

Action Plan for Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity

Introduction

Trees make a huge impact on our rural and urban landscapes and contribute to a vital part of our heritage and rural economy. The recent launch of the National Ecosystem Assessment highlighted the significant contribution of trees and forests in terms of the ecosystem services they provide to society, as well as through direct economic value and social amenity¹. Trees can also help mitigate climate change by capturing and storing carbon. Preserving the health of our trees, woodlands and forests is therefore vital, and is something we all can and should contribute to.

Need for Action

1. In the past few years, a number of new tree and plant pests and pathogens have emerged as significant risks. Threats to tree health have increased with the globalisation of trade generally, with a marked increase in the volume and diversity of plants and plant products entering the UK. This has increased the likelihood of plant pests and pathogens also being introduced, spreading through gardens and woodlands and potentially causing serious damage to either our native flora or commercial crops. Predicted climate change effects, such as warmer winters and changes in seasonal rainfall and storm patterns, may also increase the risk of pest establishment, spread and impact. In view of the rising threat to our trees, the Government has made preparing for and managing risk from plant disease a top priority.
2. These threats have been highlighted by an increasing number of plant pest and pathogen outbreaks in the UK, including, for example, *Phytophthora ramorum* and *Phytophthora kernoviae* affecting trees, heathland plants and heritage gardens; oak processionary moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) with its associated threat to human health; and red band needle blight (*Dothistroma septosporum*).

Our Response

3. In order to be most effective in combating these threats we would need civic society to be aware and capable of taking action where it is

¹ UK National Ecosystem Assessment: <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/> and <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/uknea/>.

needed. To address these threats, Defra and the Forestry Commission have brought together stakeholders from across the forestry and research sectors, including the Devolved Administrations, to develop this Action Plan, which sets out an integrated approach developed by those best placed to act to deal with the increasing threat to the health of our trees.

4. Implementation of the Action Plan will mobilise the available expertise and resources of landowners, industry, academia and Government. This requires collaborative working in effective partnerships to allow civic society to do its bit to protect the health of our nation's trees.
5. This Action Plan centres around four main themes:
 - Protecting the UK – import controls;
 - Practical actions;
 - Public and stakeholder engagement; and
 - Research opportunities and evidence priorities.
6. Implementation of the Plan will involve immediate action to counter specific current disease and pest outbreaks. In addition there are actions to respond to future threats. These will help us to understand the nature of and risk posed by these threats so we can develop the contingency plans, tools and techniques to deal with them.

Benefits

7. The successful delivery of this Action Plan will contribute to a number of benefits, including:
 - a reduction in damage to woodlands and amenity trees from pests and pathogens;
 - a reduction in losses to the economy and our natural capital caused by the unavoidable felling or reduction in yield of infected trees;
 - a reduction in the number of incidences where infected plants are found in nurseries and gardens, reducing the need for destruction of plants and loss of income, and, over time, leading to fewer and shorter and thus less-costly inspection visits to businesses;
 - stakeholders, including landowners, woodland managers, the horticulture sector, academics and the public, will be better informed about tree diseases and enabled to help prevent their spread;
 - the right evidence commissioned and used effectively to underpin sound management practices and minimise new threats; and
 - enhanced capability – including detection, diagnosis and control.

8. Progress in implementing this Action Plan will be published periodically.

ACTIONS

THEME A: PROTECTING THE UK – IMPORT CONTROLS

One of the best forms of prevention for pests and pathogens is to reduce risks at borders. The aim of this theme is to minimise the risk of importing pests and pathogens from within the EU or from third countries, while not impacting on trade by:

Strengthening import control activities and protocols

- We will deploy more Inspectors at Heathrow Airport and other points of entry, and review current import control activities and protocols. This will include investigating whether to modify the relevant passenger baggage terms to reduce the risk of passengers bringing pests and pathogens back into the country, and the development and pilot use of new technologies for detection and diagnosis of plant pests and pathogens at points of entry to the UK.
- We will consult on plant health import inspection charges and aim to release more funding for follow-up inspections at growing sites, and a surveillance programme of random checks of those imports which are not covered by controls.

Reviewing the EU Plant Health Regime

- We will use the on-going review of the EU Plant Health Regime to increase border security and increase collaboration and consistency in approach between the inspection services of Member States, including reporting of findings of unknown and unnamed organisms and the measures being taken against them. In parallel with these negotiations we will also update the UK Plant Health Strategy with input, via the advisory group, from representative tree stakeholders.

Facilitating greater international collaboration

- We will develop international risk assessments to ensure new trades and other potential pathways are safe. We will also participate in the development of an international standard for management of plant health risks associated with shipping containers.

THEME B: PRACTICAL ACTIONS

The actions in this theme have been developed with our stakeholders to reduce risks from pests and diseases through essential practical actions.

Taking account of the socio-economic benefits of healthy plants and trees

- We will prioritise our actions on tree pests and diseases by taking account of the level of risk and the value of the nation's trees and woodlands to society.

Understanding and adopting biosecurity measures

- We will work collaboratively with the forestry and tree management sectors to introduce biosecurity measures that address the pathways for transmission of pests and diseases.

Surveillance is a vital tool to detect and monitor pests and diseases

- We will improve our surveillance strategy for tree pests and diseases by giving our stakeholders, including tree and forest owners and the general public, better opportunities to contribute information and take action.

THEME C: PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Building on the considerable public concern for the health of our trees, there is an important role for, and reasonable expectation that Government acts to ensure a coherent, joined-up and collaborative approach to engagement and communication with the public and professional stakeholders (for example, owners, managers and sector representatives of woodlands, parks, gardens, nurseries and garden centres) so that they are more aware of tree health and broader plant biosecurity, and know how they can help.

Government coherence on engagement and communications

- We will develop a coherent, co-ordinated and targeted communication and media strategy across Government, and will ensure we have a collaborative approach for communication of key messages between public, private and third sectors.

Raised public and professionals' awareness

- We will prioritise development of awareness and educational material and will aim to improve people's ability to access (and report) information about plant and tree pests and diseases. To help achieve this we will prepare and launch a publicity campaign about the risks of bringing in illegal or infected plant material from abroad.

Public and professionals more informed about ways they can help

- We will accelerate production and dissemination of best-practice biosecurity protocols, and we will train professionals and volunteers (for instance, industry, non-government organisations and nature groups) to improve their ability to detect and report pests and pathogens in support of official surveillance.
- We will examine the feasibility of including biosecurity as a criterion in awards/schemes, such as Green Flag Awards for Parks, Heritage Lottery Funding and Woodland Assurance Standards.

THEME D: RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES AND EVIDENCE PRIORITIES

Minimising risks of entry to the UK of new pests and pathogens, and effective management of those already present in the UK, both need a suitable evidence base to inform contingency planning and management options. This theme aims to underpin the other themes in this Action Plan.

Research needs can be grouped on the basis of general underlying science and needs more specifically associated with individual pests and pathogens. There may be different needs for pests and pathogens that are endemic and well established in the UK, as opposed to those newly arrived in the UK, or those which are potential threats because they are present in the EU or globally, but are not present in the UK.

Making the best use of existing evidence and prioritising new research and evidence needs

- We will combine a long-term programme of strategic research, horizon scanning and evidence gathering with immediate applied research to support pest and disease contingency planning and control. This research will have an interdisciplinary approach, integrating natural sciences and social and economic evidence.
- We will improve co-ordination of plant and tree health research in order to get the best value from resources and avoid duplication. This approach will involve the public, Forest Research and Fera, and will engage the wider science community and the forestry sector, potentially within a Living With Environmental Change (LWEC)-type programme that draws on a widest possible funding base.
- We will continue to increase our understanding of the biology of priority pests and pathogens, and learn from the contribution of research to successful control policies.
- We will also address resilience in terms of environmental management and improved understanding and use of genetic resources. This will include research into epidemiology, pest and plant biology, modelling of disease outbreaks, cost-benefit analyses, use of new or emerging technologies, and social aspects, including behaviour.

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Further Information

For further information on the development of the Action Plan, please see:

- Tree health and plant biosecurity stakeholder workshop - 16 February 2011
[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Reporttreehealthworkshop16Feb2011.pdf/\\$FILE/Reporttreehealthworkshop16Feb2011.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Reporttreehealthworkshop16Feb2011.pdf/$FILE/Reporttreehealthworkshop16Feb2011.pdf)
- Tree health in a changing climate – Living With Environmental Change science workshop 6 May 2011
<http://www.lwec.org.uk/stories/lwec-collaboration-tree-health>
- Living with tree pests and diseases workshop – 25 May 2011
[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Notepacticalactionsworkshop25May2011.pdf/\\$FILE/Notepacticalactionsworkshop25May2011.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Notepacticalactionsworkshop25May2011.pdf/$FILE/Notepacticalactionsworkshop25May2011.pdf)

Science Expert Group – 1 July 2011.

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/inf-d-8gykmt>