

**REPORT OF MEETING HELD AT TRANSPORT HOUSE, LONDON APRIL
11th 2007 OF THE FORESTRY WORKERS NATIONAL ORGANISING
COMMITTEE**

Present

Robert Beaney Scotland Chair
Edwin Rowlands England
Andy Patmore England
John Broatch England
Tim Gill England
Tom Grimwood England
Raymond Smith England
Andy Philips Wales
Chris Tucker Wales
Jeff Dymond Scotland
Audrey White Scotland
Ivan Monkton GEC rep.
John Cryer Political Advisor

Apologies

John Davidson
Chris Kaufman
Colin Watret

The Chair **Robert Beaney** welcomed everyone to the meeting and he introduced **Audrey White**, Audrey attending her first meeting the Chair asked Audrey if she would introduce herself and give some indication as to what she does working for the Forestry Commission in Scotland. Audrey thanked the Chair for the introduction and went on to explain that she is part of a project team in Scotland that work with young people of ages between 17 and 22 years the majority of whom come from deprived areas of Scotland where there is very little opportunity for them to gain experience of apprenticeship schemes for example in early life. The scheme is called Project Scotland and each individual person has funding for one year. Audrey is part of a team which supervises these 17 to 22 year old people and they assist them in obtaining land-based skills.

At the moment it is a three-year contract but there is hope that this will be extended for a further period. Audrey works with three other supervisors and they have in the region of about thirty students. The Chair thanked Audrey for her introduction and also some background of her involvement with the F.C.

The Chair then went through the minutes of the previous meeting held in November and the Chair asked for any amendments or alterations, there were none and the minutes of the 22 November 2006 meeting were accepted as a true account of that meeting.

Matters arising from 22 November meeting:

The Chair asked **Ivan Monkton** who is the General Executive Council Member to update the group of the situation with regard to the new union and at what stage the negotiations were and whether matters were going forward as planned. Ivan said that 79% of T&G members accepted the amalgamation and 70% of Amacus members. Ivan also reported that Amacus members welcomed the opportunity for lay-member representation as it exits in the T&G at the moment, 1st May still appears to be the target date for the amalgamation. The GEC has outlined those who were going to represent the T&G on the new union and Ivan mentioned that he will be part of the Rules Commission there will be have equal numbers between T&G and Amacus.

Edwin raised his concerns about the rural identity within the new union, Ivan assured him that he will do everything possible to ensure that rural matters and issues are brought to the fore and that he will ensure our sector has a strong voice and that he will do everything to ensure our recognition is retained. The Chair thanked Ivan for the update and asked for any other matters arising.

Ray Smith raised his concerns about T&G District Officers and the lack of interest they show in forestry members, several members of the committee mentioned that it was possibly due to the fact that there were very few forestry members within that particular unit or the responsibility of that officer but it was up to Raymond to make sure that his voice is heard and that he does bring forestry members concerns to the fore.

At this stage of the meeting the chair introduced **John Cryer**, John went on to explain his position within the T&G outlining that his title is 'Political Advisor' he has good contacts within parliament having been an MP himself for several years.

John asked what can he do to assist the committee, the Chair went on to explain that at it's last meeting a proposal was put forward that a campaign should be set up to raise the awareness of the difficult financial position the FC is in, particularly in England.

Ivan stated that from the reports that were presented earlier in the meeting he sensed that it was all doom & gloom and that the Forestry Commission appeared to be in a depressed state, scrambling around for an existence should not be the case Ivan said, the Forestry Commission is the largest land owner in England and it is struggling on.

A plea went out from the committee to both Ivan and John to see what can be done to try and change the depressing direction it appears that the FC is going.

Ivan promised to make the National Committee aware at it's next meeting the problems that the FC was experiencing financially and that he would also report to the members of the NC that John Cryer would be requesting a meeting with the Chairman of the FC Lord David Clark.

It was also asked if any members of the back benches in parliament had any influence on any of the decisions that are made politically, John said that some do and he would seek out those he felt could help.

The chair reported that **Chris Kaufman** would be requesting a meeting with Barry Gardiner who is now Minister responsible for Forestry matters, John said that he would speak to Chris to see if he could join in on the meeting.

Following on from this lengthy debate a proposal was put forward that as we do not at the moment have a representative from the Forestry Workers National Organising Committee on the RAAW National Committee we should request that an invitation should be forwarded to the FWNOC to nominate a person to report on Forestry matters to the RAAW National Committee. If the proposal is accepted **Edwin Rowlands's** name was put forwarded as the person to represent the FWNOC, Edwin accepted this nomination.

Ivan agreed to put our request to the RAAW National Committees next meeting.

The chair thanked both John and Ivan for their valuable contribution to this debate.

The next item on the agenda was a report from the regional staff councils, the Chair asked **Tim Gill** the representative for England to update everyone on the situation in FC England. Tim went on to say that a lot of work had gone on behind the scenes, the Comprehensive Spending Review is still on going and Defra have submitted a financial figure to the government for consideration. Tim felt that it was inevitable that there would be a 5% reduction in the funding and if Treasury insist there could be another 5% reduction in the financial support for FC England. At the moment there is £1.6m – £1.7m shortfall and Tim made the committee aware that they are still looking at how to continue saving money and it does not rule out the possibility of staff reductions if natural wastage does not absorb the number of staff required to reduce the overall costs. Tim reported that the Regional Director, proposals for a regional structure does not appear to be the route that we will be going down but Tim mentioned that we wait and see.

The England National Staff Council meeting had been cancelled and a new date had been fixed for the end of July, this is to enable for information to be collated from FC Districts. Tim reported that there were vacancies on the National Staff Council and the post of Health and Safety Co-ordinator was vacant now that John Broach was retiring.

John Broatch emphasised that the Highlodge recreation area in East Anglia was going out to franchise and that he was concerned about the long-term effect this would have on the recreation facilities within East Anglia.

John Crier asked Tim to confirm the financial position and did Tim really mean that there could be a 10% cut in funding in the next 2-3 years in FC England. Tim confirmed that this was the case.

The Chair thanked Tim for his detailed report on the situation in England and asked **Jeff Dymond** from Scotland to give an overview on the situation there. Jeff mentioned there was a restructuring of jobs within Scotland, operations were still ongoing but there was no new money for education, which appears a shame as this is an area which would benefit FC Scotland and the Scottish Parliament. The ranger and

wildlife staff numbers are still under review in Scotland and it appears as though a lot more of the wildlife control would be going out to contract, some rangers are being redeployed to other FC work at the moment. Natural wastage as in England is not fast enough to keep pace with funds, but on a positive note, Jeff reported that apprenticeship system is still going well and that FC Scotland are positive in driving this matter through. At the moment 15 young people have been recruited into forestry as a result of the apprenticeship scheme but the biggest concern for staff in FC Scotland is the possible reduction of staff numbers.

The Chair thanked Jeff for his comprehensive report on the situation in Scotland and asked **Chris Tucker** to report on the position in Wales. Chris reported that unlike England and Scotland, the financial position in Wales is good and that the Welsh Assembly feels positive about forestry in Wales and is positive with regards to the funding it is making available. The Trade Union side and representatives from FC Wales have been in discussions about a staffing plan and it appears now to have reached an agreement. It is identified there will be 50 staff loses from FC Wales over the next few years through natural wastage, at the moment it does not appear as though these will be replaced but the TUS in Wales may have further discussions with the Director about this matter in the future.

Timber sales are good and it seems new contracts are being set up with various contractors. The grant system Better Woodland for Wales, there is lots of interest from landowners regarding this scheme. **Andy Phillips** said his main concern is the selling off of the crown jewels in Wales and mentioned that it was still an ongoing matter. Andy had expressed this concern previously and it appears this is a matter which will not go away unless the Trade Union side campaign and bring to the fore to the attention of the people of Wales that they are actually losing their crown jewels.

Ivan asked who was the TU representative for the FC Commissioners, Ivan said that he has made an application to be considered for a position but has never been successful and was wondering if Chris Kalfman could examine the correct route for nomination. The Chair thanked the country representatives for their reports.

The next item on the agenda was Health & Safety, **John Broatch** introduced this subject and expressed his concerns that the national FC/TU safety committee meetings had now been reduced to one meeting a year, this is possible due to the lack of interest shown by TU reps as often some of the previous meetings went ahead with few places taken up by our reps. Further discussions had taken place with regard to internal training courses for FC/TU Safety reps. Chris Tucker said that he was drafting a list of H&S reps in Wales. Ivan said that he would make contact with John Mowatt who is senior training officer for the T&G to see if he could start the ball rolling. Robert agreed to talk to Emily Ramsay to again see if it would be possible to do a joint venture.

Edwin expressed his concerns that the T&G Health & Safety sub committee had not met for a considerable time, Ivan agreed and said that he would check with Chris Kaufman why there had been this lapse. Ivan also reported that the H&S Executive offices in Stoneleigh would possibly be closing shortly.

The chair thanked John for his presentation and wished him well for the future as this is possibly John's last meeting he would be attending.

The next item was pay 2007/2008, the chair had prepared a paper for the meeting, the chair expresses his concerns that at the moment there doesn't appear that there will be a long term agreement and this year he expects that we will have to settle for a one year deal. The group stressed that part of the negotiations and settlements that there must be revalorisation of all pay bands and allowances that would keep ahead of inflation. The chair said that there are meetings planned with other FC Trade Union colleagues to prepare a pay claim this will then be presented to the official side of the FC.

The chair asked the group to keep the information provided confidential until such times that there had been a prepared paper for national consideration.

The next item on the agenda was 'New Entrants list' the chair asked the group if they felt that the list provided was helpful and did it go any way in helping recruit those who had recently joined the FC into the T&G. Everyone agreed that it helpful and asked the chair to carry on issuing the list.

The other remaining items on the agenda included pensions, **Chris Tucker** briefly outlined the relevant papers he had received from the CSU and reported matters that he felt was of interest to the group.

The chair felt it appropriate at this stage to mention that the age retirement for staff in the FC was 65 and this was FC policy. In England no member of staff will be allowed to work beyond their 65th birthday unless they have started a specific project and there is a need to work an extra few months or so to see the project completed.

The chair asked **Andy Phillips** to report on the Harassment and Bulling situation within the FC and asked if he felt that matters were improving, Andy stated that he did not feel that the situation had improved in fact he felt that matters were getting worse this he felt was due to a lot of staff being over worked and that lots of staff were now expected to carry out roles that included more responsibility and decision making. This can bring about bullying Andy felt and he was interested to hear from others if they felt that things were getting better within the FC. Andy agreed to prepare a paper for our next meeting with some facts and figures so that the group could get a better feel of the situation.

The chair stated that he had recently attended a course which was also attended by some members of management. The course was on Mediation and although very intense (held over six days, two days at a time) it was felt to be very useful by all who attended and also something that could be of wider use throughout the FC. The suggestion has been made to the DG and the Director of HR that mediation could be of benefit in some grievance and disciplinary cases and this is now under consideration.

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The chair thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting, it had been a long day but all those present had an opportunity to raise points and issues and the chair hoped that when we meet again in the autumn there would be lots to report that were of a positive note.

The date for the next meeting has been confirmed as Tuesday 23rd October 2007

Follow up

Ivan has reported to Edwin that he presented the FWNOC minutes to the RAAW National Trade Group Committee at their last meeting in particular the matter relating to the financial situation in England. The RAAW National Committee has now extended an invitation to Edwin to attend their future meetings as an ex officio and give a report on Forestry matters. The next meeting is on 26th July.

Ivan has also raised the matter with the GEC and mentioned to them that there could be a campaign raised regarding the lack of finance being made available to FC England.

Congratulations to Ivan for being elected to the position of Vice Chair of the GEC