

GB & NI Tree Health Advisory Group Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2015

Central Boardroom, Silvan House, Edinburgh

Present:

David Sulman - UKFPA
Jane Barbrook - APHA
Anna Brown - FC Scotland
Roger Coppock - FC X Border (Chair)
Chris Jones - NRW (telecom)
John Morgan - FC X Border
Diane Stevenson - DARDNI
Duncan Stone - SNH
Joan Webber - FR
Nicola Spence - Defra
Jamie Farquhar - Confor
Paul Woodcock - JNCC (telecom)
Andrew Smith - FE England
Emma Goldberg - Natural England
Tom Jenkins - representing Welsh Government
John Speirs - Scottish Government
Lorna Baillie - FC X Border (minutes)

Apologies:

Adrian Jowitt - Natural England
Andy Hall - FC England
David Brown - HTA
Chris Cheffings - JNCC
Christine Reid - Woodland Trust
John Dye - TIMCON
Harry Frew - Confor NPG
Jamie Dewhurst - Confor
Jon Heuch - Arboricultural Association
Jon Stokes - Tree Council
Caroline Harrison - Confor
Ray Hawes - National Trust
Martin Williams - Welsh Government

1. Welcome and Introductions

Roger welcomed everyone to the meeting and the members introduced themselves.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and actions

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising

<p>Action – Group to be used for feedback for the portal at future meeting. Nicola to provide update.</p>	<p>The link had been circulated to members. Progress was being made. Any feedback and comments were welcome. Action: Responses should be presented before the end of January. Action: Lorna to circulate link to those who had just joined the meeting.</p>
<p>Action – John M to discuss with Jamie how communication with the trade on notifications can be improved.</p>	<p>This was under development and moving forward. As soon as any EU decisions were made the trade would be made aware. Action to carry forward.</p>
<p>Action- Roger to plan for inclusion of update from James Morison on Climate Change Risk Assessment in future agenda. James advised there was not enough work on this at present to provide an update but that he is happy to do this at a later meeting.</p>	<p>Not enough work completed at present to develop a presentation. It was thought it would be mid to late 2016 before this would be possible. Action carried forward.</p>
<p>Action – Jane to circulate the general ALB finalised leaflet once available. David Brown can help circulate to some members. Leaflet was circulated for the meeting. This specific ALB Kent outbreak leaflet was now going to households.</p>	<p>Jane had circulated the leaflet and advised there had been positive feedback. Action: Jane to check with David Brown if circulated to HTA members.</p>
<p>Action: For a future meeting – look across full research landscape.</p>	<p>Action to carry forward.</p>
<p>Action: Chris R to arrange a meeting/training for Tree Alert. The Woodland trust is fully booked up across the UK. Chris to email Kate to arrange a meeting with the relevant parties.</p>	<p>Chris to provide an update at the next meeting on the progress of the meeting/training for Tree Alert. Action carried forward.</p>

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<p>Action: Chris J to get in touch with Consortium or York University who are completing work in relation to Chalara and may be interested in the site in Wales.</p>	<p>When Chris attended the site the disease had actually spread rapidly and a lot of regrowth was affected too. The planned management of the site was in discussion with the owner and was an ongoing situation. It was worth discussing how this site could be used for research.</p>
<p>Action – Diane to contact members of the group individually to discuss the current situation with Chalara in Ireland.</p>	<p>This would be picked up in the NI update later in the agenda. Action discharged.</p>
<p>Action: Mark to send presentation to Roger in order to circulate to the group.</p>	<p>Presentation circulated to group by Lorna in July. If any member required this to be sent again they could contact Lorna. Action Discharged.</p>
<p>Action– Longer projects and how they should be managed/researched should be considered as a topic for the next meeting. Roger to ask some members of the group to compile a paper on resilience in order to initiate the conversation at the next meeting.</p>	<p>This is covered later in the agenda. Action discharged.</p>

As per a previous action a representative was sought from Bali. Roger advised that the representative had now left the organisation and so a replacement had been requested. Roger was awaiting a response.

3.Plant Health Service updates

Defra

OPM - Evaluation of the surveillance programme was taking place and would be reported on in 2016. Next year’s surveillance programme was being planned and meetings with stakeholders were taking place. There had been a few more findings, particularly in the Guilford area. OPM continued to be major concern.

P.ramorum – Future policy was starting to be considered.

Considering broader policy review, the Tree Health Management Plan had been published and a new Tree Resilience Plan was now being considered. Work was starting with

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stakeholders, and it was thought this would take on a more urban tree approach. This would be developed in the first half of 2016.

There was active consideration of new threats through the Plant Health Risk Group. A number of pests and diseases had been flagged for national legislation. Ministers had agreed these were of concern and wanted to move forward with legislation.

More work was being completed to identify high risk in the trade.

Xylella was of real concern. There had been an outbreak in Italy on olive trees and also an outbreak in Corsica. An emergency decision had been taken by the European Commission. New EU emergency measures would come in to force early in the new-year. There would be a longer host list, countries must have contingency plans and there would be movement restrictions in countries where the disease was present. Outbreaks would be considered on a case by case basis. There was concern in the industry about what this meant as the new legislation would be issued in the middle of the supply season for most nurseries. Growing season inspections would not have been carried out but interim arrangements could be brought in to ensure the plant passporting of material. Industry had a right to be concerned and would need to ensure they were aware of the implications of the new measures and ensure sound biosecurity decisions were taken. Concerns raised by Confor were discussed, and Defra will be in touch with the sector shortly to outline proposed measures in the event of an outbreak.

Oak was covered under other plant passporting from North America.

Action: Joan to circulate climex data

Jon Stokes' document on ash by the road side would be published by Christmas.

Forestry Commission GB

The update was previously circulated to the group. John gave an overview of the details.

Chalara – Although inspectors would be able to pick subtle signs up they may not be obvious to general practitioners.

P.ramorum – There had been 2 reasonably quiet years due to dry weather in 2013 and 2014, meaning conditions were less favourable for sporulation.

OPM – Further sites had been identified. Work was being completed to determine the core area for 2016/17.

Oriental Gall Wasp – There had been a finding in Kent which was under eradication. Surveillance had been carried out by FCE throughout the whole of the South of England. There had been no further findings of this pest, or Sweet Chestnut Blight, which was surveyed for at the same time.

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There had been some improvement in wood packaging materials associated with steel imports. Interceptions tended to be for non-compliant markings rather than significant pests. Particular issues were found with material from China, Russia, Ukraine and Turkey.

Chinese stone imports were more compliant than steel imports.

FC England

Most matters were covered in the GB update, further information was provided as follows.

- Plane wilt survey – Surveys of three other cities had come back negative.
- Ben Jones had won a Civil Service award for manager of the year as a result of his work on plant health aerial reconnaissance.
- It was thought that air quality may affect the spread of a disease. There was an LWEC project considering air quality which the FC was part of and so may be able to feed in to this regarding plant health. **Action: Joan to follow up.**

FC Scotland

P. ramorum – Progression was mainly around known areas of infection. Any new areas were in remote locations. There had been a lot more findings in zone 3. Climate modelling was being carried out by CEH to consider zoning which may result in losing a zone or moving some areas to zone 1. These zones were indicative and at a country policy level and so it was thought that these could be changed without seeking approval at GB level.

Pine Tree Lappet Moth – As much of the site was being covered as possible, it was not possible to get to every tree due to the adverse topography.

Aerial work – It was likely that the last trial involving fungicides had taken place but more time would be spent on working with the helicopter companies to work out the best way to spread fungicides.

Brown Spruce Longhorn Beetle– There had been checks on traps that were already out in Perthshire and there had been no further findings.

Scottish Government

The next Scottish Plant Health Workshop was to be held on 14th December. This would involve interactive sessions on the key issues within the draft Scottish Plant Health strategy.

P. ramorum – The Scottish strategy and Status Report was published in September. The Scottish Phytophthora Steering group was due to meet on 20th January.

Proactive engagement – The Gardening Scotland event was growing every year and would allow Scottish Government to reach high volumes of people. There would be a plant health stand at future events in order to cascade key messages.

Natural Resources Wales

Chalara – There had been a change to some numbers which showed on the GB report. Numbers had increased up to 21% squares.

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P. ramorum – Some results had not been recorded as they were 'assumed' cases. It was found that SPHNS issued to the Highways Agency were miss-recorded. The number had been corrected in later data.

There was a new infection site at Welshpool. There had previously been no finding on larch at this site, although the infection had been found on rhododendron.

Noble Fir outbreaks – These were in mixture with Sitka. There was Larch in the area and some stands within several hundred metres.

Welsh Government

There was to be a project to assess the knowledge of Rhododendron adjacent to larch though this may not be comprehensive due to a lack of resource.

The Wales Tree and Plant Operational working group were to take forward Plant Health in Wales. This would include NRW, Welsh Government, APHA and FC GB. The aim was for an inaugural meeting to be held at the beginning of 2016 when the Terms of Reference would be developed.

APHA

Larch +ive sites – There was to be a follow up on results from NRW and FC England.

P. kernoviae – One new site had been found in the wider environment. This was adjacent to an existing site. There had generally been low levels of findings, which reflected weather patterns.

Oriental Gall Wasp – There had been some follow up work in private gardens.

Asian Longhorn Beetle – The first week of the winter survey had just commenced. This was a key year due to the three year cycle.

DARDNI

Ash die-back – Buffer surveys were prioritised. The results of the buffer surveys would be monitored in to next year. There had been some findings in hedgerow trees, which were adjacent to recent plantings. These were being kept under review.

P. ramorum – There had been a quiet year for this disease. There were roughly 10 new sites, mainly concentrated on the east, where the disease was more prevalent.

Action: Diane to feedback from policy review at next meeting.

4. Report back from Pallet Congress in Cork

Ian Brownlee attended the meeting to provide information about the recent pallet congress in Cork.

FEFPEB – The European Federation of Wooden Pallet and Packaging Manufacturers was the EU equivalent of TIMCON, who had organised the Congress.

The key messages to come out of this event were:

- Markets were important to the sector.
- There had been a slow downturn in demand from China.
- There had been a downturn in demand for repaired pallets.
- The event emphasised the benefits of using timber instead of plastic, including sustainability.
- EU sawn timber production relied on the relationship with the forestry sector.
- There was some concern about the need for proper quality marking amongst producers, but the group agreed that non-compliant marks could not be accepted.

The issue of repaired pallets needing to be treated was not consistent across member states. This would be brought to the advisory council in the near future.

Action: Ian to provide the link to the press release on the FEFPEB website and Lorna to circulate to the group.

5. Plant health resilience and longer term research

A discussion paper prepared by Duncan had been circulated to members prior to the meeting.

The following points were covered in discussion:

- Similar areas were being covered across a number of existing research programmes, and this work required some co-ordination.
- The paper posed the challenge of whether 'enough' resilience was what we might be looking for, and there are different views and uncertainty surrounding what needs protected.
- Possible solutions include the introduction of planting in mixture or different species, which might involve changes to native species, and considering how climate change could affect this. However, the scale at which resilience is desired needs to take natural environment views and wider impact into account to provide a more integrated approach.
- Some views were expressed that forests were already diversifying, and concerns were expressed that restrictions may be imposed if changes were made to e.g. recommended species/where to plant certain species.
- It was agreed that there is a need for the research sector to be given clear instructions on what is required to be looked at. This would require defining elements/components/ambitions/what is trying to be achieved in order to identify knowledge gaps.
- Industry view – There would have to be a change in mind set. The market place is in white wood and it was difficult to sell anything other than this profitably. Risk posed by pests and disease was of great concern as Sitka spruce could be susceptible to a future disease. The need is for advice/support so land owners could make well informed decisions.
- There was support for the discussion paper and the group agreed that it was happy to act as a sounding board for Defra's resilience plan, which would use the paper and the discussions to create a framework to take the issue forward.

Initially a GB wide guidance/framework should be developed to which country perspectives could be added.

- It was agreed that to analyse recovery – a longer term view was required, and stress testing of alternatives, and considering risks e.g. continuing to plant Sitka spruce, would need to be built into the process. There should be also be analysis on the impacts if something were to go wrong.

Action: Nicola to feedback what is happening in the Defra groups working on resilience to get a GB wide perspective, which the GB&NI Group can comment on.

6.The work of the Plant Health Risk Group

Nicola gave a presentation to the group. In addition, the following points were made:

- The Plant Health Risk Group was made up of 4 administrations which met to analyse new threats. UK decisions were developed to take to ministers and the EU.
- There had been no slowing down in identifying new threats.
- The group was able to prioritise and take action on the highest risks first.
- Previously full pest risk analyses were published for consultation, and these were complex documents to understand. There was now a shorter summary, which would allow more people to become involved in the consultation process.
- The information on the risk register could be searched by host to find out particular issues which affect that host.

Action: Lorna to circulate presentation to the group.

Action: Nicola to speak to Richard to look in to developing guidance on legislation for plants, similar to that which the FC GB team produced on timber.

Action: Nicola to make sure Caroline is sighted on this information.

7.APHUK update

There was agreement from Ministers that there would be a new partnership board. There was a Terms of Reference in place and the first step would be to elect a board. This would include 2 academic members and 2 members from industry. There would be a small Secretariat between BBSRC and Defra (this team would be employed by BBSRC).

Several projects were underway. The Plant Health skills project was led by Nicola and had had a number of successful outcomes already. The Register of Plant Health Professionals was moving along very well and it was hoped this would be rolled out early next year.

The Plant and Animal Health strategy was nearing completion and is likely to be launched with Ministerial approval.

It was noted that industry did not feel sighted on this update.

The group was reassured that tree health would be properly represented at this board.

8. Legislative options for further devolution

John Morgan gave a presentation to the group. The following additional points were made:

- There were 3 different drivers – further devolution, changes to legislation and national legislative changes, all running in parallel.
- Implementation Project Plan for the new PH Regulation – there would be a lot of work in this area between 2016 and 2019.
- Any movement of conifer roundwood and bark within the UK had been treated as a local movement up to now and so there had been no requirement for a plant passport. Under the new EU regulation, local movement exceptions would not be permitted. The way the UK deploys the definition of local movement was not used by other Member States, so was difficult to argue to have this included in the new legislation.
- Options for change in plant health legislation which would be required under devolution would be put to the countries to consider which one they prefer.
- During transition, amendments already in the Non-Forestry Orders would not be duplicated in the Forestry Orders.
- A steer was being sought as to how to provide technical advice to Defra.
- An alternative approach suggested was to legislate for wood and bark separately, as in Northern Ireland, but this would still duplicate information in both Orders.
- The Countries are working at different speeds and so completing all legislative changes at the same time may not work as the stages of completion would be reached at different times.
- If legislation to set fees was combined then it would make sense to have a common approach to charging; however, charging was calculated differently in Scotland than in other areas of the UK.
- Different implementing decisions would be adopted at different times between the 3 year period to 2019.

Action: Lorna to circulate presentation to the group.

Action: John to provide update at a future meeting.

9. FVO Mission

The response from the FVO Mission was very positive and was a good reflection of what was trying to be achieved.

Action: John to send conclusions from the FVO Mission to Lorna to circulate to the group.

10. Organisational changes for the plant health service – Defra and FC

Roger provided information to the group to raise awareness of organisational changes.

The Forest Governance Project would consider how functions would be devolved to countries.

FR Plus would be the refreshed FR including IFOS, Publications and Statistics. Other functions, including Plant Health, were being considered by countries as to which of them should be devolved to them over the next few years. Countries were currently putting forward business cases.

Initial discussions had started regarding how the GB Plant Health service would be devolved to England and Scotland. Wales was also included in some of this service. It was likely that in the next 2-3 years the countries would set up their own Plant Health departments, dealing with policy etc. themselves. It was thought it would still be likely that the countries would want a shared forum like this one to allow sharing of information when there would be no GB FC.

It was possible that more would be known at the time of next meeting and any developments would be shared with the group.

11. AOB

- a) It was requested if there was likely to be a pest alert issued soon for pine processionary moth. It was advised that FR already had a pest alert in preparation.

Action: Andrew to follow up pest alert with Joan.

- b) If there were an outbreak of pine processionary moth, this would not be something that FC GB would be involved with. This would be down to country teams and country Comms teams.
- c) The quality of Christmas trees coming in to the UK this year was discussed after some concern had been raised. FC GB was in contact with importers through the Christmas tree grower's website and was making them aware of the landing requirements. This issue had also been highlighted to inspectors to look at some samples.

12. Date and location of future meetings

Action: Lorna to circulate link to doodle poll for a date in June 2016. The meeting would either be held at the Motorcycle Museum in Birmingham or in Foss House in York.