



Woodland Carbon Code advisory board minutes

Wednesday 24 April 2024 on Microsoft Teams

Present: Vicky West, Andy Baker, Susan Szymborski-Welsh, Jamie Smith (Scottish Forestry), Fiona Hay (Welsh Government), Stuart Goodall (Confederation of Forest Industries - Confor), Julia Raybould (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Defra), Matthew Brander (Edinburgh University), Robert South (Institute of Chartered Foresters), Nick Blyth (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment), Renée Kirkvliet-Hermans (IUCN - Peatland Code), James Russell (Marston Vale Trust), David Robertson (Scottish Woodlands), Andy Grundy, Alex Hart, Rebecca Fairman (Soil Association), Bruce Kennedy (Boston Consulting Group), Peter Coleman (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero), Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission), Graham Clark (Country Land and Business Association), Peter Wilson (Wilson Applied/ UK Woodland Assurance Standard)

Apologies: Pat Snowdon (Scottish Forestry), Robert Guest (Foresight Group), Areeb Arshad (South Pole), Roger Kerr (Organic Farmers and Growers), Ben Searle (Northern Ireland Forest Service), Ewan Mackie (Forest Research), Emma Stewart (Forestry Commission), Steve Clarkson (Organic Farmers & Growers), Anne Mari Cobb (Soil Association)

This meeting was chaired by Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission) in Pat Snowdon's absence.

1. Minutes of the last meeting

Vicky West provided updates on actions from the previous advisory board meeting:

The Woodland Carbon Code secretariat will review the 'small projects' process to make it as accessible as possible. Vicky explained that it will be reviewed as part of a wider update to the code scheduled for later this year. In the meantime, we are planning to provide more communications to help highlight the current process.

Jonathan Speed, Nature Markets Contracts Project Manager, is also looking at projects on crofted this as part of his work on buyer/seller contracts and is meeting with crofting bodies.

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 to the code
- 3 projects were verified to the code

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.

Board members were interested in the reasons for projects being removed from the registry.

Action 1: Vicky to provide analysis of projects removed at the next advisory board meeting.

Nature Markets Strategy Board

Mark Broadmeadow 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.

Pat Snowdon is liaising with the four countries to agree a date for the first meeting in June. 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.

Members discussed whether private sector members should be included on the new board. Mark will discuss this with Pat.

Additionality - further work

Andy Baker outlined the latest work on reviewing the code's additionality rules. The secretariat is working with EY to evaluate the current test and future options. The project will include stakeholder engagement and should be complete by July.

Robert South, Stuart Goodall and David Robertson indicated a desire for changes to the current test.

Peter Coleman suggested the stakeholder list should include those who understand the need for a robust additionality test.

Additionality - timings

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.

Andy is now making some small amendments to the plans and hopes to implement the development later this year.

3. Compliance with standards frameworks

Vicky detailed work to ensure the Woodland Carbon Code is compliant with new and updated standard frameworks. This includes the Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative, the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market, the BSI Nature Markets Framework and the UK Accreditation Service's ISO certifications.

Mark Broadmeadow thanked the team for their work in engaging with the frameworks.

Bruce Kennedy explained that he sits on the Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative early adopters programme which focuses on how buyers use credits. He offered to help if anyone has any questions.

4. Changes to UK Land Carbon Registry Fees

Mark Broadmeadow updated the group on the proposals to change the way services are charged to ensure the Woodland Carbon Code secretariat is financially sustainable. One advisory board member suggested that unit issuance fees could be linked to the current average carbon price in future. However, the advisory board were supportive of the proposed changes and recognised the importance of financial sustainability of the Woodland Carbon Code team. The next steps are for Vicky to review and confirm changes with the Peatland Code team and S&P global. The Woodland Carbon Code team plan to implement the changes from September 2024.

5. Clarifications to the standard

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.

Peter Wilson welcomed the clarity on what is a requirement in the code and what is guidance.

6. Future monitoring

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 sites over the summer. He will provide feedback as the trials progress.

The board agreed it is vital to embrace new technology as it may help to reduce monitoring costs and increase accuracy.

7. Communications



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 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.

8. Policy updates from countries

England

Mark Broadmeadow informed the board about updates to the England Woodland Creation Offer and that the eighth Woodland Carbon Guarantee will take place in September. It will have a new category with a higher, but unpublished, reserve price for projects which are not seeking grant aid.

Julia Raybould highlighted an upcoming consultation on whether and how to incorporate greenhouse gas removals into the UK Emissions Trading Scheme. She also explained that changes to agricultural property tax relief for certain environmental land management agreements which were announced in the spring budget will come into force from April 2025.

Scotland

Jamie Smith provided an update on grant budgets and applications. There is a 40% cut to the capital grant budget in 2023-24 and the budget is partitioned differently, including an allocation for projects over 50 hectares where the applicant is willing to accept a reduction in the grant rate of at least £1,000 per hectare. This could be attractive to some projects also wishing to sell carbon credits.

Wales

Fiona Hay highlighted that Naomi Matthiessen has joined Welsh Government as deputy director for landscapes, nature and forestry and that there has been a small reduction in forestry grant applications. She also explained that work by Forest Research on the woodland restoration scheme is coming to an end and that a report will be published shortly.

Northern Ireland

No representative was present to provide an update from Northern Ireland.

9. Any other business and date of next meeting

Robert South asked if the Woodland Carbon Code team had looked at possible changes to the yield class yet. Vicky explained this is still to be looked at by Forest Research.



Advisory board

24 April 2024

Nick Blyth invited advisory board members to join him for a discussion about carbon in-setting.

Action 2: The secretariat to work with Nick to set up an online discussion on in-setting.

Next meeting: 9am to 11am on Wednesday 23 October 2024 via Microsoft Teams.