



House of Commons
Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

**Tree health and plant
biosecurity**

Tenth Report of Session 2013–14

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evidence*

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Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Summary	3
1 Introduction	5
Our inquiry	6
2 Enhanced Plant Health Programme	7
3 Access to information	8
Risk Register	8
Co-ordination and collaboration	9
4 Review of legislation	11
5 Capacity and capability	14
Funding	14
Expertise	15
6 Control measures	17
Resistance	17
Environmental impacts	17
Conclusions and recommendations	19
Formal Minutes	22
Witnesses	23
Published written evidence	24
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	25

Summary

Plant disease and pest outbreaks in the UK can cause adverse environmental, social and economic impacts. The Government must develop its capability to predict, monitor, control and mitigate the impact of pests and pathogens on plants in the UK.

We endorse the recommendations of the Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce but we expect the Government to complete its delivery of all the recommendations in collaboration with stakeholders through the enhanced plant health programme, to be published in Spring 2014.

There is currently some lack of definition of the roles and responsibilities of plant health authorities in the UK. The newly appointed Chief Plant Health Officer should address this shortcoming as a key priority. Communication and collaboration between organisations within the UK, and between the UK and EU member states, must also be improved.

The current review of the EU plant health regime is the ideal opportunity for Defra to negotiate a new regime more consistent with the UK Government's aims. However, the EU review may take several years, and in the interim the Government must consider strengthening the protection afforded to the UK by using existing legislative mechanisms.

One of Defra's four key priority areas is safeguarding plant health, yet we received evidence that it has become increasingly difficult to source UK funds for research on tree health issues. Resource constraints have led to a short-term fire-fighting approach to deal with existing disease outbreaks. It is essential that ring-fenced funding is provided for long-term research and development work that focuses on preparation for future plant health threats.

We welcome the Government's commitment to take action to address the declining number of experts in the field of plant health, but we expect Defra to provide us with a full list of immediate initiatives that are being taken, including clear timeframes for implementation and details of the funding that has been allocated. We recommend that funding is allocated to increase the number of university courses and research posts available in the field of plant health in order to secure new entrants and to maintain a suitable level of expertise. The UK needs a core of dedicated, well-motivated experts to provide evidence of emerging plant health threats and to be ready to manage them.

1 Introduction

1. The growth of global trade in plant materials has led to a marked increase in the volume and diversity of trees, plants and plant products entering the UK in recent years. This has led to a higher likelihood of harmful plant pests and pathogens being introduced into the UK. Disease outbreaks such as *Chalara fraxinea* may also be attributable to extreme weather events which can bring infectious spores into the UK from the continent. The growing number of disease and pest outbreaks in the UK serves to underline the reality of these risks. These outbreaks can cause adverse economic, social and environmental impacts.

2. In October 2011, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published a Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan, which set out a long-term commitment to tackle biosecurity threats to Britain's trees and forests.¹ This commitment gained importance following the discovery of the fungus *Chalara fraxinea* in native UK ash trees in 2012. Defra subsequently published, in March 2013, a Chalara Management Plan (updating a control strategy published in December 2012).² More recently, Defra has identified safeguarding plant health as one of its four key priorities and committed to publishing a new plant health strategy in Spring 2014.

3. *Chalara fraxinea* (more commonly known as ash dieback disease) provides an example of the range of effects that an outbreak of disease can have. Cases of ash dieback disease were first identified in the UK in saplings in a nursery in Buckinghamshire in February 2012, and in October 2012 the first signs of the disease were detected in mature trees in the wider natural environment in Norfolk and Suffolk.³ The outbreak of ash dieback disease has led to (but is not limited to) the following consequences:

- ash has been lost as a timber tree: the loss of income and changes required woodland management have been economically detrimental;
- for private owners, the cost of surveying, felling and replacing ash trees is high: the overall cost of managing ash dieback disease for the National Trust is estimated at £15 million;⁴
- losing a large number of ash trees could reduce the amount of carbon dioxide that is removed from the air, leaving more greenhouse gas in the atmosphere;⁵
- the environment has been negatively affected: ash has many associated species and is the sole food-plant for numerous species of invertebrate; and

1 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan](#), October 2011

2 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Chalara Management Plan](#), March 2013

3 Forestry Commission, [Chalara Dieback of ash](#), accessed 20 January 2014

4 Q223

5 University of Edinburgh, [Funus may devastate ash woodlands](#), 6 May 2013

— ecosystems and biodiversity levels have been negatively impacted: nutrients are released from soil and habitats lost.

Our inquiry

4. In November 2012, in response to the outbreak of ash dieback disease and the wider failures in UK plant health protection that the outbreak exposed, we invited written submissions on Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity. The aim of this inquiry was to explore whether Defra policies such as the Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan were suitable. We used ash dieback disease as an archetypal example of an outbreak of disease in the UK, but we also looked at wider plant health issues and asked whether there are sufficient resources and adequate management plans to effectively prevent and manage disease outbreaks.

5. The twenty-nine written submissions and transcripts of three oral evidence sessions, hearing from representatives of government, landowners, farmers, trade bodies, wildlife, conservation and environmental groups are published on our website.⁶ We also submitted written questions to the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP and received a total of five written submissions from Defra (incorporating input from the Forestry Commission and the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera)).⁷ We are grateful to all who provided evidence to our inquiry.

6 [EFRA Committee website](#), Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity inquiry

7 Ibid.

2 Enhanced Plant Health Programme

6. As part of its plant health strategy, Defra asked its Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Ian Boyd, to set up the Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce to provide an independent perspective on risks, costs and strategy related to tree health and related biosecurity in the UK. The Taskforce published its Final Report setting out the following recommendations in May 2013:

- i) to develop a prioritised UK plant health risk register;
- ii) to appoint a Chief Plant Health Officer to own the UK plant health risk register and to provide strategic and tactical leadership for managing those risks;
- iii) to develop and implement procedures for preparedness and contingency planning to predict, monitor and control the spread of pests and pathogens;
- iv) to review, simplify and strengthen governance and legislation;
- v) to improve the use of epidemiological intelligence from EU/other regions and work to improve the EU regulations concerned with tree health and plant biosecurity;
- vi) to strengthen biosecurity to reduce risks at the border and within the UK;
- vii) to develop a modern, user-friendly, system to provide quick and intelligent access to information about tree health and plant biosecurity; and
- viii) to address key skills shortages.⁸

7. Defra accepted recommendations (i), (ii) and (iii) over summer 2013⁹ and the remainder of the Taskforce's recommendations in December 2013.¹⁰ In order to deliver these latter recommendations, Defra is developing an enhanced plant health programme, details of which will be set out in a new plant health strategy to be published in Spring 2014. We understand that an initial version of the strategy was shared with industry and environmental groups at the Plant Health Stakeholder Summit on 20 January 2014.

8. We recognise the value of the Taskforce Report and welcome Defra's acceptance of its eight recommendations.

9. Defra must collaborate with all stakeholders to complete its delivery of all the Taskforce recommendations by creating a transparent, comprehensive and effective enhanced plant health programme. The Government must develop its capability to accurately predict, monitor, control and mitigate the impact of pests and pathogens in the UK.

⁸ Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce, [Final Report](#), May 2013

⁹ HC Deb, 20 May 2013, [col 54WS](#) and HC Deb, 16 July 2013, [col 78WS](#)

¹⁰ HC Deb, 12 December, [col 53WS](#)

3 Access to information

Risk Register

10. The first recommendation of the Taskforce is to develop a prioritised UK plant health risk register. The Taskforce identified the purpose of the risk register:

“to identify and prioritise the risks of those pests and pathogens that pose the greatest threat, including the probability of entry of exotics or the occurrence of new strains of indigenous species. [...] The risk register would inform choices and policy options, as well as identifying how best to deploy resources most effectively to manage a range of threats”.

11. We heard general support for the risk register from witnesses. The Country Land and Business Association told us that the register will be:

“extremely welcome, and, as long as it can be effectively used by people on the ground, i.e. it is easily searched by both disease and by species, we are sure it will be a great benefit”.¹¹

12. The Wildlife Trusts added that it “needs to be a useful document that evolves and develops over time”.¹² Concern was expressed by the Country Land and Business Association, the National Farmers Union and the Woodland Trust that the register will only be useful if sufficient mitigation measures are identified and then firmly and effectively utilised.¹³

13. Phase 1 of the risk register was published online by Fera on 20 January 2014. Fera’s accompanying summary guide states the purpose of the register is “to record and rate risks to UK crops, trees, gardens and ecosystems from plant pests and pathogens. It forms an agreed, evidence based framework for decisions on priorities for actions by government and plant health stakeholders”.¹⁴ Pests or organisms are searchable online by “preferred name”, “synonym”, “common name” or “host”, and the register includes high-level information on mitigation measures and proposed actions.¹⁵

14. Defra informed us that the risk register will be reviewed and updated monthly by experts (including representatives from all UK plant health authorities) and on a quarterly basis involving stakeholders.¹⁶

15. The process of updating the risk register is vital to ensure that the priorities set out in the register remain relevant.

11 Q232

12 Q253

13 Q232 and Q253

14 Fera, *Phase 1 UK Plant Health Risk Register, Summary Guide*, accessed 12 February 2014.

15 Fera, *Phase 1 UK Plant Health Risk Register*, accessed 31 January 2014

16 Ev w49

16. It is essential that the risk register incorporates sufficient information and detail about relevant mitigation measures, proposed actions and their potential impacts. Defra must secure this level of detail in order to enable consistent application by stakeholders and to ensure that resources are effectively deployed to manage the particular threat in question.

Co-ordination and collaboration

17. The Plant Health Act 1967 has resulted in plant health responsibilities being split between the Forestry Commission and Defra, which in turn delegate responsibility to Fera (although the Plant Health Policy Team transferred from Fera back to Defra in December 2012). Responsibility for plant health in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is devolved. Pest and disease outbreaks are the joint responsibility of Fera and the Forestry Commission, with roles agreed on a case-by-case basis, depending on where the sites are and what resources and capabilities are required to deal with the outbreak. Fera carries out inspections of plants and produce imported from non-EU countries and targeted monitoring of plants moving within the EU. Fera also carries out risk assessments for plant health (other than forest trees), diagnosis of pests and pathogens, and research on risk assessment, detection, diagnosis and control.¹⁷

18. We received evidence that the ash dieback outbreak exposed a lack of definition over the roles and responsibilities of plant health authorities in the UK.¹⁸ Confor (a membership organisation for the forestry industry) observed that “the private sector finds it very difficult to engage effectively with so many levels and layers of groups and committees determining policy on plant health”¹⁹ and that “there is a lot of confusion as to the cascade of governance for plant health into different administrations”.²⁰ The National Trust told us that “things can easily fall between stools” and that “it does not feel [like] you get that cross-discipline approach that you do with, say, academics working together”.²¹

19. The Taskforce recommended that a Chief Plant Health Officer (CPHO) be appointed to own the risk register and to provide strategic and tactical leadership for managing those risks. Defra advertised to fill this role towards the end of 2013 and have informed us that recruitment is under way.²² The new CPHO will play a high-profile role in advising Ministers, industry and others about the risks posed by plant pests and diseases, and in ensuring that measures are in place to manage those risks and minimise their impact. We heard general support for this appointment, as it will remove the current uncertainty over roles and responsibilities for plant health.²³

17 Ev w18 [Defra]

18 Ev w25 [Horticultural Trades Association]

19 Ev w2

20 Q184

21 Q234

22 Ev w49

23 Ev w2, Ev w27

20. We endorse the findings of the Taskforce and agree that there is a need for a coherent line of authority identifying who has ultimate responsibility for the decisions made to address disease and pest outbreaks. Co-ordination and communication between the disparate organisations is essential for effective evidence generation and quick responses to new outbreaks.

21. We looked at the lessons that can be learnt from other countries where a pest or disease has already spread or is spreading. The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board informed us that “good use of existing research and experience in other EU states e.g. Denmark, assists in prioritising activities and tackling the problem in the UK”²⁴ and Scottish Natural Heritage told us that “knowledge exchange about threats and how to manage plant pathogens, and non-native species more generally, plays a vital role in supporting responses to emerging threats”.²⁵

22. The Taskforce Report provides the example of the Asian long-horned beetle (*Anoplophora glabripennis*) outbreak in Kent in March 2012 to illustrate the benefits that can be gained through collaboration with EU member states. Before the discovery of this outbreak, Fera and Forest Research had learnt how to manage such outbreaks from other EU member states at the EU standing committee and via collaborative research projects. Following the outbreak, Fera scientists sought and received advice from countries with prior experience of running eradication campaigns against the pest.²⁶

23. Defra informed us that, in relation to *Chalara fraxinea*, the UK has learnt from experience on mainland Europe and is a member of Fraxback, an EU-funded programme aimed to generate a comprehensive understanding of ash dieback through sharing of knowledge. However, the National Farmers Union are “concerned” that the UK has not learned from experiences at EU level; the National Trust “are not confident that we have learned yet”²⁷; and the Woodland Trust told us that even with twenty years experience of *Chalara fraxinea* in Europe, “early action to reduce the rate of spread or implement mitigation measures was not taken”.²⁸

24. We urge the Government to ensure that the Chief Plant Health Officer role is clearly defined and supported. Responsibilities should include providing clear co-ordination and integrated delivery between the different organisations involved in plant health within the UK and improving the lines of communication between the UK and EU member states to aid collaboration and the exchange of pest and pathogen information.

25. We invite Defra to indicate which EU member states provide the most useful and comprehensive information to the UK to assist with combating plant disease.

24 Ev w53

25 Ev w75

26 Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce, [Final Report](#), May 2013, p27

27 Q246

28 Ev w46

4 Review of legislation

26. There is an established framework of plant health legislation in the UK aimed at preventing the introduction and spread of harmful diseases or pests, without preventing trade. At an international level, the UK has obligations under the World Trade Organisation Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. At an EU level, specific control measures may be targeted at harmful organisms that are listed in the EU Plant Health Directive 2000/29/EC or at other harmful organisms previously unknown to occur in the EU but which are of potential economic importance.²⁹ If a harmful organism is found in the EU, the country concerned must notify the European Commission and other EU countries and eradicate or prevent the spread of the harmful organism. If there is an imminent danger of introduction or spread of a harmful organism, an EU country may temporarily take additional national control measures.

27. In accordance with the Directive, an EU country may request special protection for all or part of its territory (a protected zone) from harmful organisms listed in the EU Directive when: (i) the harmful organism is not present in that area despite environmental conditions being favourable for its establishment; or (ii) it is present, but under eradication.³⁰ Each protected zone is defined in specific geographic terms and in relation to a particular harmful organism.

28. A number of plant pests and diseases are classified as ‘quarantine’ organisms and therefore subject to further legislative control. A plant passport is required to facilitate the movement of a limited range of materials which are susceptible to ‘quarantine’ organisms. Where required, a plant passport is needed both for movements within and between member states, and additional requirements apply for movements into and within protected zones.

29. We received evidence that the ash dieback outbreak highlighted a lack of flexibility which prevented the UK from protecting its plant health status: ash imports continued because ash did not fall within the plant passport system.³¹ The national measures taken by the Government regarding ash dieback disease were introduced under the temporary national control measures as *Chalara fraxinea* was not listed as a ‘harmful organism’ in the EU Plant Health Directive.

30. In May 2013, the European Commission proposed a new package of measures relating to (amongst other things) plant health and plant reproductive material.³² The current review of the EU regime provides an opportunity for the Government to secure significant changes to plant health controls, and to negotiate a new regime more consistent with the UK Government’s aims. Defra have assured us that they will negotiate for a new regime

29 European Commission guidance, [Plant Health Emergency Measures](#), accessed on 12 February 2014

30 European Commission, [Protected Zones](#), accessed 10 February 2014

31 Ev w26

32 European Commission [press release](#), 6 May 2013

which achieves: faster decision making as plant health risks change and new pests arrive; better risk targeting, including regionalisation where appropriate, and a shift of inspection effort from plant produce to high-risk plants and propagating material; and more co-operation between plant health inspectorates across the EU and between plant health and customs services.³³

31. We support Defra’s aim to negotiate a new and improved regime at EU level to enhance the UK’s protection against pests and disease, and enable the UK to respond quickly to the arrival of new pests and diseases.

32. We recommend that Defra supports the extension of the plant passport system during the review of the EU regime so that it applies to all commercially traded plants. We expect Defra to provide us with regular updates on its progress on negotiating the new EU plant health regime, including the specific EU proposals it is seeking to influence and any substantial conflicts between the EU proposals and the UK strategy.

33. At a UK level, the Plant Health Act 1967 is the main piece of legislation governing the introduction and spread of pests and diseases. Defra have informed us that they have reviewed all UK plant health legislation as part of the Red Tape Challenge and propose to consolidate certain important regulations and consult on revoking others. **We welcome the specific new protection measures relating to the import of plane, sweet chestnut and pine implemented in November 2013 by the Plant Health (England) (Amendment) (No.3) Order 2013.**

34. In its response to this report, we expect Defra to identify the plant health regulations which it is proposing to revoke and to confirm that each of its proposals will be subject to full consultation to allow for proper scrutiny of the revocations and their effects.

35. When looking at the role of industry, we heard that there have been instances where seed was sent abroad to be grown in other EU nurseries and then sold back to the UK as young plants. For example, despite being a native species, over four million ash trees have been imported into the UK since January 2009.³⁴ The Horticultural Trades Association agreed that this practice has “created a biosecurity risk”³⁵ but that “there is nothing that will stop that [practice][...]Not while we have such a volatile marketplace”.³⁶ The Taskforce Report states that financial pressures on UK nurseries have led to many reducing costs by purchasing or growing stocks overseas, which has in turn led to a marked increase in the volume and diversity of plants and plant products entering the UK.³⁷ Professor Ian Boyd told us that reviewing the type of biosecurity that is placed at the UK border could help to monitor this sort of import/export process. It would “not necessarily stop it happening, but it would allow it to be properly assessed against the risks that occur in the locations where

33 Ev w49

34 “Ash dieback could cost industry £2.5m”, [Redditch Advertiser](#), 27 November 2012

35 Q95

36 Q147

37 Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce, [Final Report](#), 20 May 2013, p10

the seed might actually be propagated”.³⁸ **The plant and forestry industry has a role to play in reducing biosecurity risks by reviewing their import/export processes and contributing to the cost of managing plant disease in the UK.**

36. The new EU regime is subject to a co-decision process which may take several years. This leaves a gap in which potential threats to the UK may be left unchecked in the short term. **Whilst recognising the importance of trade to the UK plant industry, the Government must act now to strengthen biosecurity and ensure that any potential pests and diseases are kept out of the UK.**

37. In the period before the new EU plant health regime is implemented, we recommend that Defra consider strengthening the protection afforded to the UK by using existing legislative mechanisms, such as requesting protected zones for pests that are already present in Europe but not the UK or implementing new regulation where appropriate.

5 Capacity and capability

Funding

38. We received evidence that it has become increasingly difficult to source UK funds for research on tree health issues over the past twenty years.³⁹ Defra has acknowledged that the overall budget on forestry research has decreased over the last five years, but emphasised that the amount spent on plant health research has increased.⁴⁰ The table below sets out the funding provided by Defra and the Forestry Commission over the past five years on plant health research, and the funding planned up to 2014/15.⁴¹

	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
Defra Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£2m	£2m	£2m
Defra Plant Health Research (managed by Fera)	£1.3m	£1.4m	£0.7m	£2m	£1.6m	£1.4m	£1.3m
Forestry Commission Plant Health Research	£1.5m	£1.4m	£1.4m	£1.7m	£2m	£2.3m	£2.1m
Total	£2.8m	£2.8m	£2.1m	£3.7m	£5.6m	£5.7m	£5.4m

39. By contrast, we have been informed that the estimated annual economic cost of tree disease alone (not including ash dieback disease) to the UK is nearly £172 million.⁴² Ash trees are used for both hedgerow trees and woodland trees. When we tried to determine the total cost of ash dieback (both to the public purse and private landowners) to the UK, witnesses were not able to provide a definitive answer.⁴³ *We invite Defra to provide us with an estimated overall cost of ash dieback disease to both the Government and private owners in the UK, including management, removal, replacement and protection costs.*

40. We heard concerns that where limited resources are diverted to address a specific threat after it emerges, longer-term preparatory work, such as monitoring and research, is further under-resourced. The National Farmers Union stated that “investment in preparation and monitoring services are critical to effective biosecurity”⁴⁴ and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology pointed in particular to the focus of Defra’s Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan, noting that “it could be argued that the research element of this programme has a mainly short-term focus, responding to current problems, rather

39 Ev w73

40 Ev w8

41 Defra’s budgets for 2013/14 and beyond are indicative only.

42 Ev w45

43 See, for example, Q221

44 Ev w32

than preparing for emerging threats and supporting research that will underpin a future UK response”.⁴⁵ The Woodland Trust added that:

“Resource constraints lead to a “firefighting” approach to dealing with outbreaks to the detriment of other work that in the long term would help build resilience in woodland and wider landscapes by enhancing biodiversity and enabling adaptation to climate change.”⁴⁶

41. Ongoing research and development work relating to threats to plant health in the UK is essential to enable an effective response. **We welcome the increased funding available for plant health research but we are concerned that the overall budget for forestry research has reduced over the past five years despite a marked increase in the overall level of risk and consequent economic impact. We are concerned that resource constraints inevitably lead to a focus on short-term “fire-fighting” leaving long-term preparatory work, such as monitoring and research, under-resourced.**

42. In line with Defra’s key priority to safeguard plant health, it is essential that ring-fenced funding is provided for long-term research and development work that focuses on preparation for future plant health threats in order to ensure an effective response in the UK. This work should include monitoring; the development of control measures; developing a greater understanding of resistance; and researching other risk areas such as soil, untreated wood and insect pests.

Expertise

43. There was broad agreement from our witnesses that there is a lack of relevant expertise in the field of plant health, both in terms of the numbers of people and their technical background. The Scottish Forestry Trust told us that the total number of tree pathologists in the UK is “probably about 5 or 6” and that they are mostly over 55 years old.⁴⁷ The British Society for Plant Pathology (BSPP) has carried out an audit of plant pathology training and education in the UK which found that the UK has seen a reduction in plant science institutes and that several UK organisations have reduced their cohort of plant pathologists over the last fifteen years.⁴⁸ The BSPP audit also highlights the problem that the age profile of specialists in this area is weighted towards the 41-60 age group and that “the great worry is that in 10 years’ time, those specialists at the higher end of the age profile will have retired and take with them many years of accumulated knowledge, while there are insufficient new entrants”.⁴⁹

44. When questioned on the apparent delay in taking action to pursue a pest-risk analysis in relation to *Chalara fraxinea*, the Forestry Commission explained that:

45 Ev w57

46 Ev w45

47 Ev w73

48 British Society for Plant Pathology, [Plant Pathology Education and Training in the UK: An Audit](#), September 2012, p7

49 Ibid.

“The difficulty was that we were already dealing with a number of outbreaks of other pests and disease at that time. The record will show that the number of pathologists available in Britain to deal with some of these pests and diseases is very small at the present time. Ideally, we would have liked to have got the pest-risk analysis done more rapidly than we did do, but we were dealing with fires at home at the time.”⁵⁰

45. A report by The Woodland Trust identifies a key knowledge gap as being “how the disease will progress under UK conditions, how long infected trees will survive and what the response of the rest of the ecosystem might be”.⁵¹ Increased expertise in the UK is needed to plug this knowledge gap and build on lessons learned from the EU.

46. Defra have informed us that a range of immediate initiatives are being taken to address skills shortages. At a strategic level, the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Mark Walport, is undertaking a study alongside Defra’s Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Ian Boyd, to determine the UK’s long term needs for capability in the provision of research.⁵²

47. In order to provide evidence of emerging threats and to be ready to manage them, the UK needs a core of dedicated, well-motivated experts. **We support the Government’s commitment to take action to address the decline of expertise and start to build up the UK’s capability in this area.**

48. We invite Defra to set out in its response to this report a full list of the immediate initiatives that are being taken to address the lack of relevant expertise in the field of plant health, including clear timeframes for implementation of these initiatives and details of the funding that has been allocated; and an explanation of how Defra is co-ordinating its response with the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that the most effective and collaborative solution is realised.

49. In order to secure new entrants and to maintain a suitable level of expertise in the field of plant health, we recommend that funding is provided to increase the number of university courses and research posts, with a corresponding increase in the number of related university places in the UK.

50 Q20

51 Report of a Woodland Trust Conference, *Chalara fraxinea and other threats to woodland* (2013)

52 Ev w50

6 Control measures

Resistance

50. One response to plant disease is to find naturally resistant plants. For example, a small proportion of ash trees have a certain degree of resistance to *Chalara fraxinea* which provides an opportunity to propagate or breed more resistant stock in the UK. The Forestry Commission's Forest Research agency is part of a consortium awarded £2.4 million research funding to develop an in-depth understanding of the ash dieback fungus and the natural resistance of some ash trees.

51. However, as explained by Professor Boyd, "trees do not grow quickly, and I suspect that it will be a decade or so before that discovery will have a significant impact on both the trade and the silvicultural practice that there is within the UK."⁵³ In addition, studies carried out in Denmark between 2007 and 2009 have shown that there are significant differences in the susceptibility of cloned ash to ash dieback disease.⁵⁴ The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology provides another example of the drawbacks of focusing on resistance alone as trees that are resistant to Dutch Elm disease have taken over 40 years to develop and their use is restricted by patents.⁵⁵

52. Another response to plant disease is to develop an antidote. However, in relation to *Chalara fraxinea*, while an antidote "would be the ideal"⁵⁶ the Country Land and Business Association told us that an economically viable, easily applied, workable and environmentally safe antidote is not available at the moment.⁵⁷

53. *In the longer term, the development of resistant strains of ash trees will provide the surest protection against the prevalence of Chalara fraxinea, but the resources diverted to this end must not be at the expense of other, more immediate, control measures.*

Environmental impacts

54. Diseases or pests can damage and kill plants which are integral to an ecosystem. Recent research into the impact that tree diseases and epidemics can have on ecosystem services⁵⁸ shows that as new trees grow to replace lost species, some ecosystem services (perhaps carbon storage or water purification) are regained, whereas others (perhaps the biodiversity supported by the diseased tree species) are permanently disrupted.⁵⁹ In

53 Q60

54 L.V. McKinney, I.M. Thomsen, E.D. Kjaer and L.R. Nielsen, [Genetic resistance to Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus limits fungal growth and symptom occurrence in Fraxinus excelsior](#), *Forest Pathology*, Vol 42 (2012) p69-74

55 Ev w60

56 Q229 [The National Trust]

57 Q228

58 Ecosystem Services are defined by the [Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report](#) as "benefits people obtain from ecosystems" e.g. food, water, energy, carbon sequestration, pollination, recreation.

59 I.L. Boyd, P.H. Freer-Smith, C.A. Gilligan, H.C.J. Godfray, [The Consequence of Tree Pests and Diseases for Ecosystem Services](#), *Science Magazine*, Vol 342 (15 November 2013)

addition, control measures in themselves can have negative as well as positive impacts on wildlife. For example, the timing of tree removal and sanitation felling can cause disturbance to nesting birds.⁶⁰

55. The Woodland Trust criticised Defra’s Chalara Management Plan for failing “to adequately reflect wider biodiversity and social costs and the impacts of the potential loss of ash, particularly the estimated fifteen million ash trees in hedgerows and the wider countryside across the UK”.⁶¹ The RSPB told us that:

“The current and future responses to *Chalara* ash dieback and other tree pathogens, pests and diseases need to be considered in respect to biodiversity and other public benefits, not just as commercial forestry problems that require research, survey, monitoring and control.”⁶²

56. The Living With Environmental Change Partnership set up a new initiative in October 2012 with the aim of generating natural and social scientific knowledge to address current and emerging threats to trees and woodland ecosystems from pathogens and pests. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology told us that this initiative had the potential to address some existing limitations by having a more long-term focus on future health and resilience of trees and their ecosystems.⁶³ Defra has confirmed that environmental and social impacts, as well as economic impacts, were considered during the compilation of the risk register and that further developing these aspects will be an important element of refining and enhancing the methodology in 2014.⁶⁴

57. The Government’s approach to safeguarding plant health must encompass the protection and enhancement of public benefits, including biodiversity and ecosystem services. Mitigation measures and proposed actions in the risk register must include building resilience in woodlands and wider landscapes through conservation, restoration and expansion of our natural habitats.

58. This is an essential part of the response to plant diseases and pests in order to enable adaptation and robustness in our ecosystems.

60 Q259 [RSPB]

61 Ev w48

62 Ev w39

63 Ev w58

64 Ev w51

Conclusions and recommendations

Enhanced plant health programme

1. We recognise the value of the Taskforce Report and welcome Defra's acceptance of its eight recommendations. (Paragraph 8)
2. *Defra must collaborate with all stakeholders to complete its delivery of all the Taskforce recommendations by creating a transparent, comprehensive and effective enhanced plant health programme. The Government must develop its capability to accurately predict, monitor, control and mitigate the impact of pests and pathogens in the UK.* (Paragraph 9)

Risk register

3. The process of updating the risk register is vital to ensure that the priorities set out in the register remain relevant. (Paragraph 15)
4. *It is essential that the risk register incorporates sufficient information and detail about relevant mitigation measures, proposed actions and their potential impacts. Defra must secure this level of detail in order to enable consistent application by stakeholders and to ensure that resources are effectively deployed to manage the particular threat in question.* (Paragraph 16)

Co-ordination and collaboration

5. We endorse the findings of the Taskforce and agree that there is a need for a coherent line of authority identifying who has ultimate responsibility for the decisions made to address disease and pest outbreaks. Co-ordination and communication between the disparate organisations is essential for effective evidence generation and quick responses to new outbreaks. (Paragraph 20)
6. *We urge the Government to ensure that the Chief Plant Health Officer role is clearly defined and supported. Responsibilities should include providing clear co-ordination and integrated delivery between the different organisations involved in plant health within the UK and improving the lines of communication between the UK and EU member states to aid collaboration and the exchange of pest and pathogen information.* (Paragraph 24)
7. *We invite Defra to indicate which EU member states provide the most useful and comprehensive information to the UK to assist with combating plant disease.* (Paragraph 25)

Review of legislation

8. We support Defra's aim to negotiate a new and improved regime at EU level to enhance the UK's protection against pests and disease, and enable the UK to respond quickly to the arrival of new pests and diseases. (Paragraph 31)
9. *We recommend that Defra supports the extension of the plant passport system during the review of the EU regime so that it applies to all commercially traded plants.*

10. *We expect Defra to provide us with regular updates on its progress on negotiating the new EU plant health regime, including the specific EU proposals it is seeking to influence and any substantial conflicts between the EU proposals and the UK strategy. (Paragraph 32)*
11. We welcome the specific new protection measures relating to the import of plane, sweet chestnut and pine implemented in November 2013 by the Plant Health (England) (Amendment) (No.3) Order 2013. (Paragraph 33)
12. *In its response to this report, we expect Defra to identify the plant health regulations which it is proposing to revoke and to confirm that each of its proposals will be subject to full consultation to allow for proper scrutiny of the revocations and their effects. (Paragraph 34)*
13. The plant and forestry industry has a role to play in reducing biosecurity risks by reviewing their import/export processes and contributing to the cost of managing plant disease in the UK. (Paragraph 35)
14. Whilst recognising the importance of trade to the UK plant industry, the Government must act now to strengthen biosecurity and ensure that any potential pests and diseases are kept out of the UK. (Paragraph 36)
15. *In the period before the new EU plant health regime is implemented, we recommend that Defra consider strengthening the protection afforded to the UK by using existing legislative mechanisms, such as requesting protected zones for pests that are already present in Europe but not the UK or implementing new regulation where appropriate. (Paragraph 37)*

Capacity and capability

16. *We invite Defra to provide us with an estimated overall cost of ash dieback disease to both the Government and private owners in the UK, including management, removal, replacement and protection costs. (Paragraph 39)*
17. We welcome the increased funding available for plant health research but we are concerned that the overall budget for forestry research has reduced over the past five years despite a marked increase in the overall level of risk and consequent economic impact. We are concerned that resource constraints inevitably lead to a focus on short-term “fire-fighting” leaving long-term preparatory work, such as monitoring and research, under-resourced. (Paragraph 41)
18. *In line with Defra’s key priority to safeguard plant health, it is essential that ring-fenced funding is provided for long-term research and development work that focuses on preparation for future plant health threats in order to ensure an effective response in the UK. This work should include monitoring; the development of control measures; developing a greater understanding of resistance; and researching other risk areas such as soil, untreated wood and insect pests. (Paragraph 42)*

Expertise

19. We support the Government's commitment to take action to address the decline of expertise and start to build up the UK's capability in this area. (Paragraph 47)
20. *We invite Defra to set out in its response to this report a full list of the immediate initiatives that are being taken to address the lack of relevant expertise in the field of plant health, including clear timeframes for implementation of these initiatives and details of the funding that has been allocated; and an explanation of how Defra is co-ordinating its response with the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that the most effective and collaborative solution is realised.* (Paragraph 48)
21. *In order to secure new entrants and to maintain a suitable level of expertise in the field of plant health, we recommend that funding is provided to increase the number of university courses and research posts, with a corresponding increase in the number of related university places in the UK.* (Paragraph 49)

Resistance

22. *In the longer term, the development of resistant strains of ash trees will provide the surest protection against the prevalence of Chalara fraxinea, but the resources diverted to this end must not be at the expense of other, more immediate, control measures.* (Paragraph 53)

Environmental impacts

23. *The Government's approach to safeguarding plant health must encompass the protection and enhancement of public benefits, including biodiversity and ecosystem services. Mitigation measures and proposed actions in the risk register must include building resilience in woodlands and wider landscapes through conservation, restoration and expansion of our natural habitats.* (Paragraph 57)
24. This is an essential part of the response to plant diseases and pests in order to enable adaptation and robustness in our ecosystems. (Paragraph 58)

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 5 March 2014

Members present:

Miss Anne McIntosh, in the Chair

Richard Drax

Mrs Mary Glendon

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck

Sheryll Murray

Neil Parish

Mr Mark Spencer

Roger Williams

Draft Report (*Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity*) brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 58 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Tenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned until Tuesday 11 March at 2.30 pm

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at www.parliament.uk/efracom.

Tuesday 11 December 2012

Page

Professor Ian Boyd, Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, **Martin Ward**, Head of Policy Programme and UK Chief Plant Health Officer, Food and Environment Research Agency, and **Roger Coppock**, Head of Analysts, Forestry Commission

Ev 1

Wednesday 26 June 2013

Jamie Dewhurst, Horticultural Trades Association, and Managing Director, J&A Growers, **Caroline Harrison**, England Manager, Confor, and **Chris Inglis**, Chair, Confor Nursery Producers Group

Ev 13

Wednesday 16 October 2013

Harry Cotterell, President, Country Land and Business Association, **Don Pendergrast**, Plant Health Adviser, National Farmers' Union, and **Dr Simon Pryor**, Natural Environment Director, National Trust

Ev 28

Dr Hilary Allison, Policy Director, Woodland Trust, **Paul Wilkinson**, Head of Living Landscape, The Wildlife Trusts, and **Mike Wood**, UK Forestry Policy Officer, RSPB

Ev 34

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at www.parliament.uk/efracom.

1	Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board	Ev w52
2	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	Ev w53
3	BSW Timber	Ev w55
4	Centre for Ecology and Hydrology	Ev w57
5	Confor	Ev w1
6	Country Land and Business Association	Ev w3: w5
7	Defra	Ev w6: w8: w14: w18: w48
8	Horticultural Trades Association	Ev w25: w27: w29
9	Institute of Chartered Foresters	Ev w60
10	Dr David Lonsdale	Ev w62
11	National Farmers Union	Ev w31
12	National Trust	Ev w33
13	Jim Pratt	Ev w64: w65
14	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Ev w37: w40
15	Dr Claire Sansford	Ev w66
16	Scottish Forestry Trust	Ev w72
17	Scottish Natural Heritage	Ev w73
18	Sir Richard Storey	Ev w75
19	Woodland Trust	Ev w44: w47

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/efracom.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2013–14

First Report	Draft Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill	HC 95 (HC 637)
Second Report	Vaccination against bovine TB	HC 258 (HC 705)
Third Report	Managing Flood Risk	HC 330 (HC 706)
Fourth Report	Wild Animals in Circuses	HC 553 (HC 746)
Fifth Report	Food Contamination	HC 141 (HC 707)
Sixth Report	Rural Communities	HC 602 (HC 764)
Seventh Report	CAP implementation 2014–2020	HC 745 (HC 1088)
Eighth Report	Appointment of Chairman of Natural England	HC 890
Ninth Report	Departmental Annual Report 2012–13	HC 741

Session 2012–13

First Report	Greening the Common Agricultural Policy	HC 170 (HC 654)
Second Report	The Water White Paper	HC 374 (HC 602)
Third Report	Pre-appointment hearing: Chair of the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)	HC 471-I & -II
Fourth Report	Natural Environment White Paper	HC 492 (HC 653)
Fifth Report	Desinewed Meat	HC 120 (Cm 8462)
Sixth Report	Draft Water Bill	HC 674 (Cm 8643)
Seventh Report	Dog Control and Welfare	HC 575 (HC 1092)
Eighth Report	Contamination of Beef Products	HC 946 (HC 1085)

Session 2010–12

First Report	Future Flood and Water Management Legislation	HC 522 (HC 922)
Second Report	The Marine Policy Statement	HC 635
Third Report	Farming in the Uplands	HC 556 (HC 953)
Fourth Report	The draft National Policy statement (NPS) on Waste Water	HC 736
Fifth Report	The Common Agricultural Policy after 2013	HC 671 (HC 1356)
Sixth Report	Implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy: Domestic Fisheries Management	HC 858 (HC 1485)
Seventh Report	Pre-appointment hearing: Chair of Gangmasters Licensing Authority	HC 1400-I & -II
Eighth Report	EU proposals for the dairy sector and the future of	HC 952 (HC 1548)

	the dairy industry	
Ninth Report	The Welfare of Laying Hens Directive—Implications for the egg industry	HC 830 (HC 1664)
Tenth Report	The outcome of the independent Farming Regulation Task Force	HC 1266 (HC 1669)
Eleventh Report	The draft National Policy Statement for Hazardous Waste	HC 1465 (HC (Session 2012–13) 540)
Twelfth Report	EU proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy	HC 1563-I & -II (HC (Session 2012–13) 108)
First Special Report	The National Forest: Government response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 400
Second Special Report	Dairy Farmers of Britain: Government response to the Committee’s Fifth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 401