

Britain's place in global forestry

Richard Howe explains the Forestry Commission's approach to international issues

Since the Forestry Commission was founded in 1919, it has played a full part in forestry issues worldwide. Indeed, our structure was initially based on the Colonial forest services, particularly India, and used the same terms such as 'conservator' and 'district officer'. Since the end of Britain's colonial period, our forestry priorities have obviously changed but Britain continues to play an active and influential part in international forestry globally, regionally, and within the EU. The approach is informed by both our steadily expanding domestic forest area and the industry it serves and also by the fact that the UK remains a major importer of timber from forests worldwide. The focus is on managing forests sustainably to maintain the multiple functions of forests crucial to society, both at home and abroad.

Although forestry is now largely devolved to the 4 countries, international issues are reserved for the UK Government. Since 2012, the lead on international forestry policy has been held by Defra with the Forestry Commission in a supporting role. We provide specialist advice and policy support and also share approaches and expertise with many other countries and with EU Member States. Forest Research also co-operates and shares experience with the international community of research organisations and academic institutions.

Defra represents the UK in international fora, such as Forest Europe and the EU Council Working Party on Forestry. The Forestry Commission assists with technical input, providing appropriate specialists, and garnering the views of the

devolved administrations. The objective is to work up consensual UK positions on forestry topics, and on closely associated areas such as climate change, forest economics, biodiversity, forest inventories, and woody biomass for renewable energy.

In terms of forestry practice, the various international commitments to manage forests sustainably are incorporated within the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS). This provides a framework for domestic practice and straddles both reserved elements, (in that they translate internationally agreed approaches into national circumstances), and devolved elements that relate to the forestry policies of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Forestry is not included within the competence (i.e. the capacity to act) of the European Union. However many of the other areas in which the EU does have competence, (or shared competence), such as environment, energy, and agriculture have the potential to impact significantly on forests and forestry. Accordingly, EU



Member States and the European Commission co-operate on forestry matters through the EU Council Working party on Forestry and the EU Standing Forestry Committee.

Through the EU Standing Forestry Committee, the European Commission is keen to ensure the views of Member States forestry administrations on forestry matters are taken into account as policies are developed. This also involves seeking the views of environmental, forestry

FC AIMS ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

UK policy on international forestry is informed by domestic practice and the UK approach is promoted internationally.

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.

A common UK approach is developed to forestry issues where this is desirable and feasible – taking account of country priorities, the views of UK organisations (such as Confor), research findings, and the practicalities of forest management.

The approach to forestry issues is coordinated across Government, taking full account of the agreed approach articulated by the UKFS.

Forestry expertise and specialists from across the UK are engaged in informing, developing and influencing the outcome of international forestry processes.



New Generations Plantations project study tour in 2012. Led by WWF-International, this aims to promote the highest standards of sustainable plantation forestry worldwide and thus reduce deforestation of natural forests.

Early FC Commissioners

and other organisations who are often invited to contribute to ad-hoc working groups. For example, both FERN, a European environmental NGO for forests; and CEPF, European forest owners' organisation, were part of a recent working group on sustainability criteria for biomass.) CEPF is one of the principal forest-owners organisations and works to ensure private forestry interests are protected.

In order to clarify the Forestry Commission's approach to international issues affecting forestry a number of aims were identified (see panel).

The UK Government, through Defra and the Forestry Commission, is keen to ensure that practitioners in the UK are not put at a disadvantage through international processes.

Recent examples include the EU Timber Regulation, where the Forestry Commission worked with Confor to ensure the approach to implementation took full account of existing regulatory mechanisms - rather than by imposing unnecessary new requirements. The Forestry Commission has also engaged with the EU working group on biomass sustainability and has worked to ensure that requirements to demonstrate the sustainability of biomass are compatible with UK forestry practice.

Forestry support, through the Rural Development Regulations, is the responsibility of the

four country teams who work to develop their Rural Development Plans. However through the EU Standing Forestry Committee the UK has been influential in the revision of the EU Forest Strategy, as a framework for forest-related actions in support of sustainable forest management. One objective to improve the coherence of forest-related EU policies and ensure the sector's voice is heard. The Forestry Commission works to ensure the Strategy opens up possibilities for funding the sorts of activities relevant to the UK.

In terms of the UK's wider impacts on the world's forests through timber imports, the Government is fully committed to combatting illegal logging and deforestation. The UK is a member of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) which recognises the links between forests and sustainable development and aims to cut the current rate of deforestation by 50% by 2020 through concerted international actions. The UK is also supporting efforts to combat climate change and Defra's £140 million share of the International Climate Fund funds international projects to address deforestation.

The whole issue of deforestation is closely linked to how effective governments are at implementing the law, or governance. Within the EU, there is an Action Plan called 'Forest Law

Enforcement, Governance and Trade' or FLEGT. The UK is one of the leading countries in supporting FLEGT action internationally. The UK has also been at the forefront of applying the EU Timber Regulation, designed to minimise the illegal logging of timber.

The UK has a good reputation in the international forestry community and we have been regarded as world leaders in a number of new and challenging areas of sustainable forest management and forestry research. The value of international engagement is to ensure that international processes work to the advantage of the UK, and that UK policies and forestry practice are understood as agreements develop. As the part of government that manages forests, the Forestry Commission is well equipped to bring experience to the table. In doing so, we maintain our links with the wider sector. Together with our colleagues in Defra are always keen to make use of the expertise of Confor and its members to serve the interests of the forestry sector in Britain.

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