

Trees and Woodland Scientific Advisory Group (TAW-SAG)

Meeting 28 Minutes: 23rd July 2025 10:00 -11:30

Attendees

- **Ruth Mitchell** (RM) - Biodiversity and Ecosystems Group, Ecological Sciences Department, James Hutton Institute.
- **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.
- **Maggie Roe** (MR) - Landscape Planning Research & Policy Engagement, University of Newcastle.
- **Paul Burgess** (PB) - Sustainable Agriculture and Agroforestry, Cranfield Soil and Agrifood Institute, Cranfield University.
- **John Healey** (JH) – Professor of Forest Science, Bangor University.
- **Ian Bateman** (IB) - Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute. University of Exeter.
- **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.
- **Alex Elsy** (AE) - Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/ Forestry, Defra.
- **Hugh Loxton** (HL) - Policy Team for Trees/Forestry, Defra.
- **George Wibberley** (GW) – Economics Team Leader for Trees/ Forestry, Defra.
- **Stephen Nelson** (SN) - Senior Economic Adviser for Land Use, Defra.

Apologies

- **Rob MacKenzie** (RMK) - School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences University of Birmingham; Birmingham Institute of Forest Research.
- **Bianca Ambros-Oji** (BAO) - Chief Scientist, Forest Research.
- **Stephen Cavers** (SC) - Ecology Evolution and Environmental Change - Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.
- **Julie Urquhart** (JU) - Environmental Social Science, University of Gloucestershire.
- **Martin Lucak** (ML) – Professor of Ecosystem Science, University of Reading.
- **Daisy Ellis** (DE) - Head of Strategy, Engagement and Analysis, Defra.
- **Dan Doherty** (DD) - Head of Trees, Woodlands and Forestry Policy, Defra.
- **Tamsin Lockwood** (TM) - Evidence and Analysis Fellow for Trees/Forestry, Defra.

Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1. RM welcomed attendees to the meeting
2. RM informed the group that KK has been appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to ecology, forestry and woodland management. The group congratulated KK on this well-deserved achievement.

Item 2: Review Minutes From Previous Meeting

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

Item 3: Updates from Defra

4. ID gave a short update on Defra priorities, as DD and DE were unable to attend the meeting.

Item 4: Tree Target Benefits Modelling Paper

5. GW presented the current approach to modelling benefits from tree planting for the statutory tree target. The group broadly agreed that the high-level modelling was appropriate for current use.
6. TaWSAG recognised the limitations of the analysis for spatial prioritisation or other targeting applications. Whilst TaWSAG endorsed the use of average values as appropriate for the current uses of the modelling work, it was recognised that this approach could not support site-level targeting.
7. TaWSAG encouraged the Defra Forestry team to ensure integration with ongoing Defra Farming and Countryside Programme (FCP) work.
8. TaWSAG recognised the analysis as being conservative with the risk that it may underestimate benefits from trees.

Action 1: TAW-SAG members to email comments on the modelling paper directly to GW.

Action 2: GW to integrate feedback and explore whether outputs from Liverpool John Moores University can improve modelling precision.

Item 5: Water-Related Tree Benefits – Scoping Review (presented by CM on behalf of TL)

9. CM introduced TL's work to scope evidence on how tree planting influences water outcomes. The group welcomed the focus but suggested further clarity on aims and approach (literature vs. empirical data vs. knowledge mapping).
10. TaWSAG noted the importance of linking to ongoing work including work supporting Defra's Farming and Countryside Programme.
11. TaWSAG recommended that carrying out analysis to support spatial prioritisation of woodland creation with respect to water benefits was too big a challenge for a Fellowship role and approved of the proposal for TL to act as a bridge between the wide range of ongoing research work and Defra policy, particularly regarding evidence gaps and horizon scanning.

Item 6: Tree Cover Target Adjustment

- 12. ID and GW confirmed that the Defra trees team has passed on the support of TaW-SAG in the advice to ministers.
- 13. GW updated on ongoing work to boost private finance for woodland creation, including engagement with the Emissions Trading Scheme team in DESNZ.

Item 7: AOB

- 14. None.