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Submission by the Forestry Commission Trade Unions to the Science and Technology Select Committee

June 2011

Introduction

1. The Forestry Commission Trades Unions jointly represent scientists, technicians, professionals and support staff in the Forestry Commission's Forest Research Agency (FR) and the experts and analysts in the Forestry Commission (FC) who, together, are responsible for defining, commissioning and carrying out research. Our resolve is that Great Britain should continue to support stable, sustainable forestry institutions in which our members can serve the British public and the national interest.

2. Our response to the specific issues identified by the Select Committee is set out below.

The effect of the Spending Review on Forest Research

3. 80% of FR's budget is funded by DEFRA by way of FC GB in the same way as for FC England and FC (GB). FR, therefore, faces the same 25% budget cuts as a direct result of the Spending Review 2010. Efficiency savings have been made to meet the year-on-year inflationary cuts suffered by FR in recent years. Therefore meeting the further reduction can only be achieved by a significant loss of scientific and support staff. As was recently acknowledged by Sir John Beddington in correspondence with Prospect, over the coming four years the Agency's income from Forestry Commission (GB) is projected to reduce from about £10m to just over £7m. At current rates of inflation this equates to at least a 40% reduction in real terms in the Government's spending on research in the forestry sector over the period to 2015.

4. FC has concluded that these reductions are too deep to allow continuation of

research in all its current fields. Research will cease immediately in areas such as:

- Management of large herbivores;
- Impact of alien invasive vertebrates (not including squirrels);
- Cultural Heritage and Historic Environment;
- Social drivers and mitigation of wildfires in Wales.

In addition, from 2013-2015 research will cease in:

- Wood fuel and biomass research;
- Regeneration and sustainable silviculture.

It will also be significantly reduced in areas such as:

- Habitat management to improve biodiversity (-75%);
- Social science (- 50%);
- Operational efficiency of sustainable harvesting techniques;
- Vertebrate management;
- Adapting woodland regeneration/management to cope with the effects of climate change;
- Wood/timber properties;
- Management of current and emerging pests, weeds and disease through the sustainable use of pesticides and other non chemical methods (-60%);
- Research underpinning national inventory and forecasting, essential for monitoring sustainability and international reporting, climate change commitments, and also vital for strategic planning (-45%).

5. The remainder of FR's income is generated from collaborative research, funding from the EU and other GB and devolved government departments. The research councils have traditionally left the funding of forest science to the FC and it is not expected that new funds will be made available. FR, as a government agency, is ineligible to lead applications for research council funding. This has the additional effect of disproportionately affecting those research areas in which the research councils are major sources of funding, such as the social sciences.

6. As a result our specialist researchers face redundancy and are unlikely to find future employment within their profession. The loss of the staff and their

expertise will limit FR's ability to seek external contracts and to respond to Government policy development or enquiries. It represents a real loss of skill and scientific world standing for Great Britain.

7. The decline in Government financial support is not likely to be offset by increased spending by private and third-sector forest owners. Further, it should be noted that funding for forest research compared with other areas of agricultural and environmental research – which are also under pressure and can also make compelling arguments for a higher level of investment. For example, forestry in Great Britain is now a bigger employer and generates more income than fishing. One would expect it to support a research effort of similar size to fisheries research or greater, but it does not. In terms of economic importance, forestry accounts for around 7% of UK agriculture in cash terms. Taking account of the importance of woodlands for amenity and for wildlife, and the indirect but large economic contribution of forestry to rural tourism, one would expect forest research to attract funding equal at least to 10% of that spent on agricultural research. We do not have full figures available to us, but estimate that after the budget cuts forest research will receive less than 2% of the public funding that is directed to agricultural research. Taking account of commercially funded research in agriculture, forestry's share is less than 1%.

8. A critical issue for the funding of forest research arises from the fact that many significant socio-economic benefits and services provided by forests and woodlands do not accrue to the owner. For example the benefits of biodiversity conservation to society do not involve a financial return for the owner, unless supported by government grants. Furthermore, looking to the future, current concerns in forest policy are leading to a reshaping of the forest research agenda that is increasing the emphasis on topics that are important to society in general. However, they are topics in which individual landowners will see little short or medium-term commercial benefit and thus little incentive to fund themselves. These include ensuring sustainable supply of renewable energy and materials, climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation of biodiversity, plant health, water catchment management and urban forestry.

How are research priorities set and resources allocated?

9. Following devolution FC introduced new procedures for determining its research programmes, to ensure each country has a clear voice, recognising the different policy needs for evidence in each country in Great Britain and also the differences in the make-up of forestry both institutionally and in terms of tree species and geography.

10. FC(GB) holds the budget for FR and, with input from the NI Forest Service and in liaison with other government departments, manages the processes for setting research strategy and commissioning research. The commissioning process is managed by a small team in Edinburgh comprised of experts in key fields. New proposals have been made to widen the stakeholder input to give a

stronger voice to private and third-sector interests, to improve the transparency of the process and strengthen governance procedures and quality assurance. For example, FR's recent work on the pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum* that has formed the basis for advice not only by the FC and DARDNI but also by CONFOR in bulletins to private sector landowners. forestry.gov.uk/pramorom provided a scientific briefing on the disease itself and made recommendations on the practical implications for management of existing vulnerable crops and species choice for future planting. This demonstrates a direct connection between scientific knowledge and its application by stakeholders.

11. Forest Research in Great Britain is aligned closely to the needs of its users, continuing a strong tradition of public and private sector partnership, under which the GB forest estate was significantly expanded and sound principles of forest management were established. New techniques have been developed, yet this tradition of applied research to meet the needs of practitioners continues today. FR maintains effective feedback systems to ensure that its research remains relevant to current needs. This is part of the reason why UK forest research continues to be recognised across the world for its relevance and quality.

12. The Scottish Government has recently completed a review of its main research providers. Their chief scientist, recently retired, reported that her aspiration was to develop the same relevant research and relationships that the FC has achieved in its research commissioning.

How does UK forest research compare with capabilities in other countries?

13. Great Britain is one of the least forested temperate countries. The European average forest cover is about 30% compared with 10% in Great Britain. It is therefore difficult to compare and make like-for-like comparisons. Nonetheless the quality and reputation of its forest science and scientists and the relevance of its research to forestry practice has allowed the UK Government to play an influential role in international forestry that is disproportionate to the extent of its forest area. Illustrating the importance of global forestry processes, the Stern report suggested that deforestation accounts for 25% of total global carbon emissions. Great Britain has played a very positive role in addressing this issue, however its ability to play a credible part in global forestry policy is now at risk.

14. FR's Social and Economic Research Group is the largest single group of social researchers focusing on land management issues in the UK. The group has a very strong international reputation for research on the social and cultural values of trees, woods and forests, stakeholder engagement and participation, and forest governance. It has a well established peer-network in the UK and beyond, especially in Europe. The planned budget cuts of 50% would have a devastating impact upon this group, its science, reputation and its network, with a

commensurate impact on the UK's ability to influence the international forestry agenda.

15. Environmental management of UK (notably public) forests and compliance with environmental regulation today compares with the best in the world. Even in leading countries, such as Germany or Switzerland, the UK is seen as an exemplar in its management of forests to meet wider social ends. In each case this good practice is based on sound, applied science.

16. FR works closely with other institutes not only in Europe but across the developed world. The value of this is illustrated by *Pramorum*, where our members collaborated with scientists in North America and Europe in genetic analysis of the pathogen and mapping of its spread. No other UK institute has this level of international collaboration in forest science.

17. Our advice was sought by the State Forestry Administration in China on how to increase levels of environmental protection, climate change adaptation, and develop forest certification. We are working on forest landscape restoration with the Indian government through their Forest Research Institute.

Are there threats to forest research in Great Britain?

18. Forestry research is going to be critically important in the next 2 decades and beyond due to changing climates, changing tree species suitability, new, aggressive pests and diseases, the need for new silvicultural management approaches, etc. GB needs a strong, experienced research team to address these issues with the continuation of the broad based understanding (currently provided by FR) of the holistic requirement for successful research, e.g. critical research into tree disease also requires a strong team of field research staff, statisticians, silviculturists climate change experts etc, as well as pathologists.

19. The capacity for research in forestry in the UK has diminished considerably in recent years. The forestry departments at Oxford and Edinburgh Universities have nearly disappeared and rely on one or two key staff. At Aberdeen and Bangor there are separately taught undergraduate forestry courses, but both are under significant pressure and research capability is highly constrained. Forestry continues as an undergraduate discipline at Cumbria and Inverness, neither of which has a significant research capability. Across these institutions research specifically on forestry is small and specialised, often with a focus on tropical forests. FR represents the only grouping of forest scientists in the UK capable of delivering scientific advice and research on British forestry across a broad range of topics and disciplines.

20. Forest research in Great Britain is already funded at a minimal level, and will be drastically under-funded as the cuts proceed. We believe that its budget should not be cut at all and that efficiencies within DEFRA should be sought

before cutting back on science.

21. Further effective use must be made of FR's facilities. All forest research activities can easily be consolidated within FR. Work programmes should be transferred to them. This would also allow for modern techniques that aren't currently available at other institutes (e.g. GIS) to be utilised, and could also include research from fields related to forestry, for example wildlife management and ecology. There is also scope for FR to deliver technical services such as biometrics, production forecasting and modelling, statistics, social research and other activities that would retain a critical mass of personnel and provide flexibility and diversity to meet unexpected demands. In our view this would provide a better consolidation than any alternative proposal by DEFRA's chief scientist, Professor Bob Watson to close FR and move its functions to the DEFRA research institute, FERA, near York.

22. Subsuming FR's research into FERA would require compulsory staff moves that many of our members would be unable to undertake. The outcome would be large-scale job losses among our FR members and loss of technical expertise which could not be replaced, including in high profile and politically sensitive areas such as climate change and biosecurity. Although such a consolidation of research facilities may appear simple and expedient, it would lead immediately to the loss of scientific and in-sector networks and relationships at home and internationally - capital that takes decades to build.

23. One of the unique features of forestry research is the longevity of some projects. A typical forestry crop can take between 50 to 100 years to mature. While some research can be funded over a specific period of time, other areas require continual activity over years and decades. For example monitoring of growth rate changes due to climate change and dealing with biosecurity both need long-term and consistent research which will not be achieved by moving it from institute to institute

24. We also believe that FR has skills provided from its field station network that are relevant to research and geographic coverage across the land use sector. As such, it should be recognised as a main provider by other departments, such as DEFRA and DCLG, as well as by the Scottish and Welsh Assembly Governments. FR also uniquely benefits from its existing relationship with FC countries and FC GB through the opportunities provided to form strong links and working relationships with forestry practitioners, policy advisers and those in the front-line of policy delivery. This very effective way of working would be lost if FR were separated from FC. This could be as damaging for the capabilities of the FC as it would be for FR.

25. There is a real danger that Great Britain would lose its only institute dedicated to forest science. We do not know if the devolved Governments in Wales and Scotland are privy to this proposal. Whilst forestry is a small land use in England, it occupies almost 20% of the land area of Scotland and 12% of

Wales: in both countries it is an important part of the rural economy and requires a stronger research base than might be afforded by an English research institute to whom forest research is a marginal activity.

26. Finally we suggest that British Government needs to be more pro-active in promoting its research institutes on the European stage. Government research institutes and universities face different rules relating to matched funds, with institutes required to find matched funding from within their own or their parent department's resources. For a small body like the FC this has been a significant hurdle, limiting collaboration opportunities. There should be a level playing field and greater support from the Government in promoting UK research in Europe.

Additional information

27. FR is Britain's main provider of forestry research and scientific advice to the Government and the only significant employer of forest scientists in the UK. It was designated as an Executive Agency in 1997 but remains a core part of the Forestry Commission (FC). Despite its notionally separate status, which involves producing its own separate annual report and accounts, the staff of FR are FC employees and FR's finances continue to be semi-integrated with those of its parent.

28. Key to FR's ability to deliver advice and research on British forestry is its network of sites and field stations, which between them are able to provide geographic coverage of woodland throughout England, Scotland and Wales. This contrasts with other organisations, such as FERA, whose activity is restricted primarily to England. The field stations and the highly skilled research workers based at them are a unique resource. The geographical coverage, local knowledge, relationships with landowners and technical skills provided from these field stations enable FR to enjoy unparalleled access to sites to undertake field trials and experiments. Alongside this, FR undertakes a wide range of survey work to gather datasets representing the full range of climatic and ground conditions found across Britain.

29. This overarching ability to complete research within its public forests, including the [Alice Holt Research Forest](#) in Hampshire, respected by devolved governments in Scotland and Wales, is put at risk by proposals to sell or lease the forests held within the Public Forest Estate (PFE) in England. A future without PFE in England would mean that researchers would be faced with lengthy and costly liaisons with upwards of 20,000 individuals and organisations with a very diverse range of ownership structures, landholdings and management objectives who own the remaining 83% of forested land. The absence of any forest owners' body with the influence to impose a levy to support research means that the state has funded almost all research in forestry.

30. The attrition of FR's workforce and funding, places in jeopardy Britain's ability to undertake applied forest research and to engage credibly in international policy processes in forestry. This is a direct consequence of policies that will

shrink the main provider of forest research and the principal provider of scientific forestry and woodland management advice to Government to a size where its viability may be difficult to sustain. It is in direct conflict with the Government's stated intention to maintain its spending on scientific research.