

Trees and Woodland Scientific Advisory Group (TAW-SAG)

Meeting 29 Minutes: 24th September 2025 10:00 -12:00

Attendees

- **Ruth Mitchell** (RM) - [Chair] Biodiversity and Ecosystems Group, Ecological Sciences Department, James Hutton Institute.
- **Keith Kirby** (KK) - Department of Biology, University of Oxford.
- **Paul Burgess** (PB) - Sustainable Agriculture and Agroforestry, Cranfield Soil and Agrifood Institute, Cranfield University.
- **John Healey** (JH) – Professor of Forest Science, Bangor University.
- **Stephen Cavers** (SC) - Ecology Evolution and Environmental Change - Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.
- **Martin Lukac** (ML) – Professor of Ecosystem Science, University of Reading.
- **Anjali Goswami** – Defra Chief Scientific Advisor
- **Bianca Ambros-Oji** (BAO) - [Observer], Chief Scientist, Forest Research.
- **Mike Morecroft** (MM) - [Observer], Principal specialist on climate change, Natural England and Visiting Professor, University of Reading.
- **Daisy Ellis** (DE) - Head of Strategy, Engagement and Analysis, 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.
- **Alex Elsy** (AE) - Evidence and Analysis Team for Trees/ Forestry, Defra.
- **Julia Raybould** (JR) - Green Finance Policy Lead for Trees/ Forestry, Defra.
- **Ben Entwistle** (BE) - Economics Team for Trees/ Forestry, Defra.
- **Richard Bridge** (RBr) - Monitoring and Evaluation lead for Trees/Forestry, Defra
- **Lucy Faber** (LF) - Monitoring and Evaluation team for Trees/Forestry, Defra

Apologies

- **Rob MacKenzie** (RMK) - School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences University of Birmingham; Birmingham Institute of Forest Research.
- **Richard Buggs** (RB) - [Observer], Kew Gardens, Plant Health Group.
- **Julie Urquhart** (JU) - Environmental Social Science, University of Gloucestershire.
- **Maggie Roe** (MR) - Landscape Planning Research & Policy Engagement, Newcastle University.

- **Ian Bateman** (IB) - Director of the Land, Environment, Economics and Policy Institute. University of Exeter.

Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1. RM welcomed attendees, introducing Professor Anjali Goswami (AG) (new Defra Chief Scientific Adviser, evolutionary biologist) and Bianca Ambrose-Oji (BAO) (new Chief Scientist at FR, environmental sociologist).
2. AG emphasised Defra's broad, not always joined-up programme portfolio; her focus will be on integration and making Defra work more like an ecosystem, balancing net zero and biodiversity.
3. BAO succeeds Chris Quine, will lead on FR's strategic science direction, and highlighted opportunities offered by AI.

Item 2: Review Minutes From Previous Meeting

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

Item 3: Updates from Defra

DE reported that the Spending Review update has been replaced with a Business Case update to reflect current priorities.

The new Secretary of State is in place but parliament in recess. Water outcomes remain a high priority.

The Business Case is progressing at pace. It will be submitted to Programme Board after this meeting. RM to attend on behalf of TaWSAG. There was no Programme Board in August. Lessons from NCF1 being applied to NCF2 with a portfolio approach.

Action 1: Defra to share the business case with TaWSAG

Action 2: Defra to share new forestry team structure when available.

Item 4: Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund

5. JR introduced the Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund (WCPF), setting out identified market failures.
6. TaWSAG broadly welcomed the paper as a positive development and discussed the challenges of delivering a successful WCPF, the potential contributions of a WCPF, and the challenges which would still remain for Defra to meet its woodland creation targets.
7. TaWSAG members explained that the current small average hectareage of woodland creation schemes were not reflective of barriers to large woodland creation schemes, rather than an a lack of demand and that this fund should help alleviate some of these barriers.
8. TaWSAG encouraged Defra to engage with commercial forestry throughout development of the WCPF
9. TaWSAG asked how such a fund would compare to land purchase by government with Defra explaining that land purchase will still be pursued within the programme and that

through the WCPF it is hoped to build confidence in the Woodland Carbon Code market, delivering broader benefits.

10. TaWSAG asked how the scheme will deal with a scenario in which all Woodland Carbon Credits are not realised for a site and asked if WCPF purchased Pending Issuance Units would have precedence over land-owner-held PIUs?
11. Outstanding barriers to woodland creation were identified as additionality and permanence requirements. Permanence requirements were cited by Defra as a reason that Agroforestry would likely not be eligible for the WCPF.

Action 3: Defra to provide TaWSAG with extended notes of this discussion.

Action 4: JR to bring WCPF market testing plan to TaWSAG once developed.

Item 5: Programme Evaluation Stage 3

12. RBr reported: Stages 1–2 of the Programme Evaluation are now complete; a new supplier is now engaged for Stage 3
13. Evaluation Stage 3 will adopt value-for-money focus, including deep dives into fraud.
14. Evidence gaps remain, particularly survival/mortality rates and provenance data.
15. TaWSAG urged the collection of detailed survival data (species, provenance, nursery conditions, planting methods).

Action 5: Defra to share slides from programme evaluation with TaWSAG

Action 6: Defra to circulate evidence synthesis once ready.

Item 6: R&D Procurement Update

16. AE outlined six upcoming research area workshops; due to potential conflicts of interest with some members of TaWSAG this was an information only paper.

Action 7: AE to provide further detail on the ongoing R&D procurement at next TaWSAG meeting.

Item 7: AOB

17. Next meeting confirmed for 26 November 2025.
18. The success of 'Creating Canopies' meeting was noted and it was reported that the Agroforestry Show had a good turnout. In November there is an upcoming Defra/Future of UK Trees conference: Britain's Forest Future in Durham,