



Tree Planting and Woodlands Inquiry call Evidence for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA)

November 2020

The Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) is a global, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the promotion of responsible forest management worldwide. Our vision is that the world's forests meet the social, ecological, and economic rights and needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations, and our mission is to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests.

FSC UK is the national office of the Forest Stewardship Council in the United Kingdom. FSC UK is independent of FSC international. It sets forest management standards for the UK by inputting into the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS), promotes the FSC system, and provides an information service. FSC UK (Ephesea UK) is a charity registered in England and Wales (No. 1130203) and a nonprofit making company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (No. 06792524).

Introduction

FSC UK welcome this inquiry and any commitment towards appropriate woodland expansion and enhancement of existing woodlands. We strongly support a drive towards increased tree planting, but for this to be successful it must be combined with efforts to ensure that new and existing woodlands are managed responsibly.

Responses to questions posed by the Committee:

Why were previous ambitions for increasing tree planting in England not met and what lessons should be learned?

- We recognise that previous grant schemes aimed at increasing forest cover in England have been perceived as burdensome and overly complex due to administrative and regulatory requirements. In addition, there has been insufficient funding and advisory support for landowners with less knowledge of forestry practices. Steps should also be taken to prevent the exclusion of smallholders and those with limited capacity to follow complex rules and procedures. Such steps might range from support for certification to alternative methods of verification for small and low-intensity land management.



- There should be greater attention to monitoring and evaluation of outcomes from subsidies made available for woodland creation and tree planting. A reported absence of oversight in compliance has resulted in many planting schemes not meeting the expected standards or desired outcomes due to management failings or from inadequate planning at the initial stages. Again, credible third-party certification could offer support in assuring certain environmental and social outcome requirements are being maintained.

In relation to increasing forestry coverage in England, what should the Government be trying to achieve? For example, how should the following policy objectives be prioritised?

- The commitment to increase forest coverage provides a significant opportunity to design woodlands that deliver multiple environmental, economic, and social benefits. Woodlands can be managed with integrated objectives for biodiversity, climate and social outcomes while offering economic benefits through the supply of sustainable timber and non-timber woodland products. FSC verification of ecosystem services helps facilitate payments for ecosystem services and provide access to other benefits for those who actively support the responsible management of woodlands and their ecosystem services.
- We support any aim to encourage investment in our domestic timber industry and home-grown forest products; local use of the products of responsible forest management should always be our priority. This should go hand in hand with ensuring there are effective mechanisms for ensuring forest practices are meeting appropriate standards.
- Forestry holds significant potential in mitigating impacts of climate change and helping the UK to achieve our target of being net-zero by 2050. The FSC Ecosystem Services Procedure can help woodland owners demonstrate and communicate about the positive impact their management practices have on carbon storage as well as on co-benefits of biodiversity, soil conservation, watershed management and recreation services.
- The social benefits of woodlands should be explicitly recognised and encouraged through ensuring public access to woodlands and by greater collaboration between land managers and local communities. Spatial planning for woodland location and the prioritisation of environmental targets should be determined through engagement with locally appropriate organisations and public consultation. Local communities should also be able to inform the design of woodlands as well as being involved in woodland management planning processes.
- Any tree planting programmes, and woodland management schemes should commit to providing equal access to the range of benefits from public funding for landowners and community members, regardless of landholding size and income levels. There should also be pro-active efforts to support smallholders and target the provision of environmental and social benefits for disadvantaged communities. FSC, both in the UK and globally,



continues to explore various approaches to engaging smallholders and community woodlands in responsible forest management, and we would be happy to share what we have learned.

Are the right policies and funding in place to appropriately protect and manage existing woodlands in England? How will prospective changes to policy and legislation effect this?

- We acknowledge the value of the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS), which forms part of the foundation of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS). However, we question the enforcement capacity of regulatory authorities to monitor and ensure compliance to UKFS, given the budget cuts regulators have faced in recent years and the likely increased pressures on public finances in the near future. Findings in the recent British Woodland Survey indicate a lack of engagement by woodland owners with UKFS, with a high proportion indicating they do not have a UKFS-compliant management plan¹. While the majority of forest managers no doubt diligently comply with UKFS, restricting independent oversight to select times of regulatory approvals provides only limited assurance that UKFS is being followed.
- Any creation of new woodland should be matched with support for monitoring and the identification of appropriate mechanisms to ensure compliance to standards. Increased uptake of credible third-party certification provides robust and independent assurance that expected standards are being met. Voluntary certification is not intended to take the place of regulation, but to supplement it. Credible third-party certification has the further advantage of providing independent assurance of standards of management on the public forest estate.
- The importance of established certification schemes in demonstrating sustainable management is recognised in the UK Biodiversity Indicators and is used in national reporting on the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Payments for the provision of public goods, such as those proposed under the Environmental Land Management Scheme, can contribute to incentivising land managers to responsibly manage woodlands on their property. Specific claims verified under the FSC Ecosystem Services Procedure, including biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and storage, watershed services, soil conservation and recreational services, could form the basis for both public and private sector investment in these outcomes. The FSC Ecosystem Services Procedure also provides a proven mechanism for demonstrating and communicating to the public the positive impacts of forest management activities on the conservation or restoration of ecosystem services.

¹ Hemery, G., Petrokofsky, G., Ambrose-Oji, B., Forster, J., Hemery, T., and O'Brien, L., (2020). Awareness, action, and aspirations in the forestry sector in responding to environmental change: Report of the British Woodlands Survey 2020.



We ask EFRA to recognise the important contribution the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), through the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS), has played in driving the implementation and recognition of the highest standards of forest management in the UK over the last two decades, and its potential role in the future to independently assure and promote such management. We would welcome closer collaboration to maximise the synergies between regulation and certification to deliver the aspirations of the UK government in terms of forest coverage, restoration of nature and a green recovery.

For questions or more information please contact:

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