

National Forestry Forum – Confor progress report

Confor: Promoting forestry and wood is a membership organisation that promotes sustainable forestry and low-carbon businesses. Its strength is that it gives a small sector a more powerful voice. Confor represents the whole 'supply chain', including nurseries, contractors, growers and professionals, sawmills, panel-board producers and wood and woodfuel supply businesses. Confor focuses on the core strategic issues that are vital to the success and sustainable future of individuals and businesses, but which they cannot tackle alone.

The political and policy environment continues to be a key influence on the sector's future. Governments' interventions in the economy, construction, energy, environmental and forestry sectors all have direct bearing on the success of the industry. Given the susceptibility of the industry to government policy and actions, it is vital that we continue to build awareness and understanding of, and support for, the industry, with particular focus on the economic basis of forestry.

During 2013 Confor focused on the following priorities:

- Securing wood supply in the short and longer term;
- Promoting markets for wood products and supporting woodland management;
- Tackling pests and diseases (pathogen, insect and mammalian);
- Promoting the economic interests of the sector to politicians, civil servants, environmental NGOs and the public;

Against these priorities Confor has achieved:

Grown in Britain

The GiB campaign is providing an excellent opportunity to establish the link between wood production and consumption, and sustainable forest management. This is relevant to all woodland, softwood, hardwood and mixed, where we want to encourage woodland to be managed to produce quality wood – vital to support their future management and to expand low-carbon businesses. GiB is a means to tackle out-of-date views of commercial activity, of the simple practice of harvesting trees, and of the environmental and technical qualities of wood.

Wood for Good

Wood for Good (WfG), half-owned by Confor with Swedish industry, has built on its 'Wood First' campaign and is promoting the carbon and life-cycle benefits of wood. It continues to provide well-regarded online and seminar-based training for architects and other key audiences.

Confor's Woodfuel Group

Confor's Woodfuel Group continue to work to deliver our cross-sector position on woodfuel, promoting local-scale markets, principally heat and opposing new large-scale, dedicated power only developments. We are currently working with DECC on a variety of issues including the Biomass Suppliers List for the RHI and encouraging quality supply through a membership charter.

Confor's Nursery Producers Group

Confor's Nursery Producers Group (NPG) is responding to market requests for traceability and the market opportunity to increase domestic production.

Forestry Industry Safety Accord

Confor has assisted the development of the Forest Industry Safety Accord and provides administrative and financial support. Confor also provides a similar service to UKWAS.

Pests and diseases

Confor plays a leading role for the sector with its participation on the various biosecurity and outbreak management groups. As well as providing information to members and feeding back expert opinion to public officials on P&D strategies, Confor identifies and deals with arising issues, such as marketing and resources in the sector. Looking forward, there is still a need to guard against deforestation and loss of commercial crops as well as influencing the species that are replanted. Confor's consultations with members on species suitability in 2013 will be finalised.

Regulation

Confor met with the chief executive of FSC to make clear that current mechanisms are unsuitable and to agree that the UK will submit a proposal for a mechanism that builds on existing regulation and government oversight, with a particular focus on reducing audit costs. There is an opportunity here to build on the success that GiB has had with CPET.

Planting

The GiB campaign has driven a change in attitude in England towards expanding and protecting the softwood resource, and it has established a mechanism for companies to fund planting and woodland management through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The recent announcement for support during the transition period is welcome following an intense period of lobbying.

Regional growth

Confor's England regions will continue to be key in supporting the industry, with Local Enterprise Partnerships, and regional growth initiatives such as that in the Marches and north England. Confor is best placed, and expected, to take a lead for the industry.

Timber transport

Timber transport remains a key issue both in terms of accessing existing mature timber resources over fragile roads and in considering new areas for productive planting. Confor part-funds and hosts the GB Timber Transport Officer's post. Confor raised the need for action on timber transport in England as part of the work of the forest regulation task force.