

If responding on behalf of an organisation please give its name

NW RAC & FWAC

Does the draft document 'Towards a New Public Forest Estate management body' adequately reflect the conclusions of the government 'Government Forestry & Woodlands Policy Statement'? - If so in what way?

Not answered

What further development is needed for the Management organisation?

Forestry expertise is not static, nor is the forest estate. Delivering a vision to protect, improve and expand the estate relies on constant interplay between the assets under management, external changes and policy to influence and engage with the nation's private estate. These objectives are undermined by artificially separating the functions and undermining partnership and innovative ways of working. Whilst we recognise the Government's desire for a separate body, a single overarching governance model should be implemented to ensure that forestry policy and land management are aligned.

If not, what are your views on the proposed mission and objectives for the new organisation (see Annex A of the draft document)?

Any new organisation will incur significant costs in creating an identity and brand. We feel that the Forestry Commission brand will be lost if it only applies to the "background" functions of the current Forest Service. We therefore advocate that the new organisation should retain the Forest Commission brand. This would ensure that there is no backward step in rebuilding trust and awareness of the public in the current management of forests. Rebranding will blur the distinction with other "charitable bodies" and potentially mean that government fails to meet forestry objectives in the short/medium term.

Operational independence and greater scope for project delivery, land management, new business structures etc to be welcomed but this should not automatically mean a total separation of policy function – in some respects a greater case for integration exists with the new body effectively creating a new engagement mechanism between the public estate and private woodlands.

Policy and intelligence are better delivered through a direct understanding of issues affecting both public and private estates and the networks to seek out collaboration. The relationship is reciprocal.

What are your views on how the new organisation could improve the financial sustainability of the Estate?

Must look beyond 3 year funding cycles – adopt approach take with Mersey Basin Campaign (25 years) or Canal and River Trust (15 years). Woodlands by their very nature should be planned and managed over generational timescales. The sustainability and establishment of a new body should be over this timescale.

A direct grant should be awarded to the new board to allow for the sustainability of the forest estate to be managed over the long term. The new body should consider raising values through a mix of acquisition and development with a single purpose of advancing the policy objectives. Proceeds and additional revenues should be protected for the support of the policy function and for further reinvestment in the estate. After the initial period, say 15 years, the case for direct grant can be reviewed again but the expectation would be that the need for such direct grant is reduced by the development of the estate and thus forestry and the management of the estate is on a much more sustainable footing.

What are your views on the significant assets and disposals arrangements set out in the document?

Additional requirements over significant assets sensible and broadly welcomed and RAC's have performed this role. FWACs in future could perform this role at Board level as well as represent the region and stakeholders. Guardians not required, but should instead strengthen community forestry partnerships and ensure they are represented within the FWACs – excellent example of good practice in the North West.

It will be necessary to give the new body a new name because Forestry Commission is established in law as a cross-border body. Do you have any ideas on a suitable name?

Suggestion is for the Forestry Commission to become the overarching Board for forestry research, policy and delivery in England (and partnership with Scotland with respect to Research).

This allows for an integrated approach retaining the benefits of the existing setup but allowing for the operational independence of a new body. The suggested name for the new body is Forestry Commission Land. FC Land could be supported by a policy function, say Forestry Commission Policy reporting into the newly constituted single Board. If an England only governance model was the only workable option then the suggestion would be simply to create a Forestry Commission England with the two bodies reporting to it.

What are your views on the arrangements proposed for the new organisation's accountability to Parliament?

New body should retain Ministerial link.

What are your views on the proposed Board's remit, size and composition?

Board should be a single body, reflecting the dual remit of the organisation – single reporting structure to DEFRA/Minister. The relationship between the Board and FWACs should be clear and integrated.

What are your views on the Guardians' remit, role, numbers and composition?

There is some reluctance to create 'Guardians' as this function already delivered to some degree by RACs and in the future by FWACs. We would argue that it is better to properly set up FWACs and ensure that their membership reflects the sector regionally and is able to receive input locally and feed into directly the Board. FWACs have huge potential in this area and with some minor changes to the approach could perform the function of Guardians as envisaged without the need to create something new. The appointment of Chairs is a straightforward way of managing the function.

What are the most important things to put in a public charter for the new organisation?

New organisation should be able to adopt complete 'land management' approach, think strategically and engage in external partnerships where they add value. The new body should also support the work of economic growth programmes and demonstrate leadership through long term commitment, building on existing strengths and encouraging a more joined up partnership approach with third sector and private sector organisations.

Do you have any general comments that you believe would be of assistance in creating the new organisation?

We are clear in the view that the link between Forestry Services and the Forestry Estate should be maintained.

The forestry functions review concluded that the current arrangements 'complicate governance and obscure a clearer "line of sight" between forestry and woodland policy and delivery'. What do you think should be done to address this?

Implementation of a clear governance model with a 'single conversation' regarding forestry delivery and policy would create a clear 'line of sight' to Defra and the Minister. Separating functions entirely only creates additional layers of bureaucracy and inefficiency as officers seek to formalise operational links.

What more do you think should be done to improve the efficiency with which government's forestry functions are delivered?

Need to move on from efficiency – already a lean organisation widely recognised as doing a great job with limited resource. The focus should be on effectiveness, measured against a long term plan.

Would you like to make any other comments about the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England, including on any impacts of the creation of the Public Forest Estate management body?

Not answered

Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - Cross-boarder functions?

Not answered

Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - Shared services?

Not answered

Would you like to make any other comments at this early stage about how setting up the Public Forest Estate management body and advancing

the conclusions of the review of forestry functions in England might affect: - England's National Office

Not answered

Would you like to make any other comments about any aspect of this work?

We welcome further opportunities for the RACs/ FWACs to engage constructively in this process.

Response ID

BHLF-69TR-9XCG-G