

Woodland Carbon Code executive board minutes

Thursday 4 April 2024 via Microsoft Teams

Present: Pat Snowdon, Vicky West, Jamie Smith, Andy Baker, Susan Szymborski-Welsh (Scottish Forestry), Fiona Hay (Welsh Government), Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission), Ben Searle (Northern Ireland Forest Service)

Apologies: None

1. Actions from last meeting

Vicky West, Pat Snowdon and Andrew Baker provided updates on the actions from the previous executive board meeting:

Action 1: Vicky/Andy to discuss permanence/felling licences further with the regulations teams and UK Forestry Standard update team. (To revisit now the UK Forestry Standard is updated)

Update: Work on this is ongoing.

Action 2: Vicky to produce a paper on changes to the way the Woodland Carbon Code represents sales of pending issuance units, setting out the proposal and rationale in more detail (by correspondence or next meeting).

Update: S&P Global are exploring this further. Vicky will produce a paper once this has been completed.

Action 3: Andy to review options for a shared space for executive board papers and minutes.

Update: Work on this is ongoing. Susan is looking into a similar resource for the communications group so there could be potential to share ideas.

Action 4: Executive Board members to confirm country representatives for the Nature Markets Strategy Board.

Update: Work is ongoing to confirm the representative for Northern Ireland.

2. Updates

Statistics

Vicky West shared annual statistics about the Woodland Carbon Code. Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

- 314 new projects were registered with the code, although 80 other projects were removed from the registry, leaving a net figure of 234 new projects registered.
- 169 projects were validated by the code
- 3 projects were verified under the code



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Vicky highlighted that many projects are due to be verified this summer. She also explained that the increased capacity in the Woodland Carbon Code and external validator teams has helped complete almost double the number of validations as last year.

Fees

Vicky West updated the group on the proposals to change the way services are charged to ensure the Woodland Carbon Code secretariat is financially sustainable.

The group restated their agreement to increase the unit issuance charge at validation and verification.

Vicky explained that work is ongoing to discuss the proposal with the Peatland Code team, the registry provider and the Woodland Carbon Code Advisory Board.

Fiona Hay asked the group about reviewing fees on a regular basis. Members agreed this should be done annually.

Ben Searle and Mark Broadmeadow suggested checking whether the proposal should be considered under the public sector equality duty.

Action 5: Pat to ask the head of the Scottish Forestry Executive Office whether the proposal should be considered under the public sector equality duty.

Governance / clarity on terms of reference of each board and reporting

Pat provided an update on work to set up a Nature Markets Strategy Board. He outlined details about the role of the board, how it will operate and how it will interact with the Executive Board.

Mark Broadmeadow asked if the team may need to do more reporting to meet the BSI principals. Vicky explained this is something she will be looking at alongside Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market compliance.

Date and agenda items for first Nature Markets Strategy Board

Pat highlighted that he is liaising with the four countries to agree a date for the first meeting.

The agenda will include agreeing the new group's terms of reference, a set of standing items and key topics such as policy alignment, stakeholder management and strategic planning.

3. Clarifications - draft version for publishing

Vicky West shared a draft version of clarifications to version 2.2 of the Woodland Carbon Code.

She explained that the purpose of the document is to provide clarity in some areas of the code and offer project developers and validation and verification bodies clear direction on interpreting the standard.

Pat suggested it would be important to define the difference between what is classed as a clarification and what is a change to the standard.

There was discussion about the content of some of the draft clarifications, including guidance on minimum project size. Mark Broadmeadow suggested it would be helpful for clarifications to be shared with the Woodland Carbon Code Advisory Board.

Pat Snowdon agreed that Executive Board should approve clarifications before they are published too.

Action 6: Vicky to develop a definition of what can be classed as a clarification.

Action 7: Vicky to share draft clarifications with Advisory Board members on 24 April then circulate them to executive board members for approval via email.

4. Communications - audit and implementation plan

Susan Szymborski-Welsh, Woodland Carbon Code Communications Officer, provided an update on communications activity.

She has worked with communications contacts and the Woodland Carbon Code team to develop a draft communications strategy and plan. The strategy is based on the strategic priorities of the Woodland Carbon Code.

As part of the plan, Susan has completed a communications audit to gather audience insight to enhance our communications. She is working with the Woodland Carbon Code communications group to implement the recommendations, including refreshing website content and organising a webinar series.

5. Future monitoring - audit and piloting plans

Vicky West provided an update from the Woodland Carbon Code's Monitoring Advisor, Leon DeBell. Leon is examining how remote sensing technologies and instruments such as drones, planes and satellites could help with verification.

His initial investigations have focused on:

- Understanding the types of information needed at different verification stages
- Identifying technologies which could help to gather this information
- Discovering providers who offer services in these areas

Leon will coordinate a trial of new techniques at different Woodland Carbon Code sites over the summer. He will provide feedback as the trials progress.

6. Additionality - timing

Andy Baker updated the group about a proposal on the timing and version of the cashflow spreadsheet which is applied for financial additionality assessments.

He highlighted work to discuss the proposal with key groups, including grant teams and industry representatives.

He explained that there has been a generally positive response and recognition that the development will reduce financial uncertainty prior to validation and provide investors, buyers and landowners with greater confidence.

The board agreed to the proposal, subject to some minor amendments.

Action 8: Andy to resolve some minor issues before confirming the approach by correspondence.

7. Additionality for public sector bodies

Andrew Baker led a discussion on how additionality is assessed for public sector bodies.

The group agreed in principle that public sector organisations should be eligible to participate in the code.

Members discussed options for how additionality is assessed for public sector projects as they are unable to apply for woodland creation grants like private sector organisations. There was no consensus on the best approach at this stage.

Action 9: Andy to explore the topic further so that the executive board can revisit it at the next meeting.

8. Any other business and date of next meeting

Next meeting: 9am to 11am on Wednesday 22 May 2024 via Microsoft Teams.