

**FORESTRY COMMISSION WALES NATIONAL COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26th MAY 2006
AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY, ABERYSTWYTH**

Present : Gareth Wardell, Chairman
Anthony Bosanquet
Geraint George
Gareth Jones
John Good
Ian Forshaw
Trefor Owen
Jon Westlake

Also Attending: Peter Garson, FCW
Clive Thomas, NC Secretariat
Sue Fuge (Minutes Secretary)
Michelle Bromley, FCW [part]
Hugh Evans, FR [part]

INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and congratulated Geraint George on his re-appointment to the Committee.

NATIONAL FOREST ESTATE WINDFARM PROGRAMME

2. JW presented Paper WNC22/06, produced to provide the NC with a briefing on progress to date and to inform members about future developments. He explained that Appendix 1 had been revised following discussions at the previous meeting, and the Chairman said that he was happy with both the process, and the fact that the NC had been scrutinising the process without knowing the companies involved. GJ also confirmed that he was happy with the paper in terms of governance and the role of the NC.
3. JW ran through the key issues in the paper, and highlighted the extension to the timetable, which had come about as a result of a change in Solicitors. GJ asked if there was a provisional date for the awarding of contracts and for the work to start. JW replied that if evaluation started in mid August, the best estimate was December, the worst case February 2007. The recommendations would then need to go to IF, the EPC and the Minister for approval, which would take another 3-4 weeks. JW also stressed that subsequent to awarding options that there may well be an objection to some of the planning applications, and so they could go to public enquiry, which would further delay implementation. GJ highlighted the fact that Ministers would be in pre-election *purdah* by April and that this could have

implications on the timetable for awarding options. He urged FC to contact Special Advisors now to flag this up. The NC fully agreed with this approach.

Action: GJ & IF to discuss contact with Special Advisors

RURAL DEVELOPMENT REGULATION (RDR) AND PAYING AGENCY

4. PG had prepared paper WNC19/06 to inform the NC of the changes and subsequent implications to the FC's paying agency responsibilities. The paper also explained that the new RDR would require some changes to the administration of land management grants that would lead to resource implications for the FC. PG highlighted the key points and stressed that the FC were not opposed to a single paying agency but wanted to ensure it did not affect the FC's current customers.
5. PG said that if EPC wanted to hold the budget then the FC would support that, although the transition arrangements would need to be agreed. GJ replied that EPC would have to follow whatever the regulations said but he added that as Accounting Officer, a role that he and IF shared, they needed to consider the arrangements to ensure that grants were paid in a proper manner. He felt that the paper did address these issues, and he agreed that the FC could undertake the recommended actions in the paper and satisfy the Accounting Officer responsibilities. GJ added that he would remain personally responsible for all payments issued and would therefore need to put in place robust monitoring systems. GJ's advice was for the NC to give PG guidance and then for PG and IF to attend the Paying Agency Accreditation Committee in the Assembly where the final decision would be made.
6. There was some discussion about the impact to the BWW scheme and PG assured the NC that the timetable for the scheme would not be affected by these changes.
7. IF assured the NC that the FC were keeping the private sector informed on developments and would be updating them at the meeting scheduled for June.
8. GJ explained that the consultation document on the RDP would be published that week and he asked the NC whether they wished to put forward their own response. He added that he could arrange for a general RDR presentation for the NC and the NC felt that this would be helpful although may not be possible in the time-scale.

Action: PG to arrange for the NC preferred direction on Paying Agency to be tabled to the Accreditation Committee

NC Secretariat to investigate possibility of extra meeting for RDP presentation

Copy of consultation document to go to NC members as soon as possible

BWW – WOODLAND EXPANSION GRANTS

9. PG also presented paper WNC21/06, produced to update the NC on progress with the woodland expansion grant structure for BWW and to give the NC the

opportunity to provide guidance on how these incentives should be finalised and validated.

10. After some discussion it was agreed that there should be one more meeting of the Review Group to review developments and take comments from members. The NC agreed with this course of action and asked that any fundamental areas of concern be brought back to the NC at a future meeting.

Action: PG to arrange for final meeting of Review Group

DEVELOPMENT OF WIND FARMS ON NAW LEASEHOLD WOODLAND ESTATE

11. TO presented paper WNC17/06, which Ian Shaw had prepared. The paper sought the NC's agreement to a proposed approach to be adopted by FC(W), for responding to enquiries about wind farm development by freeholders of land leased to the National Assembly. He explained that this paper had been prompted by an approach from one of the FC's landlords, but he asked the NC to focus on the principles rather than the individual case and to develop a policy for a consistent approach.

12. The paper generated a good deal of discussion. The Chairman raised concerns about the negative PR that may arise, but conceded that in terms of the paper, which the NC agreed was well thought out, it would be difficult to disagree. There was further discussion about whether joint developments may begin to take place both on leasehold and freehold land and JW confirmed that some bidders had been asking for details of leaseholders on adjoining land.

13. GJ suggested that the Minister should be given an update on the Wind Farm programme, and that this matter should also be flagged up and this was agreed.

Action: JW, IF & GJ to update Minister on progress with the Wind Farm programme

14. JW highlighted concerns that the FC would be seen as the developer because this would be on their land, and as FC had agreed not to be involved with the planning process it was important to make this explicit in the policy. JG agreed with this and also agreed with the need for FC to handle the PR concerns and address the common misconception that the FC were involved to only derive income from these developments.

WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

15. Michelle Bromley joined the meeting and made a presentation on the Water Framework Directive, highlighting the pressures and the opportunities for the forestry sector. She also ran through Paper WNC18/06 and invited comments on the proposed engagement process and implications and risks.

16. GG referred to para 13 of the paper which explained that FC(W) had not yet been allocated a place on the Dee and Severn River Basin Liaison Panels, (RBLP) and he stressed that it was crucial for FC(W) to be represented. IF agreed and

explained that he was in contact with the Environment Agency, and was pushing hard for a place at the table.

17. The Chairman felt there were many elements in the paper to consider, including the transposition of the Directive. He asked what the differences were in Wales, but MB replied that this was led by the Environment Agency of England and Wales so the regulations and timetables falling out of the directive applied to both England & Wales. The only differences would be in Scotland. The Chairman also asked about the flood risk management part of the paper and stressed that although FR had been working on this, in wider terms there seemed to be little going on in Britain.
18. JG explained that WSAP had also received a presentation on this and had felt that it would be increasingly expensive to implement this directive as the expectations were for constantly improving standards over time. Some panel members thought this could not be accommodated within existing resources. They had also felt that ecology was driving this initiative and it seemed to be at the expense of water yield. WSAP felt there was a lot of research information regarding acidification, water yield etc but it was the application of this that was important, and they had questioned how to make the best use of existing research and resource the remainder that needed to be covered.
19. GG asked if the FC were aware of the collaborative research project between Aberystwyth and Bangor University and stressed that FC really needed to be involved with that.

Action: GG to provide more detail on Mor ir Mynydd to FC(W)

20. TO referred to the map of acidification that MB had shown and pointed out that there were potential hotspots in West Wales and so it was those areas that the FC needed to focus on. He stressed that land managers and policy makers needed to know what had to be done and how much it would cost, and that any work needed to be carried out in a structured way.
21. GJ said that this Directive was a high priority for WAG as there were very serious infraction procedures for failure to comply with the Directive. However, he added that it was the EA who monitored and regulated compliance not the Assembly. He added that he had been very interested in the presentation especially in the context of flood management.
22. The NC felt that there was a lot going on in this area, but it was not co-ordinated and there was no Wales wide approach. MB explained that there was a UK Technical Advice Group and that there was a Welsh representative on that from the CCW, but so far there had been little feedback from this group.
23. In summary, IF said that this was a hugely complicated area that would be brought back to the NC in the future. He stressed that his priority at the moment was to get a place at the RBLP's and that he would raise this at the GB Commissioners meeting. He felt that once this was achieved, the FC could progress onto the more detailed issues.

24. As a final point PG stressed that water quality and water quantity were linked and this Directive was a positive step and should not be seen as a threat. This was agreed.

FOREST RESEARCH UPDATE

25. Dr Hugh Evans of FR joined the meeting and gave a presentation on the background recent changes to FR and the current developments in Wales and GB. He also mentioned that there was currently a review of the Alice Holt location and the Wales office would also be looked at in terms of location and office size. IF stressed that he was keen on a stronger Wales focus and was being supported in this by Jim Lynch, who felt that it was important to have people based in Wales. He added that he and the Chairman would be meeting Mr Lynch in September to discuss this.

26. The Chairman thanked HE for an interesting and strategic presentation, and invited comments from the NC. JG said that the location of the FR people was not as important as the relevance of the research to Welsh people and he stressed that there were some key Welsh issues that he hoped HE would continue to support. HE agreed and said that he was currently carrying out a review of what was going on in Wales in terms of FR.

27. CT suggested that it was worth revisiting the Welsh input to the Science & Innovation Strategy as a starting point for the FC(W) representatives on the research programme advisory groups.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

28. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising

DIRECTORS REPORT

29. RFS Meeting – IF explained that he had been able to attend part of the meeting and the Dinner and that AB had also been present. He said that there had been a lot of discussion about BWW, and that there had been some very positive communication on BWW in Wales, including an article in F&BT. He felt that the effort the G&L team had put in to the consultation and managing the PR had really paid off and he recorded his thanks to the G&L team for the excellent job they had done.

30. Forward Look – IF informed the NC that a review of the forward look for 2005/06 would be brought to the next meeting.

Action: NC Secretariat to add to July Agenda

31. Appointment Process for New Commissioners – AB asked for an update on this and IF replied that the FC were taking a fresh look at what was required from a Commissioner, and that the process had already started. They would be looking closely at personal requirements and individual specifications. He added that the

NC needed to think about encouraging key people to apply. CT added that the appointment of the WSAP Chair would also be advertised at the same time.

WSAP CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

32. JG had produced a report and explained that the WSAP meeting originally planned for March had been delayed due to poor weather and rescheduled for May.
33. Most of the meeting had been taken up with the outcomes of the Conference held in January and the proposed revision of the Wales Woodland Strategy (WWS). He said that the WSAP members had been happy to adopt the 'Supplement' approach although there had been concerns raised about the practicality of having what could turn out to be several supplements. He added that members were happy to be involved with developing the supplement and the Action Plan but had stressed that it should not be rushed.
34. JG also reported that there had been a lot of discussion about the FC's policy and guidance for forestry land use change and how it linked to the Assembly's drive to CCF or LISS. TO replied that the FC had received some good guidance from the meeting

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

35. Communications – AB raised concerns over a number of communication issues. IF replied that the DG was currently working on a new GB Communication Strategy which would help to address this, and he also informed the NC that FC(W) had appointed a Communications Officer (Amanda Roll-Pickering). He added that once Amanda was in place she would come to a future meeting to meet with the Committee members. GG asked if Amanda was bilingual and CT replied that she was not but that her primary role was not as a spokesperson but as a communications manager. He said that although the media officer for FC(W) was Welsh speaking, the lack of fluent staff within the wider business was an issue for FC(W).
36. Qualifications for Rangers & Wardens – GG informed the NC of an initiative being run by CCW, UWLGA, the National Trust and Bangor University which would validate and establish a recognised qualification for Rangers and Wardens. IF said that he would be very keen to hear more information on this and GG agreed to send information to IF. It was also suggested that IF should speak to Roger Thomas of CCW, and this was agreed.

**Action: GG to send information on initiative to IF
IF to meet Roger Thomas CCW to discuss**