

# APPLICANTS' FOCUS GROUP MEETING

## National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham

### 19<sup>th</sup> May 2011

#### 1 Welcome, Introduction & Apologies

Present: Dominic Driver (FC) Mike Render (FC), Richard Sochacki (Confor), Craig Harrison (FC), Julian Ohlsen (UPM & South West AFG), Tim Shardlow (ICF), John Morris (Small woods Association), John Lockhart (RICS), John Blessington (LGA), Caroline Harrison (Confor), Chris Mcgloin (Community Forests), Simon Mageean (Wildlife and Countryside Link)

Apologies: Andrew Smith (FC), Poppy Saunders (FC), Steve Hunt (FC), Mike Wood (RSPB & W&CL), Judith Webb, Andrea Graham (NFU), Tony House (RPA)

#### 2 New Actions from this meeting

AP	Action
1	AFG members to lodge their support for new small woodland threshold as 500Ha on the UKWAS consultation (should they wish to)
2	Dominic to liaise with Richard Howe - whether the draft UKFS can be passed to Task Force
3	Andy Goodsir to consider AFG feedback in taking forward e-business, including consistent FC staff messages to customers and provision of support to current e-applicants
4	Craig to investigate Farm Woodland claim form content to improve agent ability to find reference in future
5	Bruce Rothnie to find out what is being done with the non-phytophthora damage information
6	Andrew Smith to provide a briefing w/c 23rd May on the SR10 proposed structural changes
7	Craig to check the phytophthora supplementary guidance regarding fallow period and how it fits with the grant budget rules
8	AFG to pass any further thoughts on forestry regulations to Mike Seville asap
9	Mike Render to liaise with Mike Seville on RDPE axis 1
10	Mike Render to organise an RDPE event with AFG members for June/July
11	Steve Hunt to change to Felling Licence application form, to include BL/CON split which the FC demands

### 3 Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting

The group agreed the last meeting minutes without changes and reviewed the action points:

AP1 RPA liaison – Mike Seville & Chris Starr met the Chief Executive of RPA met last week relating to the Regulatory Review Task Force. Initial issues are about the process, including a specific woodland registration form and guidance. After discussion whether separate RPA liaison should take place from forestry customer perspective, it was agreed to let Regulation Task Force be main lead on RPA liaison. See later section on Task Force

AP 3 – the group felt they had given sufficient feedback; agents simply aren't promoting certification below ~200ha because the costs outweigh the benefits. There are significant changes to UKWAS, notably (a) change of small woods definition from <100Ha to <500Ha (b) FSC have recognised England, Scotland & Wales as low risk

**Recommendation 1 AFG members to lodge their support for new small woodland threshold as 500Ha on the UKWAS consultation (should they wish to)**

### 4 Briefing Note *(paper 01/11)*

UKFS – The group asked why there had been such a delay in UKFS progress. The issue is primarily about political process, being a devolved matter so has to be agreed by devolved governments. Some of the Task Force recommendations are linked to UKFS

**Action 2 Dominic to liaise with Richard Howe - whether the draft UKFS can be passed to Task Force**

e-Business – The group discussed various aspects of e-business:

- E-business progress has faltered, there has been a loss of a central contact point, and some FC staff are actively discouraging e-applications
- Whether e-business creates FC administration savings
- The risk that IT development could be a money pit for limited benefit. The group suggested greater integration with RPA, NE to share data and where there is greater IT development resource
- The volume of traffic suggests major e-business is not cost effective. GLOS works for simple applications but too difficult with complex / large applications
- Desire from customer perspective for forms that can be completed electronically, even if not online. Some members felt this would be simple in word or pdf and wouldn't take more than a couple of hours for someone to do...

Current GLOS functionality problems were highlighted, with a need to focus development on increased stability and reliability before e-business is promoted significantly

**Action 3 Andy Goodsir to consider AFG feedback in taking forward e-business, including consistent FC staff messages to customers and provision of support to current e-applicants**

2<sup>nd</sup> Instalment grant claims – The group reported that they struggle to work out what scheme the Farm Woodland claim forms (yellow ones!) refer to, and would be helpful to include property or woodland name, owner name

**Action 4 FC to investigate Farm Woodland claim form content to improve agent ability to find reference for the future**

Phytophthora – Dominic gave further update on aerial survey, noting some damage appears to be squirrel caused, some areas of Pennines snow damaged. The group found the squirrel damage of interest and asked what would be done with the data that has been collected – it could prove useful evidence for the future

**Action 5 FC to find out what is being done with the non-phytophthora damage information**

## 5 SR10 & Enabling Framework

Dominic gave a presentation on the corporate plan, SR10 proposals and enabling frameworks, starting with some initial caveats:

- Corporate Plan not signed off but agreed it could be summarised for the group
- After 23<sup>rd</sup> May announcement to FC staff, we will provide information on the future organisational structure, we can't give information before staff know
- Enabling frameworks – definition still being considered

The group discussed a variety of points:

### *Corporate Plan*

- Pleased that impact reporting is improving and feeling that a lot of information is collected that perhaps isn't used
- Welcomed the inclusion of economic improvement and that it forms the basis for all the other priorities, but don't focus on woodfuel alone e.g. construction
- Some surprise water hasn't been highlighted in corporate plan or priorities, given Defra focus on it

### *SR10*

- Recognition of the close working relationship between WO & AO, and the risk to delivery/service if the link is physically lost
- Recognition that the AOs provide a lot of support to WOs and also customers, based on a 1:1 relationship in regions – to lose this would be detrimental
- Linked with the plan and SR10 there is an opportunity to simplify regulations and grants e.g. simple contract agreements based on UKFS (but needs to retain flexibility). There is continuous pressure with introduction of new regulations or tightening of existing ones
- Agreed that WOs must avoid getting drawn into more administration and develop a wider toolkit

- FC should consider how recent public support taken into account and used, and that the FC must maintain its environmental credentials at same time as economic improvement to maintain public support

**Action 6 FC to provide a briefing w/c 23<sup>rd</sup> May on the SR10 proposed structural changes**

*Partnerships and empowerment / engagement:*

- The civil society funding will increase through the Big Tree Plant, but other partnership funding will reduce, with fixed terms of support and decreasing financial support
- FC have been outsourcing empowerment to initiatives for years and should learned from recent experience when considering future partnerships
- Concern that temporary input to partnerships will inhibit empowerment

*Enabling Frameworks*

- Enabling frameworks always comes back to whether it makes economic sense, so need to focus on that
- Need to look at issues like monetarising carbon and other ecosystem services, biodiversity offsetting; flooding and economic impact mitigation by woodland. It was noted this is already happening already in Wales where woodland funded rather than civil engineering works
- RICS have been working on valuation of water, with idea that e.g. insurance companies provide support to reduce damage

## 6 Grants Update ([paper 02/11](#))

### Woodland Regeneration Grant ([papers 03/11 & 04/11](#))

It was explained that the new rates had to go through Ministerial approval process, hence the reduced consultation with the AFG. There had been liaison with key organisations in Autumn 2010, which allowed the FC to understand the various views regarding phytophthora supplements on PAWS. This was noted in the ministerial submission, where the FC sought a balanced approach. The group discussed the rates and supplement with views ranging from support to opposition

The group were unsure whether the 3 year fallow period principle in the supplementary guidance still stood, and if so then it would remove eligibility for WRG given 2 year budget commitment rules

**Action 7 Craig to check the phytophthora supplementary guidance regarding fallow period and how it fits with the grant budget rules**

### Woodland Creation Grant

The group commended the FCs recent changes to make creation simpler and more flexible, though it was noted landowners will continue to be affected by strong

agricultural land prices and food security considerations. The group agreed that committing land to woodland in perpetuity does put off many landowners

## Woodfuel WIG

Commended FC for actively seeking the underspend and taking the WF WIG forward. They would have preferred additional Woodland Officers rather than 3<sup>rd</sup> party advisors and were concerned about how joined up delivery would be with the rest of the EWGS grant suite / owner support

There were no substantive discussions on the other grant items

## 7 Industry Review of Regulation: Update & Discussion

Mike Seville gave the group an update and invited discussion. Key points were:

- There has been a healthy number of responses but would have liked more; it has officially finished but Mike would welcome AFG input. It was suggested the scope of the Review was too wide and respondents needed specific questions to illicit better responses

### **Action 8 AFG to pass any further thoughts on forestry regulations to Mike Seville asap**

- Key issues emerging are broadly around 'hard' regulations e.g. EIA, soft regulations e.g. UKWAS and processes e.g. land registration
- In some areas identifying who's responsible is difficult, and that some recommendations are easier to influence/change than others
- The Task Force have met with Gangmasters Licensing Authority, seeking removal of need for licensing, but still comply with the regulations on basis that forestry is recognised low risk; GLA seem resistant unless directed to make changes
- The Task Force met with the RPA Chief Executive, who was receptive to change but recognise forestry is a small part of RPAs work. It was agreed to relook at producing a bespoke form for woodland registration
- The group discussed Health & Safety simplification, noting need to maintain H&S standards and risk of greater regulation if pressed too hard
- The group discussed the restrictiveness of TPOs, noting some relates to perception rather than reality
- Suggested whether some discretion could be applied based on populations e.g. EM has masses of great crested newts so applying EPS fully is huge burden and disproportionate. Some were concerned the solution we have could be compromised if pushed further. It would require an EU legislation change so would be a 'big target'
- MacDonald report on farming regulations just published. It includes thoughts on use of certification instead of regulation, and earned recognition – which may differ from the recommendations from the forestry review
- RDPE Axis – agreed a complex area and huge in its own right, with limited knowledge to be able to make recommendations

**Action 9 Mike Render to liaise with Mike Seville on RDPE axis 1**

## 8 Defra Arms Length Body Review / RDR 2014 Update

Mike provided an update to the group:

- Further to Secretary of State request last Summer, there will be a scoping project to look at alignment/merger of grant schemes
- The Regs Task Force and Independent Panel have an interest so care needed not to compromise those processes
- Status quo will be considered but unlikely to be recommended as we're aware there are some issues at present
- FC are keen for sector/customer input to a reference group - customer benefit is a key objective

The group discussed the plans:

- Whether the focus on merger / alignment should be with agriculture or with trees
- That FC staff expertise is highly regarded and mustn't be lost
- Forcing woodlands into whole holding agreements could be a barrier to woodland creation
- It provides an opportunity to reduce duplication e.g. the general details collected on EWGS 1
- Important to learn from other country experiences e.g. Scotland
- Suggested a scheme merger may be desirable but not scheme delivery

## RDR 2014

Based on experience, we expect the regulation will not be approved until **XXXX**, so programme unlikely to be in place at beginning of 2014. AFG agreed a forestry stakeholder event with Defra in June/July would be good

**Action 10 Mike Render to organise an RDPE event with AFG members for June/July**

## 9 Woodland Carbon Code ([papers 05/11](#) & [06/11](#))

Dominic provided a brief summary of key points arising from the recent WCC seminars. The FC will use G&R information for the code as much as possible to minimise repetition of effort. An Independent body will be guardians of the code rather than FC/Government

The group asked why set up independent regulator - it creates another level of certification. The group discussed whether investors will be interested in UK at the general scale, though the security of the scheme may be attractive

## 10 AOB

Request for updated FL application form – doesn't ask for BL/CON which FC demands

**Action**                      **11 Steve Hunt to change to Felling Licence application form, to include BL/CON split which the FC demands**

Date of Next Meeting: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2011