



PRESS RELEASE

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Issued by Owen Adams, on behalf of the FCN

07530 646286 – 01594 541014 – oo.adams@gmail.com

WE DEMAND A SEAT ON THE PANEL!

*NEW ALLIANCE OF FOREST CAMPAIGN GROUPS CALLS FOR A PROPER SAY ON
FUTURE OF OUR PUBLIC WOODS*

Many may have thought that after the Government made its U-turn following a massive public outcry against the disposal of our forests that the many campaigns that sprang up would have packed up and gone home victorious.

But while the Government dumped its consultation and the forestry clauses in the Public Bodies Bill, it has failed to give any indication of ditching its policy of privatisation – which we view as a land grab from the people. It is also pressing ahead with plans to decimate the Forestry Commission (with a quarter – up to 500 - staff jobs set to go), and is setting up an “independent” (but Government-appointed) panel to review the future of the public forest estate.

We have yet to hear of anyone with an interest in keeping our forests public being invited on to the panel – that includes our forests’ inhabitants and frequent users, and the half-million-plus people that have campaigned to keep our woods in public hands.

The forestry minister Jim Paice is holding the cards close to his chest regarding the panel. He told Parliament on Tuesday March 1: “I am sorry, but I will not be drawn on the membership of the panel because once I give way on one aspect of who might be on the panel, I will be drawn into discussing everything.”

One thing we have heard: the panel will only have a small number of members. We believe that, as the future of our forests are being reviewed, we – as those who use, inhabit, care deeply about them and are connected to them – must be given a place on the panel.

Forest of Dean group Hands Off Our Forest has already written to the Prime Minister and environment secretary Caroline Spelman requesting a seat, and has not yet had a reply.

The Forest Campaigns’ Network was formed on February 28, 2011 to speak with one voice to keep our forest in public hands and publicly run by the Forestry Commission.

We are calling on the Government to appoint one FCN member to the panel, so the people wedded to our forests get some say in their future. We will select someone with the necessary expertise and knowledge, who also shares our aims.

The FCN is also promoting Celebrate Our Forests day across England on March 20, on the eve of World Forestry Day. 38 Degrees plans to list events country-wide where the public will be encouraged to demonstrate just how much their forests mean to them, with rambles, cycle rides, picnics, rallies and more being organised.

Tony Farndon, from Save Our Forests, part of the FCN, said: “When you are forced to make a u-turn, you can either go back home or you can try and find a side street and still get to your destination. We ask the Government not to seek this side street, but instead protect and increase public benefits through a properly resourced Forestry Commission.”

Notes

* Groups that have joined the Forest Campaigns’ Network so far include 38 Degrees (national), Friends of Bourne Wood (Lincolnshire), Friends of Chopwell Wood (Tyne & Wear), Friends of Hurn’s Forests (Dorset), Friends of Thetford Forest Park (Norfolk), Hands Off Our Forest (Forest of Dean), Keep Our Forests Public (Sussex), One Voice (New Forest), Save Cannock Chase (Staffordshire), Save Haldon Forest (Devon), Save Our Forests (national), Save Our Woods (national), Save Sandlings Forests (Suffolk) and Save Sherwood Forest (Nottinghamshire). Invitations are being sent out to other grassroots campaign groups from across England.

* The FCN website is in the process of being completed.