



GLOBAL FOREST AGREEMENTS: SCOPE FOR JNCC ENGAGEMENT

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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

GLOBAL FOREST AGREEMENTS: SCOPE FOR JNCC ENGAGEMENT

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1. Background

- 1.1 Although the country conservation bodies make a contribution to sustainable forest management in the UK, JNCC has traditionally had little direct involvement in providing advice to the UK government with respect to international debates and negotiations concerning the conservation and sustainable use of forests and their biodiversity.
- 1.2 However, globally, forests are now much higher up the political and environmental agenda, especially with regard to negotiations related to climate change, such as on payments related to REDD (Reduced Emissions from Avoided Deforestation and Forest Degradation). Whilst forests are clearly critical in terms of their role in contributing to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change and in regulating global climate and regional patterns of weather and precipitation, they also have a vital role in biodiversity conservation and in supporting the livelihoods of indigenous and other local communities who depend on forest ecosystem services. Along with participating in international mechanisms which affect forests globally, the UK might also have an impact, through its patterns of trade and consumption, on rates of deforestation and thus has the opportunity to seek to mitigate these.
- 1.3 This paper summarises the outcome of a scoping study commissioned by the support company in 2009 to advise upon the range of international mechanisms, relevant to our aims and functions, which affect the conservation and sustainable use of forests and to which JNCC input and expertise might provide added value to any UK involvement.

2. Global agreements with an impact on forests

- 2.1 There is a wide range (>25) of multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other multi-lateral initiatives and mechanisms with either a forest-specific focus or which address forests in some way. However, the agreements identified as having greatest potential relevance to JNCC are as follows:
 - i. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC). This is the environmental body with the highest current profile in international debate on climate change; this is equally true for forests as well, given the link between forests and the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. Despite

the absence of a focus on forests or biodiversity *per se*, UNFCCC has recognised the importance of forests (if not their biodiversity) to achieving climate change objectives.

- ii. *United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF)*. This is the main global body with a specific focus on forests in the widest sense. Although the UNFF adopted a Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests and Global Forest Objectives, it subsequently failed at its 8th session (May 2009) to reach agreement on how to finance their implementation and sustainable forest management. Despite this lack of success, the Forum remains an important arena for debate and improving understanding of global forest issues.
 - iii. *Food & Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)*. FAO is responsible for the reporting of forest statistics for the biennial State of the World's Forests reports and the quinquennial Global Forest Resources Assessment. This is the oldest and most influential inter-governmental body dealing with forests and maintains the only global forest statistics.
 - iv. *Convention on Biodiversity (CBD)*. Forest biodiversity is specifically addressed under the CBD's programme of work on forest biodiversity and thus has the strongest relationship to work that JNCC is already doing of any of the instruments identified here. On the other hand, the CBD is a relatively weak instrument with regard to forests as it competes with numerous other inter-governmental instruments and entities that have a role in forest policy-making. In addition, biodiversity is not the primary interest of most entities involved with forests, nor the target of much of the international funding available for forests.
 - v. *Ministerial Council for the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE)*. This relates to forests within Europe and, thus, the UK. It is considered an effective regional mechanism and has recently been considering the negotiation of a binding regional forest instrument.
 - vi. *International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA)*. This is a commodity agreement, delivered by the International Timber Trade Organization (ITTO), which also undertakes policy work and funds development projects related to its mandate. The UK regards it primarily as an instrument for development, including wide application of sustainable forest management (SFM) and enhanced forest governance.
- 2.2 CBD and UNFCCC are binding agreements, the latter imposing specific requirements under the Kyoto Protocol for emission reductions in developed countries. UNFF and MCPFE are non-binding; even so, decisions taken in these may influence policy and legislation within the

European Community and may thus have implications for the UK. ITTA is a commodity agreement and its membership obligations are limited to the provision of timber trade statistics and trade information, although it also contains a commitment to SFM on the part of signatory states. FAO forestry requirements are primarily the provision of forest statistics although the FAO also runs development and technical assistance components for which funds are regularly sought.

- 2.3 The European Community's Standing Forestry Committee acts as an advisory and management committee on issues relating to forestry measures within the EC and enables the exchange of information between Member States. Whilst formulation of forest policies within the EC is the competence of Member States, forests are affected by a number of EU policies and initiatives, such as the EU Forest Strategy and Forest Action Plan.
- 2.4 Of the agreements above, JNCC provides advice routinely on the CBD and has had some input to UNFCCC but has had no direct engagement at all on most of the other agreements. Nevertheless, JNCC and the country conservation bodies bring a range of potential strengths to the forest arena. In particular, our experience across a range of other biodiversity MEAs, and our involvement in ecosystems other than forests, enables us to provide a coherence and consistency of approach across ecosystems and mechanisms. Likewise our work on a range of MEA reports and indicators, and country body input to the UK Forest Strategy, to setting forestry standards and to woodland Habitat Action Plans, means our experience can be available to the relevant UK leads for international agreements.

3. Resources and priorities

- 3.1 All the international agreements which relate to forests and in which the UK is involved have lead departments (Defra, DECC, DfID and/or the Forestry Commission). Within CITES, the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew acts as the UK Scientific Authority for plants and thus advises on issues relating to international trade in timber, and other forest plant species listed by the Convention. There is clearly no merit in JNCC trying to duplicate effort or compete with other bodies especially when the resources of all public bodies are currently constrained and will be increasingly so in future. Nor do we have any individuals dedicated to forest issues (though some staff members come from forestry backgrounds) and any work we might do on forests would have to be at the expense of another element of JNCC work. Likewise, the resources available in the country conservation bodies to support inter-agency work on forest-related issues, for example through Lead Coordination Networks, are also likely to be increasingly limited.
- 3.2 Seeking to increase effort, even modestly, in a relatively new area of work when resources are going to be reduced in forthcoming years, is likely to be challenging at best. Accordingly, it is vital that we target any input by JNCC into areas for which we have specialist expertise, where we can add value to the input of the lead UK bodies (and JNCC input is welcome), and where we can provide a dimension relating to forests and their biodiversity that is

otherwise absent from current approaches. In other words, we need to identify an effective and realistic role for JNCC with respect to international forest issues.

- 3.3 Based on analysis for the scoping study, we recommend that any JNCC input be focused on two priority areas, namely to:
- i. ensure that biodiversity, and the role and value of ecosystem services, are taken into account in negotiations and decisions taken in mechanisms dealing with forest conservation and use, especially where these mechanisms have other primary objectives for forests (such as carbon sequestration or bio-energy); and
 - ii. share our expertise to seek to achieve improved reporting of forest status to provide simplified, coherent, cost-effective indicators of the extent and condition of forests to better inform the development of policy.
- 3.4 These priorities play to JNCC's strengths in monitoring and reporting, handling data and evaluating evidence, valuing ecosystem services, and acting as an interface between science and policy, especially with respect to the role of biodiversity in contributing to ecosystem services.
- 3.5 Other subsidiary topics to which we might contribute include seeking to refine the definitions of forests which underpin monitoring and reporting (and thus say implementation of REDD payments), and recording and analysing the impact of the UK's trade on forests and their biodiversity internationally. JNCC might also, as part of its wider role in intelligence provision in Europe, seek to ensure the country conservation bodies are aware of international forest issues of relevance to them and to share information from our networks with UK lead departments.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 Under current and projected resource constraints it is **recommended** that JNCC seeks only a limited engagement with global forest instruments focusing on a few priority topics on forests. Such topics will need to be identified with care and in consultation with the UK lead departments, and with the Forestry Commission especially, and will need to clarify ways of working and collaboration; any input would be guided by the priorities suggested above. Resources are unlikely to exceed a total of 0.5 of a full-time equivalent *per annum* in the first instance (but are likely to involve multiple staff) and will be found by re-deploying effort. Any engagement would thus have to be considered in the light of available resources and the need to ensure core JNCC commitments are maintained; an initial low intensity engagement in the subject area might inform future direction for JNCC in the longer-term.