

Expert Committee on Forest Science

Minutes of the meeting held 13.30 on 12th May 2016

(Belle Vue Royal Hotel, Aberystwyth, Wales)

Attending:

Roger Coppock
Julian Evans (Chair)
Peter Freer-Smith
Jaboury Ghazoul
Clive Potter
Monique Simmonds
Andrew Watkinson
Lorna Baillie (minutes)

Apologies:

Peter Whitfield

1. Welcome and preliminaries

Julian welcomed the Committee and welcomed Clive to his first meeting. Julian advised that Peter W sent his apologies for being unable to attend the meeting and field trip. Julian provided a brief outline of the 2 day programme.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2015

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

Actions and matters arising

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<p>Roger to contact Ian Boyd on behalf of the Committee in relation to Horizon Scanning concerns.</p>	<p>Roger spoke to Ian who advised that formal Horizon Scanning within Defra was diminishing. It was Ian's view that committees such as ECFS should work to provide Horizon Scanning for the organisations they work with, they should drive science rather than just respond to it. The Committee would need to consider how best to achieve this considering the skills of the members. Action: Peter FS to provide information to the Committee regarding what was currently being undertaken and the government's policy on Horizon Scanning. To be an agenda item for the next meeting.</p>
<p>Peter FS to update ECFS on social media in Spring 2016.</p>	<p>See Agenda Item 5 Action discharged.</p>
<p>Roger and Peter FS to take on board comments of the ECFS on both Emerging Species, Modelling and Sample Plots and consider funding options again before returning to the RSMB.</p>	<p>Mainly covered in Agenda Item 9. It had been agreed at the RSMB that £390K extra funding would be provided by CFS over the next few years. Discussions were to start with the private sector regarding funding. As a last resort the external research budget of CFS could be used. Action discharged.</p>
<p>Peter FS, Roger and Wilma to consider the ToR for the review and reconsider whether the whole of FR should be included.</p>	<p>See Agenda Item 10. Action discharged.</p>
<p>Roger and Julian to work on updating the press release before submitting.</p>	<p>Action discharged. Good coverage and a reasonable profile had been achieved.</p>
<p>Julian to draft an article for ICF's Chartered Forester.</p>	<p>Action discharged. Julian passed a copy of the article around the Committee.</p>

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Roger to provide a draft schedule and documentation to circulate to the full Committee to comment on.	Action discharged.
Roger to contact Monique to enquire whether she would be happy to commit to a further 3 years on the Committee.	Action discharged. Monique is happy to continue for a further 3 years.

3. Update on FR's work

Peter presented Paper 1 to the Committee.

The following points were highlighted:

- It was useful to consider high level priorities. This would be a starting point for Horizon scanning.
- The biggest recent organisational development is the move of IFOS, Publications and Statistics in to FR. This had gone well and was a positive step.
- FR remained internationally competitive. Linkages with universities to gain FR access to Research Councils funds as a full partner rather than a bit piece player.
- Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp was still an important ongoing issue. There were still new reports being received.
- Ash and tree breeding in general remained an important strategic priority.

The following points were discussed by the Committee:

- Flooding – FR had always had a hydrologist on the team, although there had been a shift from chemistry to the quantity of water. Much publicity around FR/Environment Agency project 'Pickering- Slowing the Flow'.
- Recent forest fires in Canada. There had been no issues raised by this. The publication by Andy Moffat, 'Early fire hazard warning system' was available to Forest Managers. There was a risk register and forest fires would appear on this.
- Climate change, in relation to drought and the extent that trees can be weakened. There was good published data on this subject. Napier University was due to start work on this topic soon.
- Social science. Little was reported and it was agreed to make social science a major theme as the next meeting.

Action: Peter FS to invite Liz O'Brien to present current social science research at next ECFS meeting.

4. Feedback on the Committee's Review of IFOS

Julian provided a brief background to the light-touch review on 23 February 2016. Presentations by IFOS staff were given to Julian, Andrew and Peter W. It was felt that IFOS moving to FR made good sense due to complementary skillsets.

One issue was the suggestion that a new format for 'Forestry Facts and Figures' could be an annual 'State of UK Forests' to emulate, though much reduced in size, FAO's 'State of the World's Forests' and the new publication 'State of the World's Plants' from Kew. In general these data need highlighting and given more publicity as an excellent source of information.

Opportunities for data sharing should be encouraged. Explore scenarios of FC making data available to universities. Forestry Facts and Figures was available online and there were aspirations to turn this in to a 'State of UK Forests' document.

The IFOS team reported that the review was a useful and positive experience.

The review recommended that FR staff should be fully briefed on IFOS and their work.

Action: Peter FS to contact Peter Weston to arrange meetings between FR staff and the IFOS team to consider the work carried out by each. IFOS leaders to potentially give presentations to FR staff.

The Forestry Commission thanked the Committee for their time to carry out this review as it was very useful to get an external perspective.

5. Update on FR use of social media

Peter FS presented Paper 3, produced by Dianne Stilwell.

The following supplementary comments were discussed:

- The FR website had undergone a major revision in the past 2 years. It was now used much more than previously. It was recommended as a portal for anyone in the forestry sector.

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- There was a clear link to science web pages from the FC website.
- Tree Alert was linked to and from both the FR and FC website.
- It would be interesting to know if Welsh users still use the FC website as opposed to NRW.
- There were now three sets of archived out of print FC publications online. Creating the metadata to make them searchable was time consuming and so the archives are being completed in batches.
- Twitter - there was substantial activity but the intention is to move to blogging to allow more characters. Twitter will continue for information sharing rather than discussion/engagement. For example, if notification of a new publication was tweeted the download rate increased.
- The Communications department had good relationships with journalists. There was also a good link with Science Media Centres. FR staff need to be listed for available spokesperson(s) when a tree or forestry story breaks and so be better positioned to get sound messages across.

The committee welcomed the enhanced website which served industry and the wider public well.

Action: Peter FS to add committee members to circulation list for e-newsletters.

Action: Clive to see if data can show relative use in Wales of FC/FR as opposed to NRW website.

6. Update on the Scottish Government/Defra Forestry Governance Board

Roger gave a brief update on the developments in this area.

7. Update on ICF Annual Conference (April 2016)

Roger put together the programme and invited speakers for the ICF Annual Conference. This was very successful and well attended with 250 plus delegates.

Roger provided a review of the programme which included genomics, tools for inventory, 3D scanning, challenges for SMEs, future markets and architecture.

All presentations were available on the ICF website.

Research priorities identified included:

- Mixed species management
- Continuous Cover Forestry on Spruce on challenging upland sites
- Genomics
- Tree breeding
- Timber properties and use of 'minor' and alternative species.
- Supply chain logistics

The Committee was interested in an event that James Pendlebury would be organising regarding the above research priorities.

Action: Peter FS to make Committee aware of the date of research priorities event.

8. Report on recent work on evaluation of ecosystem services

Pat Snowdon author of Paper 4 was unable to attend the Committee and the paper was presented by Roger.

Professor Bateman's report on a 'Scoping study on valuing the social and environmental benefits of trees and woodlands in England, Scotland and Wales' had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. The aim was to bring together all the information of relevance to forestry.

Highlights included the sensitivity of the Woodland Carbon Code to the price of carbon suggesting scenarios when it may be worth more to keep trees for carbon rather than felling for their timber. Also a hard economic case was being built for forests where they can contribute to alleviating flooding. If good evidence can be provided, insurance companies could be approached to explore their appetite to invest in woodland creation, on the basis of potential of huge savings in insurance claims.

The following comments were made by the Committee:

- Information was required on how stocks relate to flows.
- There were many social issues regarding adoption of codes.
- Ecosystem costs needed to be taken account of, e.g. trees falling in urban areas and causing damage.
- Some benefits were hard to measure, e.g. biodiversity/cultural benefits. These may be inadequately valued in this framework despite their importance.
- More science was needed to assist land owners to understand the decision making processes.

- Highlight more clearly options for policy makers.
- FC should work to standardise data.

Overall, the Committee were grateful for the work being commissioned, but raised some cautions. It should be taken forward provided the spend is not excessive.

Action: Roger to get information on whether companies can trade carbon.

Action: Roger to pass thanks to Pat and also to Professor Ian Bate-man for bringing report together.

9. Mobilisation of research funding from the UK Forestry

Roger presented Paper 5 to the Committee.

Discussion had taken place regarding industry contributing funding to re-search. A model was being sought that would mean all could contribute. The paper highlighted alternatives. Roger advised that the model in Annex 2 was preferred.

A trialling of this model to help fund tree breeding was to be a National Tree Improvement Strategy meeting held on 19th May.

The Economics team had prepared a short paper on tax relief. Advice could not be given but it was possible to highlight these benefits to companies to explore.

It may be possible to receive funding from Innovate UK.

Action: Peter FS to speak to Innovate UK regarding funding, Monique to provide contact details.

There would be formal agreements in place with industry regarding contribu-tions. This would help with concerns over organisations pulling out of funding depending on market demand.

The capacity to sell expertise abroad to bring in capital should be considered.

The possibility of sector secondments to FR should be considered.

FC/FR are to be applauded for getting to this point. The Committee would be interested to hear about the progress of the National Tree Improvement Strategy meeting.

10. FR Review Schedule

At a previous meeting it was agreed that the ECFS would complete an external science review of FR during 2017/18. This would include NFI, GIS, For-ester plus the separate programmes, both work funded by the FC and external customers.

Action: Roger to confirm scope with Jean Lindsay.

The following decisions were reached:

- The review would be held from 6th-10th November 2017.
- The review would be held in two locations – Alice Holt and NRS.
- There would be a discussion with customer groups and with Peter FS and James Pendlebury and also a summary session.
- Presentations would be given from each of the programme teams.
- Staff would know the criteria they would be evaluated on.
- The required papers would be agreed at the next meeting.
- The Committee would respond to paperwork ahead of the formal review sessions so that FR staff would know what to address in their presentations.
- The Committee would provide clear pointers on each programme.

11. Date and location of next meeting – Autumn 2016

The next ECFS meeting would be held at Alice Holt on 1st and 2nd November 2016. The structure would be to meet for a meal on evening of 1st, conduct business on the morning of 2nd and then meet with social science staff and the tree health group for one hour each in the afternoon.

12. Briefing of Field Visit 13th May

Peter covered the risk assessment and checked logistical arrangements.

13. AOB

No other business.