

Agenda Item 10 Executive Board Meeting Memo No 6/14
5 March 2014

Update on international forestry, forestry standards and certification.

Purpose

1 To provide the board with an overview of the work carried out by CFS on international forestry, forestry standards and certification.

Background

2 Since April 2012, Defra have had the lead on international forestry policy for the UK. The FC has a supporting role in providing specialist advice as well as covering the more technical aspects of forestry in UK engagement at international level. (The split of responsibilities between the FC (CFS) and Defra's EU & International Forestry Unit is defined in a MoU – available at Annex 1). As the UK approach to sustainable forestry is defined through the UK Forestry Standard, responsibility for this is combined with international forestry to form the core work of this branch of CFS.

3 Technically, international issues are reserved; whereas forestry standards have both reserved elements (in that they link to international agreements) and devolved elements that relate to country forestry policies and forestry practice. The current arrangements are determined by the constitutional position whereby it is the UK, or in some cases the EU, which has the right of representation in international processes. (This may need to be revisited depending on the outcome of the Independence Referendum in Scotland.) The Westminster Government's "Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement" (Jan 2013), recognised the importance of adequate provision to support cross border co-operation in a number of areas - including both standards and international issues, "*where this represents the most efficient and effective means for their delivery*". CFS thus works closely with the countries on these topics where it makes sense to take a cross-border approach. (Examples of recent international and standards work is set out in Annex 2.)

Principles

- 4 In order to clarify our approach we have defined the following guiding principles.
- i. UK policy on international forestry is informed by domestic practice and the UK approach is promoted internationally.
 - ii. A proportionate, or risk-based, approach is taken using existing UKFS-based mechanisms so that potentially detrimental impacts and burdens on forest owners and the UK sector are avoided or minimised.

- iii. A common UK approach is developed to forestry issues where this is desirable and feasible - taking account of country priorities, UK organisations (such as Confor), research findings, and the practicalities of forest management.
- iv. The approach to forestry issues is coordinated across the Westminster Government, taking full account of the agreed approach articulated by the UK Forestry Standard.
- v. Forestry expertise and specialists from across the UK are engaged in informing, developing and influencing the outcome of international forestry processes.

International forestry responsibilities

5 In international forestry policy we act specifically to support Defra. This may comprise, for example, forming part of the UK delegation for Forest Europe meetings. We also provide comments and technical input for Defra in the various fora they attend, such as the UN Forum on Forests and the EU Council Working Parties on Forestry. In supporting Defra, we garner the views of the devolved administrations and involve forestry experts to develop UK positions, (on topics such as climate change, economics, biodiversity, forest inventories,). This enables us to influence international processes and policies.

- 6 We act for the UK in areas where the FC has primary responsibility:
- i. EU Standing Forestry Committee (SFC);
 - ii. the United Nations FAO European Forestry Commission and ECE Committee on Forests and Forest Industry;
 - iii. the UK's technical contribution in support of Forest Europe's Work Programme;
 - iv. bilateral engagements, international initiatives (such as New Generations Plantations Project – WWF) , and cooperation;
 - v. the forestry content of the EU Forestry Strategy.

7 Through exercise of the principles in para 4, the value of engaging in these areas is to ensure that international processes work to the advantage of the UK, and that UK policies are promoted. There is also value in the FC having the lead in specific fora where a more technical contribution is required. In some cases, the UK is committed through international treaties and agreements to be part of the process, while in others, there are is a clear national interest or link to wider foreign policy. Nevertheless, we are selective in determining which of these processes to engage with and use our networks to influence them at the appropriate time.

Note: Specialist work on Rural Development /State Aids is undertaken by Mike Render, FCE's policy lead based in Defra offices. Other specialist policy leads include Mark Broadmeadow, who provides technical contributions to DECC on land use and carbon, including where these feed in to international processes.

Cross Border Engagement and the Woodland Policy Enabling Programme (WPEP)

8 The WPEP reviewed the Cross Border workstream (Phase 1) and in relation to international work it concluded that it is important that FC retains this expertise so that it is available to all three administrations. In carrying out this work, we consult and maintain a dialogue with the countries. For example, we have instigated formal quarterly review meetings with DEFRA International which include the country representatives. We work to strike the right balance between engaging countries on the one hand, and not over-burdening staff with unnecessary details on the other hand. *For example, we seek country views when we represent the UK at the EU Standing Forestry Committee in relation to the development of the EU Forestry Strategy. This influences Rural Development funding for forestry.*

9 In addition to our specific role with Defra, we act as point of reference to other departments on UK-wide forestry issues based on international agreements, international reporting, the UK Forestry Standard and certification as it affects the UK. *For example, we have been working with DEFRA on timber procurement policy and with DECC on criteria for sustainable biomass (See Annex 2; we also undertook a review of EU Competencies in relation to EU forestry, see Annex 3).* On certification, which links closely to the UKFS, we work on matters of common interest and we co-ordinate country positions in relation to the UKWAS steering group. We also work with UK-wide organisations such as Confor, the RSPB. For example we worked *closely with Confor on a UK approach to the EU Timber Regulation (Annex 2).*

Resource Implications

10 At the time of devolution, Forestry Ministers agreed that rather than trisect funding, those functions which were either reserved or carried by agreement out on a cross-border basis would be funded through the UK Government (Defra). This was reiterated in "The Government Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement Implementation Plan – One Year On", which commented on the: " ... *significant benefits for both efficiency and/or effectiveness from continuing to deliver those functions on a cross-border basis*".

11 Following the transfer of responsibilities to Defra, International Branch was reduced from 1PB1, 2xPB3 and 1PB4, (and a substantial element of the DG's time) to 1 PB 3 (Frances Snaith), and 1 PB 2 (Richard Howe). This arrangement allows for support as necessary from other members of the CFS Analysts' team and specialists in Forest Research and the countries.

12 By undertaking this on a cross border basis, it avoids complications over representation of a UK position by countries. It removes the need for each of the four countries to develop the necessary knowledge, expertise and networks, and to commit resources into the international forestry processes to carry out this work. Without a cross border approach, an alternative mechanism would be needed to bring country forestry perspectives together to form a UK position.

Conclusions

12 When the lead in international forestry policy was passed to DEFRA in 2012, the challenge for the Forestry Commission was to take advantage of Defra's international and departmental profile, ensure the sector's interests continued to be promoted robustly and ensure that positions taken internationally were fully aligned and compatible with domestic priorities and practice.

13 We are confident this is developing well. Our hand has been strengthened by taking advantage of the Westminster profile of DEFRA and by combining international issues with responsibility for the UK Forestry Standard. We have developed a good relationship with Defra who value our expertise. Having one point of contact for Defra (and other Departments and bodies) to deal with is proving effective and has enabled us to define and promote unified positions and make forestry contributions count. These co-ordinated contributions can be strengthened by compatible messages through devolved channels.

Risk Assessment

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

- The forestry contribution to both international and cross border issues would be dissipated and lose focus through lack of coordination.
- The UK is likely to be less engaged in international processes and the particular circumstances of British forests would be less well reflected.
- The interests of forestry would likely be subsumed within other sector's / Departmental priorities such as biodiversity or climate change.
- The lack of common UK approach, defined by the UK Forestry Standard, would mean that each of the four countries would need to duplicate the work by developing their equivalents: divergence between the approaches across borders would not be well-received by the forestry sector.

Recommendation

15 The Board supports the work being undertaken at cross border level on international forestry and standards work and endorses the principles we are working to (listed at paragraph 4).

Richard Howe
Head of International Branch, CFS
31 January 2014

Case Studies and Examples

1 The UK Forestry Standard: this continues to act as the foundation for British forestry, (its worth was recognised by the Independent Forestry Panel in England, the Task Force on Forestry Regulation, and the “Grown in Britain” initiative.) It provides a proportionate, flexible, low-burden approach to sustainability and we have promoted it as such both domestically and internationally. We are working work to ensure it remains current and is supported by appropriate guidance. *For example surface water acidification, principally due to atmospheric pollution, continues to affect acid sensitive regions of the UK. We have led a hard-won cross-border approach, drawing on 20 years of research and participation from the regulatory authorities in the four countries. Due for publication shortly, the Practice Guide and a supporting Research Note describe the measures required to minimise the risk of adverse impacts of acidification in relation to new planting, felling or restocking proposals.*

2 The EU Timber Regulation: introduced as part of international measures to combat illegal logging, we worked closely with Defra as the Regulation developed, in particular to ensure that whilst tackling illegal logging it did not result in a disproportionate burden to the domestic forestry industry. We kept countries informed and worked with them to maximise the extent to which existing regulatory controls could incorporate the regulation. *For example; working with FE England and Confor, we put together a straightforward form to enable woodland owners to address the EUTR requirement for a risk assessment and agreed the approach with the National Measurements Office (the enforcement authority).*

3 Criteria for Sustainable Biomass: new markets for biomass have been driven by climate change policies agreed through UN Conventions, EU policies and UK legislation. A primary condition of incentives is that biomass must emanate from sustainably managed forests and we have been working at EU level, and with DECC and DEFRA over the last 18 months on defining sustainability criteria. Our aim is to provide the necessary assurances whilst minimising potential additional burdens on the sector. This involves making make as use as possible of existing mechanisms for demonstrating forestry sustainability, such as certification and the Forest Europe criteria and indicators as expressed through the UKFS. We were instrumental in shaping the EU Standing Forestry Committee's opinion on sustainable biomass and domestically we have worked closely with FCE and with DEFRA on alignment with the UK Government's timber procurement policies (CPET).

4 Forestry Report on the UK Government's review of EU competences: as part of the UK Government's review of EU competencies, we assembled a forestry submission to Defra. Although the EU does not have competence in forestry per se, there are many areas of EU competence which have a direct bearing on the forestry sector such as biodiversity, climate change and agriculture. In close consultation with the countries we summarised the positive and negative impacts in all the relevant areas.

5 EU Forest Monitoring: In the EU Standing Forestry Committee we successfully shaped the EU approach to forest monitoring by advocating a system based primarily on national level forest inventories. The resulting agreement to establish a voluntary Forest Information System for Europe (FISE) takes a stepwise approach and recognises the need to improve the quality of knowledge and information on forests and forestry to contribute to better policy formulation, as well as to respond to international reporting commitments. FISE focuses on a number of key priorities agreed among EU Member States including the carbon cycle, biodiversity, forest resources and biomass and forms an integral part of the EU Forest Strategy.

6 Forest Europe - Tools for further developing Sustainable Forest Management: we lead for the UK within the Forest Europe process on technical expertise and we contributed to the review of Criteria and Indicators for further developing SFM. We influenced discussions so as to reduce the risk to our own approach to SFM, as defined in the UK Forestry Standard, whilst responding to increasing demands to make the pan-European indicators more focussed and relevant to new issues such as biomass. We have linked this process to other work taking place in the EU on criteria for sustainable biomass to ensure consistency in approach.

7 EU Rural Development Funding and Cross-Compliance: our contacts and working relationship with colleagues in the European Commission has meant we have been able to act quickly to raise awareness of our concerns on potential harvesting restrictions linked to cross-compliance obligations. We have instigated informal discussions in Brussels between DG Agri forestry experts and the Commission's agriculture and rural development experts on the implications for forestry, and we shall be raising the issue at the next standing forestry committee.