

Dear Cabinet Member

On February 17, 2011, the Defra Secretary of State Caroline Spelman told Parliament that "my ambition to provide a better future for our forests is undiminished". She announced the formation of an independent panel of experts to advise on future forestry policy.

The Independent Panel for Forestry's report, published in July 2012, was welcomed by our group, Hands Off Our Forest (of Dean), by our MP, Mark Harper, and by the Government.

Yet we have been waiting in vain now for almost two years for the Panel's recommendations to be adopted and implemented by the Government.

This is why Hands Off Our Forest is writing to each of you as Cabinet members, to ask you to ensure draft forestry legislation to form a new Public Forest Estate management organisation and Charter is announced in the Queen's Speech on June 4, in line with the Government's stated determination to secure a better future for our Forest of Dean and other public woodlands.

Lord de Mauley has stated that "we as a Government remain committed to allowing an opportunity for pre-legislative scrutiny" (House of Lords Hansard, February 12, 2014). We welcome this opportunity, and ask that the legislation is laid before Parliament and the public sooner rather than later.

We expect legislation to include clear safeguards against future privatisation, echoing Lord de Mauley's statement that "we can put the right safeguards in place to ensure that it is less vulnerable to short-term political demands and ensure that any plans to dispose of it in future will require further primary legislation and be subjected to full parliamentary scrutiny" (ibid).

We also want the legislation fully to accord with the IPF's recommendation on page 50 and 51 of its final report, for a group of Guardians to be formed to deliver a Parliamentary Charter and with powers to oversee the new management body for our Public Forest Estate.

In addition, we support the Forestry Commission's Payment For Ecosystems Services model, and a guarantee that the number-one core principle of the new management body (as outlined by Defra on January 31, 2014), "to conserve and enhance the estate for the benefit of people, nature and the economy", can be fully resourced from the Treasury.

We hope you will take the opportunity to introduce the draft legislation so it can be fully scrutinised by MPs and the public. The final Act and Charter could be a legacy we - the Government, Parliament and the 40 million users of our public forest estate - we can all be proud of achieving.

Best regards

Owen Adams, secretary, on behalf of Hands Off Our Forest