

**The Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee  
National Assembly for Wales**

Inquiry into forestry and woodland policy in Wales

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**SUBMISSION BY THE RFS (ROYAL FORESTRY SOCIETY)**

The RFS is the largest and longest established education charity dedicated to promoting the wise management of trees and woods across England Wales and Northern Ireland. The RFS membership in Wales of about 350 represents a broad range of forestry, arboriculture and related interests.

**DELIVERY OF STRATEGIC THEMES**

**1. Responding to climate change – coping with climate change and helping reduce our carbon footprint**

- a. Much of the apparent increase in forest cover from 2010 to 2011 can be attributed to improved measurement techniques (*Woodlands for Wales Indicators<sup>1</sup> 2015-16, p.5*). Forest cover now appears to be decreasing; clearfelling is not always followed by restocking (sometimes for good reasons), and woodland creation is not sufficient to compensate. This reduction of forest cover has implications for climate change mitigation (outcome 3.1 of the strategy); there are fewer trees to sequester carbon and, in the longer term, there will be less wood for carbon substitution.
- b. Delivery of this theme requires research on, and development of management approaches for, increasing forest resilience. This research must be well-funded and coordinated across the UK and internationally. The ability of scientists in Wales to participate in relevant research projects may be affected if the UK leaves the European Union (see “The challenges and opportunities that arise from leaving the European Union”, below).

**2. Woodlands for people – serving local needs for health, education and jobs**

- a. More people are enjoying “the life-long learning benefits of woodlands” (outcome 4.2 of the strategy), while levels of community involvement in woodland management (4.1) and forest recreation (with associated health benefits, 4.3) are being maintained (*Woodlands for Wales Indicators 2015-16, pp. 34-36*).
- b. Data on employment in the wider forestry sector are of poor quality (*Woodlands for Wales Indicators 2015-16, pp.40-41*); it is not clear if “more people [now] benefit from woodland related enterprises” (4.4).
- c. Targeted grant schemes are needed to bring woodlands that serve local needs into management and to maintain them in good condition; the current Glastir scheme does not provide the necessary incentives.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2016/161220-woodlands-wales-indicators-2015-16-en.pdf>

### **A competitive and integrated forest sector – innovative, skilled industries supplying renewable products from Wales**

- a. It appears that the amount of “Welsh-grown timber ... used in Wales” is declining slightly *Woodlands for Wales Indicators 2015-16, p. 44*), rather than increasing (outcome 5.1)
- b. The indicators for the other key outcomes (5.2-5.4) under this strategic theme are not fully developed. However, the RFS has concerns about the low numbers of young people on forestry-related education and training courses, which has serious implications for the development of a “thriving, skilled workforce in the forestry sector” (outcome 5.4) in Wales.
- c. There is a need for investment in the forestry supply chain to bring wood to market, including funding for roading, mobile equipment and cooperative ventures, as well as for training.

### **3. Environmental quality – making a positive contribution to biodiversity, landscapes and heritage, and reducing other environmental pressures**

- a. The majority of managed woodland in Wales “achieves high standards of environmental stewardship” (section 6.1), and woodlands continue to contribute to “the special landscape character of Wales” (6.4)
- b. However, most ancient semi-natural woodland in Wales is in unfavourable condition. As much of it is also unmanaged, it’s difficult to see how this might change (outcomes 6.2 and 6.3).
- c. The contribution that woodlands could make to flood alleviation (part of outcome 6.5) is now recognised quite widely, but little is being done realise this potential.
- d. Targeted grant schemes are needed to bring woodlands that contribute to environmental quality into management and to maintain them in good condition; the current Glastir scheme does not provide the necessary incentives.

#### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

### **4. How the strategy is contributing to the delivery of duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016**

- a. The strategy contributes directly to all seven goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, and to Part 1 (Sustainable management of natural resources) of the Environment (Wales) Act.
- b. However, these contributions could be compromised by:
  - the reduction of forest cover in Wales (see above)

- loss of staff with forestry expertise from Natural Resources Wales (NRW), which is likely to have negative effects on the long-term stewardship of state forests (the Welsh Government Woodland Estate, WGWE)

**6. How the strategy will be considered in the context of emerging policies, plans and statements (e.g. National Natural Resources Policy, Biodiversity Plans and Area Statements)**

- a. Forests / woodlands are a natural resource, and if the four strategic themes of *Woodlands for Wales* are still fit for purpose, they should form part of the National Natural Resources Policy.

**7. The challenges and opportunities that arise from leaving the European Union**

- a. Challenges
  - Possible / probable reduced financial support for forestry, affecting the sector's ability to deliver non-market ecosystem services.
  - Scientists in Wales may not be able to participate in EU-funded research projects relevant to forestry (see "Responding to climate change", above).
- b. Opportunities
  - Hill farming becomes unprofitable and land becomes available for afforestation by planting or natural colonisation. However, this would happen at considerable social cost and would be undesirable in the wider rural context.

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