

EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee

Brexit: plant and animal biosecurity

Call for evidence

Introduction

Confor – promoting forestry and wood (www.confor.org.uk) is a not-for-profit membership organisation for sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses. Confor represents the whole forestry and wood supply chain and focuses on strategic issues vital to the success and sustainable future of the sector.

Confor commissioned a report on behalf of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Forestry, "[*Shaping a post-EU future for the UK forestry sector*](#)". Published in August 2016. This report includes a section on plant health and quality and the potential impacts of UK's withdrawal from the EU. See page 11.

In October 2016 Confor produced a further report, "[*A thriving forestry and timber sector in a post-Brexit world*](#)". With input from members, this report asked five big questions and set out policy recommendations that could allow the forestry and timber sector to thrive post-Brexit. "How can we strengthen plant health and protection without restricting domestic trade?" 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.

In January 2018 Confor produced a position statement on the ban of importation of live plant material and firewood [here](#).

Confor is a member of the country specific Tree Health Advisory Groups, the GB & NI Tree Health Advisory Group and the UK Plant Health Advisory Forum.

The Plant Health Biosecurity Strategy will be revised in 2020. In England, working with Government, the horticultural sector, landscape sector, landowner representative bodies and environmental organisations, Confor is contributing to the new Tree Health Resilience Strategy that will directly inform the development of the 2020 Plant Health Biosecurity Strategy.

The actions identified in this new strategy are directly relevant to this call for evidence.

Questions

1. What are the implications of the UK's withdrawal from the EU for the UK's biosecurity in terms of animal and plant health, invasive species and food safety?

See above set of reports. Biosecurity must be at the heart of everything we do from onsite activities to buying practices.

2. Will the transfer of law via the EU (Withdrawal) Bill be sufficient to ensure that current legislative protections remain in place?

No comment.

3. To what extent is a shared approach to biosecurity between the UK and the EU necessary and / or appropriate post-Brexit?

A shared approach is essential, with continuing knowledge transfer between the UK and EU.

a. Should the UK retain the precautionary principle in its implementation of biosecurity legislation after leaving the EU?

The precautionary principle should be retained but applied in a relevant and evidence-based way. For example, the implications of current EU legislation on plant passporting on movement of forest products *within* the UK, will do nothing to improve UK biosecurity, and could divert scarce resources from the more essential work of preventing pests and diseases entering our ports.

4. To what extent is the UK reliant on the EU for the surveillance and timely notification of biosecurity threats?

The UK is very reliant on the EU for surveillance and notification. For example the recent spread of *Xylella fastidiosa*.

a. Are there alternative (i.e. non-EU, or international) mechanisms that the UK will be able to participate in post-Brexit?

Not that Confor is aware of.

5. What are the main mechanisms for biosecurity information sharing between the UK and the rest of the EU? Can these be maintained post-Brexit?

In the forestry sector the main mechanisms are DEFRA (APHA), Forest Research and EPPO (The European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization).

It is essential that these links are maintained.

6. What biosecurity risk assessment, inspection and management is currently carried out by the EU that will need to be repatriated post-Brexit, and are there any resource challenges associated with this?

EPPO carries out much of this work and membership of this organisation is expected to continue.

7. To what extent is a common biosecurity framework across the UK necessary post Brexit?

A common biosecurity framework across the UK is essential. Large amounts of plant material are transferred around the UK, for example Scottish timber is exported to England. Country boundaries are permeable to forestry plant and timber trade.

8. How should biosecurity be managed on the island of Ireland post-Brexit?

The same as is current practice between mainland UK and all EU Member States. The risk may be greater. Maybe answers can be learnt from Norway and Sweden.

9. Are there steps the UK can take post-Brexit to strengthen its biosecurity, in ways currently prohibited by EU membership?

See Confor paper on the ban of the importation high risk plant material and firewood.

There will be opportunities to impose additional legislation without gaining approval from the EU, although the new EU Plant Health Regulation will allow Member States to implement emergency legislation much quicker than previously.

Confor

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