

Agenda Item 5

Executive Board Meeting
9 July 2015

Memo No 19/15

Review of the UK Forestry Standard

1 Purpose

- To inform the board on proposals to review and update the UK Forestry Standard.
- To seek the board's endorsement and support for the process – which is to be carried out by CFS in conjunction with policy teams from the 4 countries.

2 Background

The current third edition of the UKFS will have been in place for five years by 2016. Since that edition, the context for forestry has changed: in terms of legislation, organisations, new drivers such as the Rural Development Regulations, the impacts of pests and diseases on tree health and the increasing importance of wood for fuel. To plan for how the UKFS might be updated or replaced, a policy paper 'Options for the Future of the UKFS' was circulated to country policy heads in April 2015 by CFS as a basis for consideration of the issues at their respective Boards. Of the seven options presented, the consensus in each of the four countries, together with staff working at UK level, was to undertake a 'light-touch review'. Within this concept, we shall accommodate the priorities of the countries through a Steering Group. The work is to be facilitated by CFS as a co-operative project on behalf of the countries, with the support of expertise from Forest Research.

The first meeting of the Steering Group was held on 1 July. The scope of the review was agreed together with arrangements for each country to get ministerial cover or clearance and the nature of wider engagement through a UKFS reference group.

3 Principles

The aim of this project is to consolidate and extend the life of the UKFS and Guidelines published in 2011. This will be achieved by a light touch review that will:

- Update the series to reflect changes in legislation relevant to forestry and other regulatory requirements.
- Reflect key policy changes arising from increased devolution.
- Update with developments in the organisations and mandates of the forestry authorities, e.g. FC Wales > NRW.
- Have the new edition in place by the end of 2016. (~5 years since the last edition).

4 The UKFS and Defra's smarter guidance initiative

In undertaking the revision, we are cognisant of the Defra-led initiative to reduce and rationalise the quantity of environmental guidance provided by the Westminster Government. The approach to the UKFS, and other key supporting cross-border guidance, has been put forward by the Strategic Publications Group. The overarching principles have been submitted to Defra by FC England and Cross-border services. Two of the fundamental points in support of the UKFS are:

- The UKFS provides a one-stop-shop that sets out what people must do to practise sustainable forest management and it clearly sets out their legal obligations.
- The good practice requirements set out in the UKFS aim to encourage action (that supports government policy and international commitments) through guidance rather than by mandating it through legislation. This aim is supported by country grant schemes.

In addition, the following considerations are relevant in relation to the UKFS and Guidelines:

- they meet the requirement to put the UK's international obligations into place;
- they provide the framework for operationalising the output of Forest Research – as we take an empirical approach to implementation;
- they set out the priorities and regulatory needs of the 4 countries, including critically, what has to be done to meet the EU Rural Development requirements;
- they are the basis of independent certification (UKWAS) and the Woodland Carbon Code;
- they are consensus documents that represent the views of wide range of stakeholders beyond government, for example: Woodland Trust, RSPB, ICF and the Confederation of Forest Industries (Confor).

On this basis, we have explained to Defra that the review of the UKFS will take place. However, where possible, we will rationalise the content during the review process, and reduce the amount of published material in the final edition.

5 Roles of UKFS Review Steering Group

The Steering Group, which met for the first time on 1st July, comprises a nominee from each of the four country policy teams and is chaired by Richard Howe. Other expertise, including external, will be deployed as required. The functions will be to:

- oversee the project and provide guidance;
- agree technical content and extent of editorial changes required;
- nominate and offer the expertise of suitable specific subject leads/contacts (from each country) for each aspect of sustainable forest management;

- liaise with the respective forestry boards and secure, where necessary, ministerial endorsement;
- advise on the extent and nature of consultation required to capture a broader perspective.

6 Resource Implications

Undertaking the light touch review will involve some external expenditure and staff resources from both CFS and the four countries. This staff-time from the countries is expected to be fairly modest. For CFS we expect most of the contribution can be managed within existing budgets with £20k is earmarked for this in 15/16 , but there may be some knock-on effects with the publications programme and these will be discussed within the Strategic Publications Group. The option of “do nothing” was ruled out by all the countries and the light touch represents the next cheapest option that will minimise the resource required to develop a new edition whilst capitalising on the investment in the major reworking of the UKFS concept in 2011.

By undertaking this work on a cross-border basis, we will avoid duplication through the four countries having to develop the necessary knowledge and expertise and of having to find the resource to develop alternative mechanism. (The Government Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement Implementation Plan – One Year On, commented on the: *'... significant benefits for both efficiency and/or effectiveness from continuing to deliver those functions on a cross-border basis'.)*

The update must be achieved through consensus between the forestry teams and CFS. The review must not stray into a comprehensive re-write as the resource to undertake the revision is limited and the work would not be done by the 5th anniversary of the current edition.

7 Risk Assessment

There are risks to British forestry if we were not to do this work:

- The lack of a common UK approach, defined by the UK Forestry Standard, would mean that each of the four countries would need to develop equivalents: divergence between the approaches across borders would not be helpful or well-received by the forestry sector, or by certification bodies and UKWAS.
- The forestry contribution to both international and cross border issues would be dissipated and lose both focus and influence through lack of coordination.

8 Communications – options for final publication

An important consideration will be the format and publication of the next edition. To inform the decision, CFS will work with the countries to investigate how the current edition is used. Final decisions on style and content (in terms of editorial) will be determined by the Publishing and Technical Communications Team. These decisions will

be based on evidence, and taken in consultation with the cross border Strategic Publishing Group. Final publication will also be influenced by constraints such as time, budget and ease of future management.

The precise nature of consultation and publicity for the new drafts will be discussed by the Steering Group, with the help and expertise of the CFS and country communications teams. However, the emphasis will be that this is an update not a change to the essential content.

9 Discussion

There will be several challenges in bringing this project to fruition. A compromise will need to be found through the varying priorities and approaches of the countries, particularly, perhaps, the drive from England and Westminster to rationalise guidance. There could be confusion for users if there are significant changes, beyond those of a 'light touch' revision, as initial feedback from forestry regulators has emphasised that the last edition is only just bedding-in. Moreover, were the revision to stray into too much detail, we would run the risk of the UKFS becoming 'unravelling' by the various stakeholders, and resultant delays to the 2016 target. There could also be country disagreement over technical content and structure.

We are confident that these various pressures can be resolved and that the project can be achieved by the end of 2016. In order to achieve this, the full co-operation of the countries together with the support and endorsement of the EB is sought.

10 Recommendation

The Board supports the revision process being undertaken at cross-border level to update the UK Forestry Standard and endorses the approach described above.

Richard Howe and Elaine Dick
30 June 2015