

**National Assembly for Wales**  
**Environment and Sustainability Committee**  
**PFE 4**  
**Inquiry into The Public Forest Estate in Wales**  
**Response from: Llais y Goedwig Board**



**NAW Environment & Sustainability Committee Enquiry into the public forest estate in Wales**

Written submission from Llais y Goedwig ( the umbrella organisation for community woodland groups in Wales)

**1. Introduction**

Llais y Goedwig welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to this enquiry, and in particular to highlight the engagement that NRW has had with community woodland groups in Wales, in using the public forest estate and how this may be further developed. Llais y Goedwig has 49 full members (constituted groups that work in, lease or own woodlands ) and 154 associate members (from individuals to national organisations). Most of our member groups will have had some level of engagement with NRW (or Forestry Commission Wales before the creation of NRW) whether this has been for advice, information, formal agreements (such as leases) and permissions (such as felling licences). The experience of individual groups has been quite varied, and some may choose to make their own submissions, but our response draws on views that have been expressed within the network of members.

**2. Terms of Reference**

The committee seeks to assess the management of the public forestry estate in Wales and the provision of forestry services under a number of themes, so our response follows those thematic areas with some additional comments also provided that do not readily come into these headings.

*a. The commercial operations and focus of NRW*

In our view the commercial operations of NRW continue to be predominantly focused on large scale contracts, which mean that tenders for work are realistically deliverable only by large contractor organisations. There has been a welcome growing awareness that some smaller portions of the forestry estate are less likely to get contractor interest (for timber felling and extraction) and can lend themselves to small scale extraction work that in turn can support a level of community scale social enterprise. We recognise that NRW has to make money through the forestry holding, but would argue that a balance needs to be struck so that community scale enterprise is considered alongside larger scale commercial operations.

NRW does look to support community use of the woodland estate through its 'Woodlands and You' (WaY) programme, and Llais y Goedwig has worked with NRW to undertake some survey work on take up (or not).

The principles of WaY are positive, but public/community awareness is not high, and take up patchy. There do not seem to be clear and consistent procedures and protocols in place within NRW on application of WaY so leading to high dependence on key staff being proactive in order to explain the WaY programme and opportunities it brings. We are working with NRW to produce a discussion note on community take up of WaY.

In our view greater emphasis on community engagement and participation in using the national forestry estate in Wales would be positive and beneficial in ensuring it is managed sustainably .

*b. Delivery of business advice and support to the forestry sector in Wales*

From our experience there have been very good examples of support given to community groups seeking advice/information (for example on available grant funding, or on sources of advice for woodland management) but there have also been examples of poor/indifferent contact. As an umbrella body for groups we have worked closely with NRW staff to develop and improve that contact, and in particular to mutually support signposting people to get the information that they need. Whilst community woodland groups are quite small scale within the whole forestry sector in Wales, the numbers are growing and we believe that awareness of the community sector within NRW could be usefully broadened.

Work that has been done by Llais y Goedwig, in association with NRW, indicates that there is a growing interest and demand for sustainably produced firewood for very local markets as people look move away from over reliance on non renewable fuel sources such as oil or gas. We believe that this an area that NRW should look at closely in the management of the national forest estate. This would involve planting a more diverse range of tree species, and promotion of small scale woodland industry to make use of chip and pellet for wood fuel as well.

*c. Management of disease outbreaks on the public forestry estate*

This has been generally positive – the response to disease spread is inevitably reactive, and practice evolves. Mass clear felling was used in response to phytophthora ramorum spread in larch, and this perhaps understandable, but we would note that it would seem sensible to look at a mix of approaches rather than 'all eggs in one basket'. That has happened more as recognition grew that spread was inevitable and could not be contained.

Public information dissemination is key and in particular, working with the forestry sector as a whole to spread information and explain actions being taken – this could learn from the experience to date, so that NRW takes a lead but also establishes good links with others to examine the best approaches and how other partners can assist.

*d. Progress made by NRW to deliver the recommendations of the Wales Audit Office*

Llais y Goedwig do not feel able to comment on this in detail.

**3. Other comments and observations**

Llais y Goedwig would highlight here our manifesto for the Woodlands and Forest of Wales. This sets out the wide range of benefits that can accrue from forests and we would urge that NRW keep this broad view of benefits in all forward planning..

### **1. Be part of a healthy and biodiverse landscape**

- create an interconnected landscape at a local and personal scale
- create sites where wild plants and animals can find a home and flourish
- maintain, extend and connect natural habitats
- increase the scope for understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- create welcoming and accessible spaces in woodland for everyone to enjoy

### **2. Provide materials and resources to meet local needs**

- a sustainable flow of woodland resources to supply local enterprises and needs. For example: timber for sawmills, firewood, food products, seeds, bark, moss etc.
- opportunities to shape woodland management to grow the resources we will need in the future
- a way to create local markets and economy based on woodland resources
- opportunities for leisure, recreation and education

### **3. Offer opportunities for local employment**

- tourism, recreation, leisure, life style and craft businesses
- small business using traditional skills to manage woodland
- development of social enterprises
- delivery of training & apprenticeship schemes for woodland skills
- use of woodland as a venue for delivery of social and personal services, e.g. GP referrals, rehabilitation, training and education
- long-term employment within the timber supply chain and woodfuel sector

### **4. Connect people with the natural world**

- experience wildlife in its natural habitat
- deepen our understanding of our place in the natural world
- engage with creative and nurturing activities
- develop a sense of place
- work together to increase woodland and community resilience to change

### **5. Be a focus for community well-being**

- a context for exploring local history and culture
- activities for physical and mental health and wellbeing
- activities to raise self-esteem and build confidence
- volunteer opportunities
- opportunities to meet people through participating in community activities
- opportunities for community empowerment and cohesion – the ability to make decisions on behalf of our community and see them through

### **6. Contribute to learning and developing skills**

- know more about the natural world they live in
- have opportunities for apprenticeships and employment in a forest or woodland setting
- can add value to their forest or use of woodland resource
- can design and implement sustainable woodland management
- can manage woodlands for different purposes, e.g. training, learning and livelihoods
- can learn more about woodlands while learning and playing outdoors

## **7. Engage with civil society**

The current concerns pertaining to our interests include:

- statutory protection of the public forest estate
- use of revenues arising from use of public forest on development of the estate
- local consultation with encouragement for community involvement in the management of the public estate
- involvement in non-governmental organisation/Welsh Government debate and decision making

To achieve this, it will be necessary to:

Recognise the contribution that community woodlands can make to local sustainable development and to a sense of health and well-being;

Give communities in Wales a voice in policy determination and the distribution of resources;

Embed the concept of 'localism' within planning processes at the scale of functional communities (i.e. within walking distance);

Gain a much higher level of co-operation between forest and woodland owners, local communities and users than is currently the case, with an increasing emphasis on long term partnerships as opposed to short term plans.

David Williams

On behalf of Llais y Goedwig Board