

FCTU Update on the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme (England)

The purpose of this briefing is to update all union members and others in the whole of the Forestry Commission on the aspects of this programme and the level of union activity that is being directed towards ensuring meaningful consultation in accordance with the Partnership Agreement.

The Woodland Policy Enabling Programme is required to implement parts of the Government Policy Statement, which are within the remit of the FC. The programme consists of 3 projects; (i) Public Forest Estate Management Organisation (PFEMO) – greater arms length agreements, stakeholders, staff, now within the framework of this programme; (ii) Forest Functions Review (FS) and (iii) Cross-Border Project – implications for Central Services, including FR.

FCTU are concerned that meaningful consultation on the first two parts of the programme have so far not provided any opportunity for your union to discuss these issues with you.

Following our request to meet with Director England, we did so on May 15th in Bristol and put forward a series of questions; however the answers given did not ease our disquiet about this whole process of splitting up the FC in England.

We sent a further letter to Director England on 23rd May on the subject of setting up the new organisation to manage the PFE. We asked for you to be accorded the opportunity to put forward your views on the proposal prior to the FC taking forward recommendations to Ministers. It was stated that they are currently working on options with DEFRA and would maintain close contact with FCTU through this process.

On 3rd June we responded by seeking a clear and meaningful consultation period with the FC on the setting up of this new organisation. We had been informed that the FC and DEFRA were intending to meet with the Forest Campaigns Network on 18th June to discuss and seek views on a draft version of the proposed Mission and Objectives for the new organisation. However, FC England has now clarified that this will be primarily an information sharing event and not part of any formal consultation.

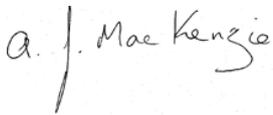
In a further response from the FC on 6th June we were again told that we would receive information as and when FC considered it appropriate to do so and that we would be given information in advance of the managers' briefing to England staff due on 26th June. However and rather alarmingly we were told that no assurance would be forthcoming on entering into consultation prior to any proposals going to Ministers. It is likely that we will require further discussions with the senior FC team in England and expressing again the level of frustration that many union members are feeling in how this process is being conducted.

We can now confirm that a further meeting between FCTU and FC England will take place on June 14th. We will report back on the outcomes from this meeting.

The review of the Government's forestry functions has been running alongside the Triennial Review of Natural England and the Environment Agency to ascertain how best to deliver these functions in the future. FCTU were alarmed to discover at a meeting on 11th April that options had been worked up and were being presented to a variety of stakeholders for their views on which ones should be taken forward. It was as a result of this event that a meeting with the new Director was requested.

On 3rd June the FC began to formally consult on the forest functions and presented FCTU with four key questions and requested that we supply feedback on five key variables. We are currently seeking the views of all members on this and have to respond back to the FC by 27th June. FCTU will offer an initial response to this review which hopefully will aid members and provide the FC with our early thinking on this issue.

In regard to the third strand in the programme; the Cross-Border Project, we are being briefed by Director Central Services at regular intervals with the next staff briefing arranged for 26th June. We are also setting up a separate Staff Council to engage with the FC on issues affecting members in Central Services.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "a. J. MacKenzie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'a'.

Allan MacKenzie
FCTU Departmental Secretary
10 June 2013