



Trees and Woodland Scientific Advisory Group (TAW-SAG)

Meeting 27 Minutes: 14th May 2025, 10:00 – 12:00

Attendees:

- **Rob MacKenzie** (RMK) - [Chair], School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences University of Birmingham; Birmingham Institute of Forest Research.
- **Richard Buggs** (RB) - [Observer], Kew Gardens, Plant Health Group.
- **Keith Kirby** (KK) - Department of Biology, University of Oxford.
- **Mike Morecroft** (MM) - [Observer], Principal specialist on climate change, Natural England and Visiting Professor, University of Reading.
- **Ruth Mitchell** (RM) - Biodiversity and Ecosystems Group, Ecological Sciences Department, James Hutton Institute.
- **Stephen Cavers** (SC) - Ecology Evolution and Environmental Change - Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.
- **Maggie Roe** (MR) - Landscape Planning Research & Policy Engagement, University of Newcastle
- **Martin Lucak** (ML) – Professor of Ecosystem Science, University of Reading
- **John Healey** (JH) – Professor of Forest Science, Bangor University
- **Ian Bateman** (IB) - Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute. University of Exeter
- **Dan Doherty** (DD) - Head of Trees, Woodlands and Forestry Policy, Defra.
- **Iain Dummett** (ID) - Evidence and Analysis Team Leader for Trees/ Forestry, Defra.
- **Rhiannon Leyden-Preece** (RLP) - Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/Forestry, Defra.
- **Chris McGurk** (CM) - Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/Forestry, Defra.
- **Tamsin Lockwood** (TM) - Evidence and Analysis Fellow for Trees/Forestry, Defra.
- **Alex Elsy** (AE) - Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/Forestry, Defra.
- **Richard Bridge** (RBr) – Monitoring and Evaluation lead for Trees/Forestry, Defra – attended for Items 1-4
- **Joshua Price** (JP) – Programme Management Office, Trees/Forestry, Defra – attended for Item 6 only
- **Rebecca Royal** (RR) – Programme Management Office, Trees/Forestry, Defra – attended for Item 6 only

Apologies:

- **Daisy Ellis** (DE) - Head of Strategy, Engagement and Analysis, Defra.
- **Paul Burgess** (PB) - Ecology and Management, Cranfield Soil and Agri-food Institute Cranfield University.
- **FR Chief Scientist** – Role temporarily vacant
- **Julie Urquhart** (JU) - Environmental Social Science, University of Gloucestershire.

Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1. RMK explained that Bianca Ambrose-Oji (BAO) will be joining TaW-SAG as an observer from the next meeting, replacing Chris Quine as the Forest Research Chief Scientist
2. RMK explained that Defra have announced the new Chief Scientific Advisor: Professor Anjali Goswami. RMK recognised the contribution of the current Defra Chief Scientific Advisor and extended an offer of engagement to the new Chief Scientific Advisor, via Defra
3. RMK thanked SB for all her work supporting TaW-SAG
4. RMK welcomed Tamsin Lockwood, a new Defra Forestry Fellow to TaW-SAG
5. RMK remarked that it has been good to PB talking about Agroforestry in the media

Item 2: Review Minutes From Previous Meeting

6. The minutes from the last meeting were agreed and the actions were reviewed:

Item 3: Updates from Defra

7. RMK thanked RM for attending the last programme board on behalf of TaWSAG
8. DD gave an overview of the progress of spending review
9. DD gave an overview of the Secretary of State's cross-Defra priorities and implications for Forestry.
10. TaWSAG discussed the implications of prioritising different outcomes within the Forestry programme

Action 1: DD to bring to TaW-SAG the work underlying Defra's estimations of the benefits expected from the Forestry programme from 26/27 onwards

Action 2: RBr to share the Liverpool John Moores University analysis of the benefits resulting from tree planting to date

Item 4: Value for Money Evaluation

11. RB summarised the independent evaluation of the value for money delivered via the England Woodland Creation Offer and the Woodland Creation Partnerships.
12. TaW-SAG welcomed Defra sharing the report, recognising it as good quality and discussing potential future developments
13. TaW-SAG recognised that this evaluation, and evidence presented at the last TaW-SAG meeting regarding user experience of woodland creation schemes, made clear the value of support for applicants and the quality of service applicants experience

Item 5: Woodland Management actions and links to biodiversity and governmental priorities

14. AE gave a summary of his report regarding woodland management actions and links to biodiversity and governmental priorities
15. TaW-SAG recognised the report as being high quality and suggesting that it would be good if the approach the report took could be extended beyond Forestry, across Defra.
16. TaW-SAG highlighted that, in some scenarios, an active decision to pursue low/no intervention can be positive and that the language in the review should reflect this.
17. TaW-SAG members discussed potential future extensions of this work and suggested that AE may want to attempt to publish the report in an academic journal.

Action3: TaWSAG members to send feedback on the woodland management and biodiversity review to AE and RLP, by email by 20/7/2025

Item 6: Business Case development support

- 18. ID introduced the paper which outlines potential implications of prioritising biodiversity and water benefits, for the Forestry programme.
- 19. Regarding natural colonisation, the group flagged that Defra need to be clear that natural colonisation does not include non-native species, that natural colonisation will not be appropriate in all situations and needs to be implemented in the right places only. The Group would welcome more prioritisation of natural colonisation but warned Defra about taking a purist approach to natural colonisation.
- 20. TaW-SAG raised the need to think about utilisation/overutilisation of water resources.
- 21. Regarding coppice – TaW-SAG explained that biodiversity outcomes would be best achieved via management of woodlands, rather than creation of new coppice areas.

Item 8: Overview of R&D projects

- 22. RLP shared the list of R&D projects that the Forestry team will be funding in 25/26 and asked TaW-SAG members to 1) flag any relevant work they are aware of and 2) to let her know if they would like to sit on the steering groups for any of the projects

Action 4: TaWSAG members to flag any work relevant to the procured R&D projects

Action 5: TaWSAG members to email RLP and ID where they would like to join the steering group for an R&D project.

Item 9: AOB

- 23. TaW-SAG thanked Defra for sharing the paper regarding the impact of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on stakeholder experiences of woodland creation. TaW-SAG invited Defra to present a paper regarding the EIA more broadly

Action 6: Defra to bring an item to TaW-SAG regarding the EIA regulation in the context of the outcomes the forestry programme or to explain why this is not possible (e.g. not enough resource)