

MINUTES OF THE 858TH MEETING OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSIONERS, HELD AT THE ANGEL HOTEL, CARDIFF ON THURSDAY 13 MARCH 2003

Present:

Lord Clark, Chairman
Anthony Bosanquet
Tom Bruce Jones
Tony Cooper
Victoria Edwards
John James
Duncan Macniven
Andrew Raven
Gareth Wardell
Frank Strang, Secretary

Also attending:

Simon Hewitt
Bob Farmer
Jim Lynch
Ian Shaw (item 6 only)
Andy Inglis (item 7 only)
Lucy Kirkham (item 8 only)
Sally York (item 8 only)
Martyn Giles, Minute Secretary

1. INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. He thanked Mr Bruce Jones, who was attending his last meeting, for his contribution to the Board over the past six years. Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Bills and Dr McIntosh.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2003

Subject to the following amendments the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2003 were agreed as a true record:

Page 2, Item 4 paragraph 2 line 6: delete 'noted'; insert 'agreed'.

Page 5, Item 11b line 4: delete 'Royal'; insert 'Rural'.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Mr Wardell asked whether more information on the Green Homes Project in the New Forest could be provided.

Action: Mr Hill-Tout

Mr Hewitt said that the draft Wales Corporate Plan would be circulated shortly.

Action: Mr Hewitt

4. FORESTRY DEVOLUTION REVIEW

Mr Strang and Mr Hewitt gave details of the proposed membership of the National Committees. There was a discussion about remuneration for Committee members. It was agreed that a paper should be prepared for consideration at the next Board meeting. The paper would consider levels of remuneration along with other issues such as frequency of meetings, time commitment, differences between the Committees of each country and the scope for increasing diversity. Board members were asked to feed in their thoughts to Mr Strang.

Action: Mr Strang

Commissioners were content with the proposals for membership of the English and Welsh Committees, subject to pressing Defra as to the status and level of their representation.

Action: Mr Hill-Tout & Mr Hewitt

Some Commissioners remained concerned about Gravetye and about the ability of Commissioners to act as Trustees. Mr James said that the sub-committee would make proposals about appropriate delegation.

Mr Cooper had agreed to replace Mr Bruce Jones on the Audit Committee. The Committee would report to the Board on post-Review arrangements for corporate governance.

Action: Mr Macniven

Commissioners agreed the arrangements for creating the new forest management agencies and the timetable for future GB meetings. It was also agreed that the GB Board should continue to make country visits alongside meetings.

5. VIRES AND THE FORESTRY ACT

Mr Strang presented a paper which advised the Board of amendments proposed to forestry legislation via the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 which would remove legislative barriers that prevented Forestry Commissioners from participating in joint ventures or forming companies to facilitate partnership working.

It was agreed that this issue should be pursued, but that the options should not be narrowed down prematurely. There might not be another opportunity for some time. The FC should seek a steer from Mr Morley about pursuing this course before consulting with the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Executive.

Action: Mr Strang

Mr Raven requested that a paper specific to Scotland should be prepared for discussion by the National Committee for Scotland and by the Board.

Action: Mr Strang

6. REPLANTING POLICY IN WALES

Mr Hewitt presented a paper that advised Commissioners on a policy development the Welsh Rural Development Minister intended to announce at the next meeting of the Woodland Forum on 27 March 2003. The statement would set out ways in which a move towards more mixed species woodlands might be accelerated. Commissioners were asked to comment on the draft paper so that their views could be included in the final draft to go to the Minister.

Commissioners were very concerned about both the process followed and the current draft of the paper. It omitted to acknowledge fundamental parts of Welsh Assembly Government policy as set out in the Wales Woodland Strategy; it overlooked key aspects of sustainability; it seriously underestimated the impact of the proposed change on the private sector; and it understated the economic impacts. On process, Commissioners considered it was very important that this should be the start of a consultation, not its conclusion. They were concerned that the paper, as drafted, would be seen as FC policy with much wider implications, not just in Wales, but throughout the UK.

Commissioners agreed that Mr Hewitt and Mr Farmer should seek to have further discussions with the Welsh Assembly Government before the final draft was presented to the Woodland Forum on 27 March. Gareth Wardell confirmed his intention to attend the Woodland Forum meeting.

7. PROPOSED WIND FARM DEVELOPMENT IN TYWI FOREST

Ian Shaw presented a paper on the proposed wind farm development in the Tywi Forest. Commissioners were asked to consider whether Forest Enterprise Wales should enter into a lease arrangement with the Camddwr Trust should planning permission be granted. Because of the scale of the proposal they agreed to reserve judgement until a site visit had been made. Commissioners also expressed some concern as to the status of the Trust and the proposed distribution of benefits to the local community.

Action: Mr Hewitt

It was agreed that following the site visit the proposal would be discussed at a meeting of the National Committee for Wales and its recommendations would be presented to the full Board in late summer. This might be an opportunity to discuss generic issues, such as the allocation of benefits between different interests.

Action: Mr Hewitt

Mr Hewitt agreed to remind Commissioners of the previously-approved selection criteria used by Forest Enterprise Wales for assessing the impact of developments within its estate.

Action: Mr Hewitt

8. FORESTRY FOR PEOPLE PANEL

Andrew Inglis joined Commissioners to present the interim report by the Forestry for People Panel. Commissioners warmly welcomed the work of the Panel, although some concerns were expressed about the appropriateness of transferring nationally-owned assets to one particular section of the community. They were anxious that some of the lessons learnt should also be applied outside Scotland. Following discussion, Commissioners agreed with the proposed response to Dr Mary Hobley's report, subject to a reference to the role of education.

Action: Dr McIntosh

9. EDUCATION STRATEGY UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Lucy Kirkham and Sally York to the meeting to present a progress report on the FC Education and Learning Strategy. Lucy described progress made in Wales and mentioned the Children's Conference being held on 26 June 2003. Commissioners said it was important for the date of this event to be circulated widely.

Action: Mrs Kirkham

The Board welcomed the progress being made and agreed that this area should be firmly on the agenda for National Committees. The Chairman said it was important for good practices at country level to be disseminated widely. There should be regular feed into the GB Board.

10. TRAINING DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Mr Macniven reported on progress within the organisation and the wider industry. Investors in People accreditation had been renewed for FC and FE, with FR pending. 360 degree assessment of senior staff had been very effective. Commissioners noted the paper.

11. CASH FLOW REPORT

Mr Macniven provided details of income and expenditure for the first 10 months of the financial year. He expected to be able to report the end year position to the meeting of Commissioners on 11 April 2003.

Action: Mr Macniven

12. DIRECTOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Commissioners noted the Director General's written report. It was agreed that, whilst increasing the proportion of ethnic minority staff was proving difficult, the FC should remain active.

13. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Commissioners had no comment to make on Dr McIntosh's written report.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Information papers were tabled giving updates on Woodfuel Developments and the CAP Reform Mid-Term Review.

At the end of the meeting Lord Clark presented Mr Bruce Jones with a gift to thank him for his valuable service as a Commissioner and Mrs Bruce Jones with a bouquet of flowers.

17 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled to be held in Edinburgh on 11 April 2003.