



MINUTES OF THE FORESTRY COMMISSION TRADE UNIONS' DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 8TH NOVEMBER, ROOM 4, 1ST FLOOR, IN SILVAN HOUSE, EDINBURGH

Present:	Robert Beaney	FCTU Chair
	Edward Shephard	FCTU Secretary
	Allan Mackenzie	PCS
	Lorraine Adams	Prospect
	Roy Laird	GMB
	Malcolm Currie	Prospect FTO
	Danny Williamson	PCS FTO
	Lynn Henderson (item 6)	PCS Political Officer
	Frank Carrigan (item 6)	GMB FTO
	Mary Irvine (by telephone)	FCTU Silvan House
	Malcolm Crosby	FCTU Scotland
	Antony Griffiths (by telephone)	FCTU Wales
Minute Secretary	Sam Telford	FCTU Office

1. Introduction

Robert welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Tim Gill. The group expressed their best wishes to Sue Gillingwater who is currently on sick leave.

3. Minutes of 8th September 2008

The above were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Committee Remit, Method & Confidentiality

As this was the first Departmental Committee meeting since the new [FCTU constitution](#) was agreed, the committee confirmed understanding of its remit and composition.

In addition it was also agreed that there would be benefit to opening up the meetings or individual agenda items to Area Committee representatives, particularly if there is a significant issue of concern within a particular area, or a need to update colleagues on any issues that might be happening elsewhere. Edward said that there was no obligation for Area Committee representatives to attend every meeting or to stay for the entire meeting. It was noted that meetings would be held monthly in Silvan House and that telephone conference facilities would be available as standard to minimise expense and travel.

5. Pay

The committee held a confidential discussion on the details of Pay 2008/09. Edward said that a pay negotiation meeting with HR would take place following the meeting.

6. Scottish Climate Change Bill

Edward reported that Allan MacKenzie, Malcolm Crosby, Gordon Donaldson and himself had met with Mike Russell, the Scottish Minister on 4th November to discuss implications that the consultation on the Scottish Climate Change Bill might have on Scottish forestry and the wider FC.

Edward gave the group a detailed summary of the meeting:

- The consultation seeks to include a 'forestry amendment' in the bill which will enable the Scottish Government to maximise the National Forest Estate's contribution towards mitigating the impact of climate change, and in particular release capital from the Estate and reinvest it elsewhere within its climate change programme.
- Although the consultation covers a number of areas and seeks views on any other proposals that we might have to increase the forestry sector's contribution to alleviating climate change, the most striking proposal is to 'offer leases or cutting rights' over part of the National Forest Estate.
- The Minister was asked what these Rights might look like, and how they differ from the current medium and long-term felling contracts that are currently offered to the industry and he explained that they are proposing to offer commercial investors the Right to manage up to 25% of the most commercially viable parts of the forest estate for the next 75 years, in order to release capital to reinvest in other climate change projects.
- Capital Fund could be managed by a not-for-profit trust which would reinvest the money in other climate change projects.
- The consultation paper indicates that the fund will be used for woodland creation but this is not guaranteed: the Minister was clear that the fund is ring-fenced for climate change projects and not necessarily forestry related ones. The Minister was equally clear that the Scottish Government has no more money to invest either directly in the PFE or to kick-start the flagging grant scheme.
- The FCTU had asked for a copy of the business plan for how the project would deliver capital and benefits over the 75 year period without destroying the income stream which the FC relies on for its other work, but were told that this has not yet been prepared, but would be available 'reasonably soon'.
- Concerns about implications for jobs had been raised and the Minister had opined that the plan could be 'good news' and might even create more opportunities for employment. When this notion was challenged, the Minister indicated that other parties had suggested to him that were the commercial parts of the PFE managed in a different way then more employment could be created - though he was unfortunately unable to expand on who the other parties are, on what basis they believe that more jobs can be created or how many, what type and where those jobs might be. In relation to jobs, the Minister offered three commitments which were, 1) a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies, 2) that all staff who do not wish to transfer will be given priority to transfer into any suitable vacant posts elsewhere, and 3) that any remaining staff would be TUPE-transferred as part of the lease (in other words moved out of the FC to the private management entity).

Edward said that whilst there may be some positive elements within these proposals, the centre-piece element of leasing the most commercial part of the estate to foreign investors could change the nature of the forestry sector in Scotland and have a profound impact on many FC jobs. He stated that the proposals could affect other parts of the FC and stated that the immediate onus is on the Minister and FC Senior Managers to clearly layout the main implications of a plan of this sort. Edward stressed that the FCTU must fully understand how the released capital and additional income adds up and be much clearer on what jobs may be created and how this would be done.

Edward reported that he had received a great deal of initial feedback from members who are very concerned by the proposal to lease out part of the estate. The committee expressed concern that there was no indication that the leasing arrangements would be successful and that further explanation would be sought at a meeting with Bob McIntosh due to be held the following day. Edward added that initial feedback from outside the FC was also sceptical and unconvinced as to the merits of the argument. He said that the industry appreciated that the FC manages its forests sustainably and puts regular amounts of timber to the market irrespective of timber prices; which enables them to invest in mills guaranteed that they will get a steady timber

supply. The committee expressed concern that the long-term interests of the FC and the Scottish Forestry Sector may take second place to the political drive by the Scottish Government to raise funds to deliver its as yet unfunded commitments on climate change.

The committee agreed that two FCTU teams were required: one to look into the technical aspects of the proposals and to draft a response to the consultation, and a second to lead on our campaigning and political response. It was noted that a number of FC staff who are specialists in these areas had offered support to assist in framing some of the arguments to be included in the response.

Robert emphasised that as the FCTU would be supporting some of the elements of the proposals such as the proposal to work in partnership with energy companies, the group would need to ensure that the response highlights what the FCTU views as the negative points, and that we are not seen to be opposing the climate change bill per se: the committee agreed. It was agreed that Malcolm Crosby would chair the group in charge of drafting the response to the consultation. It was agreed that Allan MacKenzie would be involved in the group and that others would contribute as needed. Malcolm agreed to circulate a timeline for producing a final draft response by 26th January 2009, taking into account that a template for responding to the consultation will need to be sent to members. Edward said that an advanced draft would be needed before the Christmas break.

Action Required: Malcolm Crosby

Lynn Henderson outlined the main areas of her work as the PCS political officer for Scotland, and provided a useful background to the likely legislative process. Lynn informed the committee that one of her jobs in PCS is to organise parliamentary work and said that PCS have a group of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament who work together with all parties on issues of concern to PCS members. Frank Carrigan confirmed that GMB operates in a similar manner (as do the other unions) and confirmed that Richard Leonard (GMB Political Officer) is happy to assist with any lobbying work. Lynn reported that she has already been in contact with the lead MSP on the PCS Parliamentary Group and that she is interested in the issue and in pursuing discussions with the FCTU. Lynn felt that there should be an event in the Scottish Parliament at which those who are interested can attend and hear our concerns. She added that this may have to take place prior to the end of the consultation period on 27th January. It was agreed that Lynn and Richard would coordinate our political campaigning work, and that Edward would arrange a follow up meeting on this topic. It was agreed that the FCTU would contact all MSPs raise awareness of the consultation paper. Edward agreed to draw up some key points for Lynn and Richard to draft into an appropriate format.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

Edward informed the committee that we shall need to establish what the scope of the proposed legislative changes are and whether or not the various elements can be separated out at the primary legislative stage or whether further work will be needed either at the second regulatory stage or during implementation. The committee recognised that the approach may not be with through the legislative change but with some elements of the implementation. Further clarification on this would be sought from Director Scotland on the 13th November.

Action Required: Edward Shephard

Malcolm Crosby advised that the FCTU needs to be careful not to just make the campaign political. He reminded the committee that environmental lobbying played a big part in saving the FC from past privatisation plans and said that they had received a great deal of support from the RSPB and the Scottish Wildlife Trust who were both vocal and influential. Malcolm said that if there is any expectation or possibility that the proposals were to affect them, they will likely provide support. Following discussion, Malcolm agreed that he would attempt to obtain contacts within these groups.

Action Required: Malcolm Crosby

Allan said that he would obtain details of non Government bodies in Scotland from the Rural Community Gateway website that may have an interest in forestry in Scotland.

Action Required: Allan MacKenzie

It was agreed that the initial messages to present to members are:

- Inform them of the FCTU's awareness and actions.
- Ensure that they attend communication meetings.
- Explain that FCTU is formulating a bullet pointed list of key issues to be included in the response to the consultation.
- Ensure that they respond to the consultation document.
- Ensure that they contact their MSP to raise concerns.
- Ask for feedback on ideas or concerns that they have.

Robert said that Bob McIntosh would be holding workplace meetings with staff and said that the FCTU would be invited and given an opportunity to discuss the implications in detail with staff. Edward said that a letter would be drafted to members explaining what the FCTU plan to do as a next step. Frank Carrigan suggested that it would be worthwhile to help members know who their local MSPs are, when they are available and where they are located. Lynn said that PCS has this information and that she would forward it to Edward.

Action Required: Lynn Henderson

Action Point Summary:

- Edward to outline the FCTU's initial position in bullet point form for use in communication with members and MSPs.
- Edward to contact Lynn and Richard to set up the 'political' sub-group.; inc letters to MSPs, parliamentary event planning etc.
- Edward, Robert, Allan, Malcolm Crosby and Gordon Donaldson to meet with Bob and Hugh on 13th, to clarify proposals; inc legislative process, detailed lease arrangements, target land areas, implications for staff, other proposals currently being considered.
- Frank to supply contact details for Richard Leonard.
- Lynne to supply details of MSPs' surgeries.
- Malcolm Crosby to lead on drafting the FCTU response to the consultation.
- Malcolm Crosby to draw up timeline for responding to the consultation.
- Edward to go back to volunteers, reaffirm commitment and arrange an initial meeting.
- Malcolm Currie to research and provide pertinent information on not-for-profit trusts.
- Malcolm Crosby to establish contacts with environmental groups.
- Allan to establish contacts with NGO's.
- Edward to contact Ann Alexander re FCTU attendance at communication events.
- Allan and Edward to agree format for FCTU session at communication events.

7. Recruitment & Mapping

Edward referred to the action points of the last meeting and said that confirmation of the baseline mapping was required from GMB and Unite representatives.

Action Required: Roy Laird and Tim Gill

8. Review of the FC Flexible Benefits System

The committee referred to the paper from HR on suggested ideas for the FC Flexible Benefits System. Edward advised that HR would be working on making clearer proposals, having further consultation with staff and asking for feedback on which elements staff were particularly interested in.

9. Promoting FC Staff

Edward said that one of the angles which the unions have been working on at a national level is to try and dispel the 'Whitehall' image of Civil Servants and to promote them as dedicated public

servants and providers of essential and valuable services to the public. Edward felt that promoting positive images of Civil Servants and the work that they do is something that the FCTU should do more of and which union reps and contacts could put to a wide variety of uses; such as providing a positive spin in a campaign, altering public opinion, producing promotion material or highlighting the alignment of our work to the major themes of our various governments and governments-in-waiting. He welcomed feedback on the concept and said that although it may be the potential of a protracted pay dispute which has pushed this up the agenda, he believed that helping to promote a positive image of the FC and in particular the work that FC staff undertake was something that will be of benefit to everyone in the long run. Edward reported that if progress was made, Communications Department were willing to help and that HR were already doing work on this for a recruitment website that would contain stories and case studies about the interesting work that people do in the Forestry Commission.

The committee agreed that it would be worth pursuing and keeping on the agenda. Edward said that at the moment they were just exploring the scope of what could be done and that he would be discussing ideas further.

10.AOB

There were no further items to add to the agenda.