

National Assembly for Wales
Environment and Sustainability Committee
PFE 1
Inquiry into The Public Forest Estate in Wales
Response from: Marc P. Jones

26 April 2014

Committee Clerk
Environment and Sustainability Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Ref: Public Forest Estate in Wales Inquiry

Dear Sir

As you assess how Natural Resource Wales manages the public forest estate in Wales, I am grateful for the opportunity to share my perspective.

I feel there is insufficient engagement with the private sector in achieving objectives centered on woodland in Wales. The private sector could contribute ideas and capital that could help the public sector achieve objectives with fewer resources while benefiting local communities.

An approach that encouraged Public/Private partnership could better deliver on objectives. There is no single Public/Private format that should be followed, but instead the need to be more open to proposals from the private sector that should be assessed against defined criteria.

In the attached submission, I highlight one example. Other examples would arise of similar or greater merit if Natural Resources Wales and the Forest Estate of Wales were more available to engagement and action with the private sector.

I would be pleased to provide oral evidence as required.

Yours sincerely

Marc Jones

Public/Private Partnerships

A dynamic approach to managing forest estates in Wales

1.1 **Summary:** I propose that NRW should more actively embrace the “dynamic” approach once suggested in the management of the Government’s forest estate. By doing so, there is better scope to achieve the Welsh Government’s Woodland for Wales forest strategy and mobilize private capital to assist in the pursuit of public aims.

1.2 I propose that through Public/Private partnerships, there is scope for greater success in achieving two of the objectives of the Woodland for Wales forest strategy: (i) Woodlands for People and (ii) A Competitive and Integrated Forest Sector.

2.1 **Background:** Wales is one of the least wooded countries in Europe. Despite public support through the Glastir Woodland Scheme, the target of 100,000 hectares of new woodland in Wales by 2020 is unlikely to be achieved.

2.2 As an initiative, PLANT has increased awareness and contributed to woodland creation in Wales. While 200,000 trees have been planted, these have been restricted to seven sites highlighting the poor alignment between the NRW forestry estate and the areas of population. This reduces the participation of the community with woodland in Wales.

3.1 **Proposal:** There is scope to increase private participation in the forestry sector in Wales and through doing so increase (i) The resources available to the public sector for woodland creation in areas more closely aligned with areas of population (ii) Participation of the local community in initiatives such as PLANT (iii) Foster local businesses opportunities with woodland and thereby increase prospects for employment.

3.2 Within the Forest Estate there are sites which are not well aligned with current policy, whether because (i) They are not located close to areas of population to provide community involvement (ii) Do not offer a site of scale that helps the commercial viability for NRW (iii) Are not a priority for investment by the public sector even if private sector investment was feasible.

3.3 The proposed Public/Private partnership aims to identify and engage with private interest in sites where local knowledge can better justify investment and increase viability in a manner that increases benefits to the local community while fulfilling public policy. The NRW should be open to such proposals as it would then allow public capital to be released so that it can be deployed for woodland creation in areas more aligned with population or generally achieving public policy. This process could be undertaken as a “Woodland Swap” where the private sector acquires NRW owned woodland sites in exchange for new land or woodland that would be better suited to NRW.

- 3.4 This proposal does not suggest that the private sector can manage woodland better than the NRW. Instead it relies on the premise that local knowledge will allow the private sector to identify more ways to increase the relevance of the woodland to the local economy and justify investment. Whether this is by increasing local scale for integrated operations linked with woodland (e.g. sawmills, biomass sector) or developing facilities to increase local attractions for tourism or other sectors. The investment of time and capital required to pursue such initiatives on smaller sites away from areas of significant population would be difficult for the NRW to justify.
- 3.5 I propose that through Public/Private partnership there is scope for the objectives of all stakeholders to be met. Private capital with objectives that are aligned with those of the NRW is identified allowing the release of public capital to be redeployed in sites better aligned with public policy. These situations may be site specific, but could provide an opportunity for outcomes with strong benefits.
- 4.1 **Case Study:** The opportunity for Public/Private Partnership exists at Mathrafal, Meifod, Powys. There is scope at the local level (biomass sector activity, tourism) to justify capital investment in Ffridd Mathrafal – a WAG/NRW woodland site. This opportunity is made more acute by the hosting of the Welsh National Eisteddfod at Mathrafal in 2015. This presents a commercial opportunity to the private sector to justify capital investment that would not be made by the NRW.
- 4.2 There is need to recognize the importance of time. This proposal was first tabled with the Forestry Commission Wales in 2011. If private capital is to be attracted in a manner that can benefit the public sector, there is need for the latter to be more responsive.
- 4.3 I would welcome the opportunity to discuss Private/Public partnership in more detail and present a more complete proposal in relation to the Ffridd Mathrafal Case Study.

Marc P. Jones
26 April 2014