

FORESTRY COMMISSION WALES NATIONAL COMMITTEE MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 26TH MARCH 2010 IN ABERYSTWYTH

- Present:** Jon Owen Jones, Chairman
Roger Cooper
Trefor Owen
Clive Thomas
- Judith Webb
John Lloyd Jones
Peter Garson
- Apologies:** Rory O'Sullivan
- Also attending:** Martin Veale
James Laing (Secretariat)

INTRODUCTION

1. JOJ welcomed Martin Veale and received apologies from ROS.

MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

2. The minutes of 12th February were approved as a true record.
3. JLJ noted the outstanding action regarding Newborough Forest and asked if infraction procedures were likely to be instigated against WAG. PG reassured the committee that this was not the case.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

4. TMO commenced his report by underlining FCWs focus on woodland creation. JOJ questioned the overall demand for the BWW scheme and TMO responded that there was strong demand to enter the scheme. JLJ queried the accuracy of the figures presented in paragraph 5.

Action: Check accuracy of BWW figures in report and reissue to Committee

5. TMO continued his report by outlining negotiations on four coal bed methane development sites on the Assembly Government woodland estate. This may provide further revenue streams. Good progress achieved on the Heads of the Valleys partnership and there were further opportunities to engage with the urban agenda.
6. JLJ highlighted the need for Snowdonia National Park Authority to take an active role in the centre of excellence in Coed y Brenin Forest Park.

TMO

Action: Provide briefing on Outdoor, Centre of Excellence in Coed y Brenin Forest Park to Committee

PG

FINANCE REPORT

7. FY09/10 – Martin Veale (MV) confirmed that the forecast outturn had not changed materially since end of February. FCW was experiencing an expenditure surge towards the end of the financial year. This expenditure profile needed to be addressed in future years. MV reiterated the potential of the flexible funding reserve to address future funding issues. He summarised his report by telling the committee that future report formats would change in line with the move to accounting by objectives. JLJ raised the issue of end of year spending. TMO was disappointed that this still happened, as had been raised in the Value for Money report.
8. With reference to Annex 1 of the report JOJ expressed concern that the expenditure on renewable energy was greater than income. PG responded that this was due to start up costs in the planning phase of the programme and low-income work such as roadside vegetation management that avoided forest management costs. JW acknowledged the clarity provided by the new financial format in Annex 1, but indicated that a commentary would be required to support the figures showing how FCW are delivering *Woodlands for Wales* and the Corporate Plan. The committee noted the report.

Action: Additional commentary on figures to be provided with next Finance Report

MV

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

9. JW thanked MV for attending the recent ARC and appreciated the speed with which he was getting to grips with key issues. CT queried the recorded discussion in the minutes on Corporate Risk Register 5 WAG policy. He confirmed FCW are in control of the FCW Corporate Plan, but need to work hard to influence WAG policy. MV added that all outstanding queries from WAO on the International Financial Reporting Standards had been addressed. The committee noted the report.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

10. CT clarified the approach to performance measures, and asked the Committee to note that targets cannot be changed once agreed. JLJ agreed the need for a mixture of targets that can be influenced, and those that are under FCW control. RC expressed concern over 3 indicators (5b, 7d & 7e) as being too precise, not under FCW control and beyond our influence. CT agreed that these were targets with greater risk attached but argued that some influence was possible and that the alternative would be a very parochial approach resulting in output, rather than outcome targets. JLJ believed the targets would allow FCW to measure direction of travel and change in response to the Corporate Plan, as more information becomes available. There followed a short discussion on the recent Ministerial announcement of 100,000 hectares of woodland creation and link to FCW targets.

11. JOJ highlighted the difference between income and expenditure in Corporate Programme 3. CT explained there was greater expenditure at these early stages as the programme develops and that the income figures do not reflect the full gross position from wind farm option fees. The committee agreed the corporate plan needed more detail to explain these figures.

Action: Corporate Plan to include description alongside figures of Corporate Programme 3

CT

12. JLJ queried the strategic direction on woodland grants noted in Corporate Programme 1, as it could fundamentally alter the way FCW works. TMO responded by saying if the risk of transferring FCW grant schemes was unacceptable in terms of achieving woodland related outcomes, then FCW would not argue for integration. He added he was keen to explore the opportunities at this stage. JW raised a final point on ensuring that any guidance on native tree provenances should reflect the emerging evidence on climate change impacts. CT confirmed this issue would be reflected in the Biodiversity Policy Position, which will influence Corporate Programmes 9 and 10.

13. The committee approved the Corporate Plan subject to amendments.

14. Welsh Woodlands Policy Position – Michelle van-Velzen tabled the policy position and reminded the committee that it did not cover individual trees or incorporate recent comments on woodland creation announced by the Minister. Key stakeholders had been engaged in drafting the policy position, which elaborated the contents of *Woodlands for Wales*. The committee identified

sections of the document where some of the language requires further clarification.

15. The committee approved the policy position subject to amendments.

WOODLAND STRATEGY ADVISORY PANEL REPORT

16. RC tabled his report and added that he had received feedback on the Read Report from panel members. The committee noted the report.

ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT WOODLAND ESTATE RESEARCH PROJECT

17. Bill MacDonald confirmed that the project initiation document had been approved and explained that there are many lessons to be learned from the recent Scotland and England exercises looking at their public estates. JLJ pointed out this was a fundamental study on the need for WAG to own woodlands. JOJ asked if FCW was looking at examples outside the UK. Bill MacDonald responded that only limited work on this can be done within the set timescale, but had spoken with selected external stakeholders. TMO concluded by saying he planned to present his initial report to the Minister in the summer. The committee noted the update.

PLANT HEALTH UPDATE

18. Richard Siddons outlined four key updates on the GB Biosecurity Programme, Phytophthora ramorum, Acute Oak Decline and Citrus Longhorn Beetle. PG asked if the Plant Health Regulations were still appropriate or needed tightening up in light of recent plant health developments. Richard Siddons confirmed that the EU was revising its approach to plant health issues. JW emphasised the need for awareness training and Richard Siddons added that FERA resources were being accessed to provide training for FCW staff. The committee noted the report.

FOREST RESEARCH IN WALES UPDATE

19. Hugh Evans tabled his report and added that the Forest Research Executive Board are meeting in Wales and attending the Royal Welsh Show in July. He said there had been good progress in developing links with research groups in Wales. There was a brief discussion regarding the Research Forest initiative and the use of the Dyfi catchment as a possible site. The committee noted the report.

National Committee

AOB

20.JL reminded the committee of the need to complete the self-assessment questionnaire recently circulated.

Action: Resend questionnaire to relevant NC members

JL

Next National Committee meeting - 14th May in Cardiff – location tbc