

Written evidence submitted by Julian Ohlsen (TPW0092)

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Julian Ohlsen Comments on Questions 238 - 333

Introduction

I currently work for Tilhill Forestry Ltd, a UK-wide private forestry contracting and consultancy company that employs 230 staff, manage over 160,000 hectares of woodland and are the UK's leading timber harvesting company. I am a member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters.

Starting my forestry career in 1978, I have now worked with trees for 44 years and I am keen to make a real contribution to the English wooded landscape. I would love to see the revival of woodland creation on a scale that would make a meaningful contribution to future generations - for a range of different objectives.

Over the years, I have experienced state encouragement for new woodland creation through Schedule D tax allowance, FGS, WGS, EWGS, Countryside Stewardship and now EWCO - all backed by locational supplements, FWPS and others. Yet now, at a time of real need, planting woodland takes longer to achieve approval, is more bureaucratic and comes with higher risk – hence schemes are more difficult and frustrating to implement than ever before.

Representing the South West of England and private company forestry, I sit on the Forestry Commission's Applicants' Focus Group committee. This group was formed some years ago for feedback, input and discussion from the wider customer base for FC grants and regulations.

My Responses to Questions

Question 241 Under the England Woodland Creation Offer, I believe that the incentive levels for new planting are well-balanced between the levels of incentive without over-paying for the benefits. Standard costs involved the EWCO process need to be regularly revised to ensure that the true costs of woodland creation are acknowledged and current. My major concern over 'the incentive to plant woodland' lies with speed of application approval, uncertainty associated with the approval process and the unbalanced nature of decision-making processes.

Question 245 & 252 The minister refers to native woodland in several circumstances that almost suggest that all woodland creation revolves around native woodland species. My premise is that those planting trees require the right tree, in the right place, for the right reason. The current narrative going out to the potential planters of new woodland is that the only objective is to plant native woodland. This approach will not provide us with wider and more resilient woodlands for the

future, will almost certainly not provide for an economic, sustainable future management and will prove harder to de-carbonise the built environment.

Question 253 The reference to conifer monocultures is unhelpful and somewhat out-dated. Under the United Kingdom Forestry Standard (UKFS), there is no longer opportunity for professionally designed woodlands to become “coniferous monocultures”. Indeed, the more likely monoculture will occur through a poorly designed and maintained intimate mixture of new native broadleaved woodland planting.

Question 264 Much work has been done by the Forestry Commission’s Forest Research teams on planting woodland under future climate change scenarios. Planting a mixture of Douglas fir, Scots pine, English oak, beech, lime or wild cherry, today’s forester has to consider the environment those trees will face in sixty, seventy or a hundred years’ time. Factors to be taken into account include employing seed sources from continental Europe, avoiding certain tree species (especially in southern England) and the need for future tree breeding programmes to enable shorter rotations and disease resistance. Many of the NGOs considering native woodland planting are not taking sufficient consideration of these factors for future resilience.

Question 313 The concern of deforestation in England is very real and current. We have large areas of the New Forest and other productive woodlands across the south of England being removed for lowland heathland restoration. This woodland removal is not being met by compensatory planting or by an increase in productive woodland creation elsewhere within the country. By constantly reducing the productive capacity of our forests, we simply to continue to outsource our building materials, our insulation products, our packaging, pulp and paper products to other countries. Our importation bill of over ten billion pounds per annum will simply continue to grow, irrespective of how many hectares of woodland creation are planted annually.

Question 333 It was a disappointment to see that the clear benefits of promoting and planting a wide range of conifer species was not given the time to be fully justified or explored. Many of the large oak woodlands that we see reaching maturity today would in most cases have been originally planted with a conifer nurse. Foresters throughout history have understood the benefits of encouraging straight, strong, early growth of oak trees within a framework of conifers. This ultimate climax woodland of oak has all the advantages of biodiversity, woodland habitat and landscape enhancement whilst the earlier removal of the conifer nurse has helped the economic maintenance over many years.

Personal Comments on Succeeding in Woodland Creation Targets

The current experience of an application to plant new woodland with the Forestry Commission is taking over two years to process. A landowner or investor faced with the uncertainty and changing investment climate cannot afford to wait this long. The Forestry Commission launched the Woodland Creation Planning Grant to provide more confidence and improved woodland design to reduce this risk. However, this process has simply created more bureaucracy, had led to further delays and created even less certainty. A large part of this delay appears to be the reluctance of the Forestry Commission to make informed, timely decisions. Faced with historic criticism, the Commission now seeks 100% endorsement from every stakeholder and a growing reliance on validation from certain public facing organisations where other protective organisations would be happy to see woodland expansion. It is my view that the Forestry Commission needs to be

empowered to make quicker and more decisive approvals to reduce the lead-in period for planting trees at all scale of afforestation.

I would like to suggest that smaller woodland creation schemes of say less than 30 hectares, in areas of low risk from environmental consequences, could receive permitted development approval through a prior notification process, such as exists in the planning sector. In such cases, a landowner would give the Forestry Commission details of the proposed planting and could receive permission within 28 days.

With the inherent protection and benefits within UKFS compliant planting proposals, the Forestry Commission should be encouraged to accept retrospective planting grant agreements to again speed up the rate of new woodland creation. Certain safeguards and notifications would be required in order to allow appropriate controls and budgetary management.

The whole sector, including Forestry Commission and government, should actively promote the use of conifers as well as native broadleaves to help combat the climate emergency. To rely on the current larger woodland planting bodies such as the Forestry England, Woodland Trust and National Trust, England will only ever see a very narrow type of woodland planting over the next few years. It is vital that we provide a wider range and scale of woodlands being planted across England.

Whilst the current capital grants that exist under EWCO are acknowledged as being fair, the interim gap between an established woodland and income being achievable from thinning or carbon unit sales, needs to be addressed through an extended woodland maintenance support. Historically, this period between planting and income generation has been supported over 30 years, 15 years and more recently over 10 years. I would suggest, and especially where conifers are not planted, this support needs to be for at least 25 years. By encouraging better mixed woodlands, this interim can be reduced to 15 years.

The private sector made up of estates, farms, outside investors and local companies are all ready to step in and replace the Forestry Commission in being the woodland owners and managers of the future. Without addressing the above concerns, fewer of these bodies will be keen to wait and every year that goes by when trees are not planted, the climate emergency simply gets greater.

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