

Expert Committee on Forest Science

Minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2015

(Northern Research Station, Roslin, Scotland)

Attending:

Julian Evans (Chair)
Jaboury Ghazoul
Peter Whitfield
Andrew Watkinson
Peter Freer-Smith
Roger Coppock
Lorna Baillie (minutes)

Helen McKay (Item 4 and 5)
Wilma Harper (Item 7 onwards)

Apologies:

Clive Potter
Monique Simmonds

1. Welcome and preliminaries

Julian welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Roger and Peter for facilitating yesterday's visit.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14th April 2015

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Actions and matters arising

<p>Action 4/14: NRW to circulate business plan. Peter Freer Smith agreed to chase NRW for the document.</p>	<p>Peter highlighted important information within the NRW business plan. It was noted that little mention was made of research and research commissioning. Viewing the plan gave a context for the meeting which would be held in Wales in Spring 2016. Action: Discharged</p>
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Action 9/14: Peter Freer Smith to request Evaluation of ecosystem services framework	Action Discharged
Roger to provide an update on Horizon Scanning regarding devolving to the countries.	Roger briefed members on the situation. The Committee noted that funding had diminished and there was a lack of activity which needed to be addressed. The Committee wished to formally express concern about Horizon Scanning to Ian Boyd (DEFRA). Action: Roger to contact Ian Boyd on behalf of the Committee.
Roger to recirculate email relating to UK forestry and agriculture spend.	Action Discharged
Seminar days with external stakeholders.	The Committee will be joined by 3 representatives of external research bodies during the afternoon session. Action discharged.
Peter FS to revise external review ToR.	Agenda Item 7.
Jaboury to send PDF of outcome mapping document to the group.	Julian thanked Jaboury for sending this information to the group. Action Discharged
Roger to provide the group with a summary of timber resources and forest products consumption.	Agenda Item 8
Andrew to contact Henry Ford regarding Ecoflora.	Andrew reported that the amount of information on trees in the database is not that large. Action Discharged.
Peter FS to update ECFS on social media in Spring 2016	Action carried forward.

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Liaison/meetings with CEFAS and CEH.	Roger and Peter met with CEFAS and CEH. It was noted there was opportunity for collaboration when it comes to science. It would be worthwhile to explore the CEFAS modelling development although the specifics would be different. The relevant experts should be put in touch with each other.
Paper to be prepared on the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme.	Agenda item 9.

3.CFS and FR Corporate Plans

Forest Research (FR)

Peter FS gave an overview of the FR Corporate Plan and presented Paper 1.

The Corporate Plan reiterated FR's role and high level aims. The Plan sets out FR's 18 key actions for 2015/16 under science priorities and one business priority. The Corporate Plan also provides a short description of each of the seven new research programmes, sets out four impact indicators and the business plan. Together these represent a challenging range of objectives and FR also expects to achieve the reorganisation agreed under the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme over the year.

Paper 1 gave examples of important day to day delivery against objectives of which three are highlighted.

- The success of Observatree and the fact this had detected Oriental Sweet Chestnut Gall Wasp in a new location.
- Horizon 2020. There were 3 projects running which were very competitive. This endorsed FR's international competitiveness.
- Forest Yield would now be available as downloadable software for the first time. This was a major advance in support of forest and timber industry.

Corporate and Forestry Support

This would be the last Cross Border Corporate Plan; next year's would be included in England's plan.

Roger highlighted the sections on Evidence (pages 10-11) and Indicators and Actions (page 16).

It was noted that LWEC would be coming to an end and there was discussion on whether the research councils had any plans for a legacy or initiatives leading to further research. The programme management group was discussing whether organisations may be able to continue funding but this was dependent on SR15 budget provision.

4. Strategic review on emerging species

Julian welcomed Helen to the meeting and commented that both this item and agenda item 5 were important to the Committee.

Peter FS gave a brief overview of the history of the emerging species work. The Committee was advised that the review had already gone to the RSMB which had discussed the need for work on Emerging Species and on Modelling and Sample Plot work in some detail. The RSMB had concluded that the work on emerging species and the permanent sample plot network should be funded, accepting that there are uncertainties regarding SR15. It was thought that it would be helpful to revisit the programmes from a risk point of view and the RSMB had asked Roger and Peter to come up with options for funding additional work in these two areas. The comments of the ECFS Committee would additionally influence how Peter and Roger responded to the RSMB.

Helen provided background to the Committee on the projects both of which started a number of years ago. Helen advised there was currently no funding for continued maintenance.

Helen presented the paper 'Emerging Species Review'. It was noted that 'PHI' was the term for a scoring system which made an assessment on each individual criteria.

The following comments/discussion points were made by the Committee:

- Julian wished to record that the review's authors, Dr Gary Kerr and Dr Richard Jinks, should be commended on the document.
- The Emerging Species work currently sat within Programme 3 and was unfunded because other areas within the Programme were of higher priority.
- It had been hoped that the work would be funded through the Life + EU programme, but this was unsuccessful.
- Continuation Funding was also applied for, with a very strong bid, a number of years ago, but the work was not funded through this either.
- There may be an opportunity to put forward an EU bid to maintain and monitor the projects which were already in the ground.
- The committee considered the research to be fundamental to the future of commercial forestry. Ways of attracting some industry funding for this work was discussed.

- £20,000 was allocated to this work after EU Life+ proposal had been unsuccessful. This was provided by managers in FR who held budgets. The possibility of maintaining projects at a minimal level and collecting data in say 5 years' time was discussed. However, this was seen as being demotivating to staff and likely to cause the loss of a key staff member. Such neglect would also make it difficult to differentiate between, for example, frost, disease and weed competition as a cause of tree deaths on experimental sites, and thus nullify the research.
- Another possibility was allowing PhD students to use the plots and maintain them. Collaborative opportunities between FR, Universities and the industry should be explored.
- Industry needed to be made more aware that these experiments existed to evaluate and secure the species future generations would come rely on.

The Committee strongly endorsed the importance of the Emerging Species work.

5.Strategic review of modelling and sample plots

Peter FS gave a brief overview of this work and the funding issue was the same as that for Emerging Species work.

Helen gave the Committee background information on this work. It is only recently that the work of the FC's Inventory Forecasting and Operational Support group (IFOS) has come under the RSMB's remit and the permanent sample plot and modelling work in FR is commissioned by the head of IFOS. Limited models had been much extended beyond their original narrow focus and although fit for purpose for forest management, may be less well suited for the challenges now being faced.

The following discussions/comments were made by the Committee:

- There needed to be a better picture of how FC modelling compared to modelling approaches elsewhere.
- Consideration had to be given on how to deal with legacy issues but at the same time take international modelling into consideration and learn from this.
- If there was to be funding for modelling the work would not need to start from scratch. Experience had been gained from the MOSES model (presently calibrated for Sitka spruce but with suitable data available for calibration able to predict growth of mixed age and species stands) There were realistic expectations for what may be involved.
- Models now provided managers with many options. Were these all required? These needed to be simplified going in the future.
- How well the needs of the sector were being met. Stakeholder analysis always raised expectations and wish lists.

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- There should be a clear vision with a decision needed on what the models would be used for/which models would be required.
- If the current models were discontinued it would have implications for the Permanent Sample Plot Network and data collection protocols.
- The possibility was raised of an external reviewer to consider the best way to use models. However it would probably be better to allow the team to develop recommendations and then have an external reviewer comment on this.

Overall there was unease about where FR are within the resources they had. There was agreement that a line needed to be drawn and that the Permanent Sample Plot Network did not go into long term decline.

Action: Roger and Peter FS to take on board comments of the ECFS on both Emerging Species, Modelling and Sample Plots and consider funding options again before returning to the RSMB.

6. Evaluation of Recent work on the evaluation of ecosystem services

Agenda item deferred to the next meeting.

7. Remit criteria and programme for external review of FR 2017/18

Peter FS presented the ToR for the external review of FR to the Committee. This was developed with input from Wilma Harper and James Pendlebury.

The focus was on the Committee evaluating the 7 SIS Programmes, not the whole of FR. This work accounted for 57% of FR activity. The thinking behind this was that the work completed by FR as part of the 7 Programmes was not competitively based so there was a special need to ensure that best science was being provided through the external review process. Furthermore the external review is required as part of the arrangements set out in Science & Innovation Strategy (FC 2014) under which the 7 research programmes are commissioned; other customer (EU, Defra, Scottish Government, NRW) have their own quality assurance criteria and procedures.

The Committee's view was that the whole of FR should be reviewed. Peter and Wilma were asked to consider this option as it would be difficult for the Committee to tease out which work was part of the 57% and not consider those parts of the work which overlap. It was felt there was a need to know about other research being carried out so the Committee could at the very least judge allocation of resources devoted to the 7 Programmes.

Action: Peter FS, Roger and Wilma to consider the ToR for the review and reconsider whether the whole of FR should be included.

8. Timber resources and use of forest products

Roger presented Paper 6 to the Committee.

Julian thanked Roger for providing this information. This had been requested purely for briefing the Committee so they had an understanding of the current state of the market. It was noted that information could be found in Forestry Facts and Figures and the NFI reports.

9. Update on Woodland Policy Enabling Programme

Wilma provided a verbal update on the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme (WPEP).

Wilma summarised the background to the WPEP cross border work stream which was set up to consider the functions and models of how these may be delivered in the future. This was put on hold while the FR Refresh was looking at the purpose and objectives of FR and which functions would be a part of this.

IFOS, Publications and Statistics would move from CFS in to the refreshed FR in April 2016. The proposals for the FR refresh had gone out for consultation and there would be a response to the trade union later in the week. The parts of CFS which would not be included in the FR refresh would gradually be taken on by the devolved countries. Capability would have to be built up to take this work on. These areas included Research Commissioning, Economics, International Team, Plant Health and Corporate work.

In June/July 2015 the Scottish Government announced its intention to complete the devolvement of forestry. The Forestry Government Project Board (FGP) was set up to deal with this. There would be 3 work streams; Legislation, Finance and FR. There were legislative options to be considered. The FGP would make recommendations to Ministers by March, but due to the upcoming Scottish election in spring 2016, these may not progress until the summer of 2016. In the event that there was no longer a Forestry Commission, FR could no longer be an agency of the Forestry Commission. Consideration would therefore be given to alternative models for FR for example if FR could become a company limited by guarantee, a company limited by shares or combine with a university.

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10. Press release from the Committee and Committee membership/succession planning

Roger advised that the circulated draft had been written for comment from the Committee before being submitted.

The following changes were to be made:

- Change wording to '**will** reduce capacity' instead of 'maybe reduce capacity'.
- Include a figure instead of using 'huge value'.
- The information on research should be first in the release so as not to lose the important message. There should then be a bridge between this information and the news about Dr Clive Potter being appointed to the Committee to demonstrate how the research concerns regarding ecosystems have been met.

It was agreed that the release would go out via the Forestry Commission on behalf of the Committee.

Action: Roger and Julian to work on updating the press release before submitting.

Action: Julian to draft an article for ICF's Chartered Forester

11. Any other business

(a) Roger invited the Committee to review IFOS prior to it moving to FR. It was intended that this would be a one day meeting/workshop to gain an external perspective to assist FR in how IFOS will best fit into the refreshed agency. It was noted that this would also be a helpful process for the committee in finding out about the work of the group. It was decided that a draft schedule and documentation covering IFOS's work would be circulated for comment from the Committee. Julian, Andrew and Peter W (and others if available) would then attend the meeting to present the views of the Committee. 23rd February 2016 was set for the workshop/meeting. It was also agreed that the statistics and publications functions should be in scope for this review as they will also transfer to FR in April 2016.

Action: Roger to provide a draft schedule and documentation to circulate to the full committee to comment on.

(b) Members discussed succession to the Committee since the initial three year terms ended in September 2016. Members who were present all confirmed they were happy to serve for a further three years on the Committee. This would allow the expertise that had been gathered to remain in the Committee going in to the 2017/18 review of FR.

Action: Roger to contact Monique to enquire whether she would be happy to commit to a further 3 years on the Committee.

12. Date and location of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be held in Wales in May 2016. The Committee agreed on the afternoon of 12th May and a full day on 13th May. NRW will have some input in to this meeting.