

Forestry Regulation Task Force - Actions

Purpose

1. To:
 - update members of the AFG on the actions government has committed to in its response to the Forestry Regulation Task Force
 - indicate how we are taking forward those actions assigned to the Forestry Commission
 - identify how the sector wishes to be involved in activity
 - encourage early discussion on nature of action required on two key areas.

Background

2. The Government Response to the Forestry Regulation Task Force Report was published by Defra on 27 March 2012. It is planned to produce an update note one year on to inform stakeholders how commitments are being delivered.
3. As a government response a number of departments will be taking forward actions. They will not all rest with the Forestry Commission.
4. Our 'working table' of actions, departmental responsibilities and initial views on how we will take forward actions is at Annex A.
5. We currently envisage three substantive areas of work where close and/or iterative involvement of the sector is likely to be required as we work up potential solutions. These are development of:
 - forestry grants for the next Rural Development Plan period
 - a system of earned recognition
 - UKFS compliant management plan templates.
6. For the above areas we will be forming small project teams to take forward the work. In most other areas work will rest with a single individual to take forward as part of 'normal' business. Several commitments require no further or immediate action as they are principles, have been completed or just require a watching brief.

Discussion points

Sector Engagement and broad approach

7. A phrase in the response may have led to misunderstanding over how we might involve the Applicants Focus Group in implementation of actions, 'A lot of our commitments will therefore be further developed and delivered through the Forestry Commission's Applicants Focus Group'. Recognising the limits on the capacity of members forming the AFG and what FC staff are paid to do we are currently envisaging the bulk of work being undertaken by FC staff. We would like to identify the most efficient way of involving the sector. We think this might be by:

- Sighting the AFG on the broad scope of our responses (as in Annex A) and discussion at this meeting, and follow-up at November meeting.
- Where actions rest with individuals those people using their contacts and knowledge to take on board or engage the sector (not limited to AFG) as they think fit – e.g. update on e-forms at today's meeting.
- For the more substantive items in paragraph 5 more detailed involvement as per paragraph 8 below.

Are you comfortable with this level of involvement?

8. For the substantive pieces of work there are potentially two broad options:

- To second a sector representative(s) onto the project teams taking forward work. Note that to ensure active and focussed progress these teams are likely to meet fortnightly and will be kept small in number to approx 6 members. Thus this would mean identifying one or two sector representatives.
- The FC project teams ensure wide sector engagement via networking and or adhoc focus groups at national or local level (e.g. as per grant development work last autumn). Substantive options or draft proposals are brought to AFG or other representative groups (e.g. RDPE stakeholder forum for grant issues) during development.

Which of these approaches would be preferred?

Are there response activities missing from Annex A?

Earned recognition

9. We have had some initial dialogue with Defra, the Farming Task Force secretariat and Environment Agency on approaches to earned recognition. It is apparent that a key feature of many systems is reduced licence/application fees, also the use of industry led assurance schemes.

What specific benefits (as opposed to generic principles) do you envisage a system of earned recognition for forestry yielding for applicants?

What 'risk' factors might be utilised in any approach for forestry – e.g. assurance/certification schemes, professional qualifications?

Woodland Management Plans

10. We are mindful that the more templates that are produced potentially the more complex management planning can appear. There are clearly some opportunities to differentiate templates on the basis of woodland size and/or type.

How many templates do you envisage being required and on what basis might they be differentiated?

11. The UKFS recognises two principle levels of planning: strategic and operational. Broadly for felling licencing the FC only requires a strategic level of detail and this is suited to 10-year management plans. Some grant applications require operational detail. Permissions for other regimes such as SSSI will also require operational detail usually limiting the planning horizon to a much shorter timescale. There would seem to be a tension between longer-term outline strategic plans attracting perhaps only felling permission, versus more detailed (possibly shorter-term) plans covering more permissions.

Where do you feel the balance lies between detail and longevity of plans?