



# PCS Forestry Commission Group News

Welcome to the second of our group newsletters. The newsletter is not intended as a definitive account of the GEC's actions, that is recorded in the minutes of meetings, but as before is rather an ad-hoc selection of articles each one penned by a member of the GEC. It is hoped that the result gives a flavour of the work of the GEC and will be of general interest to most members.

In this edition:

- Allan MacKenzie and Joanne McAuley give a short update on [PCS's National Campaign](#).
- Antony Griffiths and Liz Richardson provide some house-keeping updates on [Motions to next Year's conference](#), and proposed changes to our [branch structures](#).
- David Gibson reports from the [PCS Disability forum](#).
- Jon Bates provides a quick update on [Pay 2007](#), and finally
- Steve Holdsworth, Malcolm Crosby and Hazel MacLean provide three reports on ongoing reviews on [England](#), [Scotland](#) and [SEARs/SRDP](#).

## **PCS National Campaign by Allan Mackenzie and Joanne McAuley**

PCS consulted with over 25,000 members at over 1,500 meetings over the course of the summer, and the clear outcome was that members recognise the need for further action as part of the national campaign if we are to successfully fight the attacks on our jobs and pay.

Whilst we welcome previous comments about no compulsory redundancies, it is clear that jobs will go, and a number of important questions have yet to be answered, including:

- Why are we still recruiting so many agency staff and consultants?
- Will staff face compulsory moves as colleagues leave and are not replaced?
- What happens if the required savings aren't achieved through staff turnover?

As a consequence of these job cuts, many of us will face increasing workloads, longer working hours and increased stress at work.

In other government departments this year, the strict enforcement of the UK government's policy of pay restraint meant that previously agreed progression arrangements were torn up, and cost of living increases were less than half the rate of inflation—in 7 departments pay offers were imposed following rejection by the members. Inflation (Retail Prices Index) at the end of September 2007 is running at 4.1%. Unless we can persuade the government to change its approach, we will continue to face unacceptable real terms cuts in pay and living standards.

The result of the ballot was announced on October 31<sup>st</sup> and as anticipated a resounding **yes** vote was achieved. However the NEC has decided not to escalate the campaign at this stage due to the Cabinet Office offering to enter into discussions with PCS to reach an

agreed settlement by the end of the year. The constant pressure of the campaign and the unity of members in demonstrating to this Government that they needed to negotiate towards a reasonable outcome have led directly to this opportunity for talks to commence.

**Our collective strength is something that only you as a union member can invoke and by your continued support of the PCS campaign we may be on the verge of securing a fair deal for all PCS members throughout the whole of the Civil Service.**

### **Motions to Group Conference by Antony Griffiths**

It is now time for all members to put forward 'Motions for Conference' for the Forestry Commission PCS Conference on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> May 2008. Although this may sound a long way away, motions need to be submitted in time for your branch's AGM. Motions to conference are one of the most important ways of determining group policy, and help determine much of the annual work programme for the GEC.

### **Branch Structures and AGMs by Liz Richardson**

The GEC has for some time been concerned that branches are finding it difficult to implement the group organising strategy for a number of reasons, a recurring one being geographical distribution of members.

After discussion about branch relevance at a local level the GEC has decided to look at a proposal for restructuring the branches to enable better functioning and relevance of branches at the local level.

For example the proposal is for South & West England and South & East England to be structured in the following manner: -

- The creation of 4 new branches in line with Government Regions as follows: -
- South & West England to cover Peninsula, Forest of Dean and Bristol
- South & East England to cover South East England, Alice Holt and The New Forest
- East England to cover Thetford and Cambridge
- Midlands to cover West Midlands, Northants and Sherwood & Lincs

North England, Wales and North Scotland are also to consider the option of creating new branch structures for the benefit of the members in those areas.

All AGMs (Annual General Meeting) will be discussing the proposals so if you have an opinion get along to your AGM and have your say!

AGMs are currently being scheduled, but those agreed to date are:

- South East England, 30<sup>th</sup> January – Cambridge
- Wales, 13<sup>th</sup> February – Location TBC

- South Scotland, 21<sup>st</sup> February - Aberfoyle

### **Disability by David Gibson**

I am a member of the PCS National Disability Forum, which represents disabled members across the Civil Service and private sector, which was formerly in the public sector.

The Disability Forum works closely with the TUC and the Disability Rights Commission to highlight issues affecting disabled members and to work with the employer to try and find solutions to such problems. Within the Forestry Commission we have worked with the Estates teams when looking at access to building issues.

Current topics in the Forum are a) The Health and Safety Executive and Disability Rights Commission have produced joint guidance on disability and health and safety risk assessment. The aim of the guidance is to promote good practice in the application of health and safety principles relating to disability and disabled workers at work. b) Trade Union Charter for Disability Equality produced by the Trade Union Disability Alliance. PCS are keen to sign up to this and are likely to do so early in the new year. C) Health and Safety Suspensions. The union is trying to find out if any systems are in place for a scenario whereby a member of staff is unable to work safely through lack of proper equipment but they are not otherwise incapacitated for work purposes.

I am not aware of any outstanding issues within the Forestry Commission but if anyone has any issues please contact me David Gibson (tel. 01387 272440).

### **Pay 2007 by Jon Bates**

You will be aware that the anniversary of the annual pay award 1st October has been and gone and we currently have no agreement in place.

The claim was submitted on the 28th June. Full details can be obtained from the following link <http://www.fctu.org.uk/pay2007/2007PayClaimFinal.pdf>. To summarise the main points :-

- A minimum, fully consolidated pay increase of RPI on all spine points, paid in addition to progression.
- An abolition of the performance pay system with all monies used to fund basic pay.
- A standard set of overtime and TOIL arrangements for all non-operational employees.
- 30 days annual leave for all employees irrespective of grade or length of service.
- A simplification of procedures on promotion so that members do not mark time or lose out.

It has been especially slow getting clearance from Ministers this year because of the Comprehensive Spending Review process. However, approval from Treasury has now been received and negotiations have finally begun.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, negotiations are not expected to be easy. Inflation (RPI) continues to be at around 4%, meaning higher living costs for all of us. The tough stance

from the former Chancellor and now Prime Minister continues with a 2% cap on pay in the public sector. As the saying goes, something's got to give!

If you have any comments, please send them to [unions@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:unions@forestry.gsi.gov.uk). Alternatively, join the discussion forum by using the following link and make your views known : <http://www.fctu.org.uk/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=2>

## **FE England Efficiency Review by Steve Holdsworth**

On the 19<sup>th</sup> September I met up with fellow England NOC members and Edward in order to discuss the FE England Efficiency Plan with Simon Hodgson, FE England Chief Executive and Ken Milsom, Personnel Manager. This followed a request made by the Trade Unions during the last England Staff Council meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> July.

At the meeting we were able to get more detail on the proposals from the England Forest Districts about how FMD's are going to meet the challenge of the next funding agreement. At the time of writing this report, all I know is that the CSR has grown the DEFRA budget by 1.4%. With a great deal of emphasis being put on flood risk management, I don't expect the FC will do any better than the current zero growth figure over the CSR period.

Simon informed us that the asset sales programme, mostly achieved through disposals of FC property and land, still has ministerial backing for a further two years. It is important for us to ensure that the largest part of this revenue heads towards reinvestment in capital programmes, rather than ongoing costs.

Another opportunity to reinvest raises its head in terms of the current levels of timber income, which continues to exceed expectations, through higher prices being achieved at auction, not over-cutting! Whilst it is unlikely that the FC ends up being able to exploit all of this, it should present Senior Managers with an opportunity to lobby hard for additional resources in order to deliver projects and programmes which support the "Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests".

## **Scottish Reviews by Malcolm Crosby**

Bob Macintosh and Hugh Insley are holding eight Communications Meetings over the winter. This time they will also be attended by Head of Business Units, Michael Ansell, a member of the National Committee for Scotland and someone from the Trade Union Side. I will be at four of them.

I know there is an element of cynicism from some staff about the purpose of these meetings, but after the previous round I spoke to many who appreciated the face-to-face contact and opportunity to put forward their point of view and the TUS have warmly welcomed this initiative.

You will be aware of the political fuss over the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, but at least it is now published and all Departments can proceed with their financial settlements. In FCS, we are expecting it to be finalised over the next month or so and units are submitting their budgets soon. We know that money is going to be tight and this is an opportunity to share the issues with staff and seek some understanding on the way forward.

The DP Review published at the beginning of September was not a good example of how to do things. The TUS drew a line in the sand to show our strength of feeling, the first time for

many years that we have refused to co-operate. The message has finally penetrated that although managers are paid to manage, they don't have all the answers and it is just possible that another perspective may add value to a proposal. Consultation and imposition are not the same thing. Staff are currently being consulted on their views and we will be meeting again on 2nd November to consider the way forward.

Strong feelings have also been generated by the Ops Review and the Review of the Review. The motion to Group Conference in May from N(S) branch asked us for a survey of views. This was launched in September and we were delighted with the level of interest shown.

124 people responded, covering all Pay Bands from 6b to 1. Staff from all parts of FCS gave a range of comments and we were pleased that it was treated so seriously, much thought went into them.

The results confirm our expectations. Some find their work more straightforward, with less confusion over responsibilities, a simpler management chain and better service to timber customers. Almost all feel that it has reduced job satisfaction and increased workloads. By increasing specialism, it has made interchange between jobs more difficult and reduced promotion opportunities. Increased travel times and distance, lack of contact with staff, different friction boundaries and admin arrangements are all raised as problems.

Our thanks to all of you who took part - including the 23 non-union members, please join us to strengthen our voice in the FC. We will be following up these issues with management over the next few months. A review of admin is just starting with TUS membership of the group.

Come along to the Communication Meetings, make your views known and become part of the action. Collectively we can be much more powerful than working in isolation.

### **SEARs and SRPD by Hazel MacLean**

Building on the achievements of the 'On the Ground' programme, during the summer of 2007 the organisations jointly developed this proposal through a design team. The project Board has reported to the CE or equivalents of the Departments/Organisations and the report has now been signed off by all involved and will be released shortly to staff. This will be implemented over the next two years with as much as possible before The Royal Highland Show 2008. By then the organisations will come together to deliver to the Scottish rural sector, an improving customer experience by co-ordinating inspections and visits, providing a flexible access to service through any door, facilitating customer access to multiple and co-ordinated services, sharing and using information more effectively, empowering individual staff to provide a wider range of services.

All staff of the 9 public bodies involved will need to be aware of the 'single delivery service' and what it is intended to achieve. This especially includes staff who receive telephone calls from land managers, staff who are the first port of call in dealing with enquiries from visitors to offices, to those staff that routinely visit farms, crofts, estates and woodlands in relation to grants or inspections. No changes to legislation are expected or required to deliver the proposal, the letter from the Minister in June confirmed that the proposal was to be developed within our established legislative frameworks. The Implementation Project Board will be chaired by Dr Campbell Gemmell, Chief Executive Officer of SEPA. One of the key

projects to be delivered will be RDCs through the SRDP. Management of Scottish Government land will be tackled in a future phase of the project.

### **Scottish Rural Development Plan and Rural Development Contracts (Grant Schemes)**

This is moving ahead at an ever quicker pace with the aim of having the new scheme open for business in January with an IT system up and running for each stage as it is required. This IT system will be based on some of the work carried out for GLADE. The Grants will be administered through Case Officers and RPAC Co-ordinators. RPACs will set regional priorities for grant assistance and as the scheme will be competitive, will judge proposals. Co-ordinators and case officers have now attended workshops in preparation, and I'd be grateful for any feedback on these: [email](#). These workshops will detail duties and ways of working for the RDCs, some of this has major implications for FCS staff and their duties. As the pace quickens James Simpson has agreed to update the Staff Council on a monthly basis of any progress.

### **...and finally**

Hopefully you have found this second newsletter interesting and worthwhile—if you have any comments then we should welcome feedback on both the format and content. You can email us at [unions@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:unions@forestry.gsi.gov.uk) or please speak to your local GEC rep:

#### **Branch**

Group President  
North Scotland  
South Scotland  
Silvan House  
Wales  
North England  
South West England  
South & East England

#### **GEC Reps**

Allan MacKenzie  
Fiona Barnett & Hazel MacLean  
Malcolm Crosby & David Gibson  
Edward Shephard & Joanne McAuley  
Andy Best & Antony Griffiths  
Jim O'Neill and Jon Bates  
Steve Holdsworth & John Winterbourne  
Liz Richardson & Vacancy!!

[Latest GEC Minutes](#)

#### **Edward Shephard**

*Cobbler-together in Chief*

Ps: don't forget that all our latest news is now online at [www.fctu.org.uk](http://www.fctu.org.uk)