

Trees and Woodland Scientific Advisory Group (TAW-SAG)

Meeting 6 Minutes: 13 January 2022

Attendees

- Rob MacKenzie (RMK) - chair, School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences University of Birmingham; Birmingham Institute of Forest Research
- Ian Bateman (IB) - Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute. University of Exeter
- Richard Buggs (RB) - observer, Kew Gardens, Plant Health Group
- Paul Burgess (PB) - Ecology and Management, Cranfield Soil and Agri-food Institute Cranfield University
- Keith Kirby (KK) - Department of Plant Sciences, University of Oxford
- Ruth Mitchell (RM) - Biodiversity and Ecosystems Group, Ecological Sciences Department, James Hutton Institute
- Chris Quine (CQ) - observer, Chief Scientist, Forest Research
- Patricia Thornley (PT) - School of Engineering and Applied Science, Aston University
- Stephen Cavers (SC) - Ecology Evolution and Environmental Change - Centre for Ecology and Hydrology
- Mike Morecroft (MM) - observer, principal specialist on climate change, Natural England and senior visiting research associate, Oxford University
- Julie Urquhart (JU) - Environmental Social Science at University of Gloucestershire
- Maggie Roe (MR) - Landscape Planning Research and Policy Engagement, University of Newcastle
- Rebecca Waite (RW) - guest – Nature for Climate Fund (NCF) programme board paper, Head of Design and Delivery for Trees and Forestry, Defra
- Zoe Pellatt (ZP) - Head of Evidence and Analysis for Trees and Forestry, Defra
- Daisy Ellis (DE) - Head of Strategy, Engagement and Analysis, Defra
- Caroline Bell (CB) - PMO Team, Defra
- Clare Williams (CW) – minutes taker, Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees and Forestry, Defra

Apologies

- Yadvinder Malhi (YM) - Ecosystems Research, Environmental Change Institute, Oxford University
- Bella Murfin (BM) – Tree Programme Director, Defra
- Naomi Matthiessen (NM) – Tree Programme Director, Defra

Item 1: Welcome and updates

- RMK welcomed everyone to the sixth meeting of the TAW-SAG
- ZP introduced CW who has recently joined the Defra Evidence and Analysis Team. The team also includes John Hales and Jasmeet will start on Monday and Charlotte will start in mid-February
- RW introduced herself and explained that she is joining the meeting occasionally to join up delivery, policy and the monitoring and evaluation framework
- RW discussed the NCF programme board paper circulated by email on 13 January 2022 for discussion regarding proposals to help improve delivery of nature recovery outcomes in NCF and England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO). This is discussed further in item 6

Item 2: Review and agree minutes

The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed and agreed by TAW-SAG members.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- apologies to CQ for the error in the previous minutes. He is an observer for the group rather than a guest
- there are some font issues and some repetition of actions and decisions
- let us know after the meeting if you feel the minutes should be in more or less depth

Decision 1

The minutes of meeting 5 were agreed as accurate and correct.

Action 1

CW to check font and repetition issues.

Action 2

TAW-SAG to send any comments on depth of minutes by email to TAWSAG@defra.gov.uk.

Item 3: Presentation on the research and development programme update

ZP presented the trees and forestry research and development portfolio and covered the following points:

- the research and development programme supports the objectives set in England Trees Action Plan (ETAP), extra budget processes, evidence base for monitoring and evaluation and the wider space in trees and forestry
- money is set aside to fund the research and development programme

- an research and development strategy will be drafted to formalise the programme of work between now and 2025
- this financial year the research and development programme focused on 9 key action points of ETAP and ZP went through some of the 2021 to 2022 funded projects, and some have funding in future years
- the funding for ETAP is not exclusive and CW will be leading on drafting a research strategy for ETAP and the wider space, looking at, for example, Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and Forest Research Science and Innovation Strategy and where there are research gaps
- at the end of 2021, Defra policy colleagues and arms-length bodies (ALBs) provided initial ideas for future research and development priorities
- the research and development strategy will propose priorities inside and outside of ETAP and what is feasible within the timescale and budget
- Defra will draft the research and development strategy up to 2025 and wish to get the opinions of TAW-SAG members and consult with Defra policy leads and ALBs

Summary key points raised in discussion

- a question was raised about how the research priorities align with the Treescapes programme. The deadline for new projects is March.
- there is already funding for research fellowships, which will be policy targeted and further discussion is needed to avoid duplication. The treescapes programme has agreed funding however the call out for fellows has not yet been issued
- the Defra team are joined up with Policy leads outside of trees and woodlands and Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) to help avoid duplication.
- Treescapes, the first round of grants were also open to FR as well as academics and the second round was expanded to other non-academic institutions. The change of the PSRE status was the cause of this change
- the monitoring of the programme is not included. Validation is important to analyse effectiveness of policy and who takes up the policies and the mechanisms of uptake. The research and development programme will not implement all ETAP action points, it is split across the team and will be evaluated
- the research and development strategy will be an iterative process developing over the next 6 to 8 weeks
- TAW-SAG felt it would be helpful to share the broad research areas so they can consider it before the draft strategy
- it is important to understand how the list of projects address the gaps in knowledge and prioritise the gaps in knowledge linked to the different stages of the policies and the timeline
- theory of change, scheduling and what it means for the programme was discussed
- mapping out the different initiatives and research projects and where there are synergies and gaps is important
- there are gaps in carbon knowledge, for example, carbon balance for managed forests and naturally occurring woodland
- question regarding whether funding is allocated annually or for more than one financial year

- an overview for identifying priorities within the research and development strategy is needed, which is an iterative process
- gap analysis – it is important to know where the policy teams see the gaps in knowledge
- a question was raised about the Centre for Forest Management and Climate Change (on ZP presentation) and how it differs from the Centre for Forest Protection.
- Some things have been done before and the main drivers need to be considered such as economics
- the research and development team will need to consider any conflicts of interest with TAW-SAG individuals, and the need for transparency

Action 3

ZP to provide a short note with background work and areas proposed to be covered.

Action 4

ZP to confirm funding allocation and timelines.

Action 5

ZP to confirm how funding information is made public.

Item 4: Presentation on the monitoring and evaluation update

ZP presented the monitoring and evaluation update and covered the following points:

- a framework contract was awarded to consultants in December. Defra are working with the consultants to understand our needs for the framework. The Consultants will work with policy team leads and develop the theory of change at a policy level and formulate the monitoring and evaluation strategy and framework. We will continue with mapping the data and check how robust the data is
- the future work, which is not included in the current contract, will be for platforms and tools to utilise the data and the evaluation process
- we have already had consultation with policy leads and will be meeting ALBs to discuss outputs and proposals in more detail. Stakeholder meetings to be held with Defra and ALBs to refine what we have in terms of data and the monitoring needs for the programme
- the final framework is due to be delivered by the end of March

Summary key points raised in discussion

- a discussion on whether there will be a monitoring and evaluation update at every TAW-SAG meeting, what will be done with the information and what is the added value. TAW-SAG request a synthesis of what's going in to look at interesting or common findings
- monitoring and evaluation is divided into 3 components: impact assessment, process evaluation and value for money

- the monitoring data is not just collected for ETAP purposes, and the framework will identify the gaps
- also have the dashboard with systematic data and live updates and monitoring and evaluation will use some of that and go beyond those data
- how Defra use it for the bigger picture is still to be determined and the strategic framework will be considered after the first draft stage in March
- TAW-SAG would like inputs at the early stages around developing the theory of change. TAW-SAG considered the theory of change last year and comments have been taken into account. The programme theory of change will feed into the project theory of change
- the consultancy considering this is independent
- the logic model needs to be specific to monitoring and evaluation

Action 6

ZP to consider timetable for monitoring and evaluation update for TAW-SAG.

Item 5: Paper 1 on the environmental land management convenor partnership for Hampshire

MR discussed an unpublished report which is a landscape led project tested and trialled in Hampshire focused on Environmental Land Management (ELM).

Action 7

MR to feed comments back on the report.

Item 6: NCF Programme Board paper circulated by email for discussion regarding proposals to help improve delivery of nature recovery outcomes in NCF and EWCO

TAW-SAG members raised the following points:

- discussion that 20% non-native species is not included but should farmers grow the most productive trees?
- the context of this grant was explained, which is a specific extra grant for nature recovery. It is a supplement for nature recovery and not for all woodlands and may be where crop or timber returns are lower in more biodiverse woodlands. The paper is about base levels and rules
- there was a discussion that the species need to be robust in a changing climate.
- clarification is needed regarding naturalised and honorary natives
- planting depends on the objectives and whether it is for biodiversity. Research on non-natives lacks evidence on their ability to host non-natives for biodiversity
- question whether studies needed on non-native species in parklands, or should we plant, grow and study them? Recording for non-natives is not always carried out and

non-natives have been surveyed in arboretums, but the biodiversity is limited to that within the area to colonise

- question regarding the evidence that extra stems will offset the carbon store when planting more shrubs. There is research on carbon store in the shrubland from overseas studies but there is a lack of evidence on stem density
- question about whether carbon should be measured rather than proxy measures. The paper is not having to prove the carbon target but proposes planting densities to retain tree stem and carbon sequestration levels associated with the existing standards
- question over which species are counted as naturalised. There is a list of species
- when varying the structure, there is a need to be realistic that open space and understorey will have significant impact in first few decades and management is important after this. Varying the structure when planting may not make a large long-term impact on biodiversity and there may be a greater impact through management at later stages
- the delivery of tree planting and management for the long term is a challenge and 30 to 50 years is difficult to plan for
- the structural point is a difficult one with options for natives, non-natives, naturalised, trees or shrub. This paper is for basic rules. The paper proposes more diverse stands and to broaden the range of species
- cannot assess the carbon impact of a planting scheme at this stage

Action 8

KK to share list of species counted as naturalised.

Action 9

RW to compile comments for the programme board.

Item 7: AOB

RMK followed up on action points of October 2021 meeting to confirm with Brendan Costelloe after seeking TAW-SAG and Defra colleagues views on increasing the minimum proportion of broadleaf trees and associated risks but has not had the meeting yet.

Trees and Forestry, Strategy Engagement and Analysis Team February 2022