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From Rt Hon Jim Paice MP  
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food

Thank you for your letter of 4 February to the Prime Minister regarding the Forestry Commission. Your letter was passed to Defra as the Government Department with responsibility for this issue. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Please be assured that I value the work of all those involved in the protection and maintenance of woodlands throughout England, and I do indeed recognise that part of this work is carried out by the Forestry Commission.

As you will be aware the Government has established an Independent Panel to consider forestry policy in England. The Panel will advise on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England, on the role of the Forestry Commission, and on the role of the public forest estate. It includes representatives of key environmental and access organisations alongside representatives of the forestry industry. You will be pleased to hear that Forestry Commissioner Sir Harry Studholme is a member of the panel. Further details on the Panel's membership and terms of reference can be found on Defra's website at [www.defra.gov.uk/rural/forestry/panel](http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/forestry/panel). There is also information there on how to contact the Panel Secretariat.

I note your comments about the good work of the Forestry Commission staff and I recognise the high regard in which the Forestry Commission is held across the country. Forestry Commission staff have shown dedication over many years in delivering the policies of the government of the day, as well as skill and commitment in delivering practical results on the ground. I look forward to working with them as we work to secure a sustainable future for England's woods and forests and meet the challenges of the Spending Review settlement.

RT HON JIM PAICE MP