

**If responding on behalf of an organisation please give its name**

Save Our Woods

**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?**

Difficult to answer this as the 'Government Forestry & Woodlands Policy Statement' was unclear on many of its conclusions and didn't go into much detail, it also drifted somewhat from the recommendations of the Forestry Panel. So whilst the draft document 'Towards a New Public Forest Estate management body' may, or may not, adequately reflect the Government's conclusions, it does not accurately reflect the conclusions of the many public consultations that there have been about the PFE to date.

**What further development is needed for the Management organisation?**

What makes our forests 'public' forests? What makes our public forests something that people deeply value and consistently fight to protect? – What drove civil society to force this entire process to occur?

What makes our public forest unique and have a special place in the hearts of the nation is not just the balance of the environmental/social/economic aspects that form the fundamental roots of the estate, but also how those aspects holistically connect. Not least through the diverse cultural heritage of the forests and its strong relationship with industries engaged with the estate.

In these proposals I don't see the depth of understanding of this that I know Forestry Commission staff have. These proposals lack any obvious vision. It's just a plain explanation of how DEFRA are going to turn our public forest estate into a profit driven business that feeds back into the treasury and cuts civil service jobs. Isn't that what we stopped happening in 2011?

Write your proposals to include the social and environmental aspects of the PFE with the same detail that you have done for the economic aspects so that we can comment fully on your aspirations that at the moment, according to this document, are unclear and un-settling.

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

Over-all it is too vague and does not illustrate the 'balance' that is mentioned in the overarching objective. The 'direction of travel' is almost positive but the language used means it could be interpreted to allow the new management body to do whatever it likes. In it's current state this cannot be used for the checks and balances needed to protect the estate from unfavourable exploitation.

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

'Improving' the public forest estate's financial sustainability should be constrained within bounds comparable to a social enterprise. As a 'public' forest estate the economic aspect should serve & support the social and environmental aspects of our PFE, not override them and this should be quantified using natural capital accounting. The emphasis throughout the proposals is on more than just financial sustainability it's on the economic growth of the estate, with the social an aside and environmental at the bottom of the pack. You even go as far as paying dividends to Government instead of investing any windfalls back into the PFE. This is unacceptable.

The success of the PFE should be measured on its outcomes in terms of public and environmental benefit via natural capital accounting and not on its ability for year on year financial growth. Year on year financial growth is not sustainable in the long term, however year on year growth in biodiversity & social engagement is exponential and will ultimately lead to the financial sustainability of the estate, by building strong community networks, resilient & abundant forest ecosystems and a strong timber market via the resulting woodland culture. The much sought after Woodland Culture should have the Public Forest Estate as it's beating heart. This should be the aim of the PFEMO.

There should be a clear funding contract (enshrined in legislation) between Government and the PFE for the public benefits the PFE provides as quantified through natural capital accounting. Public benefits should include, amongst other things, the management and creation of areas of non-forested/non-productive land for exceptional ecological/social purposes (for example; ancient woodland/heathland/scrubland/lakes). However, any change of land use should be in close consultation with the local, national and forest practitioner communities and be PFE & civil society led, not 'partner' led.

The PFE should continue to be an exemplar of, innovate and expand environmentally & financially sustainable forestry and continue to support local/national/international industries.

The PFE should actively encourage knowledge transfer and development of skills/expertise through apprenticeship schemes.

Respecting local heritage, the PFE should actively protect, promote and maintain the cultural diversity in landscape management practices throughout the estate. Avoiding a homogenous approach to landscape management, forest design and onsite marketing.

A new PFE wood products line should be created to encourage the use of British wood and celebrate the skills of designers, artists, carpenters, greenwoodsmen and underwoodsmen. Selling products onsite and online.

Approximately 75% of the business on the estate is in the private sector already. The PFE could probably play a fuller part in the rural economy if it stopped privatising the business's already on the estate. There should be strict controls over how much more of the estate's current and future business is given over to the private sector. If the PFEMO lacks the relevant experience to run an enterprise on the estate then it should bring the experience into the organisation and not pass the enterprise to the private sector or rely heavily on 'partnerships'.

Change of land use (including on land leased to the private sector), non-timber resource extraction and renewable energy farms on the estate should go through a strict and thorough process of local and national consultation before going to the planning process.

As for entry fees.. what? No.

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

How big does an area of land have to be before it's classed as 'significant'?

How important to the local or national community does an area of land have to be before it is classed as 'significant'?

How valuable ecologically does an area of land have to be before it's classed as 'significant'?

Whether you define 'significant' by size or by importance to wildlife

or users, all sales/transfers/leases, regardless of size or perceived value, should be agreed firstly with the relevant local community and secondly with the national community. This could be once or twice a year through the publishing of the PFEMO's proposed business/development plans for the coming yr, actively inviting comment from all stakeholders and in particular civil society.

Not consulting nationally on the disposal of small parcels of land could deny those people who visit from urban areas from 'having a say' on an area of the forest that is important to them. Whilst the PFE is made up of individual forests with unique cultural heritage it should always be viewed in decision making as a national public asset. The wider public has a valuable role to play in decision making alongside the forested communities.

The management board should only hold ownership of the estate if there is legislated, participative civil society representation on the board.

There should be a strong remit to expand the estate, through acquisition of forests & creation of new forests. This should include timber plantations as well as forests for conservation and amenity forests close to urban/peri-urban areas.

**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?**

I don't like Forest England.. it might roll off the tongue nicely but it doesn't convey the connection of the PFE to the people. I prefer Public Forest England (PFE)

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

It's not clear to me how arms length from Ministers/sponsoring dept the new body will be. Clarity of the distance from Ministerial/sponsoring dept control is crucial for me to respond accurately and so must be explicitly spelled out.

Piecing bits together from the doc, it doesn't appear that the new PFE body will be very far from Govt control at all. In fact, it looks like it will be under closer control of Govt, with the added benefit of Govt achieving what it set out to do originally by cutting more civil servant jobs/benefits/pensions etc and splitting up the Forestry Commission.

The public appointments process is less than transparent or free from 'cronyism'. The Guardians should be a part of the selection process for all seats on the board, exec, non-exec and including the Chair.

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

The Board's remit should be to manage the estate and be answerable to the Guardians.

However, if there is to be a Board as you describe it then it's composition should be legislated along these lines:

- (a) at least two shall be persons who have special knowledge and experience of ecologically and financially sustainable forestry;
- (b) at least one shall be a person who has scientific attainments and a technical knowledge of ecologically sustainable forestry
- (c) at least one shall be a person who has special knowledge and experience of the global timber trade and also local markets;
- (d) at least two shall be persons from civil society; and
- (e) at least two shall be persons who have special knowledge and experience of nested living systems (both social and eco' systems)

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

The Guardians could be an innovative and inspiring body that reflects the principles of the European Landscape Convention.

The proposed Board is a million miles away from the Forestry Panel recommendations which should have inspired a new type of public body, with the people that saved the forests from privatisation (civil society) placed firmly in the role of Guardian alongside forestry practitioners, ecologists, timber market and community engagement specialists.

These Guardians should hold the estate in trust for the Nation, hold the estates management to account and have direct line of sight to Govt.

Focusing on the outcomes of the estate is too late. The Guardians should be a part of the decision making.

FWACS should not be a route to becoming a Guardian.

It's difficult to see the vision for the Guardians as described in the proposal.

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

Before comment it needs to be made clear what will give the charter legal status. Is being mentioned in the legislation enough?

It also needs to be understood what will be in the legislation, what the decision is on the details of the management board and Guardians.

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

Forestry Commission staff, community campaign groups and other forest stakeholders should have prior sight of the draft legislation, management and business plans before entering the parliamentary process.

**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?**

When we started the campaign Save Our Woods, we were fighting to stop the fragmentation & selling off of our Public Forest Estate and the loss of the almost 100 yr old Forestry Commission that we trust and respect.

We campaigned for a Public Forest Estate managed for the people by the Forestry Commission with the ability to retain the profits the estate makes to invest in enhancing the public and environmental benefits it brings. Enabling the Forestry Commission to manage the estate to the gold standard that private & public forestry across Europe looked to for inspiration.

It seems to me that in these days of increasing tree pest and disease and the need to prepare for climate change that splitting up the Forestry Commission would be a grave mistake regretted for generations. Even now we don't know what will happen to the research sites on the Public Forest Estate. Will Forest Research be privatised and forced to lease the plots from the new PFEMO?

The Forestry Commission reflects the nature of our Public Forest Estate. It is a multi-faceted collection of expertise and passion made up of staff that love the estate the same as it's users and communities, because they ARE it's users and are a PART of the communities.

Together the parts of the Forestry Commission are greater than the sum of its parts. This country needs the Forestry Commission to stay an integrated whole, funded sufficiently. A vital evolution of the Forestry Commission not a dissolution.

I wrote this article at the end of last year. It's one of the most shared articles on the Save Our Woods site. I post it here because it says it all for me:

Forestry Commission – you don't know what you've got till it's gone

Ok, bare with me while I create some background...

When I started Save Our Woods (SoW) with my mate Karen a couple of years ago, it was for a simple reason. To find out WHY Government wanted to sell off the 250, 000 hectares of our publicly owned forests. That's it. Since March 2011 Save Our Woods has been just me and Pip Howard, with the help of many new and old friends that know a thing or two about forests, politics and people. It's been a very steep learning curve for me.

SoW has achieved a lot in its short life. We played a key role in getting the forestry clauses thrown out of the public bodies bill, we drove hundreds of thousands of people to the 38 Degrees petition, we led the #saveourforests twitter campaign, we networked with campaign groups, experts, professionals and politicians to make sure that our campaign had a strong foundation in facts and we published exclusive information. We also pushed hard against the large environmental NGO's who appeared to be resigned to the sell off and instead of helping us fight against it were looking to see how they could work with Government to gain from it.

It was about 3 weeks into the life of SoW that Karen and I sat down and agreed that as the Public Forest Estate was so intertwined with the Forestry Commission (FC) we needed to learn more about them and make sure that we wanted to support them as the caretakers of our public forests. That meant that I had to undo 10 years of brainwashing and open my mind so I could research the work the FC does, without bias. I can't tell you how glad I am I did that.

### How I became a Forestry Commission convert

Firstly, I should say that my first contact with the Forestry Commission was when I bought a woodland about 5 years ago and needed advice on management. I was struck at how lovely the FC guy was and how helpful too. He gave up a lot of his time & gave lots of free advice, which was invaluable. Certainly not the tree eating money monsters I'd been led to believe.

The forest campaigns and 'Friends of' groups, taught me that with each forest being unique and multi purpose, the FC works very closely with communities to engage them with their forests – and the groups are violently protective of the relationships they've built up with the FC!

I learned that the FC has been a global pioneer in sustainable forest management and not only that, they've played a part in healing industrial landscapes near urban conurbations and have opened up areas in some of their forests to create mosaics of habitat to boost biodiversity, encouraging the forests to become more resilient. I've learned that quite contrary to what we're all led to believe, the FC are amongst the most successful at protecting some of our rarest woodland species. I learned that the Forestry Commission's scientists have already researched how they're going to make our

forests more resilient in the face of climate change.

I learned that the foresters are men and women who have dedicated their entire lives to working in all weathers, often for more hours than paid for, out in the forest and with local communities because it's more than just a job, it's a passion. A perfect example of this is the fact that FC staff have dedicated this past few weeks, working tirelessly around the clock, surveying our Ash trees for *chalara fraxinea*, leading the public, NGO's and other bodies in assessing their woodlands too.

Why don't we hear about all the amazing work the Forestry Commission does? Well, I believe it's because they're a Government department & government departments don't waste resources on PR unless they have to.

The danger of this is that if people don't know about the work the Forestry Commission does, they can't care about losing them. They think that the organisations with the loudest PR are the pioneers and the knights in shining armor that can save our forests. My research has taught me that although the Forestry Commission is not perfect, it is World renowned and if we lose them or dilute them through partnerships, I fear we're going to lose the skills, expertise and passion of a unique team of people that we'll be hard pushed to replace. We won't know what we've lost till it's gone.

My message to our new environment ministers is this:

Please, DON'T put an NGO between us and those we trust at the Forestry Commission. Particularly over something as important as community engagement, tree disease and forest resilience to climate change.

Please, DO give the Forestry Commission the resources and freedom it needs to work with us, the public, to advance our multi-

purpose forests into a financially and ecologically sustainable future we can be proud to leave our children.

I can't believe this is me writing this. If it had been 2 years ago I'd be saying give the Woodland Trust all our public woods! Well, after 2 years of research I now know how dangerously wrong I would have been.

**Response ID**

ANON-69TR-9XCS-V