

Response to the Consultative Panel Red Band Needle Blight (RBNB)

RBNB

Red band needle blight, caused by the fungus *Dothistroma septosporum*, has been found on a range of conifer species in Great Britain. Pine species are by far the most common hosts, and Corsican pine is the main species affected. Scots Pine is generally considered to be more resistant although it can be affected when levels of the disease are high in surrounding stands.

The disease was first detected in the UK between 1955-66 in Dorset and South Wales and again in 1989 in South Wales. Although the earlier outbreaks seemed to clear up, RBNB appeared again in 1999 and has spread rapidly throughout the UK. The disease has been found on Corsican pine in all of the Commission's Forest Districts in England, the majority in Wales and several in Scotland. It is considered that the current strain of RBNB is much more robust than earlier strains due to its wider genetic diversity and that its spread is being further aided by the current climatic conditions/trends.

RBNB has significant impact upon Corsican Pine productivity with high levels of infection resulting in mortality, particularly in young stands. The Forestry Commission has imposed a moratorium on re-planting with Corsican Pine in FC managed woodland.

Effect upon Design Plans

New Forest District (Crown Lands & Dorset) has over 3000 ha of Corsican Pine accounting for 18% of the tree crop. The District is working to manage the impact of RBNB through a series of management measures recommended by Forest Research, including:

- More intensive and earlier thinning of young crops to increase airflow through the canopy and minimise mortality
- Where Forest Design Plans indicate restocking with Corsican Pine, Scots Pine or another suitable alternative (e.g. Douglas fir) will be used.
- Where a mature stand is particularly badly affected it may be clear felled earlier than indicated in the current Forest Design Plan. Where this is required, the clear fell will be rephrased or in other words swapped with a nearby healthier stand and a Design Plan amendment carried out.

To date, no changes have been required to the Forest Design Plan concept and in the Crown Lands we anticipate this will continue to be the case.

Rumours regarding restocking with Mediterranean Species

Most of the current conifer species planted on the Crown Lands have their origins in other parts of the world, including the Mediterranean in the case of Corsican Pine or western USA/Canada. The Forestry Commission is expected to follow government guidance on Climate Change and adaptation which includes maintaining and increasing the diversity of species to ensure our timber crops are more robust to disease and changes in climate. With diseases currently affecting the main timber producing species in the UK and climate change expected to alter the suitability of certain species, we are being encouraged to plant a greater variety of timber producing species, with suitable provenances to cope with future climate predictions. Intensive forestry methods of the last 40 years have focused on five main species but many of the recommended species (cited in the Read Report) are currently growing in well our forests (including the Crown Lands) as minor components. We will continue to take note of the advice and recommendations of Forest Research who are currently researching climate change adaptation options.

Further information

Forestry Commission Research Note - Red Band Needle Blight of Conifers in Britain, June 2008, Anna Brown and Joan Webber

Forestry Commission Research Note - Climate change: impacts and adaptation in England's woodland, Duncan Ray, Mark Broadmeadow, James Morison, 2010