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

Thank you for your letter of 30 March to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about the composition of the Independent Panel which has been established to consider forestry policy in England. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

Thank you for your comments that the interests of horse riders and cyclists should be directly represented on the Panel. The Chair and the Panel's members were chosen so that the Panel has a broad range of experience and expertise covering the environmental, social and economic aspects of forestry. It is not a Panel of delegates from interested organisations but of individuals bringing their own knowledge and experience to the Panel's work.

The terms of reference show that we expect the Panel to consider options to enhance public access for recreation and leisure. To do this it will need to engage with the widest possible range of views, as set out in the terms of reference, and this will give an opportunity for representative bodies to add their expertise to the Panel's deliberations. I am confident that the Chair and the Panel will agree a process for engaging with a broad range of interests and that these interests will be heard.

The terms of reference and the Panel's contact details are available on Defra's website at: www.defra.gov.uk/rural/forestry/panel. Groups and organisations that wish to get involved can contact the Panel directly with their views.

RT HON JIM PAICE MP