

## GB & NI Tree Health Advisory Group Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2014

### Birmingham

#### **Present:**

Roger Coppock (Forestry Commission) (Chair)  
Jane Barbrook (Animal and Plant Health Agency)  
Austin Brady (Woodland Trust)  
John Browne (Natural Resources Wales)  
Hugh Clayden (Forestry Commission Scotland)  
Alan Corson (Forest Enterprise England)  
Jim Crummie (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Northern Ireland)  
Jamie Dewhurst (Confor)  
Diane Stevenson (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Northern Ireland)  
Duncan Stone (Scottish Natural Heritage)  
Ray Hawes (National Trust)  
Jon Heuch (Arboricultural Association/Institute of Chartered Foresters)  
Stewart Hex (Timcon)  
Adrian Jowitt (Natural England)  
John Morgan (Forestry Commission)  
Keith Sacre (Barcham Trees)  
Andrew Smith (Forestry Commission England)  
Nicola Spence (DEFRA)  
Jon Stokes (Tree Council)  
Joan Webber (Forest research)

Lorna Baillie (Forestry Commission, Secretary)

#### **Apologies:**

John Dye (Timcon) – Stuart Hex able to stand in.  
Jo Ellis (FE Scotland) – will remain on mailing list but represented by FCS  
Stuart Morwood (Northern Ireland Forest Service)– replaced by Diane Stevenson and Jim Crummie.  
Caroline Harrison (Confor)  
Chris Cheffings (Joint Nature Conservation Council)  
Harry Frew (Confor) – Jamie Dewhurst and Harry will take turns to represent.  
Nick Boulton (Timber Trades Federation)  
David Sulman (UK Forest Products Association)  
Mike Seville (Country Landowners Association)  
Martin Williams (Welsh Government)

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

Roger welcomed everyone to the meeting.

He outlined the rationale for establishing the group. As responses to diseases and policy are now dealt with on a country basis, there is no overall picture of activity at a GB/NI level. It was recognised that if something is happening at a country level, it is important for all countries to be aware so as to share and apply useful activity/learning as widely as possible.

All members introduced themselves, where they were from and what their job entails.

Roger cautioned that some information of a confidential nature will be shared so everyone should be careful to ensure it does not go to wider audiences, until it is agreed that it can.

A request was made for organisation trees to provide a wider landscape picture and it was felt that this could be delivered through the Go Science project on animal and plant health in the UK, which is due to be published shortly.

## 2. GB & NI Tree Health Advisory Group Terms of Reference

The draft Terms of Reference were discussed in order to refine the details. Issues arising are as detailed below.

### Purpose

- Clarification of boundary is required. For example, does it cross the boundary between agriculture and forestry or should it be dealt with on an ad hoc basis on specific issues? How will the boundary be drawn?

It was agreed that this is a grey area, and it makes sense to look at all areas regarding all trees. Agencies and organisations need to work together to resolve this issue. It was felt that the risk to other plant species in terms of imports makes the grey area less so.

- Is the advisory group to discuss only the FC approach or the wider tree health landscape? What is the scope, where are we aiming to get to?

While the focus is on tree health, and primarily aimed at forest trees, there are instances where there will be a need to address other tree species. Part of the group's work will be to explore how its expertise can be used to best effect, and there was a need to make sure non woodland area is viewed as important.

- The group will work on the wording of this outside the meeting to incorporate the discussions in a revised terms of reference.

### Governance and links

- Wilma Harper as Senior Responsible Officer can raise any issues coming from the Advisory Group direct to the FC Executive Board.
- The group should provide advice to country Chief Plant Health Officers (CPHO) too, rather than just FC.

## Method of working

- In terms of resources, the Group will need to work within existing budgets, and the aim will be to optimise the use of available resources.
- The relationship with other tree health policy groups was queried. The Advisory Group's role is to provide advice to support country groups, where it makes sense to do this at a GB&NI level. The Group does not have an executive function, and this will be made clear in the ToR, as well as the need for close liaison with other country groups to prevent duplication of effort.
- There should be wording to cover the fact that some material may be restricted. It was agreed that for this meeting, material should be restricted to Advisory Group members.
- It was suggested that there should be HMRC involvement with the group as it has an active role in prevention of disease entering the country. Defra is having discussions with the Border Force on operations and how to communicate about the risks. It was felt that since there is this interaction at the moment, the membership does not require expanding at the present time. However, the ToR allow for co-option, and also for speakers to be invited for specific issues.
- The landscaping industry is not represented and it was acknowledged that it is difficult to get a single person who could represent the whole sector. Jon Stokes will lead a small group to identify a suitable candidate with operational expertise and experience of working in representational groups.
- There was a general discussion about the need for biosecurity in the British Standard BS 8545. Keith advised that the draft standard had three paragraphs on biosecurity, one of which stated that there should be one full season in a UK nursery before going in to the UK landscape. A consultation was put out, and objections were raised on the basis that the biosecurity clauses inhibited free trade. As a consequence, they were withdrawn. Keith noted that Barcham Trees have independently taken this on board as policy.
- A further discussion centred on the need for stability in the market place. This is a structural issue where seeds are sown before orders are placed, which differs from the situation in other countries. This exposes the nursery sector to risk, which they try to mitigate by outsourcing, sometimes with unforeseen consequences.

**Action** – John Stokes to discuss with Keith Sacre and Jamie Dewhurst and find someone suitable to represent the landscape industry.

**Action** – Roger Coppock will amend the ToR. The group should aim to agree the revised version by email so that this does not need discussed at the next meeting.

Roger advised that the success of group would be on a cascade principle, people at the meetings should pass on details to their stakeholder constituents.

## 3. Plant Health Service updates

Reports by members were circulated to the group prior to the meeting. Each member who submitted a report provided a summary of the information. Future meetings will be less focussed on updates, and more on emerging issues.

## **DEFRA (Nicola Spence)**

### **UK plant health risk register**

- Used on daily basis.
- Forms basis of monthly standing committee meeting in Brussels.
- Working well, increasingly engaging industry.
- On phase 2 – looking at improving functionality, ease of use.
- Available on FERA website. Devolved administrations can take pests of interest and use in own particular way that's relevant to country.
- Selected risks taken to ministers each month.

### **Contingency planning**

- Pest specific plans being discussed. This will be tested with the industry.
- Publicly available for comment. Received comments on acute oak decline from wide range of stakeholders.
- Local resilience groups have a role on the ground.

There is concern with the number of local authorities in the UK. Nicola advised there are local events/discussions so they know what is planned and what might be expected. Jon Stokes noted that he has a meeting coming up with DCLG and can provide feedback on this to the group.

### **EU regulations**

- We can restrict movements/take action if we find pests.
- Surveillance so know where pests are.
- Working hard to identify risks then take to EU.

Make people aware that there is a profession involved around plant health, and developing a framework for this to become formalised.

Ambitions for Plant Health information portal as the one place to go for information. Outbreaks need somewhere people can go to for queries on specific disease /legislation/imports issues. Plant Health means different things to different people and there is still confusion over this, so the Portal will help the issue of communication.

It was agreed that the Advisory Group could act as a sounding board for the portal development.

**ACTION** – Group to be used for feedback for the portal at future meeting.

## **Forestry Commission**

### **John Morgan**

- Redundant legislation will be revoked
- Extra Defra money been directed to dunnage – interceptions have gone up three fold. Successful outcomes from this - serious interception from Turkey to Scotland, material collected from over 100 sites.

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- Good support at ministerial level.
- Surveillance stepped up.
- Commissioned Lantra to produce biosecurity e-learning package.
- Upped protected zone plots (almost doubled) - encouraging results.
- Heat Treatment Protocol of larch bark available for industry to use. Accepted by policy groups in England and Wales.

## Issues/Queries

- Method of advising about new legislation. Perceived lack of communication to the trade.
- Plant Health guide is good but a consolidated guide to tree plants for planting is needed. Need something similar to importation guidance.

**Action** – John M to discuss with Jamie how communication with the trade on notifications can be improved.

## Andrew Smith (FC England)

Brief summary of the plans for action on OPM next year

A further Chalara survey is not planned for next year, so the map details will quickly become out of date. Is the map of Chalara extent useful to people?

FC is producing a new locally focussed plant health newsletter to stimulate feedback on people's desire to receive local information

**ACTION-** Andrew to put link out to newsletter to members of the group.

Tree Alert – New web based version due to be launched Feb/March 15, and this will facilitate next step of Observatree. Not been possible to provide full functionality as an app, though the website can still be used on a tablet, where wireless of 3/4G reception is available.

## Hugh Clayden (FC Scotland)

- Restructuring of the Scottish Tree Health Advisory Group has taken place but will require consolidation . Need to manage expectations of what FCS can deliver.
- *P.ramorum*. Reduced spread and impacts seen in 2014. Climate assessment by CEH suggested the strong influence of weather in generating the surge in infection seen in south west Scotland in 2013. The 2014 'lull' should be taken as an opportunity to get ahead of the disease
- Chalara – Cambridge modelling helpful. There is still thought to be scope to slow down arrival in the north west of Scotland. Elsewhere, and based on recent observations in the south east, significant under recording of early symptoms is thought to be occurring. The expectation is for the disease to become more apparent in 2015.
- *Dothistroma* – Communication issue in terms of managing the disease, particularly in nursery situations, as the disease is widespread. However, the implications of the genetic variation within *D. septosporum* need to be considered and a

precautionary position with planting taken in the flagship Caledonian pinewoods. There had been a recent productive meeting with the nursery sector, the aims of which were to explore new ways of helping that sector become part of the wider solutions in terms of managing DNB.

- Pine Tree Lappet Moth – Uncertainties about the potential impact of this moth in relation to tree stress caused by other pathogens such as DNB. A new surveillance and containment strategy was now being implemented. Male moths have now been detected for the first time in a native pinewood (Strathfarrar) but tree glue banding will now be required to determine whether a new breeding population is present (i.e. caterpillars present).
- *P. austrocedrae* – The number of confirmed infections (circa 70) suggests this pathogen is widespread in Scotland. Further surveys are planned over the winter months. In the meantime, statutory action has been suspended, owners now simply being advised of biosecurity and planting guidance.

Hugh stressed the point that communication is easy with those who want to listen. Support mechanisms (such as how grants are dispersed) don't necessarily help to facilitate communication with those reluctant to engage, and other communication channels need to be found.

## **Scottish Government (John Speirs)**

Roger briefly covered this entry. Proposal for a new Centre of Expertise in Plant Health in Scotland – will cover at another meeting. Scotland is also developing its own Plant Health Strategy, which will complement the GB one. Likely publication in 2016 after extensive stakeholder consultation.

Hugh Clayden reported that an extremely useful, second Scottish Plant Health Workshop had been held on 8 December. As well as updates on a range of plant health matters, the Workshop also sought input to the development of the Scottish Plant Health Strategy.

## **Wales (John Browne NRW)**

- John is speaking to the legal team to try and resolve some complications with amended Wales legislation.
- *P. ramorum* Larch disease. Having biggest impact in Wales, seems large but a couple of hundred hectares is being cleared. Favourable weather conditions in 2014 suggest a low amount of new findings in May 2015.
- Amount of larch timber produced in Wales is up to 30% from 5% of total cut.

## **Animal and Plant Health Agency (Jane Barbrook)**

- *P. ramorum* – Extra funding to roll over what was left of the programme ending in March 15.
- This year, not as many outbreaks. No more *P. kernoviae* sites identified.

## **Northern Ireland (Diane Stevenson and Jim Crummie)**

- Detailed report on Chalara, to be discussed at Plant Health risk group next week. Anticipate reports from Republic and Northern Ireland.

- Good eye on wider environment and working with colleagues.
- Working on guidelines for private land owners to help with dealing with trees in event of pest or disease spreading.
- Tree Watch app under development– jointly hosted with Ireland.
- Research –developing research programmes with AFBI and sharing findings.

## 4. Research Update

### Forest Research (Joan Webber)

- Advisory service, Alice Holt and NRS, deal with enquiries around tree health, mainly through Tree Alert.
- Apr-Dec 2014 more than 3000 enquiries in to the database (more than 300% increase over 3-4 years ago). Mainly Chalara or P.ramorum but also the front line for picking up new organisms.
- In the UK, a new pathogen P.siscuensis found on alder (1 case), also Sirococcus sugi, which affects cedar and hemlock. Notable crown thinning.
- One to prevent entry to is Swiss Needle Cast on Douglas Fir. Issue on West Coast of America – big survey in Oregon each year. Affects needles, is a foliar disease which causes a gradual decline in tree (not mortality but affects productivity).
- P.ramorum – 2 lineages (EU1 and EU2) in UK. EU2 still seems to be localised to SW Scotland and NI, no signs of moving very quickly out of these areas.
- With the advances in molecular techniques and increased surveillance it is thought likely that there will be more tree health pests found but this should not be misinterpreted as indication that a surge of new pests has entered the country., it is not that the situation is worse than previously thought.

Joan was asked if there has been any research to find out which plant populations are likely to be affected first by new pathogens. This could help to identify areas that are more susceptible. Joan advised it should be quite straightforward to complete this work.

### DEFRA (Nicola Spence)

- Future proofing plant health – just commissioned a longer, larger project. Comprehensive, involving a number of partners.
- New research on acute oak decline. Projects starting in the summer.
- Commissioning evaluation of the control of OPM.
- Looking at potential for modelling to help inform future threats.
- Looking ahead to priorities for next year e.g. risk register.

### SNH (Duncan Stone)

- Working closely with FCS and others in Scottish Government.

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- Focused on longer term resilience. 1- Woodland conservation is a much longer time scale (150 + years) than standard commercial rotations and 2- Likely to fail to control some of the things presently identified or which will arrive in the future.
- Looking beyond current standard recommendations.
- Looking at insurance/diversity/contingency plans.
- Possible joint project for contingency planning across different species e.g. marine
- New project underway under the auspices of Climate Change Risk Assessment. Useful to invite James Morison to a future meeting to update the Advisory Group on this.

**ACTION-** Roger to plan for inclusion in future agenda.

## **NE (Adrian Jowitt)**

- Involved in study on ecological impacts of ash dieback. Hope to put in to practical guide for forest managers.
- Monitoring impacts of Chalara on woodlands and wildlife in Derbyshire.
- Working with FC on OPM work.
- Future proofing plant health link.

## **5. Non-Governmental Perspectives**

### **Jon Heuch**

- Theme of communication is important. There are people who want to know what they should be looking out for/how they can improve practice.

### **Ray Hawes**

- A lot of what is being discussed will affect the industry. The National Trust is keen to be kept up to date with what is going on.

### **Jon Stokes**

- DEFRA funded project on non-woodland ash – focussed on England, attempt to look at issues on non-woodland setting (everything that isn't recorded by FC). H&S costs of tree removal considerable. Wish to make as cost effective as possible. Tree health is not a massive priority for local authorities - those who may be asked to clear up need to be clear about the reasons and costs involved. Report to DEFRA in Feb 2015 – flag up issues which need to be resolved over next couple of years.
- Felling licences with regard to Ash, needs to be looked at by FC/FA but engage all other stake holders.
- Jon suggested that for future meetings, the Group should highlight issues which are then up to country policy teams to deal with. The Group also needs to find out what other information policy teams need to enable them to deal with the issues they face.



## **Jamie Dewhurst**

- Effective and regular communication to the trade is critical
- Better biosecurity needed.

## **Austin Brady**

- Woodland Trust recognise the biosecurity implications of using planting stock that was imported. Next week they will be going public regarding a £4.5 million contract for seed sourced and grown in the UK to supply 4 million trees over 4 years.
- Willing to support accreditation scheme to improve biosecurity.
- Involved in Observatree. Going well and will launch in March.
- Definition of resilience with regard to conservation

## **6. Areas of interest for future meetings**

- Treatment approaches for dealing with pests and diseases
- Focus group for information portal
- Communications – future presentation to the Group by Mark Funnell on PH communication strategy
- Identification of future research needs
- Animal and Plant Health in the UK report to be published 18<sup>th</sup> December. Take report and look at structures to see where this group fits.
- Resilience – baseline on climate change and how this affects resilience. May be more than one explanation. Invite James Morison to next meeting so he can advise what he is doing in FR with regards to the CCRA report being drafted.
- How to enhance the resilience of the nursery trade? It is important to look at the bigger picture. When nurseries plant, it is very often without contractual commitments from woodland managers and can be at the mercy of sudden 'shocks' such as tree health, grant changes etc.
- Presentation from Kew on the reference seed bank.
- Cost benefit analysis studies presentation
- London I tree study presentation
- Use of remote sensing for surveillance
- National database for pest and disease findings

## **7. AOB**

It was agreed that no supporting papers from this meeting are to be published. Future papers may be published, subject to issues of confidentiality, which are covered by the Environmental Information Regulations (Regulation 12(4)(e)), disclosure of internal communications'.

## 8. Future Meetings

**Action** - Lorna to complete Doodle poll for last 2 weeks in March/first week in April to arrange the next meeting which will be held in Silvan House, Edinburgh.