

Plant health beyond Brexit



Caroline Harrison, Confor England manager, outlines Confor's vision for protecting UK forestry.

In October 2016 Confor produced its report, *A thriving forestry and timber sector in a post-Brexit world*. With input from members, this document asked five big questions and set out policy recommendations that could allow the forestry and timber to thrive post-Brexit.

"How can we strengthen plant health and protection without restricting domestic trade?"

This was one of the five questions. The recommendations to make this happen were:

- **Phytosanitary certificates** should be required for all imported material: Better regulation of all plant material (horticultural products as well as forestry)

would limit the chance of new exotic pests and disease entering the UK.

- **Restrict importation of firewood:** This would reduce the risk of pest and disease entering the UK and increase demand for low-grade fuel wood from the UK's under-managed woods.
- **Achieve consistent levels of new planting to enable nurseries to plan effectively:** Short-term, inconsistent grant schemes lead to yo-yoing in planting. Long-term, consistent support for woodland creation enables nurseries to better plan production, reducing both reliance on imported plants and disease risk.

Since this report Confor has gone further and produced its position on the import of live plant material and firewood.

FTN WEB RESOURCES



Download Report: *A thriving forestry and timber sector in a post-Brexit world*
www.confor.org.uk



Where do we want to be in five years?

2018 2019 2020 2021 2022

LIVE PLANT MATERIAL

Government and public forests should...

IMMEDIATELY

Ban imports of mature trees in pots
 Address the significant biosecurity risk from plants in soil in the horticulture, landscape and amenity sectors

IN THE NEXT YEAR

Stabilise grant schemes and meet adequate deadlines for granting planting permissions
 Allow flexibility in grant years to enable planting to be deferred if necessary until home grown stock is available

IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS

Require phytosanitary certification or imported cell-grown stock
 Tender for plant supply on long-term contracts specifying home-grown stock

WITHIN FIVE YEARS

Specify that grants will only support home-grown stock

Landowners, management companies, contractors and nurseries should...

IMMEDIATELY

Ensure compliance with basic biosecurity measures

WHEN GRANTS AND APPLICATIONS ARE STABLE

Plan applications to allow time for growing of stock (2-3 years)
 Specify and supply only home-grown trees

In five years we would like to have no trade in high-risk imported plant material, driven by a lack of demand for them.

2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023

WOODFUEL

Governments and regulators should...

IMMEDIATELY

Increase monitoring and reporting to include the majority of imported firewood and wood packaging material.
 or
 Ban imported firewood.

IN THE NEXT YEAR

Report area of woodland under management in annual Forest Statistics.

IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS

Promote UK-grown firewood.
 Provide adequate grants and support for woodland management and streamline the process of approving felling permissions.

In five years, financial and regulatory incentives must make it easier and cheaper to supply firewood by managing UK woodlands, than to import it.

Landowners, management companies and nurseries should...

IN THE NEXT YEAR

Explore opportunities to bring unmanaged woodlands into management and help government create suitable support.

IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS

Take up and promote opportunities provided by government.



Should we ban pot plant and soil imports?

Buglife is the charity that sticks up for invertebrates, but there are some invertebrates that we do not appreciate - species in the wrong place, **writes Buglife's Matt Shardlow.**

Invasive alien species are a growing problem for our native wildlife. When humans introduce a species into a completely new environment it is like Russian Roulette, and when it goes wrong, the result can be dire for struggling native species.

While deliberate releases of non-native species in the UK are now illegal, imported soil material, particularly in pots with live plants is an open door for invasive species. Recently, Buglife has recorded mole-crickets, Egyptian grasshoppers and huge flatworms being imported in pot plants. If animals as big as clothes pegs are arriving, how many tiny eggs are there that no-one notices? The Obama flatworm (*Obama nungara*), one of the new arrivals, had only recently spread from Brazil, had just been named by scientists, and is already considered to be a major risk to French agriculture.

In the tropics, Asia and the America hundreds of thousands of species of animal, plant, fungus and bacteria wait to see if they will be mobilised by humans. Many are of course tree living species: think of the worst pest you have encountered, we know that worse pests are on the move, and there are certain to be even more harmful pests yet to leave their native forests.

Should we leave the door open and welcome in the pot plant stowaways, or should we stop the importation until new biosecurity measures can be developed and be shown to be safe? Buglife believes that both the economy and biodiversity will be safer if we ban pot plant and soil importation. If we do not there will be economic and societal impacts, that may include forestry and horticulture being seen as dirty industries. We can grow all the whips and garden plants we need in the UK and we should do so, this is wise, not isolationist!

www.buglife.org.uk



Buy local, burn local

The growth in popularity of wood-burning stoves has put pressure on firewood supplies, **writes Caroline Harrison.** As a result, imports have increased; latest available figures show England and Scotland imported 32,000 tonnes of firewood in the first nine months of 2017, predominantly ash. This might seem harmless, but it poses a substantial risk to our economy and environment. Why? Because bringing in firewood from outside the UK can also mean bringing in pests and diseases, in the firewood or in its packaging.

Pests we want to keep out include the Emerald ash borer beetle, which has killed millions of ash trees in Canada since it arrived from Asia. There is uncertainty about the bug spreading towards Europe from Russia but the evidence from North America is devastating - firewood has been a major factor in the rapid spread of the beetle.

Firewood imports into the UK are inspected under the Statutory Notification Scheme implemented by the Forestry Commission on a risk basis. In the nine months to the end of September 2017, spot checks revealed 28 per cent of imports inspected did not comply with UK regulations.

These cases mostly relate to paperwork inconsistencies or packaging being non-compliant. However, they raise a fundamental question - why take the risk and import firewood at all?

There are two simple actions we can take on firewood - the UK should refuse to import firewood with bark still attached or firewood that hasn't been properly dried. This would reduce the risks

of importing pests and diseases dramatically, but also help to stimulate domestic firewood markets. Phasing out firewood imports will protect the UK's native broadleaf woodlands from pests and disease, and deliver wider economic benefits by fulfilling the demand for firewood from home-grown sources.

Another 8,000ha of managed broadleaf woodland could provide the 32,000 tonnes of firewood imported in the first nine months of 2017 - and there is plenty of opportunity to do this.

The clear message is Buy Local, Burn Local.

Helen Bentley-Fox, Director of Woodsure, adds:

Woodsure is the UK's only wood fuel quality scheme dealing with a wide variety of domestic and commercial wood based biomass fuels. In operating the Ready to Burn campaign and scheme, Woodsure understands the risks of introducing pest and diseases with imported firewood. As part of its assurance schemes it raises awareness with all suppliers that import firewood on biosecurity requirements. The Forestry Commission has a digital learning site at www.forestrylearning.org.uk/login/index.php

Woodsure recommends that all the suppliers complete this sort of training in biosecurity and that they put procedures in place to ensure that any potential issues are either prevented or dealt with in a timely manner. The importance of biosecurity cannot be overstated and we have seen from the recent past that diseases and infestations can spread rapidly undermining our native stock.

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>> *Phytophthora ramorum*: impact on the market



by **Martin Bishop**
National
Manager for
Wales

Since 2010, when *Phytophthora ramorum* (*P ramorum*) was first identified on larch in the UK, the total area affected has grown to over 14,000ha UK wide. Whilst that is an appalling figure we have to be consoled by the fact that this is still a small percentage of the larch area in the UK at 126,000ha (10%), according to Forestry Statistics 2017.

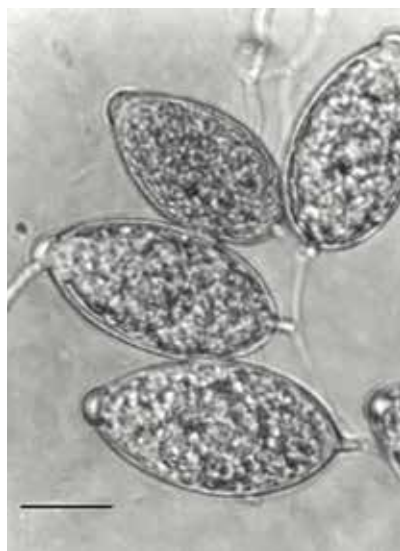
The picture is very different in the devolved regions as in England and Scotland there is still substantial areas of larch not affected so far, whereas in Wales the infected area is by far the largest percentage. There was in fact a substantial new area of infection detected in early 2017 in West Wales due, we think, to the combined effect of heavier than average rainfall in the summer of 2016 followed by a wetter than average and very warm winter in 2016/17. There have also been a few cases detected on spruce and noble fir, both of which were close to heavily infected larch. The full situation report for the UK is available in FTN web resources.

Hard facts about the exact volume of timber felled are difficult to find and is not helped by a lot of pre-emptive felling being done to combat the spread of the disease, and rightly so. But this actually raises an interesting issue regarding marketing of minor species.

Pre *P ramorum*, larch was considered a minor species, with little large scale demand although many smaller mills did process a reasonable volume. Supply and demand was in balance. As the mills became aware of the increasing volumes that would be available they did what any business would do and reacted to it, engaging with their customers and generating a demand for it; this was no easy task as customers are always right and do not like being told what they can have.

The outcome of this is that larch has changed from being a minor species into a species that is now in demand, arguably demand is now greater than supply if the almost weekly requests I get for larch from sawmills is anything to go by. Interestingly, with hindsight, maybe demand was constrained by the perception of supply. If mills perceived there was not much available then they did not gear up to take it. It seems crazy that a perceived glut has changed the supply/demand balance in the opposite way to what we would expect.

The lesson perhaps we have learnt here is that any species (well almost any species) could be marketed if it is presented in sufficient quantities to generate interest from wood processors and their customers. A lesson for how we diversify our forests and the impacts that will have on the supply and demand balance.



Sporangia of *P ramorum*

FTN WEB RESOURCES



Forestry statistics 2017
P. Ramorum Situation Report
www.confor.org.uk

Importing and nurseries

Contributed by



In an ideal world, forestry and hedging plant needs, whether for new woodland creation or restocking, conifers or broadleaves, commercial or landscape, grant aided or not, would be known in good time for UK nurseries to produce the necessary material, across the range of species and provenance that is required!

In our not quite so ideal world such long term planning is many a forester's goal but less than often achieved. Long discussed delays in awarding of grants, changes in demand for timber, delays in felling and ongoing restructuring change the needs and mix of forestry transplants for new planting and restock. These transplants don't appear overnight. It's a two to three year process from seed sowing to transport to site – assuming the seed is available to start with.

That's a big ask for a nursery without knowing that there is an end market. Many a nursery has produced what they thought was needed only to have a large bonfire at the end of the season – soul and business destroying.

That's where imports come in – to balance the supply and demand – economics really!

However that's also where pests come in to the mix – not intentionally but we've seen our fair share in the last few years – *Chalara* dieback of Ash, *Dendroctonus micans*, *Phytophthoras* and Sweet Chestnut blight to name a few, and not to mention the serious new threat of *Xylella* on our doorstep - already creeping north from the Mediterranean countries.

If our UK nurseries can grow the planting stock we need here at home, that can only increase the resilience of our forests, woodlands and environment. But this needs better identification of what species, in what quantity, and when required. Our nurseries operate on thin margins, and our sector cannot afford to lose their supplies. This will become even more important as we enter an era of increasing climate change targets for new woodland creation, coupled with increasing restocks as the harvest of the 20th century peaks. That requires everyone involved in the process to be better at their job, especially:

- For the plant purchasers to up their game on forward planning, placing forward orders and contract grows.
- For government and authorities to process approvals quicker, to be more flexible in plant provenances and planting years (should stock not be available), and to ensure any appropriate public funding is available to satisfy demand.



Plant passporting of timber and co-products



Timber movement is just one aspect of the plant health regime. Confor Scotland manager **Jamie Farquhar** looks at the small print of plant passporting regulations.

The 2016 EU Plant Health Regulation is binding on all Member States, and has to be implemented by December 2019. It is unlike the previous Directive which gave some latitude in interpretation, so that presently we move timber within the protected zone of GB under a 'local' movement exemption. The UK Government has agreed to full implementation despite date of Brexit.

The regulation demands that the movement into or within a protected pest free zone of coniferous wood, and that of sweet chestnut and plane, that is not bark free or has been heated treated, is passported. GB has for some time declared pest free status from several Ips beetles. Specifically timber from forest to mill (and chips from mill to secondary processing site) will have to be accompanied by a passport which declares that it is free from the respective protected zone quarantine pest - in our view this is an impossible assertion to make. And the passport has to be affixed to the "trade unit" - what does this mean?

Passports can only be issued by a "professional operator", who is registered with a "competent authority", and who can demonstrate a certain level of competence (will an exam be necessary?) to carry out a "meticulous examination" of the timber - to

make the impossible statement of "free from"

Assuming the "trade unit" were to be a lorry load, we calculate that blind compliance means 660,000 lorry loads of timber and co-products will have to have this "meticulous examination" in forest and mill every year. A conservative estimate means this could entail 200 plus FTEs for the industry, and assuming there is full cost recovery from industry, including that of examination and monitoring by the competent authority, could mean a bill running into many millions.

What is particularly galling about this whole matter is that the impending EU regulation is supposed to be on a risk-based approach, and to improve biosecurity. Yet nothing in the idea of plant passporting the movement of timber within GB would improve biosecurity. There is an overwhelming need for industry lobbying!



Confor is part of a Defra-led technical working group on this issue, and we are proposing a more simple solution:

The "meticulous examination" will be done via the existing aerial and follow-up ground surveys of GB woodlands by Forestry Commission, who can then make a declaration that timber is "free from pests"

The "Professional Operator" will be the FC Conservators - they issue the felling licences and so can issue the requisite passport.

The "trade unit" can then be deemed to be all coniferous wood moved within the PZ of GB from forest to primary processor, and between processors (woodchip, etc).