

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR A NORTHERN IRELAND NATIVE WOODLAND GROUP- (as reviewed March 2005).

1 Purpose

This paper sets the terms of reference for a Northern Ireland Native Woodland Group to ensure that activity in relation to native woodlands is well co-ordinated and supported. The activities of the Group will facilitate effective communication between the relevant government agencies, the private and voluntary sectors.

2 Policy

Policy responsibility for forestry and biodiversity in Northern Ireland is devolved. The lead departments are DARD (forest policy) and DOE (biodiversity), delivered respectively through the Forest Service and Environment and Heritage Service. Although implementation of native woodland habitat action plans (HAPs) is focused strongly at country level, co-ordination and common standards are provided by a UK steering group. To date NI has agreed to co-ordinate its activities and apply common standards with other parts of the UK.

UK Native woodland HAPs are implemented by NI bodies within this framework. The Forest Service is the lead organisation with other key stakeholders represented on the Group.

Forest policy is being reviewed. Current policy is that conservation of biodiversity is an objective of sustainable forest management. Native woodlands are of significant widespread public interest as part of our natural heritage. In relation to native woodlands forest policy encourages the conservation of ancient woodland sites and the management of broadleaved woodland to enhance biodiversity. To complement this, forest expansion aims to increase the area of broadleaved woodland and consolidate the most important broadleaved woodland habitats. These are upland oak, upland mixed ash, wet woodlands, and lowland woodland pasture and parkland.

3 Objectives

The main objectives of the native woodland HAPs are:

To **maintain** the extent of existing native woodland resource, and prevent the loss of areas of *ancient semi-natural woodland*.

To **enhance** the ecological condition of existing native woodlands to achieve *favourable condition*.

To **increase** the area of native woodland habitats of each type through **restoration** of some plantations on ancient woodland sites to native woodland

ecosystems, and **expansion**. Expansion includes the creation of *new native woodland* and *conversion of non-native plantation* (outside ancient woodland sites) to native woodlands.

The remit of the Native Woodland Group should include:

- 3.1 The co-ordination of arrangements for **monitoring** and **reporting** on native woodlands in the context of Biodiversity Action Plans and the UK Indicators of Sustainable Forestry.
- 3.2 The **co-ordination** of activity on native woodlands, including
 - Development of best practice
 - Advice on relevant BAP's
 - Providing guidance on support for woodland owners
 - Liaison with native woodland interests in the Republic of Ireland
 - Reporting
 - Interpretation, education and knowledge sharing
- 3.3 The identification and support of **research** needs.
- 3.4 Review of the Native Woodland Programme.
- 3.5 The provision of native woodlands **advice** to DARD and DOE.

4 **Representation**

Chairman Forest Service

Members of the Group are:

DARD
DOE
Conservation Volunteers (NI)
Council for Nature Conservation and the Country side
Forest of Belfast
Forestry and Timber Association
National Trust
Ulster Wildlife Trust
Woodland Trust
Neville McKee
Dr. Alan Cooper

Observers to the Group are:

NPWS (John Cross)
Woodlands of Ireland (Declan Little)

Forest Service (ROI) (Kevin Collins)
Coillte Teoranta (Aileen O'Sullivan)

5 Organisation

Each representative will be expected to meet their own costs of membership.
It is envisaged that the Group will hold a business meeting twice a year together with a field trip.

Forest Service will provide secretariat services to the Group.

6 Review

The effectiveness of the Group will be reviewed on a yearly basis.