

I am a Chartered Forester based in Wales, my background includes a period (1992-1998) as a Forest District Manager for about 20,000 hectares of the Welsh Public Forest Estate. I subsequently worked in forestry policy in Forestry Commission England and in Defra's Forestry Policy Unit. I recently submitted a PhD thesis to Bangor University on British Forestry Policy in the 20th Century. I own a ten hectare conifer woodland in Powys and am a member of Confor.

I would like to suggest some issues upon which the Committee should seek and consider evidence.

The commercial operations and focus of the NRW;

The "commercial" timber business of NRW continues to be strongly focussed upon the clearfelling of conifers and the replanting of clearfelled sites with a further fifty year rotation of conifers. Latest statistics¹ indicate that of 1,300 ha restocked 1,000 were with a further rotation of conifers.

The committee might consider the cost of this investment on behalf of the Welsh Government. The value of a softwood timber supply more than twenty years in the future should be evaluated.

- Does the likely distant future return justify the investment of public funds?
- Should a discount rate be applied?
- What is the rational business case for this expenditure?
- What environmental benefits or disbenefits are attached?
- Could much cheaper more informal and 'close to nature' natural regeneration yield most of the benefits at much reduced cost?

In this context the committee might consider evidence on the likelihood of long term timber price change. Evidence from the last half century suggests that prices have been generally falling.²

In this commercial context the committee might consider evidence on "forestry rewilding" projects such as "Wild Ennerdale". Some very large forest blocks could be identified for this. Phased and perhaps accelerated felling might provide an increased timber supply for current processors, with low cost regeneration. This might provide an increased cash flow in the coming decade.

The committee might also consider whether continuous cover methods are being widely enough utilised since these may combine enhanced future timber size and quality with cost free regeneration.

Communities in Wales can be divorced from the plantations imposed on their landscapes by the rather distant Forestry Commission of the last century. The Committee might consider whether communities could be significantly empowered to actually control the management

¹ Forestry Commission

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7aqknx>

² Forestry Commission Standing Sales price indices.

[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/csspi_to_mar14.pdf/\\$FILE/csspi_to_mar14.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/csspi_to_mar14.pdf/$FILE/csspi_to_mar14.pdf)

of public forests which dominate their environs. There is disappointing evidence on past attempts to do this in the South Wales Valleys,³ much more radical measures could be considered.

Ancient Woodland Restoration

There are still many ancient woodlands whose value is damaged by past conifer planting. The committee could inquire into the scale and status of these areas, consider why progress might be slow and whether NRW needs to refocus on this as a priority.

Forestry Employment

Accurate evidence is essential in public policy-making. The committee might rigorously inquire into reliable employment statistics. The current suggestion is that about 9,000 jobs relate to the public estate in Wales. However the Assembly Research Service Quick Guide⁴ notes that about half of these relate to pulp and paper business which use mainly waste paper rather than timber from Welsh forests, and a further significant proportion relate to secondary processing of timber which does not originate from Welsh forests. A reliable estimate is required to ensure that both policy makers and Assembly members do not devise policy based on unrealistic employment outcomes.

Delivery of business advice and support to the forestry sector in Wales;

It is not clear that this relates to the Public Estate. The committee might carefully consider the boundaries between legitimate business advice and the danger of supporting the resources of particular sectoral lobbying interests.

Management of disease outbreaks on the public forestry estate;

The committee might inquire into the potential implications for Sitka spruce of a disease or pest with the same impact of those recently attacking pine and larch.

- What contingency plans are there?
What mitigatory actions are currently being taken to rapidly diversify the estate?

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³ Kitchen, L. Are Trees Always 'Good'? Urban Political Ecology and Environmental Justice in the Valleys of South Wales. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. Volume 37, Issue 6, pages 1968–1983, November 2013

⁴ 'Woodlands for Wales Indicators (Revised June 2012)' <http://www.assemblywales.org/qg11-0031-c.pdf>