

If responding on behalf of an organisation please give its name

One Voice

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?

Whilst the draft document may adequately reflect the conclusions of the government policy statement, we find it is lacking the finer details of how the new PFEMO will be set out in legislation. We would need to see these details before the pre-legislative process begins and this should be open to further stakeholder scrutiny. We are not convinced that the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Forestry have been fully reflected in the draft.

What further development is needed for the Management organisation?

Not answered

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

Again, this proposed document is lacking enough detail to make an informed comment and as it stands could be open to misinterpretation. For example, the economic objectives give greater weight to generating income but only 'to encourage' economic growth. Delivering value for money will be keenly scrutinised by the general public who have yet to see a mechanism in place for this.

We fully support the social objectives in the proposed document. However, we would like to see what mechanisms would be used to 'engage' local communities. Without this detail it is difficult to see how communities can have an influence in the governance and management of the estate.

The environmental objectives need to be expanded on; for example, to seek out all UK and European grant opportunities in order to maintain and enhance these objectives. We are not sure how 'historic assets' have been, or can be, quantified and suggest rewording this.

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

We appreciate the aspiration for greater financial sustainability of the estate but find it difficult to understand how "holding the estate in trust for the nation" can be achieved without central government funding from taxpayers contributions. If the Treasury are minded not to provide at least a guaranteed sum of public funds for public benefit then the new organisation may be forced to make up any shortfall by selling 'piecemeal' parcels of the public estate, which are outside the proposed 'significant disposals' mentioned in point 47 of the document. We feel this needs to be clarified before legislation.

Funding: Dividends, or part thereof, should remain with the PFEMO for reinvestment. This can be monitored for the first 3-5 years to estimate profit/loss trend in order to see if it is in the public interest to pay future dividends, or part thereof, to the Treasury.

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

The term 'significant assets and disposals' is open to misinterpretation and is not quantifiable. There should be no correlation between parcels of local land with a 'percentage' or 'pro-rata' of the overall size of the PFE. This needs to be addressed and clarified before legislation, which should include a requirement for public consultation opportunities. We believe the Guardians and the Management Organisation should approve any proposed disposals. It is essential that records of disposals and acquisitions are available in the public domain and in 'real time'.

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?

We feel strongly that whatever name is decided it must include the word "public". The PFE has always been known by the wider public as something 'belonging' to the people. Not having this link dilutes that sense of ownership and may even be perceived as 'short-changing' the public.

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

There will of course be the need for accountability to Parliament and we feel the new organisation should also be accountable to the public through the Guardians.

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

Our views are that the Management Organisation should:

§ Be open and transparent

§ Show clear lines of accountability

§ Have a balanced mix of expertise and experience

§ Decision-making must have clearly defined and transparent processes and protocols in place and should hold up to public scrutiny

§ Have a legislative requirement to foster the socio-economic well being of communities

§ Ensure current open access to PFE is maintained and enhanced where possible

§ Minimise the risk of members having conflicts of interest

§ Have robust mechanisms and protocols in place to consult and engage with the public, particularly those hard-to-reach groups

§ Ensure good visibility in the public domain on how public money is spent

§ Develop clear lines of communication with all PFE areas

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

What use are Guardians without significant responsibilities? We believe Guardians should be a publicly accessible 'bridge' between the needs and aspirations of local communities, civil society, forest users, volunteers and the PFEMO. Both organisations/panels will be seen as caretakers of publicly owned land. Guardians should play a vital role in the future direction of the new PFE; they should have the power to make recommendations to the Board and the Board should take note and respond; they should have the power to escalate unresolved issues to the Minister. This should be reflected

within any Charter and/or Legislation.

Guardians will set up working protocols and strategies for:

- § Communications between the two bodies
- § Monitoring and measuring the effectiveness of the PFEMO
- § Public consultation
- § Public questions at board/committee meetings
- § Land sales and acquisitions of all sizes
- § Socio-economic well being of communities
- § Other committees, if appropriate
- § Effective resourcing and recruitment of forest volunteers
- § Keeping up to date with statutory and regulatory requirements
- § Building a sense of trust within the wider community
- § Open access to PFE
- § Develop mechanisms for feedback from forest users

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

Operational Structure: The most used phrase we have heard throughout this process is that 'one size doesn't fit all' and so, for it to work successfully it should be a 'bottom up' structure with increased autonomy at local level. This could be further enhanced by setting up forest Community Groups Forums, organised at local level and feeding back to the Guardians.

Ability to delegate: We are not comfortable with this and feel strongly that it should not be set in legislation. Delegation of functions leaves the door open for 'empire-building' by existing public bodies/NGOs; some of which operate with a known democratic deficit. It may also result in new charities being formed

by others for their own single-interest purposes. The ability to establish charities needs further clarification on what it would achieve. The proposed ability to delegate, in our opinion, is not removed far enough from government's initial proposals to 'sell-off' the PFE.

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

Not answered

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?

Not answered

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

Not answered

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?

Summary

ONE VOICE is grateful for the level of involvement that has been afforded to grass-roots campaign groups throughout this process and we hope that our input has been and continues to be of value to Defra/FC. However, there is still a substantial lack of detail on the draft legislation and no commitment to public consultation prior to the pre-legislative process. We would be more comfortable knowing that these two issues can be appropriately and immediately addressed.

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