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## PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

# Public Forests Estate in England: Forest Stewardship Council certification

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1 February 2011

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### Summary

- **An amendment is proposed to the Public Bodies Bill to ensure Forestry Commission managed land, all of which is currently FSC certified, retains this protection whether in public or private ownership.**
- **There is a risk that land sold or leased from the public forest estate will not necessarily be managed to the same high standard. The amendment seeks to ensure this rigorous management standard is maintained, whoever manages the land. This allows for flexibility in ownership, while guaranteeing good stewardship of the land.**
- **In 1999 the whole public forest estate received FSC certification which recognises that these forests are responsibly managed according to environmental, social and economic criteria. As a result all timber produced from the forests can be branded FSC and sold with acknowledgment that it has been responsibly produced.**
- **In 2001, WWF presented the UK government with a Gift to the Earth, in recognition of its globally significant work on certification.**

### FSC certification of the UK public forest estate:

The UK public forest estate is all certified under the FSC, using the equivalent UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS). The FSC is the “gold standard” of international forest certification schemes, which recognises social, economic and environmental interests alike. The standard is recognised globally.



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The UK government, through the Forestry Commission, attained FSC status across all of its forest estate in 1999, after months of rigorous audit. The UK was the first country in the world to achieve certification for the whole of the public forest estate.

Certification came about after government commitments set out in the UK Forestry Standard (1998), following the Rio Earth Summit in 1991.

In 2001 the FC was awarded a WWF International Gift to the Earth for its work on certification. This was the first for the UK and one of only 70 globally at that time.

There is a real danger, whatever the current assurances of the Government, that in future the current high standard of management may not be maintained. The minister was himself unable to guarantee this is his answer to a question on 17 January 2011.

*Mr Paice: Certification under the UK Woodland Assurance Standard is voluntary and this will be a decision for the new owners of woodland in the Forestry Commission's current asset sales programme. The consultation on the future ownership and management of the public forest estate will include proposals on how certification might be maintained.'*

It is WWF's contention that, through the proposed amendment, whoever owns or manages the land will be obliged to maintain high standards on biodiversity and access.'

### **Forest Stewardship Council certification:**

FSC is an independent, non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation established in 1993 to promote the responsible management of the world's forests. It was set up as a response to concerns over global deforestation.

The UK equivalent, UK Woodland Assurance Scheme, works along the same principles, and ensures proper, transparent and inspected regimes which ensure woodland is managed for future generations, protects existing biodiversity and protects public access. It is WWF's contention that if consultation promises on good quality management are to be taken at face value then the Government should welcome this amendment.

### **UK government procurement policy**

FSC certification meets the UK central government procurement standards. The procurement of legal and sustainable timber and wood products was made a requirement for all central government departments, agencies and other bodies in 2009.

### **The amendment is as follows:**

#### **Clause 17**

#### **Page 8, line 32, insert a new subsection before subsection (5)**

(x) An order under subsection (2) shall provide that any instrument executed in connection with the management, disposal, let or grant of an interest over land under Section 39 of the Forestry Act 1967 must include an obligation on any party managing, purchasing, leasing or obtaining the grant of an interest, as follows:

(a) where land was managed to standards compliant with the United Kingdom Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) on [1 January 2011], that land shall continue to be managed in accordance with that standard during the period of ownership, occupation or management by the contracting party,

(b) any disposal, let or grant of an interest over such land by a contracting party under section [17(5)(a)] of this Act must contain a provision requiring that future landowners and lessees, continue to manage the land in accordance with the UKWAS.

(c) the UKWAS shall mean the standard for the sustainable management of woodland as published by the steering group of the UKWAS company and amended from time to time.

**Page 8, line 32, subsection (6) insert at the start the words "Subject to subsection (x) ..."**

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