

## **Expert Committee on Forest Science (ECFS)**

Minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting held on Thurs 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Forestry Research Northern Research Station (NRS, Roslin EH25 7SY)

### Present

Professor Julian Evans (Chair)

Roger Coppock

Professor Peter Freer-Smith

Professor Jaboury Ghazoul

Professor Monique Simmonds

Professor Eunice Simmons

Professor Andrew Watkinson

Peter Whitfield

### In attendance

Veronica Cain (secretary)

Wilma Harper (Business meeting only)

Chris Quine

James Pendlebury FR CEO

Helen McKay

## 1. Welcome and preliminaries

Julian welcomed the committee and Forest Research (FR) representatives and explained that the committee had requested this additional meeting in order to gain a greater understanding of the work of FR, and on this occasion, to focus on some of the programmes at NRS.

James gave a brief account of the background of Forest Research. There are currently 190 staff working across a range of programmes in FR with most based at Alice Holt and NRS. James explained that FR had experienced a 25% cut in funding and a 30% decrease in staff numbers over the past 4 years. 30% of the current budget comes from external sources. FR provides services to each devolved administration. This presents an element of challenge, as each country has different priorities and processes within each programme of work.

## 2. Presentations

The remainder of the morning programme was made up of presentations on 3 of the programmes carried out by FR (detailed below).

Prior to each presentation Julian clearly stated, on behalf of the committee, that the committee's role was to learn about the work being undertaken and to provide support for the further development of each programme.

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- Realising the economic value of ecosystem services of woodland. Presented by Gregory Valatin (Programme Manager) & Pat Snowdon (CFS Analyst with responsibility for economics).  
This programme focuses on 2 main areas- Payments for Ecosystem Services and Valuation. The audience for this research is policy makers, FR, FC, the forestry sector in general, international bodies and the general public. This programme is covered under the Science and Innovation strategy as it covers aspects of climate change, ecosystems and biodiversity, sustainable forest management and sustainable economic growth.
- Social benefits of trees, woods and forests. Presented by Anna Lawrence (Head of Social Science, Economics & Statistics), David Edwards (Project Manager, [Social and Economic Research Group](#)) and Bruce Nicoll (CFS Analyst with responsibility for Social Science)  
This programme was initiated to help support policy makers in light of changing policy trends. The challenge is that the social policy agenda changes more rapidly than the forestry policy agenda. This programme looks at the perceptions and constraints faced by decision makers in the public's engagement with trees, woods and forests.
- Tree breeding/Genetic Improvement. Presented by Steve Lee (Programme Manager), Joan Cottrell (Programme Group Manager) & Roger Coppock.  
This programme looks at conifer and broadleaf breeding and developing techniques for tissue culture and molecular markers. Steve explained the projects being undertaken in tree breeding, including the involvement in the *Chalara* (ash dieback) resistance trials. Joan then gave a brief summary of the work being undertaken in molecular markers.

The Committee expressed thanks for the research presented.

### 3. Tour of NRS

Chris Quine and Helen McKay led the Committee on a tour of NRS and its facilities. Special focus was given to timber research presented by Paul McLean.

### 4. ECFS Business Meeting

Welcome and preliminaries

#### Minutes of 1<sup>st</sup> meeting on 9th October 2013

The minutes were accepted as a correct record. The committee was reminded that they are in the public domain on the FC website.

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## Matters arising

**Action 1/13: Professor Ghazoul to summarise briefly and/or alert FC to appropriate outputs from CIFOR.** Action completed and discharged.

**Action 2/13: Veronica Cain to take forward arrangements for future meetings.**

**Action 3/13: Roger Coppock to investigate commissioning an analysis of forest science funding.** Included as an agenda item.

**Action 4/13: Roger Coppock to present a paper to the next meeting on horizon scanning and priority setting.** This action is to be included on the agenda for the 3rd ECFS meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014.

**Action 5/13: Committee members will send individual points on SIS to Veronica Cain for forwarding to Roger Coppock by Friday 18 October.** Action completed and discharged.

**Action 6/13: Peter Freer Smith to provide a paper on FR staff evaluation procedures for the next meeting.**

**Action 7/13: On-going membership and succession will be discussed at the September 2014 meeting.**

Wilma provided an update on organisational change [details circulated after the meeting by email Harper 3/2/14]. Proposals for the Public Forest Estate in England are being prepared for legislation. It has been agreed that the Grants and Licenses part of Forest Services will be moved to the Rural Payments Agency but that provision of technical and silvicultural advice will remain within Forest Services of FC England. Phase 1 of the WPEP [Woodland Policy Enabling Programme] which looks at cross border functions has concluded. It was agreed that it is sensible for collaboration to continue. There will be a review of governance of Plant Health and international and EU policy. Phase 2 is due to commence in Feb and will look at organisational structure.

## Commissioning research by FC outside FR (Paper 2014/1)

Roger provided a paper on external commissioned research which was circulated prior to the meeting. Roger explained that 10% of the research budget is allocated to external commissioned research. This is for specialised research, which FR doesn't have the capacity to carry out. The full government procurement procedures are followed and open competition is carried out as far as possible. The CFS analysts are responsible for commissioning this research across a wide range of topics. Using external contractors allows new expertise and additional perspectives to be available, as well as market testing. FR can still bid for funding allocated to this budget. It has been suggested that a portion of this budget be ring-fenced as an innovation fund for FR programme managers to bid into. The external projects are commissioned to complement the work carried out by FR. The analysts consult FR and policy teams within the devolved administrations. There are currently 61 projects being funded. Due to uncertainty over future budgets most of these are short term contracts, often set up to address a short term policy need. PHDs/ Studentships are also funded through this budget. The FC partners with the Scottish Forestry Trust to jointly fund several PHDs. There are also contributions, where some FC funding is goes to projects being managed by another company. This often

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provides expert mentoring/supervision from the FC. The funding split has been in place since the introduction of the SIS and is actively managed at that level.

The Committee discussed the number and breadth of commissioned work, applauding the spread but wondering if (a) greater focus would be helpful and (b) if bidding for these funds was more readily open to FR staff.

## Analysis of forest & tree science funding by UK (Paper 2014/2)

Roger provided a paper, which was circulated prior to the meeting. This was a significant piece of work, which involved interrogating the LWEC envirobase. There were 2200 projects identified between 2000 and 2013. This does not include industry data. It is hoped that this can be used to provide spatial representation of the work on forestry (similar to that on flooding). External projects were added to the database. The results are skewed, as there were a small number of expensive projects. There may be inaccuracies over the projects listed prior to 2005. The analysis will be replicated to identify any gaps. There is a need to ensure that research listed on the FC website can easily translate to the database. Phase 2 will be available for ECFS at their September meeting.

Key conclusions are that the FC funds about one-third of forest and tree-related research in UK and that the bulk of NERC funding in this area is overseas.

## Any other business

**18/19 March 2014** Cardiff. To allow stakeholder input/briefing from Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government.

**Action 6/13: Peter Freer Smith to provide a paper on FR staff evaluation procedures for the next meeting.** Peter asked for clarity on what the Committee would like to be included in this paper. The committee would particularly welcome learning how the balance of peer-review publications and the need for technical/operational advice is judged as part of individual esteem.

## 5. ECFS short meeting for Chair and non-officials.

The committee discussed the day's programme. It had been very useful, as it has provided an insight into how FR operate. The day has also highlighted areas where the committee can provide support.

There was a discussion on the number of projects being undertaken and constraints on staff namely time management/records and the balance of publications expected – academic/peer reviewed versus practical/operational. The committee were unclear about responsibilities for seeking external funding. It was suggested that a separate administration process for external funding may relieve pressure on some scientists .

The process of commissioning external research was briefly discussed. (1) How restrictive are the government procurement guidelines and (2) There may be merit in investigating how other organisations commission research.

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**Summary** The committee wish to record their gratitude for the excellent presentations earlier in the day. They were very impressed by the volume and quality of the work being carried out. Whilst there is an impressive breadth of work the committee expressed concern about over-stretching resources. They believe that further consolidation needs to be explored. Also they look forward with interest to the presentation on horizon scanning at the next meeting as this is fundamental to attempting to foresee where new forest and tree issues will be, particularly in the context of newly published BIS review.. The key role of seed corn research was noted. The committee are looking forward to the paper on staff evaluation, as they feel that the academic process would not always be appropriate for FR scientists. The inclusion of esteem measurement is of particular interest. The committee have concerns over the expectations and morale of the scientists. There are concerns over the uncertainty of the future capital budget, as this must hinder planning. Clarity would also be welcome on how the FC can ensure that critical mass and expertise will continue at the current level.

The committee recognises that the above remarks are preliminary arising as they do in only their second meeting.

The committee requests that at its 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting, **18/19 March 2014** Cardiff, that there is stakeholder input/briefing and how research priorities are identified and communicated from both Natural Resources Wales and the Welsh Government. This will help define stakeholders which was an issueraised at the first ECFS meeting.

**16/17 September 2014** tba.

The committee anticipates its 4<sup>th</sup> meeting being at Alice Holt with an opportunity to be briefed further on FR programmes. During such briefings the committee would welcome hearing from the presenters what support they would like from the Committee.

**DOB 18/19 March 2014, Cardiff.**