

**FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND
SEVENTY FOURTH MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE
FORESTRY COMMISSION, BRISTOL
04 JUNE 2015 AT 13.30 hrs**

Minutes

Present:

Sir Harry Studholme (Chair)
Mary Barkham
Ian Gambles
Richard Greenhous
Simon Hodgson
Steve Meeks
Keith Oates
Shirley Trundle
Clive Tucker

Also present:

Richard Barker
Amanda Bryan (Scotland National Committee)
Meirion Nelson (Financial Controller) for item 5.
David Cross (Evidence and Analysis Manager) for item 7.
Josh Roberts (minute secretary)

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Harry Studholme welcomed the Committee to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Mark Pountain.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 23 APRIL 2015 2015

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

3. MATTERS ARISING/UPDATES

CAP Reform

Richard Greenhous gave an update on the implementation of Countryside Stewardship. He informed the Committee of the change in expected date for the availability of the Rural Payments IT system to support the processing of applications from July to August/September. He reminded the Committee of the decision for interim administrative grant payment functions to be set up in Natural England rather than the Rural Payments Agency during transition. He confirmed that two staff had now been seconded to Natural England. Richard Greenhous gave details of the work which was progressing to develop the integrated woodfuel grant scheme under countryside productivity. He described various issues that work was ongoing to resolve to ensure the schemes' deliverability. He also provided an update within the context of the bigger picture of delays to the basic payments scheme.

Plant Health

Richard Greenhous provided the Committee with an update on Plant Health surveillance results for the year, reporting that *Phytophthora ramorum*, Dothistroma needle blight, Acute Oak Decline (AOD) and squirrel damage were all examples of pest and disease issues under aerial surveillance. The results were subject to further monitoring and ground truthing, but at this stage there were no visible signs that *Phytophthora ramorum* had spread significantly to new areas. However, Dothistroma was showing signs of spread.

It was confirmed that the programme to control Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) had taken a new approach this year, concentrating effort at the outer extent in order to prevent spread of the disease, with landowners taking the lead on control action within the core area of infestation. He reported that the new approach had not been badly received so far, although the time of the year when OPM presented the most risk to public health --- when the caterpillars grow their toxic hairs --- was just beginning.

Richard Greenhous also informed the Committee that Observatree had now been successfully re-launched.

4. NEW GOVERNMENT PROGRAMME AND FC DEVELOPMENT

Ian Gambles gave a presentation, providing his assessment of the overall future direction, the drivers for change and the challenges ahead for the Forestry Commission. These included devolution, finding a sustainable funding model for Forest Enterprise and Forest Research and the spending review. Nothing had been confirmed at that point, but it was possible the spending review would require significant organisational reform.

Key next steps included further discussions with Ministers, official level discussions with colleagues in Defra and the Scottish Government, a review and refresh of the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme, consultation on proposals to establish corporate services provision at country level, further progress on proposals to establish a refreshed Forest Research agency and consider options for future business models for it, and securing a viable spending review settlement for the Forestry Commission in what would be an important period of change.

5. FINANCE REPORT

Paper 13/15

Steve Meeks introduced Paper 13/15, highlighting key areas for the Committee's attention and consideration, emphasizing that the figures represented the end of Period 01.

Steve Meeks commented on the in-year budget savings contribution which the Forestry Commission were being asked by Defra to contribute towards. The Committee noted this within the context of the drivers for change outlined in Ian Gambles presentation.

The Committee thanked Steve Meeks for his update and noted the financial position and risks.

6. ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2014/15

Paper 14/15

The Committee reflected on discussions that had occurred at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. The Committee agreed the recommendation of the ARAC that they should approve the Annual Report and Accounts.

7. AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Paper 15/15

The Committee noted the formal report of the past year's work of the ARAC and thanked the sub-committee for its contribution.

8. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Paper 16/15

The Committee welcomed David Cross to the meeting who gave an overview of the indicator report (Paper 16/15) drawing attention to some key elements. These included the establishment of pests and diseases and the area of managed woodland. He explained the methodology and impact of how some of the various measures were produced in order to explain the bigger picture for the Committee.

The Committee thanked David Cross for his report and summary and sought clarification on a number of issues including the significant reduction in the cost of managing the public forest estate, which was clarified by Simon Hodgson. The Committee noted that the report was a very valuable document which shed considerable light on the work of the Commission and its impact.

9. AOB (5 Minutes)

No other points of business were raised.

Harry Studholme thanked the committee for attending and closed the meeting at 15:30

Future Meetings:

22 July – Bristol

16 September – Bristol

25 November - Bristol