

**FORESTRY COMMISSION ENGLAND
SEVENTY FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE
203 NOBEL HOUSE, DEFRA, LONDON
19 NOVEMBER 2014 AT 13.00 hrs**

Minutes

Present:

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

Also present:

Josh Roberts

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

William Weston sent his apologies to the meeting. Dr Mary Barkham was welcomed to the Committee as the newly appointed Commissioner. Josh Roberts was welcomed as Minute Secretary.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 1 OCTOBER 2014

One minor amendment was suggested to the minutes of 1 October meeting by Simon Hodgson, who wished to clarify the timing of the Payments for Ecosystem Services contact.

3. MATTERS ARISING/UPDATES

Wallshield

The Committee reaffirmed their approval (conducted by correspondence) for the proposed woodland creation project at Wallshield, Northumberland.

4. FINANCE REPORT

Paper 20/14

Steve Meeks introduced Paper 20/14, highlighting key areas for the Committee's attention and consideration.

Expenditure in finance reports is treated as positive, with receipts being shown as negative. While this is a convention within government it is not in line with commercial

entities. The Committee considered, this approach and it was agreed that the current format should be maintained in order to ensure consistency and transparency. However, it was agreed that Annex B of the Report could be further clarified and that the Head of Finance, Forest Enterprise, should be asked to provide some commentary for the figures that could be reviewed for the next meeting.

Action: Simon Hodgson to raise the issue with Head of Finance, Forest Enterprise, prior to the next Committee meeting.

The Committee discussed the Paper and Simon Hodgson raised an additional issue in relation to a potential VAT over-recovery which has been exposed during an HMRC audit. This issue was discussed in detail by the Board, including how it arose, the potential impact and the need to investigate the causes to prevent any repetition.

The impact which rising timber prices had on operations and cash flow to the FC were also discussed.

5. CAP REFORM

Paper 21/14

Richard Greenhous introduced the item on CAP Reform, providing an update on the developments which had taken place since Paper 21/14 had been written which were that the assessment of confidence in CAP IS infrastructure remained a serious risk to grant availability in 2015.

Sarah Hendry informed the Committee that CAP IS would now be called 'Claiming Rural Payments' (CRP). The Committee sought clarification on elements of the CRP, which Sarah explained.

The Committee agreed that it was critical to provide information to customers as soon as was possible. The Board sought and were given assurance from Richard Greenhous that the reasons behind the delays in information releases were sound. The Committee went on to discuss how the Forestry Commission could proceed in engaging with stakeholders and concluded that stakeholders would welcome early clarification regarding grant availability in January 2015.

6. RESHAPING FOREST SERVICES

Paper 22/14

Richard Greenhous introduced the item to update the Committee on the work to reshape Forest Services. Richard invited the Committee to review the accompanying Paper 22/14 and in particular its Annex. Richard confirmed he would welcome any comments and suggestions that Committee members wished to make in connection with the consultation. He asked for these to be provided direct to him by 3 December 2014.

Action: Committee members to forward any comments on Annex 1 of Paper 22/14 to Richard Greenhous by 3 December.

7. FORWARD PLANNING/FUTURE MEETINGS

Paper 23/14

The Chair initiated the discussion on future agenda items and the Committee's approach to how it conducts its business. The Committee discussed a range of issues including how to ensure that the topics considered were strategic rather than operational, in order to help ensure that the intended role of the England National Committee was being fulfilled.

The draft forward agenda proposed for consideration was agreed.

The Committee also discussed the role of the new Forest Enterprise Strategy Board and how to ensure that this Board was empowered to take effective decisions without unnecessary bureaucracy, whilst ensuring the statutory role of the ENC was not undermined.

Action: Ian Gambles to hold discussions with Simon Hodgson on the interaction between ENC and the Forest Enterprise Strategy Board.

WOODLAND PROTECTION

.TREE HEALTH UPDATE

Paper 24/14

Richard Greenhous expanded on the issues updated in Paper 24/14 and the discussion focused on the current situation with OPM and how further progress could be made in containing the pest. It was discussed that the issue of OPM was acknowledged by London councils but was not high on their top priority list.

Action: Richard Greenhous to discuss with Sarah Hendry how to further engage local authorities on Oak Processionary Moth.

REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF DEER

Paper 25/14

Richard Greenhous explained the background to reconsidering the approach to reducing the negative impacts of deer on forestry and woodland. The Committee discussed the work and value for money of the Deer Initiative and that the impact of some deer should be reduced in some parts of the country at a landscape scale. The Committee agreed their full support for the work of Forest Services to investigate increasing value for money in this area through initiating a tendering process.

GREY SQUIRREL CONTROL POLICY

Paper 26/14

Richard updated the Committee on the progress being made with grey squirrel policy and the relative success of the UK Squirrel Accord. The Committee discussed the strategy for tackling grey squirrels and the barriers and opportunities for promoting the success of the policy.

8. AOB

The issue of the recent amendments to the Infrastructure Bill to exclude the Public Forest Estate was discussed. The Committee agreed that this had served to highlight the

continuing sensitivity around the Public Forest Estate and the implications this may have in the timing of when primary legislation may be passed to create a new Public Forest Estate Management Organisation

The Chair thanked the Committee and closed the meeting at 15:15.