

Woodland Carbon Code executive board minutes

Wednesday 29 January 2025 via Microsoft Teams

Present: Pat Snowdon, Vicky West, Andy Baker, Leon DeBell, Jonathan Speed, Susan Szymborski-Welsh (Scottish Forestry), Fiona Hay (Welsh Government), Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission)

Apologies: Ben Searle (Northern Ireland Forest Service), Jamie Smith (Scottish Forestry)

Outstanding actions

Outstanding actions from the previous executive board meeting are carried over to March 2025:

Action 1: Vicky to produce a paper on changes to the way the Woodland Carbon Code represents sales of pending issuance units, setting out the proposal and rationale in more detail (by correspondence or next meeting).

Update: Ongoing. Vicky has a meeting to discuss this with S&P Global.

Action 2: Pat to check how public sector schemes are managed under the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market's assessment framework.

Update: Ongoing. Pat has contacted the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market and is awaiting more detail.

Action 3: Vicky to contact the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero for guidance on allowing Woodland Carbon Code units to be used to compensate for international flights.

Update: Ongoing. Vicky has emailed but has not received a definitive answer. She will follow up with the department.

Action 4: The Woodland Water Code team to provide an update for the Nature Markets Strategy Board in December.

Update: This will be carried over to the next Nature Markets Strategy Board meeting.

1. Buyer-seller contracts project

Jonathan Speed provided an update on the project to develop template agreements for buying and selling units from Peatland and Woodland Carbon Code projects. The templates will help buyers and sellers understand the risks and liabilities they should consider.

Jonathan explained that 48 organisations have now engaged in the project, helping to shape and provide feedback on the templates. This includes project developers, consultancies, legal and asset investment teams as well as buyers and insurance brokers.

The project team will review the feedback and make any changes, before publishing the final templates on the Peatland Code and Woodland Carbon Code websites in March.

Fiona asked if the team had engaged with the NFU. Jonathan confirmed he had and that he had also spoken with the Country Land and Business Association.

Jonathan also spoke about other legal areas he has been looking at, including crofting and the Woodland Carbon Code's buffer. Mark suggested the Tenant Farmers Association and Evaluation for Agricultural Valuers would be interested in discussions on crofting.

Action 5: Jonathan to set out any remaining legal issues as a handover paper to the executive board in March.

2. Drone-based pilot survey

Leon outlined proposals for a methodology to conduct monitoring for year five verifications using drone imagery. He is developing plans to trial the approach in the summer.

If the methodology is effective, it would accelerate the use of remote sensing technologies to improve the efficiency, health and safety, consistency and integrity of the monitoring and verification process.

Mark asked if the proposals had been discussed with the certification bodies, what the timescale of the project is and if there are plans to develop the use of technology for later verification stages.

Leon confirmed the team has spoken with UKAS and the validation and verification bodies. He also confirmed that he is involved in looking at other options for later verification stages which require different approaches.

Action 6: Pat to arrange for Leon's work to be shared at a Nature Markets Strategy Board meeting.

3. UK Land Carbon Registry retender

Vicky provided an update on the project to retender for a registry provider. She outlined the timescales, steps, risks and requirements for moving to a new provider. The tender will open for submissions in February and the team hopes to agree a contract by summer 2025.

Pat thanked Vicky and Tom Gower for their work on the project, stating the registry service is a fundamental to the delivery of the code.

Action 7: Board members are invited to provide feedback to Vicky on the registry requirements by Monday 17 February.

4. Buying and validating registered projects

Andrew presented a paper which examines whether a change is needed to the current rule that validation can only be completed by the landowner/tenant who planted the woodland, rather than subsequent owners/tenants.

Members agreed to remove the rule and inform stakeholders of the change through a clarification.

Mark suggested it would be useful to develop a transfer form and checklist so landowners/ tenants know what documents they need to provide to new owners/tenants.

Action 8: Andy to speak to Jamie about how similar transfer forms work for the Forestry Grant Scheme and see whether it would be beneficial to create one for the code.

5. Additionality consultation

Pat explained that the consultation on the additionality test which projects need to pass to be eligible for the code has now closed. There were over 40 responses and the team is analysing the data and considering next steps. This includes plans to share a high level report about the consultation responses and to set up a workshop to explore potential changes with members of the codes' boards.

Action: Pat to propose dates for a workshop to explore changes to the additionality test.

Mark asked when any changes might come into effect. Pat explained that this would depend on the number and size of changes and the team will need to undertake scenario testing for each option. Vicky highlighted the importance of updating respondents as soon as possible on the outcome of the consultation.

Action 9: Pat to contact EY to confirm sharing the summary of consultation responses.

6. Updates

Risk register

Vicky led a discussion about the code's risk register. She explained there have been cases when landowners have bought land which has been registered with the code without fully completing the landowner commitment statement.

Jonathan offered to help explore this issue and consider how we can better share information between outgoing and incoming owners.

The group discussed that making the Woodland Carbon Code mapping dataset available to forestry authority teams will help to inform decisions on felling requests. It will also help to inform people who are considering buying woodlands whether the site is validated by the code.

UK Emissions Trading Scheme

Pat provided an update about work to explore whether greenhouse gas removals should be integrated into the UK Emissions Trading Scheme. The UK ETS Authority has run a consultation and is expected to make a decision later this year.

Fiona asked if the UK Emission Trading Scheme might be harmonised with the EU scheme. Pat responded that this is something the authority are considering.

ICROA and ICVCM accreditation

Andy explained that the International Carbon Reduction and Offset Alliance (ICROA) are asking standards to renew their accreditation every three years. The Woodland Carbon Code is due for reassessment later this year.

He provided an update on work to prepare to apply for the code to be assessed by the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market and whether this should be done at the same time or after the application to ICROA. He outlined a range of options for when to apply and how this may impact on plans to update the code.

Community Inclusion Standard

Vicky spoke about a Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland (FIRNS) project to develop a community inclusion standard. The project is being led by a number of organisations, including Deciding Matters, the Soil Association and Strathclyde University. Vicky has been working with the project group to provide feedback on behalf of the code.

Pat highlighted that this issue needs to be taken forward in conjunction with others in Scottish Forestry, notably the Forests for People team, given its wider policy implications.

Mark asked if the project team has engaged with any English organisations and suggested contacting Helen Townsend at Forestry Commission. Vicky explained the project has a Scottish focus, but that there has been some engagement with organisations in England.

Action 10: Vicky to suggest the Community Inclusion Standard team contacts Helen Townsend at Forestry Commission.

Small woodlands

Vicky outlined plans to explore ways to make it easier for small projects to access the code and detailed a range of options. She presented data on the number and size of Woodland Carbon Code projects across each nation of the UK.

Pat asked if she could share details of the amount of carbon they remove too.

Action 11: Vicky will provide data on the amount of carbon small projects remove at the next executive board meeting.

7. Any other business

Mark asked about the biodiversity crediting project that has been run in recent months by IUCN with FIRNS funding. Vicky advised that a consultation on this was running until 17 February.

Andy consulted the board on a proposal on how to assess financial additionality for public sector organisations that cannot apply for grant support.

The group considered whether the proposal could be implemented as a clarification or as part of the next version of the code. Andy and Vicky will do more work on this.

The group agreed that Andy should update advisory board members on the proposal.

Action 12: Andy to discuss proposals for assessing financial additionality for public sector organisations at the next advisory board.