

Trees and Woodland Scientific Advisory Group (TAW-SAG)

Meeting 10 Minutes: 21 September 2022

Attendees:

- **Rob MacKenzie** (RMK) – (Chair), School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences University of Birmingham; Birmingham Institute of Forest Research
- **Paul Burgess** (PB) - Ecology and Management, Cranfield Soil and Agri-food Institute Cranfield University
- **Keith Kirby** (KK) - Department of Biology, University of Oxford
- **Richard Buggs** (RB) – (Observer), Kew Gardens, Plant Health Group
- **Ruth Mitchell** (RM) - Biodiversity and Ecosystems Group, Ecological Sciences Department, James Hutton Institute
- **Chris Quine** (CQ) – (Observer), Chief Scientist, Forest Research
- **Julie Urquhart** (JU) - Environmental Social Science at University of Gloucestershire
- **Mike Morecroft** (MM) – (Observer), Principal specialist on climate change, Natural England (NE) and senior visiting research associate, Oxford University
- **Stephen Cavers** (SC) - Ecology Evolution and Environmental Change - Centre for Ecology and Hydrology
- **Daisy Ellis** (DE) - Head of Strategy, Engagement and Analysis, Defra
- **Rebecca McIlhiney** (RMI)- Evidence and Analysis Team Leader for Trees/ Forestry, Defra
- **Clare Williams** (CW) – Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/Forestry, Defra
- **Charlotte Williams** (ChW) (secretary) – (Minutes), Research & Development (R&D) Project Delivery Advisor, Defra
- **Hugh Loxton** (HL) – Head of Environmental Policy, Trees, Woodlands & Forestry Policy, Defra
- **Alec Rhodes** (AR) – Woodland Creation Incentives Team Manager, Forestry Commission (FC)

Apologies:

- **Ian Bateman** (IB) - Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute. University of Exeter
- **Yadvinder Malhi** (YM) - Ecosystems Research, Environmental Change Institute, Oxford University
- **Maggie Roe** (MR) - Landscape Planning Research & Policy Engagement, University of Newcastle
- **Patricia Thornley** (PT) - School of Engineering and Applied Science, Aston University
- **Bella Murfin** (BM) – Tree Programme Director, Defra
- **Naomi Matthiessen** (NM) – Tree Programme Director, Defra

Item 1

1. RMK welcomed everyone to the tenth meeting of the TAW-SAG.

Item 2a: Review and agree minutes from previous meeting

2. The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed with the following amendments required for agreement:
 - The last bullet point on page 2 needs amending to “this Shared Outcomes project”.
 - Item 6 – needs amending to “December 2022”.
3. The actions were reviewed:
 - Action 1 – complete.
 - Action 2 – complete. Mike will update the group when the next announcement comes out.
 - Action 3 – CW to confirm completion with Rebecca Waite.
 - Action 4 – complete.
 - Action 5 – complete.

Action 1: ChW to update the minutes from the last meeting.

Item 2b: Breeding waders update

4. HL presented an update on the breeding waders issue that TAW-SAG previously advised on. The following key points were raised:
 - A survey policy was developed to demonstrate to applicants the level of risk for breeding waders, including flowcharts to guide survey decisions.
 - A webinar was held with stakeholders to go through the guidance which was then published.
 - The guidance has three elements:
 - i. Survey policy to advise on risk areas.
 - ii. A survey flowchart to determine where to do a survey.
 - iii. Decision flowchart.
 - The guidance will be reviewed after a year to inform an approach to measuring the impact and development of a strategic mitigation framework.
5. Summary of Key Points raised in the discussion:
 - A question was raised on whether the guidelines are going beyond the TAW-SAG common statement. HL explained that a considerable amount of the red area in the Pennines is already protected for birds and peat. The guidance is used to suggest the areas where planting is possible, and not be a complete exclusion.
 - An interpretation of the guidance is that you can still plant on wader habitats, it just depends on the density of waders.
 - A question was raised on what considerations are given when wader density is calculated? Currently the whole area of the buffer is considered, but there could be areas where a part of the buffer has a high density of breeding waders but another area has no waders, so the average is low. HL explained that areas not suitable for wader habitats are excluded from calculations but that this feedback on higher density areas is very useful and will be picked up at the review point.
 - HL thanked the group for their valuable feedback and contribution to addressing this issue and a lessons learned exercise of the whole process will be completed and can be fed back to the group.

Item 3a: New ministerial appointments to date and highlights from meetings with the new Secretary of State (SoS), Ranil Jayawardena

6. DE provided an update on the new Ministers in Defra. Their portfolios are yet to be determined but the Ministers are as follows:
 - a. Ranil Jayawardena has been appointed the new SoS and his top three priorities are: food, water, and growth.
 - b. Scott Mann
 - c. Mark Spencer
 - d. Lord Benyon
 - e. Trudy Harrison.
7. The Trees team will emphasise how its work aligns with SoS' goals in upcoming engagements, hopefully using National Trees week as an opportunity for site visits and more exposure with Ministers.

8. Item 3b: Programme Board (PB) Update

9. RM has agreed to act as RMK's deputy to regularly have a TAW-SAG member at the Board.
10. The Board is waiting to see whether there will be any change in emphasis from new Ministers, but it appears unlikely as the Nature for Climate Fund (NCF) programme is broad and agile enough to cover the three priorities.
11. There are still some recruitment issues in Core Defra, FR and NE. For those members in the higher education section, it would be helpful to promote these opportunities to graduates.
12. The PB have identified research gaps in woodland management and the use of timber in buildings which is worth exploring further to define what the gaps are.

Item 4: NCF Trees R&D Proposals – presentation on new proposals

13. RMI presented on the agreed research projects that will be funded through the NCF Trees funding. The following key points were raised:
 - The feedback currently required from the group, from this presentation and the paper previously issued, is whether there are any additional stakeholders that need including or should be aware of the projects, and there are whether any tweaks or changes required to the projects.
 - The team will work with TAW-SAG to identify any evidence gaps remaining so they can be procured.
14. Summary of Key Points raised in discussion:
 - Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is separate to the R&D projects and these need to be linked and feed into each other. The R&D team work very closely with the M&E team. They contributed to the R&D Strategy, and they were included in the review process of all the projects.
 - The review and moderation process was independently carried out by the trees evidence team, the Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) team and plant heath team in Defra. This was the scientific peer review.
 - There are some overlaps with some new Treescapes projects so details of those will be forwarded. Work is underway to link up Treescapes leads where there are overlaps and proposals amended to reflect those conversations.
 - As timber in construction is going to be a key area going forward would it be helpful to have a timber expert in the group?
 - The projects will run until the end of the NCF in March 2025.

- TAW-SAG members not involved with the projects, could be involved with some project steering groups, to enable the flow of information and TAW-SAG views in and out of the group.
- There may be some parallels with the Tree Production Innovation Fund. Getting industry partners involved would be a positive contribution so suggestions on collaborators are welcome.
- Should any of the group have colleagues or know anyone who would like to have a sabbatical or secondment to FR, do let them know.
- There is a risk around the costs of attending steering groups, as there are multiple groups that meet with similar key stakeholders so this needs to be considered when planning engagement for the projects.
- To address evidence gaps in commercial forestry an aim is to hold workshops with key stakeholders to ensure the correct information is feeding into policy. A request to TAW-SAG was asked to help identify evidence gaps and topics for evidence reviews and workshops.
- For evidence gaps, the status of unmanaged woodlands and minimum intervention is an area that doesn't get explored as much. And what we use timber for. The use of timber is important to judge the value of a woodland, and to consider the whole life cycle of the timber.

Action 2: All to review R&D paper and provide RMI with further comments, if any.

Action 3: JU to send RMI details for project overlaps on Treescapes, including fellowship proposals with RMI to provide comments in the next week.

Action 4: RMI to investigate getting a timber expert and possibly a Forestry Commission member on the panel.

Action 5: RMI to provide TAW-SAG with indicative costs for projects and the project leads and collaborators.

Action 6: RMI to liaise with CQ regarding secondments.

Item 6: UKRI Future of UK Treescapes 2nd call update

15. JU presented an update on the second round of the UK Research and Innovation Treescapes proposals. The following points were raised:

- The aim of this call is to provide 'real world' evidence to find solutions for UK treescapes expansion and resilience.
- The three priorities focus on the challenges and benefits of treescapes expansion at a landscape scale; innovative ways to future-proof UK treescapes, and developing frameworks for decision making.
- Received 59 proposals, with six funded from a budget of £3M.
- The six projects are:
 - i. TreE_PlaNat – stakeholder perceptions and socio-ecological consequences of woodland expansion through planting and natural colonisation.
 - ii. iDeer – An Integrated Deer Management Platform to look at risks of deer impacts on woodlands and farmlands.
 - iii. STAND – Overcoming scale-mismatch for designing and governing treescapes expansion to benefit people and nature.

- iv. DiversiTree – Diversifying our woodlands with native and non-native species to increase resilience.
- v. Farm Tree – Balancing farm and landscape-scale demands for integrating trees on agricultural land.
- vi. Agroforestry Futures – Identifying opportunities and barriers to agroforestry in the UK and co-creating pathways to achieve a sustainable transition to increased agroforestry.
- Identified evidence gaps in the programme are in:
 - Commercial forestry and timber production.
 - Economic and financial aspects of expansion.
 - Supply of resilient and biosecure planting stock.
 - Hedgerows and Trees outside woodlands.
 - Ecological, social, economic and cultural impact of tree pests and diseases.
- There will be another round of funding specifically for knowledge exchange.

16. Summary of Key Points raised in discussion:

- There could be a lack of research skills in the commercial and timber sector, or the call didn't reach those that could do research in the area.
- Could the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) be encouraged to talk to Innovate UK to get the near to market element?

Item 7: Tree planting application and design process to determine the right place for tree planting

17. AR presented on the offers associated with getting the right tree in the right place. The following points were raised:

- Forestry Commission uses the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) when dealing with applications, and they are the regulators for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (Forestry) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999.
- Applicants need to show how to avoid negative impacts, mitigate for them or provide compensation.
- Applicants can either apply for an EIA opinion or for grant aid.
- Applicants will need to do a check of historical environmental records for the land.
- Applicants will need to do go through statutory consultation and notification, including a review by NE's Tree Action Plan delivery team.
- There is a clear process for successful applicants to follow to create a design plan with stakeholder input.
- Some issues for applicants include around uncertainty, design agreement timescales and unwillingness for stated compromises.
- Issues for FC are around proportionality of the procedure for straightforward sites, whether the data sourced is fit for purpose, duplication of stakeholder engagement, and risk appetite too low.

18. Summary of Key Points raised in discussion:

- Work is underway to analyse the impact of breeding waders on applications, so a further update can be provided when that impact is understood more.
- In 2017 some work was carried out on the EIA regulations, using national spatial data sets, to move towards a presumption to plant in low-risk areas. This hasn't gone to the next step of being more proactive engaging with those identified.
- There's a need for greater clarity on what's not suitable, and to be proactive on the areas that are.

- There's a need for guidance that allows the landowner to benefit from the land and allow schemes with low environmental risks to go ahead.
- With the change in Ministers and one of the key priorities being food, it would be good to encourage food and fibre security benefits.

Item 8: AOB

19. There is appetite from the group for an extended TAW-SAG meeting, with workshop, face to face in 2023.

Trees and Forestry, Strategy Engagement and Analysis Team October 2022

Date of document (day month year or month year)