

Update on international forestry, forestry standards and certification.

### Purpose

1 To provide the Commissioners with an overview of the work carried out by CFS on international forestry, forestry standards and certification.

### Background

2 Since April 2012, Defra have had the lead on international forestry policy for the UK. The FC has a supporting role in providing specialist advice as well as covering the more technical aspects of forestry in UK engagement at international level. (The split of responsibilities between the FC (CFS) and Defra's EU & International Forestry Unit is defined in a MoU). As the UK approach to sustainable forestry is defined through the UK Forestry Standard, responsibility for this is combined with international forestry to form the core work of this branch of CFS.

3 Technically, international issues are reserved; whereas forestry standards have both reserved elements (in that they link to international agreements) and devolved elements that relate to country forestry policies and forestry practice. The current arrangements are determined by the constitutional position whereby it is the UK, or in some cases the EU, which has the right of representation in international processes. (This may need to be revisited depending on the outcome of the Independence Referendum in Scotland.) The Westminster Government's "Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement" (Jan 2013), recognised the importance of adequate provision to support cross border co-operation in a number of areas - including both standards and international issues, "*where this represents the most efficient and effective means for their delivery*". CFS thus works closely with the countries on these topics where it makes sense to take a cross-border approach.

### Principles

- 4 In order to clarify our approach we have defined the following guiding principles.
- i. UK policy on international forestry is informed by domestic practice and the UK approach is promoted internationally.
  - ii. A proportionate, or risk-based, approach is taken using existing UKFS-based mechanisms so that potentially detrimental impacts and burdens on forest owners and the UK sector are avoided or minimised.
  - iii. A common UK approach is developed to forestry issues where this is desirable and feasible - taking account of country priorities, UK organisations (such as Confor), research findings, and the practicalities of forest management.

- iv. The approach to forestry issues is coordinated across the Westminster Government, taking full account of the agreed approach articulated by the UK Forestry Standard.
- v. Forestry expertise and specialists from across the UK are engaged in informing, developing and influencing the outcome of international forestry processes.

## International forestry responsibilities

5 In international forestry policy we act specifically to support Defra. This may comprise, for example, forming part of the UK delegation for Forest Europe meetings. We also provide comments and technical input for Defra in the various fora they attend, such as the UN Forum on Forests and the EU Council Working Parties on Forestry. In supporting Defra, we garner the views of the devolved administrations and involve forestry experts to develop UK positions, (on topics such as climate change, economics, biodiversity, forest inventories,). This enables us to influence international processes and policies.

- 6 We act for the UK in areas where the FC has primary responsibility:
- i. EU Standing Forestry Committee (SFC);
  - ii. the United Nations FAO European Forestry Commission and ECE Committee on Forests and Forest Industry;
  - iii. the UK's technical contribution in support of Forest Europe's Work Programme;
  - iv. bilateral engagements, international initiatives (such as New Generations Plantations Project – WWF) , and cooperation;
  - v. the forestry content of the EU Forestry Strategy.

7 Through exercise of the principles in para 4, the value of engaging in these areas is to ensure that international processes work to the advantage of the UK, and that UK policies are promoted. There is also value in the FC having the lead in specific fora where a more technical contribution is required. In some cases, the UK is committed through international treaties and agreements to be part of the process, while in others, there is a clear national interest or link to wider foreign policy. Nevertheless, we are selective in determining which of these processes to engage with and use our networks to influence them at the appropriate time.

**Note:** Specialist work on Rural Development /State Aids is undertaken by Mike Render, FCE's policy lead based in Defra offices. Other specialist policy leads include Mark Broadmeadow, who provides technical contributions to DECC on land use and carbon, including where these feed in to international processes.

## Cross Border Engagement and the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme (WPEP)

8 The WPEP reviewed the Cross Border workstream (Phase 1) and in relation to international work it concluded that it is important that FC retains this expertise so that it is available to all three administrations. In carrying out this work, we consult and maintain a dialogue with the countries. For example, we have instigated formal quarterly review meetings with DEFRA International which include the country representatives. We work to strike the right balance between engaging countries on the one hand, and not over-burdening staff with unnecessary details on the other hand. *For example, we seek country views when we represent the UK at the EU Standing Forestry Committee in relation*

*to the development of the EU Forestry Strategy. This influences Rural Development funding for forestry.*

9 In addition to our specific role with Defra, we act as point of reference to other departments on UK-wide forestry issues based on international agreements, international reporting, the UK Forestry Standard and certification as it affects the UK. *For example, we have been working with DEFRA on timber procurement policy and with DECC on criteria for sustainable biomass.* On certification, which links closely to the UKFS, we work on matters of common interest and we co-ordinate country positions in relation to the UKWAS steering group. We also work with UK-wide organisations such as Confor, the RSPB. For example we worked *closely with Confor on a UK approach to the EU Timber Regulation.*

## Resource Implications

10 At the time of devolution, Forestry Ministers agreed that rather than trisect funding, those functions which were either reserved or carried out by agreement on a cross-border basis would be funded through the UK Government (Defra). This was re-iterated in "The Government Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement Implementation Plan – One Year On", which commented on the: "*... significant benefits for both efficiency and/or effectiveness from continuing to deliver those functions on a cross-border basis*".

11 Following the transfer of responsibilities to Defra, International Branch was reduced from 1PB1, 2xPB3 and 1PB4, (and a substantial element of the DG's time) to 1 PB 3 (Frances Snaith), and 1 PB 2 (Richard Howe). This arrangement allows for support as necessary from other members of the CFS Analysts' team and specialists in Forest Research and the countries.

12 By undertaking this on a cross border basis, it avoids complications over representation of a UK position by countries. It removes the need for each of the four countries to develop the necessary knowledge, expertise and networks, and to commit resources into the international forestry processes to carry out this work. Without a cross border approach, an alternative mechanism would be needed to bring country forestry perspectives together to form a UK position.

## Recommendation

The Board supports the work being undertaken at cross border level on international forestry and standards work and endorses the principles we are working to (listed at paragraph 4).

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