

Agenda Item 9

26th March 2010

WNC 06.10

FOREST RESEARCH IN WALES UPDATE

Purpose

1. This paper presents an update to the Board on current developments for Forest Research (FR) in Wales.

Management

2. Peter Freer-Smith, Research Director FR visited FR in Wales in October. We discussed progress with Director FCW and met with staff of the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) and the Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences (IGES) of Aberystwyth University. Climate Change research, prospects for development of catchment-scale studies including research forests, as well as potential for implementation of remote sensing technology were key items for discussion.

Staffing

3. A meeting of all FR staff based in Wales was held in November in Brecon. Staff discussed plans for research, surveys and technology transfer in Wales and were also addressed by James Pendlebury, Chief Executive FR. The Head of the Centre for Forestry & Climate Change (F&CC) and the Head of the Centre for Forest Resources & Management outlined the work of their respective Centres. FC Wales Policy team also joined the meeting and provided an outline of developments in the *Woodlands for Wales* delivery; this valuable interaction will be a regular item for future meetings.

Finance and research opportunities

4. The Interreg IVA IMPACT project has finally commenced (official start date 1 December 2009). With FR as Lead Partner, it is worth around €490k over 3 years to FR, including 25% match funding from FC Wales. FR in Wales is also part of the recently won ISEFOR FP7 project led by Aberdeen University (value around £12k per year to FR), which will start mid 2010. A number of other funding streams is being investigated. New opportunities on Plant Health, especially on pine wood nematode under the EU FP7 programme have been identified and FR in Wales coordinated a bid (this follows his coordination of a previous EU FP5 project on pinewood nematode) for the January 2010 deadline.

National Committee

5. I met with Chris Lea (Head of Welsh Assembly Government Technical Services Division) in November. We discussed how FR can better integrate with WAG needs for evidence gathering, research and dissemination of information. Immediate opportunities in Plant Health work and in Ecosystem Services were identified. I subsequently met WAG Plant Health staff in Aberystwyth in February.
6. As part of scoping delivery of current and new survey, monitoring and research opportunities in Wales and the English borders, cross border FR staff now meet at monthly intervals. A Service Level Agreement (SLA) for FR Technical Services Unit to provide work for FC Wales Harvesting & Marketing has been agreed. Effective delivery of this SLA is important and is an opportunity to develop further work directly with FC Wales.
7. A Knowledge, Economy, Skills and Scholarship (KESS) studentship on remote sensing has been secured. FR in Wales is a co-supervisor to enable the project to benefit from the Welsh connection.
8. A very useful research opportunity/funding meeting was held with FC Wales in February. Several FR staff attended. We identified a number of areas, subsequently highlighted in the WfW Action Plan, for collaboration and joint bids for funding. At the request of FCW, work on development of tree health indicators to provide outcomes for the *Woodlands for Wales* has commenced and involves FR staff in F&CC.
9. I was invited to talk to a Workshop at IGES, Aberystwyth in relation to exploitation of research results and collaborative research. This was a useful networking opportunity and involved funders, Intellectual Property professionals and researchers from the university.
10. The European & Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO) Forest Quarantine Panel met in Cardiff last week. FR in Wales is a member of the Panel and the meeting was devoted to the threats to European forests from pine wood nematode, emerald ash borer, citrus longhorn beetle and the fungus *Chalara fraxinia*. The Panel was welcomed and addressed by the Minister for Rural Affairs, Elin Jones on 17 March.

FR in Wales Development Plan

11. Following various iterations involving FR Executive Board and the Head of Policy and Programming FC Wales, the Development Plan is now complete and has been circulated to FC Wales Management Board and National Committee. The plan will be updated annually with new targets for staffing, income and research dissemination for a range of stakeholders.

National Committee

12. Suggestions for new research directions and dissemination opportunities are welcome and I am happy to meet any FC Wales staff to discuss potential research and collaboration.

13. The main Performance Measure for 2010 will be to advance the Research Forest/Natural Laboratory planning and, if possible, initiation. Collaboration with the research community and funders in Wales is essential to moving this forward.

Communications

14. There will be three main dissemination events in Wales during 2010:

- Climate Change workshop on 18 May in Llandrindod Wells, involving several FR speakers;
- A Workshop on what FR can offer Wales (similar strategy to the recent event for Defra). The preferred speakers will be the Chief Executive, the 3 Centre Heads and Hugh Evans of FR and FR in Wales;
- A research update seminar for FCW and other stakeholders with a range of topics of research interest to Wales (probably in the autumn).

Risks

15. Good progress has been made in development of FR in Wales. However, the funding situation remains difficult, as outlined by the Chief Executive, FR in his presentation to FR in Wales staff. There is also a need to diversify the research to exploit emerging research and policy agendas in Wales. This will be a priority item during 2010.

Recommendations

16. The Board is asked to note the contents of this paper.

Dr Hugh Evans
Head of FR in Wales
March 2010