

# Expert Committee on Forest Science

Minutes of the meeting held on 14th April 2015

(Forest Hills Hotel, Aberfoyle, Scotland)

## Attending:

Julian Evans (Chair)

Jaboury Ghazoul

Andrew Watkinson

Peter Whitfield

Monique Simmonds

Eunice Simmons

Roger Coppock

Peter Freer-Smith

Lorna Baillie (minutes)

## 1. Welcome and preliminaries

Julian welcomed Lorna Baillie to her first meeting.

Gratitude was expressed to John Hair and Colin Edwards and their team who met the committee on 13<sup>th</sup> April at the Cowal and Trossachs Forest District. Thanks was also expressed to the following members of FR/FC; Helen McKay, Tom Nisbet, Bill Mason, Duncan Ray, Russell Anderson, Juan Suarez and Russell Lamont, who all gave presentations to the committee.

It was to be noted that during an informal meeting on the evening of 13<sup>th</sup> April it was decided that the practice of meeting without officials (Roger and Peter) at the end of the Committee meetings would be discontinued, starting from this meeting.

## 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

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## Actions and matters arising

<p>Action: PFS was asked to draft a short paper based on these discussions for the April 2015 ECFS meeting. This paper should consider the REF criteria and FR's remit in order to suggest suitable evaluation criteria for the next external review.</p>	<p>This would be picked up later in the agenda.</p>
<p>Action 4/14: NRW to circulate business plan. Peter Freer Smith agreed to chase NRW for the document</p>	<p><b>Action to carry forward</b></p>
<p>Action 5/14: RC to circulate Committee members with details of workshops</p>	<p><b>Action Discharged</b></p>
<p>Action 6/14: AW to write to Chris Gilligan to request links</p>	<p><b>Action to carry forward.</b> Andrew talked to Defra and Cranfield regarding Horizon Scanning. It was not clear as to how this would evolve. Devolved administrations wish to take on board Horizon Scanning rather than cross border. If this is to happen a forum for coordinating facilities will need to be set up so as not to duplicate work. <b>Action – Roger to provide an update at the next meeting.</b></p>
<p>Action 7/14: PFS to provide a breakdown of the staff in each role</p>	<p><b>Action discharged</b></p>
<p>Action 9/14 (5): Evaluation ecosystem services work within the framework</p>	<p><b>Action: Peter Freer Smith to take this up at the same time as the business plan</b></p>
<p>Action: RC to inform Committee how much in relative terms is spent on research in the UK on agriculture in comparison to trees and forests.</p>	<p>This was circulated via email. A brief analysis was provided. <b>Action: Roger to recirculate email</b></p>
<p>Action: RC and PFS to keep Committee updated on progress prior to their meeting in the Spring.</p>	<p><b>Action discharged</b></p>

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Action: ES to inform JE of her workload in due course.	<b>Action discharged</b>
Action: PFS/RC to draft short note on evaluating research impact.	<b>Action discharged</b>
Action: PFS to brief committee on use of social media to communicate research.	<b>Action discharged</b>

### 3. Review of 7 FR Research Programme Proposals 2015-19

Congratulations were expressed to Roger for seeing through the process from Science and Innovation Strategy to the new research programmes in FR which was now coming to a conclusion. Julian drew attention to the letter of appreciation from Wilma Harper to the committee.

Roger thanked the members of the committee for responding to the review. It had been very helpful to get an external perspective. Most of the comments from the committee had been incorporated in to the proposals.

Roger gave an overview of the revised programmes and highlighted the following:

Programme 3 agreed to do a strategic review of what was already known, build up list of current knowledge and uncover serious gaps in relation to emerging species. A business plan would then be produced. It was noted that Programme 5 includes tree breeding which also links in to emerging species.

There would be a strategic review of modelling in Programme 6 to decide what would be needed in the future. Carbon/biomass modelling might be pushing mensuration focused models in to areas they were never developed for. The modelling requirement had extended considerably. Once a strategic research plan was in place this would be brought back to committee to check the quality of science.

Programme 7 would be running an evaluation as the science programmes went along. This was a novel approach.

Overall comments:

- There was agreement that this was an ambitious programme.
- The long term communal/shared objectives would be well worth exploring.
- The focus on outcomes rather than output was very helpful.

- It was noted that most of the questions came from devolved administrations. Other external stakeholders, although invited to attend three regional meetings had found it difficult owing to the short notice.
- The process itself would be reviewed to inform future research strategy reviews.
- Decision support systems and a web based delivery were being considered.
- Paper 2 was very ambitious. Work needs to be maximised without overlapping. FC was working with other Defra Network Evidence Action Plans (NEAPs) to share what work was being carried out by FC and ensure what was done was as visible as possible.

**Action: Strategic review of future species research (Programme 3) and modelling in Programme 6 to be completed. Roger to liaise with Julian, Andrew and Peter W. Aim to complete this by September so can take to the RSMB.**

## 4. FC External Research Spend

In the past around 10% of the FC's research budget went to external suppliers, it was expected to continue at 9% in the future.

The reasons for using external suppliers were the ability to buy in capabilities and skills that FR did not have in house, it provided a benchmark for FC's own research costs, it provided an independent perspective on issues such as Ecosystem Service Markets, which in turn make it easier to advise to ministers/markets. Also it was possible to leverage significant amounts of cash for relatively small amount of expense.

Memberships of organisations, such as IUFRO, were also paid from the external funds. This gave access to some important initiatives.

All external research was aligned strongly with internal research. This was made explicit in the new strategy. The skill sets are being broadened and did not cross over expertise with FR.

Where there were policy implications these areas would be peer reviewed for quality assurance.

FC and FR had built relationships with several universities to ensure a range of skills would be used.

**Action: Seminar days with external stakeholders being considered; probably to be held in the autumn; ECFS members to be invited to attend.**

## 5. Remit and criteria for the next external review of FR

The next external review (visiting group) is due in 2017/18 and proposals presented in Paper 2015/04/2. Discussion on ToR was held and it was agreed that these would be finalised in time for the next ECFS meeting. This approach would ensure that FR staff would be fully apprised of review expectations near the start of the new programmes. This had been unsatisfactory for the previous review and led to unreasonable expectations being made at the last minute.

Organisational structure was under review through the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme.

The committee was asked to be part of the visiting group. Concern was expressed whether the group would be seen as being too close to the strategy. It was concluded that the committee is independent and participation as the main part of the review board would ensure that FR's workings were understood.

The following points were discussed around the recommendations within the paper:

- There was a need to bear in mind the Spending Review 2015 and the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme. There may be a requirement to be flexible but planning could commence in line with the strategy. The committee was happy to sign off on the first recommendation.
- The remit of the last review group was provided; the new remit should be similar, but with emphasis on the 7 programmes.
- The committee wished to know how senior staff who were judged internationally as being of high quality. Whether esteem is assessed was unresolved, but would not be a key requirement though individual programmes could refer to esteem in their evidence.

**Action: Peter to revise external review ToR through email discussion with a view to presenting a finalised statement at the autumn meeting.**

**Action: Peter to advise FR staff that the committee have requested firm proposals now in readiness for 2017/18 review.**

Further discussion led to the following.

- For review it was suggested that either the committee could be split in to two groups and each review several programmes or the whole committee could spend an hour with each programme leader.
- There was disagreement over use of staff CVs as criteria as this can move the focus too much on to individuals.

- It would be expected to see details of research reach included in the research programmes.
- Outcome mapping was discussed as a means to evaluate how research was taken up and the impact it ultimately had could be documented. Although this would require a resource of time it would mean evidence would be documented as the process went along and stakeholders would not need to be involved just at the end of a process. Outcome mapping should be built in to each programme.

**Action: Jaboury to send PDF of Outcome Mapping document to Lorna to circulate to the group.**

**Action: In view of Outcome Mapping proposal the next Stakeholder review of research impact (see next agenda item) to be deferred by one year to bring this closer to the timing of next external review.**

## 6. Evaluation of research impact

- Roger and Peter spoke to paper 2015/04/3 outlining proposals of evaluation.
- The FC's social research team had been sourced by Defra to help with their social research.
- The Woodland Carbon Code was internationally recognised and linked to the gold standard as a result of work from the modelling mensuration team and economists.
- Unless close to market research the timescale for full impact of research to be recognised can be considerable.
- The review was helpful and provided seven recommendations which were fed in to how the new SIS was developed.
- It was reiterated that everything discussed fitted well with the outcome mapping mentioned earlier.

**Action: Andrew requested Roger to provide the group with summary of timber resources and forest products consumption.**

## 7. Use of social media in FR/FC

- Good progress is being made with social media.
- The FC and FR Comms strategy relied heavily on digital communication.
- The FR website had been completely revamped. This was a major piece of work and was well done, especially the resource section.
- Twitter – FR had decided to run a twitter account.
- Social scientists were keen to use online consultation tools.

- Tree Alert would be discontinued as this would be provided through an improved website.
- Digital research archive - many publications were still relevant but out of print. They could provide a lot of useful information.

**Action: Andrew to contact Henry Ford regarding Ecoflora.**

**Action: Roger and Peter to arrange a meeting with CEFAS.**

**Action: Peter to update ECFS in one year's time on social media.**

**Action: Progress with CEH and CEFAS to be discussed at the next meeting.**

## 8. CFS and FR Corporate Plans

### Forest Research

The Annual Report reported that all 21 action points from 2014/15 were completed. The 2015/16 Corporate Plan would propose key actions. The content would be similar to 2014/15, with updated details regarding science delivery to explain the new seven programme structure. A formal settlement was to be agreed regarding the budget between FR and CFS. This would be signed off in late May once new ministers were in place.

### FC

Case studies were to be used in the 2015/16 Corporate Plan to explain what would be done and how outcomes would be met. The Corporate Plan had gone to Defra but not yet to ministers. The indicators and actions were similar to 2014/15.

## 9. Long-term experiments, PSPs and research forests

Research Forests had been visited by the committee on 13<sup>th</sup> April and at the previous meeting in Alice Holt (16 Sept. 2014).

The Permanent Sample Plots (PSP) network placed a heavy burden in Programme 6 and savings were needed. Their fundamental importance is recognised but it is hoped that savings in assessment can be made using Juan Suarez's survey approaches. Digitising all sample plots records is in hand but is an enormous task. It will eventually permit open access so that all researchers, including external to FR, can use this incredibly valuable database.

The Committee welcomed discussion on this subject and gave their support to the Research Forest concept. It was recognised that Programme 6 had work to do in identifying the best way forward with PSPs.

## 10. ECFS future work, membership and succession planning

At the informal meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> April, Eunice Simmons indicated she would step down from ECFS. Julian expressed thanks to Eunice on behalf of the Committee.

**Action: Roger to start the process for recruiting a new member to the Committee.**

The Committee proposed visiting Dyfi Forest in Wales next year. It is a site of major ecosystem research with the world-famous Plynlimon catchments study areas nearby.

## 11. Date and location of next meeting

26-27 October agreed dates for next ECFS to be held at NRS. Outline programme to include non FR contractors/external commissioned research presentations, business meeting, and mentoring with individual programmes.

Spring 2016 Wales research forest.

**Action: Roger and Peter to alert staff members to the visit.**

**Action: Papers to be prepared for the next meeting to include a revisit of Peter's paper on the remit and criteria for the next external review of FR, Corporate Plans and the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme.**

**Action: Peter to speak to NRW in advance of arranging the spring 2016 meeting.**

## 12. Any other business

The Committee expressed its thanks for her contribution to its work and best wishes to Eunice in her future work.