



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

## Terms of reference

Trees and Woodlands Scientific Advisory Group for  
the Nature for Climate Fund Tree Planting Programme  
Board

Date: July 2021

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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## Background

The Government has committed to facilitate an increase in tree cover on an unprecedented scale, in both rural and urban areas, in woodlands and across the wider treescape. Planting will be increased to a rate of 30,000 hectares of trees per annum across the UK from 2025 onwards, supporting Government's Net Zero commitments, whilst also maximising other environmental and socio-economic objectives.

The new England Trees Action Plan sets out priorities for achieving the objectives by expanding, protecting and improving our trees and woodlands. It also sets out the increased role that trees and woodlands can play in supporting the economy, how best to further connect people to nature, and the most effective way in which trees and woodlands can be created and managed to help combat climate change.

In order to drive forward this ambitious agenda, an England tree planting programme ('the programme') has been established to oversee the delivery of the England Trees Action Plan.

This Trees and Woodlands Scientific Advisory Group (TAW-SAG) is one of several expert advisory groups being established within Defra and one of several complementary routes by which the programme can access evidence. TAW-SAG will provide balanced scientific advice to the England tree planting programme, ensuring that Defra receives input from a wide range of scientific experts and disciplines, supporting both carbon sequestration and wider environmental and socio-economic objectives.

## Aims and objectives

The TAW-SAG will provide high quality, balanced scientific advice, in support of the programme's objectives, in particular on:

- i. Achieving key outcomes of carbon sequestration, nature recovery and biodiversity, and the broad range of public goods arising from the multiple functions of trees and woodlands<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to carbon sequestration, and nature recovery & biodiversity, the multiple benefits of trees and woodlands contribute to the three (social, economic, and environmental) pillars of sustainability and include (but are not limited to): food and fibre security; water and air quality; flood control and storm buffering; recreation; job creation and economic growth; and health and wellbeing, as outlined more fully in the National Ecosystem Assessment (<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>) and follow-on studies.

- ii. Technical advice to support achievement of these co-benefits, including mapping, planting and management.
- iii. Identifying, informing and providing leadership for the articulation of scientific evidence requirements, including the programme's role in the delivery of the England Trees Action Plan, and incorporating the development of proposals for use of any evidence funding available to the programme.
- iv. An additional role will be the provision of advice in respect of the establishment and setting of legally binding long-term targets for tree cover (see Annex 3 below).

## TAW-SAG remit

In achieving these objectives, the TAW-SAG will:

- i. Provide expert scientific input, challenge, and assurance to Defra on the use of evidence and analysis to facilitate woodland creation and improve woodland management. This input would include providing advice in relation to mapping and spatial analysis, such as advice on the development of a live data model.
- ii. Contribute to the department's 'Target Programme'. To provide independent advice on targets, the observers of the group will be required to abstain from any discussion or advice provided on targets.
- iii. Provide relevant information from participants' extended networks that will enable the England tree planting programme to have the evidence it needs to achieve its objectives. This will also help identify any wider academic expertise required. The Chair of the TAW-SAG will sit on the England tree planting programme Board to provide important links between the Board and the TAW-SAG.

## TAW-SAG Chair remit

The remit of the Chair will be agreed on appointment. It will reflect the incumbent's specialist area(s) of expertise.

However, it is expected that in addition to the above, the Chair will:

- i. Regularly review the TAW-SAG terms of reference to ensure they remain relevant and reflect the ongoing development of the programme, and wider departmental priorities. This will likely include, in the short-term at least, further clarification of the remit of the TAW-SAG as referenced above;

- ii. Lead on finalising the membership of the TAW-SAG utilising the existing 'long-list' of potential TAW-SAG members, constituting candidates proposed by the programme's Board; whilst identifying additional candidates as required. Departmental rules dictate that an audit trail of appointments is kept. The audit trail needs to demonstrate that, inter alia:
  - Due diligence has been conducted during the appointments process;
  - Security clearance has been secured for advisors where appropriate for those advisors handling sensitive documents or entering buildings independently;
  - A diverse range of advisors within the scope of the programme has, within reason, been considered during the appointments process.
- iii. Assist in the identification of the short and medium term goals of the TAW-SAG, particularly in relation to identifying priority programme needs that would benefit from expert scientific advice and coordinating the work of the (internal) Tree Science Group.
- iv. The Chair will lead both the TAW-SAG whilst also, in conjunction with the Grade 7 science lead for the programme, being a focal science point of contact for members of the programme, together with members of the Tree Science Group, and Defra's Science Advisory Council (SAC). This will be undertaken in consultation with the Secretariat.
- v. The Chair of the TAW-SAG will also sit on the main Board of the England tree planting programme.

(Note that the specific terms and conditions of appointment are detailed within a separate document - Terms And Conditions For Appointment Of Chair To The Nature For Climate Fund Tree Programme Scientific Advisory Group.)

## Governance and operating procedures

### Membership

Members are drawn to represent a balance of expertise in the natural and social sciences, economics, and other relevant disciplines. It will be chaired by Professor Rob MacKenzie. Members are appointed based on their specific skills and experience and will act independently of any of their other interests. The TAW-SAG will be supported by the Programme Board.

## Expenses and remuneration

Claiming remuneration and travel expenses (when applicable) for work is optional. Where claims are made, remuneration will be paid at a rate of £39 per hour for time spent in meetings and the time needed to prepare for these meetings. All reasonable travel expenses incurred by independent advisors in fulfilling their advisory role will be reimbursed via the committee claim procedure.

Members will be paid through Defra payroll; remuneration is treated as income and will be subject to NI and tax deductions.

## Operating procedures

It is expected that the TAW-SAG will convene approximately six times a year, either at Defra offices or by web conferencing, with the possibility of written correspondence in-between meetings. The Group will also be provided with an online collaborative tool to allow ongoing dialogue to continue between meetings.

The Group will retain an option to break into focussed groups, potentially led by the different scientific disciplines.

## Accountability

The Group will report, via the Chair, to the Nature for Climate Fund Tree Programme Board.

## Outputs

Outputs will be agreed following the convening of the first TAW-SAG meeting, in discussion with the Board and programme team. These will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are supporting overall programme objectives. The group will also be asked to undertake specific commissions for the ETPP where the desired output will be articulated and delivered

## Duration

The TAW-SAG will initially be constituted to run until 2025 reflecting the existing Nature for Climate funding timeline. At that point, continuation and ToR for the TAW-SAG will be reviewed.

Members are appointed for an initial term of two years, which may be renewed for the remainder of the NCF timeline (approximately two further years).

## Code of conduct

Members of the TAW-SAG must observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide. All members are expected to abide by the code of conduct set out in Annex 2, comprising the seven principles of public life.

## Register of interests

All TAW-SAG members will declare interests that are relevant to the remit of the Group. For example, a member might declare that they, or a relation of theirs, –

- is part of a related environmental research group;
- is a practitioner or business owner in an industry that will be stakeholder in environmental policy and targets; or
- is in receipt of remuneration from any companies, charities or groups that are stakeholders in environmental policy and targets.

To ensure the register is accurately maintained, members will inform the Secretariat of any changes as they occur. The Secretariat will be responsible for recording these declarations as well as maintaining a conflicts of interest register throughout engagement with advisors on the Target Programme.

## Changes to these terms

These terms of reference may be amended at any time in consultation with the TAW-SAG.

The terms and conditions for the Group are detailed within Annex 1.



## Annex 1: Terms and conditions

These terms set out the behaviours expected from members of the advisory group. Their purpose is to ensure that experts' independence is maintained throughout our engagement with them.

- i. Advisors must not hold any paid or high-profile posts in a political party, nor misuse information gained for personal or political gain.
- ii. Advisors must not lobby against Government environmental target policy or conduct any lobbying in relation to environmental targets.
- iii. Advisors must not engage in specific political activities on matters directly affecting the Target Programme.
- iv. Advisors must not misuse information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political purpose, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations.
- v. Advisors must observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide.
- vi. Advisors must not discuss draft plans outside the group without permission from Defra.
- vii. Advisors must direct enquiries from the media relating to the Target Programme towards Defra officials.
- viii. Advisors may, in the course of their work, address conferences and seminars, or have other speaking arrangements at which the media are present. In these circumstances, members should take care to make it clear that they are speaking in a personal capacity and not as an advisor to the Target Programme.

# Annex 2: The 7 principles of public life

## 1. Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

## 2. Integrity

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

## 3. Objectivity

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

## 4. Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

## 5. Openness

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

## 6. Honesty

Holders of public office should be truthful.

## 7. Leadership

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

## Annex 3: Target setting

Government is committed to exploring the creation of legally binding targets on trees using powers to be created through the Environment Bill. Independent (non-government) TAW-SAG members and any additional, independent members deemed appropriate by the TAW-SAG, will support this work.

To advise on the development of long-term, legally binding targets for trees the TAW-SAG will:

- i. Act as an independent expert advisory group, will meet with Defra's domestic Forestry team on an ad-hoc basis for discussion and advice on target development.
- ii. Provide independent, expert advice to Government in relation to environmental targets, as required by the Environment Bill long-term target framework. Advice will be provided throughout the target-setting process when commissioned by Defra group (Core Defra and associated agencies and public bodies). Advice will be high quality, impartial and scientific. Advice will help inform Government decision making and development of robust evidence bases for targets.

In achieving these objectives, the TAW-SAG will:

- iii. Provide guidance throughout the life cycle of evidence development, including recommending appropriate analytical methods, datasets and evidence. This is expected to be required for the following tasks;
  - Indicator development and methodologies for measurement.
  - Scenario development for exploring futures in which targets could operate.
  - Forecasting target trajectories under different scenarios.
  - Assessment of target impacts, including spill overs and unintended consequences.
- iv. Advise on the content of final evidence outputs and interim products, such as;
  - Feasibility assessments.
  - Impact assessments.
  - Risk assessments.
- ix. Provide expert judgement in evaluating target evidence potentially including;
  - The level of confidence in evidence and findings.
  - The feasibility, desirability and viability of targets under various scenarios.

The TAW-SAG sub-group will not:

- Decide which targets will be set; this is a role for the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- Decide policy roadmaps or pathways for the delivery of the targets.