

## FCW DIRECTOR'S REPORT FOR GB COMMISSIONERS

### POLICY

#### Wales Woodland Strategy Update

1. Following a 'refresh' last year, we have been asked by our Minister, Elin Jones, to review the Wales Woodlands Strategy, *Woodlands for Wales*, to align it with *One Wales* – the Labour/Plaid Cymru Coalition document produced in June 2007. Although woodlands can make a contribution to many of the One Wales commitments, the key commitment for us is:

*We will provide support for indigenous woodlands, including a tree for all new babies and adopted children, helping to create a Welsh National Forest of native trees to act as a carbon sink.*

2. The revision process is underway with our consultation document currently being developed. Our Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel is helping us create this document which, subject to Ministerial approval, will go out to the public in July. The consultation period will run for 12 weeks and all replies will be considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into the final strategy. In December the revised *Woodlands for Wales* will be passed to the Minister for approval and we intend to publish in January 2009.

### ESTATE MANAGEMENT

#### Harvesting & Marketing

Not published as per Freedom of Information Act, Part II (Exempt Information) Sections 35, Formulation of Government Policy and 43, Commercial Interests

#### Wind Farms

Not published as per Freedom of Information Act, Part II (Exempt Information) Sections 35, Formulation of Government Policy and 43, Commercial Interests

#### Garwnant Visitor Centre Refurbishment (Merthyr Tudful)

Not published as per Freedom of Information Act, Part II (Exempt Information) Section 43, Commercial Interests

#### Gwent Police team up with FCW

3. Gwent Police is the first force to team up with Forestry Commission Wales to fund two Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The PCSOs have worked closely with Local Area Manager since 1<sup>st</sup> April using FC vehicles for their patrols. The aim is to provide a reassuring uniformed presence within Assembly woodlands in Monmouthshire as well as gathering intelligence on any anti-social or criminal activity taking place. Their priorities include protecting the environment against fly-tipping, criminal damage and off-road biking, and ensuring visitors do not become victims of vehicle crime.

### **Bovine TB – Badger culling**

Not published as per Freedom of Information Act, Part II (Exempt Information)  
Sections 35, Formulation of Government Policy

### **Tintern Landslide**

4. Not published as per Freedom of Information Act, Part II (Exempt Information)  
Sections 35, Formulation of Government Policy

### **Habitats Regulation**

5. We are working to establish workable processes for meeting our obligations under these European regulations. In particular, we are working with CCW to reach agreement on how to fulfil the requirement for an “Appropriate Assessment” for Special Areas of Conservation. This issue has resulted in the continued closure of a footpath to waterfalls at Scwd yr Eira in the Brecon Beacons National Park and could also delay the approval of certain Forest Design Plans.
6. We are also working with CCW and the Welsh Assembly government as the regulatory bodies for operations that affect the European Protected Species such as dormice. WAG’s interpretation of the regulation appears to be more pragmatic than DEFRA however, until process and guidance is agreed, we may be exposed to challenge that we are not fully compliant.

## **GRANTS AND LICENCES**

### **Better Woodlands For Wales (BWW) Progress**

7. The number of applications for BWW continues to rise steadily and demand for the scheme remains strong. The number of applications for BWW is now 950 and we are looking forward to reaching 1000. We have mapped some 779 schemes and their total area exceeds 31,437 ha, with the average area remaining at around 40.5 ha. 238 schemes are either at or have been approved.
8. All BWW plans allocate approved grant to specific years. This improved forecasting ability has begun to yield good management information. The latest situation is that approximately £2.1 million, out of a budget of £3.2 million allocated to BWW, is committed to 2008-09.

9. The G&L development team at Silvan House are working towards the next set of changes which will be delivered in June (mainly dealing with IT improvements and regulatory driven upgrades.) Independent to the scheduled changes the development team is working on system stability with a range of changes being delivered in July. This will be welcome news to the sector.

### **Rural Development Plan**

10. My Grants & Licences team is working with ConFor and the Assembly's Farming Connect team to ensure that the forest sector can access business support from Farming Connect. This will put woodland owners on a par with farm businesses.

## **PROJECTS & INITIATIVES**

### **Plant! Update**

11. The first of the certificates for all babies born or adopted in Wales during January 2008 have been despatched by the Office for National Statistics/General Register Office (3000). The First Minister continues to take great interest in the Plant! project and a press release confirming this milestone has been sent out by the Welsh Assembly Government. As an outcome of the One Wales document, FCW have made a significant contribution towards its successful delivery. Work is currently ongoing with regard to the search for eligible sites. The rollout of certificates to eligible parents will continue throughout the year.

### **Wood Energy Business Scheme 1 (WEBS 1)**

12. The WEBS 1 Project was brought to a successful conclusion in March. The scheme supported 65 schemes which, with private sector contributions, totalled over £12 million. This demonstrates a large inward investment in wood energy in Wales.

### **Wood Energy Business Scheme 2 (WEBS 2)**

13. We are in the process of developing a successor programme - WEBS 2. It builds upon the experience and track record of WEBS 1, that has provided evidence of the level of demand, key drivers for uptake, levels of funding needed and other types of activities and range of support required. It comprises four inter-related projects. The total value of the four projects is over £30 million, of which nearly 60% will be private sector money.

### **Cydcoed**

14. All 122 Cydcoed projects will be physically and financially complete by the end of June 2008. Team members are attending launches and celebrations organised by the community groups, demonstrating what Cydcoed has achieved and our support for community woodland initiatives. Event guests have included Elin Jones AM, Secretary of State for Wales Paul Murphy MP, BBC newsreader Huw Edwards, Ralph Bellamy and Alun Ffred Jones AM. HRH The Princess Royal is due to visit Argoed Community Council's Upper Sirhowy project in an FCW managed woodland in Caerphilly in late June. Forest Research's evaluation of

the Cydcoed programme is proceeding well, with the final report due at the end of the summer.

### **Climate Change Conference**

15. My Policy and Programme and Communications Teams are working together to arrange the Climate Change Conference on the 18<sup>th</sup> June at the Millennium Centre, Cardiff. Our Minister Elin Jones, will attend and give a keynote speech. BBC Wales' Political Editor, Betsan Powys will facilitate.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

### **AmNawdd (formally the Welsh Student Sponsorship Scheme)**

16. Along with partner organisations Countryside Council for Wales and Environment Agency, we are awarding scholarships to bilingual first degree or post graduate students undertaking courses that could lead to a career in the environment and land based sector. The scholarship includes financial support and work experience opportunities with one of the partner organisations. We will be providing sponsorship to 6 students over the next three years. Selections have been made for the 2008/09 academic year, which will be confirmed once "A" level results are known.

### **FC Wales Staffing Action Plan**

17. We review quarterly the FCW Staffing Action Plan and good progress is being made. Most notably we have achieved an agreed Staff Structure of key and non-key posts for all FC Wales units for 2008-2011, supporting us in addressing current and future business needs.

**Trefor Owen**  
**Director**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> June 2008**