

FCTU Submission to the Forestry in England Inquiry 2016

Executive Summary

Our vision for the role of DEFRA in supporting a thriving forest economy and environment:

- The Forestry Commission to be properly resourced to carry out its role in forestry in promoting and supporting good practice, sustainable forestry and in carrying out research.
- An expanded Public Forest Estate publicly owned and managed by a properly resourced Forestry Commission.
- That forests and woods provide important public benefits to society, to the economy and for the environment. The Forestry Commission is the best at providing all these benefits.
- That it supports a multipurpose and accountable Public Forest Estate sustainably and plays a crucial role in promoting and supporting good and sustainable forestry practice.
- That it has the ability to carry out these objectives because of the experience, expertise and commitment of its FC staff.

Introduction

1. The Forestry Commission Trade Unions (FCTU) would very much appreciate the opportunity to give evidence to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee.
2. The five trade unions within the Forestry Commission (FDA, GMB, PCS, Prospect and Unite), account for approximately two-thirds of the total FC workforce. It is our belief that it is both fair and correct that our members' views should be taken into account by the EFRA Committee as it looks into the effectiveness of current Government policies and how they should be developed in future in order to achieve these objectives.
3. Members of staff in the FC are employed as Civil Servants and as such, they are bound by the Civil Service code of practice; they do not have a voice whilst at work and have to deliver what various ministers of the Government of the day require of them. Many have chosen to join a trade union to give them that 'missing' voice and through the joint unions (FCTU), we can make sure that those voices come through loud and clear.
4. Those who work for the FC have chosen to because of what the FC stands for, what it delivers and the values it places upon its self and its employees. Simply, most people enjoy the work and like the organisation. Similarly, we

have good industrial relations and any strife is usually because of outside forces.

5. The FCTU fundamentally believe that progressive cuts to FC budgets and staffing levels through Departmental spending reviews are ill advised. We are extremely concerned that the scale of cuts weakens the Forestry Commission in England.

Level of Tree Cover

6. The British public has made it very clear that they want to keep the Public Forest Estate. They want to see its expansion and they want to see the Forestry Commission manage the public's forests on their behalf. The Government has the opportunity to fully utilise a sustainably resourced Forestry Commission to deliver their expectations regarding the level of tree cover and improve the management of private and public forests in England.
7. An expanded Public Forest Estate would result in the delivery of greater public benefit through:
 - an increase in home-grown FSC certified timber;
 - more countryside access through the provision of new areas of urban green space;
 - improvements in health as more people are able to access woodland;
 - expanding a cost-effective way of combating and adapting to climate change;
 - helping to mitigate against flooding and protecting clean water supplies; and
 - an expansion in green jobs and a more sustainable future for us all.

Balanced Approach

8. Forests and woods are places of great beauty where everyone can get active in the countryside, observe wildlife, appreciate historic landscapes and enjoy the natural world.
9. Forests and woods offer opportunities for health-giving recreation, both physical and mental. They provide opportunities for volunteering and for the acquisition of new skills through such voluntary work. They extend education beyond the classroom and in later life.
10. Forests and woods offer a range of habitats for wildlife. They help mitigate climate change and produce a renewable energy resource, supporting a low carbon economy and a varied ecosystem. The Forestry Commission is committed to the restoration of ancient woodlands and open habitat components of the public forests and woodlands to improve the condition, extent and connectivity of conservation-priority woodlands, non-woodland habitats and associated populations of conservation-priority species. Overall, the Public Forest Estate has 9000 hectares designated as National Nature Reserves and 80000 hectares as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. (By early

2010, 99% of SSSIs managed by the Forestry Commission were in favourable condition. This exceeded the government target of 95% and is greater than any other public, private or charitable organisation).

11. Forests and woods produce the national timber resource and support associated timber industries and businesses. The wood-processing industry benefits from the continuity of supply, as set out in the Forestry Commission's published forecasts; this enables the industry to plan for new investment. Timber from the Forestry Commission is certified through the Forestry Stewardship Council's UK Woodland Assurance Scheme. This ensures that all FC managed woodlands are managed sustainably.
12. Forests and woods provide timber and other wood markets based products and the Forestry Commission's role is crucial in terms of local and national supply. The UKWAS accreditation of FC timber and the FC's commitment to bring a guaranteed long-term volume of timber to the private sector is crucial within the industry as it allows businesses the opportunity to plan and invest for the future.
13. Forests provide the potential to develop renewable energy from wood fuel, which could generate valuable new green business in rural areas across the country, as well as helping to combat climate change by reducing our reliance on burning fossil fuels. New markets for wood fuel help to create and maintain rural jobs as well as contributing to the sustainable management of woodlands. The Forestry Commission has done pioneering work on this, with both national and regional initiatives such as the Woodland Carbon Task Force and Woodfuel East in East Anglia. This worked with woodland owners and managers, contractors and users to facilitate the use of locally grown woodfuel in efficient, modern boilers as a clean way to provide heat for business and community buildings, saving money and CO₂.
14. Forests and woods are important for tourism and local businesses, with visits to the Public Forest Estate generating up to £2bn each year from over 40 million visitors. This revenue is crucial to the local economy, in particular in supporting small local businesses such as cycle hire, food outlets, local pubs, shops, bed-and-breakfast, Go-Ape (adventure centres in forests), cafes, and outdoor gear specialists.
15. There are economic benefits from improved mental and physical health from use of forests and woods, in terms of savings through reduced burdens on the NHS and through reduced loss of productivity due to sickness. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has estimated that if everyone in the UK had easy access to green space there would be £2.bn savings to the NHS every year. It also calculates that the 'Walking the Way to Health Initiative' in England saves £7 for every £1 it spends.
16. In rural areas, the Forestry Commission is a significant employer, helping to sustain local economies and communities. Visits to the Public Forest Estate

generate up to £2bn each year from recreation and this supports other tourism providers and businesses.

Strategic Framework

17. Any future solution must involve sustainable long-term funding so that the Forestry Commission can expand its work promoting business, in education, recreation and conservation and have a secure future.

Grants and Advice

18. The Forestry Commission must be appropriately resourced to act as advisor for private woodlands.
19. The Government must see the Forestry Commission as the main source of advice for all on trees, woodlands and forests in England; this is especially important as fewer than 50% of non-Public Forest Estate woods are in any form of management scheme.

The Right Research

20. The FCTU jointly represents scientists, technicians, professionals and support staff in the Forestry Commission's Forest Research Agency (FR) and the experts and analysts in the Forestry Commission (FC) who, together, are responsible for defining, commissioning and carrying out research. They are committed to ensuring that Great Britain should continue to support stable, sustainable forestry institutions in which our members can serve the British public and the national interest.
21. Forestry research in Great Britain is aligned closely to the needs of its users, continuing a strong tradition of public and private sector partnership, under which the GB forest estate was significantly expanded and sound principles of forest management were established. New techniques have been developed, yet this tradition of applied research to meet the needs of practitioners continues today. FR maintains effective feedback systems to ensure that its research remains relevant to current needs. This is part of the reason why UK forest research continues to be recognised across the world for its relevance and quality.
22. It is vital that Great Britain maintains stability in this regard and does not lose its only institute dedicated to forest science.
23. Trees have a vital role to play in the mitigation of climate change, especially in water catchment, carbon sequestration, carbon emissions and air quality. These contribute to meeting the Government's pledges on flood risk and action on climate change.
24. Forestry research is going to be critically important in the next two decades and beyond due to changing climates, changing tree species suitability, new,

aggressive pests and diseases, the need for new silvicultural management approaches, etc. GB needs a strong, experienced research team to address these issues with the continuation of the broad based understanding (currently provided by FR) of the holistic requirement for successful research, e.g. critical research into tree disease also requires a strong team of field research staff, statisticians, silviculturists, climate change experts, as well as pathologists.

25. FR represents the only grouping of forest scientists in the UK capable of delivering scientific advice and research on British forestry across a broad range of topics and disciplines.

Conclusion

26. We believe that the forests and woodlands of the Public Forest Estate, grants, licences and research are best protected and sustained under the stewardship of the Forestry Commission.
27. We believe that a properly resourced Forestry Commission should continue to develop its role: Balancing social, environmental and economic values on behalf of the public in perpetuity.