

Forest Research Response

The Independent Review of the National Forest Inventory (NFI) Findings and Recommendations

Centre for IFOS

Forest Research is the Research Agency of the Forestry Commission and is the leading UK organisation engaged in forestry and tree related research.

The Agency aims to support and enhance forestry and its role in sustainable development by providing innovative, high quality scientific research, technical support and consultancy services.

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Chief Executive's Foreword

I very much welcome both the findings and the recommendations of the Independent Review Group and would like to thank both Peter Whitfield for Chairing this piece of work and the group members, Lawrence Way, Mark Broadmeadow and Kari Karhonen who offered their valuable time and expertise to undertake this review.

Much has changed since the NFI was established in 2009, most notably the full devolution of forest policy; it is therefore reassuring that there remains clear support for the NFI as a key source of information about forests and woodlands across GB. However, I recognise the Group's assessment that there is a need for the NFI to evolve and adapt if it is to continue to meet the diverse requirements of the current and future customer base.

I am happy to accept all 13 recommendations and have set a 3-year timetable for them to be implemented in full. I am also committed to publishing our action plan and to report on progress annually.

I look forward to working with our key customers and stakeholders to continue to develop the NFI, to explore new funding opportunities for a revised core offering and to ensure that the service thrives and grows by acting on the feedback given and maturing the service and product offering in response to our users' needs.

Professor James Pendlebury

CEO Forest Research

May 2021

Introduction.

The Review report offered 13 recommendations. To manage our implementation effort, we have organised these recommendations under six key headings and have framed our response accordingly.

1. Value and Purpose of the NFI

Recommendations

1. That FR re-establishes and articulates the rationale and strategic importance for the public provision of a dataset that supports industry as well as the development of public policy. **Accepted**
2. That FR clarifies with stakeholders a set of core products and services that are required from the NFI and ensures that these are fully supported by the current funding model. **Accepted**
3. That FR ensures that the NFI has the structure and resources to sustain better engagement with the diverse user base in order to help develop the service and find opportunities to diversify the funding base. **Accepted**
4. That FR ensures that the data captured is appropriate to be able to report on and inform the development of key policy areas for all three governments. **Accepted**

Forest Research Response

We will articulate a vision and strategy for the NFI in conjunction with our key funders and stakeholders and use this to drive the direction of the service and develop a 10-year strategy. We judge the Group's report provides sufficient feedback to shape the existing products and services and provides useful clarity on new areas for development. **We will use our Service Forum and our Expert Group on Timber Trade Statistics** to help devise the vision and strategy and refine and define our product and service offer, ensuring that these are effectively communicated and given prominence on our website.

We will review how we are structured to ensure we meet current and future demands on our service and to ensure we continue to deliver value for money. **We will also review the data that we capture and what we report on it** to ensure that we can provide relevant and pertinent information and statistics on forests and woodlands in GB to the customers who require it.

We will actively seek additional funding from existing and new funders as part of a revised agreement on what the NFI will deliver as part of its core funding and prepare a package of additional value-added products and services that could be provided with supplemental funding.

2. Stakeholder Engagement and Analytical Partners

Recommendation

5. That FR establishes a structured ongoing dialogue with customers and other interested parties so they are aware of the status of the current field cycle, what to expect from the NFI over the next 12 months and can help to inform the ongoing development of the service. **Accepted**
6. That FR explores the development of analytical partners who could, under licence, provide additional analysis and services that build on the NFI dataset. **Accepted**

Forest Research Response

We will review both our existing groups and their membership to understand any gaps in representation. We will review the nature of our engagement with key customers to ensure that we build and nurture productive working arrangements. We will also collate a clear and coherent list of activities and outputs and make this available on our website and provide a timeline for the five-year cycle of the NFI, providing greater detail annually as highlighted in this recommendation.

We will explore analytical partners within the university and sectoral groups, in order to better understand the nature and appetite for potential collaborations and we will seek to expand the concept if this kind of arrangement is favoured.

3. Reporting Cycles

Recommendation

7. That FR looks to adopt new technologies and methodologies to allow for both an annual cycle of data collection, analysis and reporting (if necessary), alongside the current quinquennial cycle whilst still supporting robust and consistent long-term sampling. In doing so, FR should look for any quick wins for new products or services (e.g. simple adjustments to field protocol which don't significantly increase visit/survey time). **Accepted**

Forest Research Response

We will establish an internal group to review our data collection methods and explore the opportunities that Lidar, Terrestrial Laser Scanning (TLS) and other remote sensing techniques offer with a view to providing selected key information on a more regular basis. We judge there is significant current demand and interest for regular reporting of certain data and **we will investigate how samples from the existing five-year survey could provide annual or bi-annual reporting.**

4. Data Exploitation and Self-Service Portal

Recommendation

8. That FR develops and publishes a data exploitation strategy that sets out how FR will unlock and maximise the value and benefits that can be derived from the NFI data. **Accepted**
9. That FR develops a range of tools and business model(s) that allows users to perform simple queries and produce reports on demand and on a self-service basis. **Accepted**

Forest Research Response

FR is currently reviewing its Data Strategy and this review will specify how FR is delivering value for money, promoting the NFI as the definitive source of data on forest resources in Great Britain, and maximising the public benefits and commercial opportunities that our data assets may hold.

We will initiate a project to review options for developing a self-service portal considering existing tools and services alongside new and innovative solutions. We want the portal to offer the ability to view results in a spatial or data table format and we will seek to define user requirements through our customer/stakeholder groups.

FR will implement a structured data/information request system that will formalise and manage how we manage demand for information to understand where we can make greater use of a self-service portal.

5. Communications and Marketing

Recommendations

10. That FR develops a structured communications and marketing plan using social media and other means of suitable communications with users to keep them informed of what is happening in terms of work and upcoming publications. **Accepted**
11. That FR develops a new website which improves user awareness, collaboration and knowledge transfer. **Accepted**

Forest Research Response

We agree with these recommendations. **We will develop a clear and coherent communications plan** and will work with our Communications and Business Development teams on our marketing requirements that will shape our marketing plan. **We will update our website as part of a wider improvement programme** and develop a Knowledge and Information Hub (KIH), that is

envisaged to provide a modern, intuitive and informative asset that will endeavour to maximise the user experience.

6. Official Statistics & Quality Assurance

Recommendation

12. That FR ensures that the designation of NFI outputs as official statistics does not have a disproportionate impact on either the lead time for the production of reports nor the ability of FR and others to develop and exploit the value of the NFI data and models. **Accepted**

13. That FR publishes clearer information on the quality assurance methodologies and standards that underpin NFI outputs (data, models and results), in order to provide users with confidence and clarity around their use. **Accepted**

Forest Research Response

As part of our data strategy **we will provide a data access policy statement** that articulates how anyone can engage with us and gain access, where appropriate to our data holding, including information on any charges that may apply. We will release the results of our outputs as soon as they are ready and will pre-announce release dates for any data publication covered by official statistics. **We will also publish a process map** setting out our Quality Assurance protocols in information provision. **We will publish our data management process protocols**, including dealing with data collection, data cleansing and data analysis.

Implementation

We will publish a detailed implementation plan by the autumn of 2021 which will be based on the responses contained in this report. In addition, we will also draft and publish an engagement plan outlining how we will keep stakeholders apprised of progress.

Recommendation Heading	FR Response Action
Value and Purpose of the NFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use our Service Forum and our Expert Group on Timber Trade Statistics to help develop the vision and refine and define our product and service offering and set this out in a 10-year strategy. • Review NFI structures and resources to ensure optimal delivery of the strategy and services. • Review the data captured ensuring enduring, relevant and pertinent information and statistics on forests and woodlands in GB is available. • We will actively seek additional funding from existing and new funders as part of a revised agreement on what the NFI will deliver as part of its core funding.
Stakeholder Engagement and Analytical Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review both our existing groups and their membership to understand any gaps in representation. • Collate a clear and coherent list of activities and outputs and make this available on the FR website

	<p>and provide a timeline for the five-year cycle of the NFI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore through existing partners that we collaborate with, such as universities and sectoral groups, how we might develop a network of analytical partners.
Reporting Cycles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an internal group to review our data collection methods and explore the opportunities that Lidar, Terrestrial Laser Scanning (TLS) and other remote sensing techniques offer to provide certain key information on a more regular basis. • We will investigate how samples from the existing five-year survey could provide annual or bi-annual reporting.
Data Exploitation and Self-Service Portal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the FR Data Strategy including a clear rationale for FR to fully understand its data holding and how to maximise public benefits and commercial opportunities that our data assets may hold. • We will initiate a project to review options for developing the self-service portal considering existing tools and services alongside new and innovative solutions. • FR will implement a structured data/information request system
Communications and Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear and coherent communications plan and work with our Business Development and

	<p>communication teams on our marketing requirements that will help shape the FR/IFOS marketing plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the FR website as part of a wider improvement programme and develop a Knowledge and Information Hub (KIH).
Official Statistics and Quality Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a data access policy statement that articulates how any interested party can engage with FR and where appropriate gain access to FR data holding, including information and advice on any charges that may apply. • We will consult with key stakeholders on format & timetable for published outputs. • We will publish a clear process map setting out our Quality Assurance protocols. • We will publish our data management processing protocols.

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