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## **SOW Response to ‘Independent Panel on Forestry – Progress Report’**

The fear that a public voice may not be included into the deliberations of the forestry panel is lessened by this interim report. The sheer volume of submissions by individuals; forest users, practitioners and other ‘stakeholders’ is overwhelming and the cherry picked statements in the report highlight an integrated approach in deliberation by the panel. Talking across the chasms in forestry and tree interests and industry is starting to happen and the progress report clearly illustrates that this is not confined to social media and the internet but will help shape policy making.

The omission on the panel of a voice specifically for urban trees as well as a practitioner / contractor voice remains a problem. Given the promising statements with regards connecting people with trees and forests the urban angle is vitally important, the idea to simply enable access to ‘woodland’ by all members of society cannot replace the absolute need for trees in the urban environment itself, there is little regard given to this fact in the overall text and this should be remedied.

However in essence SOW welcomes this report, the overall aspirations, particularly the foreword of true worth by Bishop James himself, lead us to believe that a recommendation of large scale planting for multi purpose forestry is to be forthcoming in the final report.

Recognition of chasms within the forest and woodland sector, recognition of the need for modern skills (protecting existing skills and knowledge also?), to further forestry and the irrefutable need by the public for access to forest and woodland, together with a respect to the Forestry Commission who manage this resource, are highlighted in the report. The UKNEA is showing its worth in highlighting the benefits we derive from the forests as communities. But afforestation is needed for much more than this; the UK forest products industry is vital in terms of progressing with sustainable development and to meet an increasing demand for wood for fuel and energy.

***We need to be planting much more and felling much more.***

The panel are clearly looking deeply into the finances at play and the future economic importance of forests. The decision to carry on with budget cuts to the Forestry Commission (FC) by the government was crazy. The FC knowledge of sustainable forest management, the timber industry and providing defence against pests, diseases and non natives is needed and the status quo should have been maintained whilst the panel exist, we know the status quo is not a long term consideration. One hopes the panel can help in persuading the



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government to look again at the forestry sector right at the forefront of a new green economy, not one where it is subject to felling to make way for wind farms to lessen NIMBY disapproval, or cut down to favour a designers' image of a landscape.

As seen in the latest timber value figures There is real money in trees and the private sector has a huge role, after all they can make forestry pay. The highlighted statement in the progress report - "Make sure they do not fall in to the hands of private individuals or companies who seek to exploit them to the detriment of wildlife and people." – is a commonly held perception and proves there is a need for some serious myth busting and further communication across the forestry sector and into the public domain is vital particularly when we face a new risk that funding through EU channels is under threat. Can we honestly believe, when so many welfare issues, (as well as subsidising the favoured financial service industry and dying traditional industry), need to be funded also, that money will be willingly given directly by central government?

More questions than answers and we know that we have a role as does everyone in land industry and particularly Forestry and Arboriculture in helping to get every relevant voice, every angle, every myth busted out there in the public domain to ensure the final recommendations of the forestry panel provide clear and tangible solutions to both protect all trees and forests but also provide a well resourced future for all involved.