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Mr Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre
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The Queen's House
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From Rt Hon Jim Paice MP
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food

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defra

Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs

Our ref: PO 222198

16 April 2011

Dear Mr Crosthwaite-Eyre

Thank you for your letter of 23 February about the forestry clauses in the Public Bodies Bill. I am sorry for the delay in replying to you.

As the Secretary of State announced on 17 February, the consultation on the future management of the public forest estate has been withdrawn and all forestry clauses in the Public Bodies Bill will be removed. The Government has always placed the highest priority on preserving access and protecting our forests. We took a decision to end the consultation on the future of the public forest estate because it is quite clear from the early responses to the consultation that the public and many MPs were not happy with the proposals we set out.

The Public Bodies Bill, published well before we launched the consultation, gave the wrong impression as to the Government's intentions and all provisions relating to forestry and the Forestry Commission have been removed from the Public Bodies Bill. The only power which remains is the power to abolish the Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee; this is a Committee which has not met for over five years and is defunct. As such, there are no bodies in the Bill that exercise forestry functions so we cannot envisage any circumstances in which the powers in the Bill would ever be used to change the New Forest Acts.


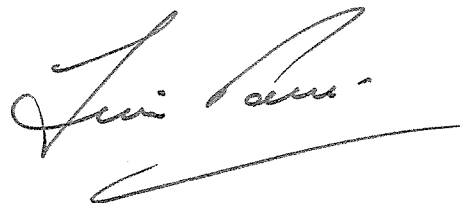
Regarding the Independent Panel on Forestry, on 17 March the Secretary of State announced the Chair, membership and terms of reference for the Panel. The Panel will advise on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England, on the role of the Forestry Commission, and on the role of the public forest estate.

The Panel is to be chaired by the Right Reverend James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool. He is a well-known respected figure and has a deep love for our natural environment. The Panel Members have a wide range of experience and expertise in all aspects of forestry. They are:

- Shireen Chambers (Institute of Chartered Foresters)
- Dr Mike Clarke (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)
- Tom Franklin (Ramblers)
- Stuart Goodall (Confederation of Forest Industries)
- Stephanie Hilborne OBE (Wildlife Trusts)
- Sue Holden (Woodland Trust)
- Alan Knight OBE (Single Planet Living)
- Dame Fiona Reynolds (National Trust)
- Sir Harry Studholme (Forestry Commissioner)
- John Varley (Clinton Devon Estates)
- William Worsley (Country Land and Business Association)

The terms of reference make it clear that we expect the Panel to engage the widest range of views to support its work. Contact details for the Panel Secretariat are on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk/rural/forestry/panel and we would encourage you to engage with its work.

It is clear that people cherish their forests and woodlands and the benefits they bring, and the Government's first priority has always been securing a sustainable future for our woodlands and forests. Our ambition to provide a better future for our forests is undiminished.

RT HON JIM PAICE MP