

Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

Telephone 08459 335577
Email helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
Website www.defra.gov.uk

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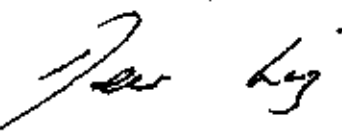
Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs

Elizabeth Truss MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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31 March 2011

From Rt Hon Jim Paice MP
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food



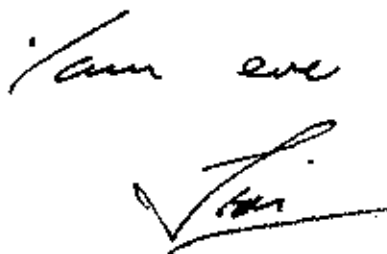
Thank you for your letter of 31 January to the Secretary of State about the future of the public forest estate in England. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

As the Secretary of State announced on 17 February, the consultation on the future management of the public forest estate has been ended 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 so we have removed the forestry clauses from the Public Bodies Bill.

We have established an independent Panel to consider forestry policy in England. 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. It includes representatives of key environmental and access organisations alongside representatives of the forestry industry. Further details on the Panel's membership and terms of reference can be found on Defra's website at ww2.defra.gov.uk/rural/forestry/panel. There is also information there on how to contact the Panel Secretariat.

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