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**Forestry Commission
Joint Trade Unions**

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Dear James

Inventory and forecasting review stakeholder consultation exercise: response from the Forestry Commission Joint Trade Unions

I am writing on behalf of the Forestry Commission Joint Trade Unions in response to the Inventory and Forecasting (I&F) review stakeholder consultation exercise. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for granting us extra time to consult more thoroughly with union members. We appreciate that this consultation exercise is a key step in engaging staff and look forward to being involved in future stages

Trade union consultation process

A discussion document was produced by Prospect representatives to stimulate debate among union members. Following this, meetings of union members were held at Alice Holt and the Northern Research Station of Forest Research. A number of points emerged from these meetings and in the course of e-mail correspondence. These were used as the basis for a draft response which was circulated to union members for their final endorsement. The draft was also circulated to union members at Silvan House who have indicated their support.

Our comments address the conclusions and recommendations of the review, the implementation of the review's recommendations, as well as the review process, and we have grouped them accordingly.

Conclusions and recommendations of the review

We are aware that your Project Board is interested to know which out of the various 'scenarios' is preferred. As you must have gathered from the collective and individual responses that have been sent to you, our union members have expressed a diversity of views, therefore it is impossible for the Joint Trade Unions to state any preference.

The Forshaw Review originally identified the need for a dedicated I&F Unit, however before being able to comment effectively on the proposals we need to see:

- A clear statement of the problems with I&F delivery as originally identified in the Forshaw review – an adequate and convincing explanation has been so far been missing.
- How the final recommendations of the Project Board will address these problems.

We know that staff groups and individuals have submitted responses. The Joint Trade Unions will be looking for:

- Clear evidence that the Project Board has thoroughly evaluated these and that proposals have been modified accordingly.
- Transparency in the analysis and decision making process that leads to any solution finally proposed.

Given proper consideration of all stakeholder views, we think that the Project Board may need to consider radical changes to (or even more courageously, departures from) the scenarios as currently defined.

In 2006 the FCEB and Forestry Commissioners approved, and endorsed to staff, FR's Development Strategy. Now the FCEB is being asked to approve recommendations for change that could compromise the ability of FR to deliver this strategy. Under all the proposed scenarios experienced staff with key skills will be transferred out of FR into the proposed I&F Unit. For example:

- Almost all of the field experiments carried out by Forest Management Division (FMD) are established, maintained and assessed by the Technical Services Unit (TSU). These experiments and hence the large majority of FMD research work would not be possible without a flexible and widely-skilled TSU resource, which would be lost under the 'narrow' scenario.
- Under both the 'slim' and 'narrow' scenarios, identified unit staff located around the country currently support long term climate change and monitoring work at remote sites.
- The wide geographical location, skills and experience of the TSU as is available now to FR, give significant advantage over other organisations when applying for external funding. Reducing the TSU as proposed under the 'slim' and particularly the 'narrow' scenarios could compromise bids for external contracts, with a knock-on effect to the success of the Development Strategy.
- Analysis and prescription diagnostic services to FC and Non-FC forest industry would cease under the 'narrow' scenario.
- Under the 'narrow scenario', if the staff earmarked in grey were transferred to the I&F unit, key skills required for systems and life cycle analysis of the GB forest estate by Biometrics, Surveys and Statistics Division would be lost. This would impact on for example development of improved thinning control systems, development of forest sector carbon assessment methods, analysis of policy impacts on future timber resource, and evaluation of greenhouse gas balances of wood fibre and fuel production processes.
- The hard work and effort by FR in setting up a GIS Unit has not been considered within this review. The need for such a unit has been recognised for many years and FR staff have welcomed this opportunity to centralise and co-ordinate functions such as licence purchase and installation. Under all scenarios, the outcome of this review now jeopardises the FR GIS Unit.

Implementation of review recommendations

The Joint Trade Unions will be watching closely to ensure that implementation of the review's recommendations does not turn into a crude job cutting or downgrading exercise, either at this stage or during the 18 month review.

As implementation proceeds, the Joint Trade Unions will also be looking for evidence that a perceived damaging rift between FC and FR management is being healed, and that FC and FR are working together to develop a shared vision for a sustainable future for the whole organisation and its staff.

Inventory and Forecasting Review Process

The Joint Trade Unions have a number of concerns about the review process as described below. We will be actively monitoring other FC reviews to ensure that these aspects of the I&F review process are not setting a precedent.

It is far from clear why options involving improvements to existing structures and management processes were thrown out at an early stage during the Forshaw review. This has meant that your own review has been prevented from considering these potentially more sophisticated options. We would like to see evidence:

- That such options have been considered
- Strong justification for why these options may be (are being) ignored.

The Joint Trade unions remain firmly of the view that the approach taken to defining the scope of the proposed I&F unit through listing staff by name was neither necessary nor appropriate. We believe it has actually confused the process of defining the scope and functions of the unit. Key questions have been left completely unaddressed, such as whether transferring certain staff groups will lead to duplication or fragmentation of required roles.

The period for this consultation has been short - 15½ working days – with the Easter holidays halfway through and staff trying to meet end of financial year targets. You will understand that notice needs to be given to staff to attend consultation meetings, which also require time to organise. This situation was exacerbated by the assumption made by the Project Board that all Stakeholders were 'keeping up with developments' in the review by referring regularly to reports on the intranet. It is completely unacceptable to assume that this is a suitable, easily used and effective means of communication for this type of review. Staff have, understandably, been busy supporting their unit managers in producing a response as stakeholders. This left little time for them to provide feedback as union members, which is their right.

As a result the Joint trade unions require assurances that the consultation process across the FC has been overarching by:

- Publication of the list of stakeholders that the consultation document was sent to directly.
- How stakeholders were identified by the Project Board.
- Evidence of a breadth of replies from FC wide stakeholders.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that the vast majority of FC staff across all departments could be affected by the consequences of the review.

The Joint Trade Unions are particularly concerned that the focus on fixing problems with delivery of I&F runs the risk of creating significant problems for other parts of FC business. We are concerned that the review has reached such an advanced stage, with specific options tabled, and yet no serious attempt has been made at an impact analysis of the consequences of implementation. We argue that a thorough and transparent impact analysis for any selected option is now overdue. This needs to recognise the potentially far reaching consequences of any changes on:

- The existing and new jobs of staff transferred to any new structure.
- The existing (and potentially new) jobs of staff 'left behind' by colleagues transferred to any new structure.
- Delivery of the business objectives and requirements of FC country administrations, FC Forest Districts and Conservancies, Silvan House, Forest Research and FC Business Units, as well as the expectations of external stakeholders.

We consider that these groups are all Stakeholders within this Review, as such, short and long-term effects resulting from the formation of any unit must be recognised, fully understood and where necessary ameliorated.

Our members expect that the remainder of this review and its implementation will be carried out with full engagement with staff and their trade unions. For example trade unions expect to be consulted at an early stage about:

- Deciding the process for transfer/appointment of staff to any new structure.
- Resolving conflicts in team roles of staff transferred/appointed to any new structure.
- Definition of key performance indicators for assessing the effectiveness of any new structure.

The Joint Trade Unions also require an assurance that there is real commitment to carrying out a full, meaningful and transparent review at 18 months.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lorraine Adams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lorraine Adams
on behalf of the Forestry Commission Joint Trade Unions