

## **Confor: promoting forestry and wood**

**Briefing for Westminster Hall debate at 11.00 am, Wednesday 31 October**

### **Effect on the timber industry of the UK leaving the EU**

#### **Summary:**

Confor is the not-for-profit organisation for sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses in the UK. We have more than 1,500 member companies representing the whole forestry and wood supply chain. Confor focuses on the strategic issues that are vital to the success and sustainable future of the sector. These include helping to build the market for wood and forest products, creating a supportive policy environment and helping members to become more competitive and successful.

A flourishing forestry and wood processing sector is more important than ever when the UK leaves the European Union next March. The sector currently supports around 80,000 jobs and is worth £2 billion to the UK economy every year.

Confor believes the UK's forestry and timber processing industries can continue to flourish once the UK leaves the EU. However, government action in some key areas is needed to ensure this is achieved - Confor's summary 10-point plan on how DEFRA can support forestry to help deliver a Green Brexit is set out at the end of this briefing.

#### **Key points:**

Continued funding for new woodland creation – Confidence in future forestry funding (and policy) is essential for land-owners and managers to be able to make long term planning and management decisions, and for nurseries to grow the young trees we need. Growing trees in a forest nursery is a 4-5 year cycle from seed collection to bed preparation and the sale of the tree. Nurseries need to understand and be able to predict future demand for young trees, and that requires a stable policy and funding process for woodland creation. If nurseries are unable to predict future demand, they can choose to either risk over-production and not being able to sell surplus stock, or to be cautious and then import any additional material to meet demand which is a threat to biosecurity. Confor's proposals for a Common Countryside Policy once the UK leaves the EU are available [here](http://www.confor.org.uk/media/246687/common-countryside-policy.pdf)<sup>1</sup>.

Seasonal Labour – Forest nurseries and tree planting businesses need continued access to seasonal labour, similar to that identified by other parts of the horticultural trade<sup>2</sup> and farming – UK workers will not pick up the slack. If the UK government and devolved administrations are to meet their tree planting targets, seasonal labour with a wide range

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.confor.org.uk/media/246687/common-countryside-policy.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hortweek.com/cbi-backs-calls-new-seasonal-labour-scheme-horticulture/fresh-produce/article/1490466>

of skills and experience will be required. Tree planting and maintenance is skilled work (squads who plant trees will need to have City & Guilds NPTC certificates for Pesticides & Pest Control) and with the use of cell-grown trees, planting can now be undertaken for 9 months of the year. Sawmills and board manufacturers are also dependent on non-UK labour. It is therefore vital for the forestry and wood processing sector that measures are put in place once the UK leaves the EU that permit continued use of seasonal labour from outside the UK.

Plant Health – Confor hopes that within five years, new post-Brexit financial and regulatory incentives must make it easier, cheaper and safer to supply firewood by managing UK woodlands, than to import it. Confor wants to ensure all live plant material for forestry is imported under the Forest Reproductive Material regulations, thus ensuring traceability and control. Confor published a statement on plant health and Brexit in January this year<sup>3</sup> and a copy can be accessed through this [link](#).

Exchange rates - The weakening of the pound (£) against the Euro (€) since the Brexit vote means timber imports have risen in price. Whilst this is beneficial for UK production, nearly all forestry harvesting and timber processing equipment is imported and is priced in Euros. This has therefore made investing and upgrading equipment more expensive.

### **Further information about Confor’s views on the effect on the timber industry of the UK leaving the EU**

If you require any further information, please contact Eleanor Harris, Confor Policy Researcher: [eleanor@confor.org.uk](mailto:eleanor@confor.org.uk) / 0131 240 1410.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.confor.org.uk/media/246818/plant-health-and-brexit-statement-jan18.pdf>

## **10 ways DEFRA can support forestry to help deliver a Green Brexit**

1. **Clear and ambitious targets to drive woodland creation:** The Scottish Government has committed to planting 15,000 hectares of new forestry each year by the middle of the next decade. England could and should match this;
2. **Grasp the climate change challenge:** DEFRA should ask the Committee on Climate Change for specific recommendations to guide their planting targets, as the Scottish and Welsh Governments have done already - and embrace forestry as “a simple, low-cost option” to tackle climate change.
3. **An integrated land-use policy:** any funding available to farming must be available to forestry; and there must be regulatory alignment between farming and forestry;
4. **Level playing field:** One sector should not be funded to deliver a public benefit which another land use is expected to deliver for free. A tonne of carbon, or habitat enhancement, should have the same value across all sectors. If one sector requires public funding to remain financially viable, it should be funded for benefits which it alone can deliver;
5. **Information, advice and guidance:** Support should be given (advice, training and economic resilience grants where necessary) to help farmers diversify into forestry by planting timber on their land, especially where farm profitability is marginal.
6. **Long-term funding plan:** we need a funding plan that, as far as possible, is planned for the whole period of the 25 Year Environment Plan. The long timescales of forestry mean it has been disadvantaged by the short timescales of CAP funding and chopping and changing of policies. This will also be true for farmers who wish to build up their provision of public goods over several years or decades;
7. **Better reporting:** Reporting and information must treat forestry and timber production on an equal basis with farming and farm produce. Confor highlighted the Government failure to do this in our response to *Health and Harmony*.
8. **Targeted grants for woodland management as well as woodland creation.** For example, support is needed to bring native woodland into management for locally-produced sustainable firewood: the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) does not deliver this effectively but merely skews the market for high-value softwood timber;
9. **UK wide policy appraisals:** Policy proposals in other parts of the UK, where these are substantially different from those in England, should be evaluated for any impact they might have in attracting or discouraging investment (for example);
10. **Improved plant health:** The UK needs a plant health system to enhance the health of British trees, not one which replaces the current system based on EU regulations.