about research that equips the FC, the industry and all those who derive benefits from forests, woodlands and trees.

This modern and forward looking FC will use its nearly 100 year history to learn from and seek to provide a futuristic FC that is an enjoyable place to work and visit; provides employment and training in a variety of skills; creates economic stability and aids in the fight for better health and education.

Our FC will remain as a non-ministerial government department reporting directly to the UK parliament; funded by the taxpayer and providing free access to many facilities at point of entry. Income and benefits accrued will support the FC and will ensure that the public continue to benefit from the investment they have made over previous generations.

The FC in its ongoing regulatory role will use its highly skilled and dedicated staff to assist in unlocking the potential of all forests, woodlands and trees to bring about increased activity and economic vitality to undermanaged woodlands.

It is time to consider how best we try and use our alternative vision on those politicians who will be attending party conferences and drawing together party manifestos and how they would wish to see the benefits we will be outlining in our policy paper. The policy paper will be ready for consideration in late August and will be promoted during the members meetings scheduled in September.

It is vital that members make every effort to attend these meetings and give voice to their views and concerns. We will give continued promotion of these event and provide posters to remind staff about the event nearest to them. If we can strengthen the current mandate we can go forward with some confidence that the current governments Woodland Policy is not the only solution but our members have perhaps a better alternative and one that will not cost a fortune to put in place.