

Woodland Carbon Code Advisory Board minutes

Wednesday 25 February 2025 on Microsoft Teams

Present: Pat Snowdon, Andy Baker, Jamie Smith, Susan Szymborski-Welsh (Scottish Forestry), Fiona Hay (Welsh Government), Peter Coleman (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero), Robert South (Institute of Chartered Foresters), Lauren Dorricott (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - Defra), Andy Grundy (Soil Association), Kate Palmer (Confederation of Forest Industries - Confor), Renée Kerkvliet-Hermans (IUCN - Peatland Code), Craig Mackenzie (University of Edinburgh), Clara Guttman Belling (Cresco Capital Services), Nick Swinburn (Woodland Trust), Bruce Kennedy (Boston Consulting Group), Alex MacKinnon (Tilhill Forestry), Chris Waterfield (Forestry Commission), Steve Clarkson (Organic Farmers & Growers), Peter Wilson (Wilson Applied/ UK Woodland Assurance Standard), Ewan Mackie, Tom Nisbet, Robert Hattersley, Romany Vassell (Forest Research).

Apologies: Breandan Mulholland (Northern Ireland Forest Service), Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission), Nick Blyth (Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals), Vicky West (Scottish Forestry), Areeb Arshad (ACT), Natalia Dorfman (Kita Earth), Matthew Doran (Country Land and Business Association).

1. Welcome and congratulations

Andy Baker welcomed Tom Nisbet, Robert Hattersley and Romany Vassell from Forest Research who joined the meeting to provide an update on the woodland water code.

Andy Baker congratulated board members Alex MacKinnon and Vicky West for being shortlisted in the net zero innovation category of the Confor awards.

2. Conflict of interest

No members declared a conflict of interest.

3. Outstanding actions

Andy Baker provided updates to outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

Action 1: Andy Baker to follow up with Natalia on data support.

Update: Ongoing. Natalia has been in touch with Andy. Andy will contact Natalia to arrange a discussion.

Action 2: Members to continue to discuss ways to reduce the cost around validation and verification.

Update: Ongoing. Andy Grundy and Steve Clarkson explained the UKAS process is set up for large international schemes so includes a disproportionate level of checks for the code. The group agreed it would be helpful to meet with UKAS to discuss this issue.

4. Updates

Statistics

Andy Baker shared statistics about the Woodland Carbon Code.

- Almost 4,000 hectares were validated to the code from 1 April to 30 September 2025
- Over 1,400 hectares were verified to the code from 1 April to 30 September 2025

This represents a sizable increase from last year's figures.

Andy was unable to share statistics from the last quarter due to issues with the UK Land Carbon Registry, but reported that there has been a surge in registrations in the first two months of 2026.

ICROA

The International Carbon Reduction and Offset Alliance (ICROA) announced it will be closing next year. The Woodland Carbon Code's ICROA endorsement will remain in place until late 2026.

ICVCM

The Woodland Carbon Code team submitted an application to be assessed by the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market last year. The application has passed the 'completeness checks' (the first government-backed standard to do so) and will now proceed to the full assessment stage.

Robert South asked about the long term future of ICVCM. Bruce Kennedy highlighted ICVCM's strong connections across the market and that buyers look for ICVCM accreditation to inform their purchases.

UK Land Carbon Registry

Andy Baker provided an update on the UK Land Carbon Registry. S&P Global moved the registry to a new platform in August. The Woodland Carbon Code team is working with S&P Global to log and address outstanding issues and ensure good communication with users.

Alex MacKinnon noted that there has been a marked improvement with the registry but that there are still some minor issues to resolve.

Website user feedback

Susan Szymborski-Welsh highlighted work to gather user feedback on the code's new website through a survey and user interviews.

She encouraged advisory board members to complete the survey by 6 March and share the link with colleagues. The feedback will help to inform future development of the site.

Robert South reported that he finds the new website easier to use.

Clarification 1 to version 3.0

Andy Baker provided an update on the release of clarification 1 to version 3.0.

The clarification came into effect on Thursday 29 January and covers aspects including documents needed at registration, accounting for grant uplifts and combining nutrient neutrality and carbon projects in England.

Nick Swinburn explained that his team had to resubmit a project design document in the new version following the clarification. He suggested it would be helpful to have more flexibility when there are minor changes in document versions.

Andy agreed this is something the Woodland Carbon Code team can consider for future updates.

5. Woodland water code

Robert Hattersley, Tom Nisbet and Romany Vassell shared an update on the development of the Woodland Water Code. The code is being created by a consortium led by Forest Research and funded through Defra's Forestry Research and Development Programme.

The first phase of the project focused on designing the code, including developing benefit calculators and mapping areas where new woodland would deliver the greatest water benefits.

The current phase is centred on refining the metrics and methodologies. The team has carried out trials at 18 sites across the UK. If additional funding is secured, the next stage will examine how the woodland water code could be implemented and operated in practice.

Clara Guttman Belling asked if existing woodlands would be eligible for the Woodland Water Code and how additionality would work in this case. Tom Nisbet explained that the programme would only apply to new woodlands. The group discussed the value of encouraging owners to manage their existing woodlands better and whether buyers would pay for this.

The group discussed the options to either stack or bundle water units with Woodland Carbon Code units and stressed the need for simplicity.

Nick Swinburn raised the topic of economics, asking what the value of a unit would need to be to cover the costs of developing them and if the programme would only be viable for larger projects. Robert explained that the team had completed some market research in an earlier phase of the project and that they are keen to do more financial research. Andy Baker added the break-even point will likely vary by country depending on grant arrangements.

Action 3: Pat to highlight key issues about the Woodland Water Code project with the Woodland Nature Markets Strategy Board.

6. Biodiversity project

Renée provided an update on the project to develop standardised biodiversity metrics and financial tools for the Woodland Carbon and Peatland Codes.

The first phase explored how biodiversity uplift could be measured, validated and monetised within the UK's evolving nature markets.

The current phase is exploring whether a similarity index could help to measure biodiversity uplift. This would involve measuring the similarity between a project's baseline and a reference site. The team is working to aggregate biodiversity data from reference sites across the UK and will also look at financial modelling.

The team will deliver a webinar and publish an update before the current phase comes to an end on 31 March.

7. Project developer forum and case studies

Susan gave an update on the first project developer forum meeting. Topics included validation and verification timelines and the Pending Issuance Unit market. There were almost 50 attendees and 90% of respondents rated the session as helpful or very helpful. The next meeting will take place in April.

Susan also described work to update and gather case studies from project developers and carbon buyers.

8. Policy updates from countries

Scotland

Jamie Smith reported that Scottish Forestry has extended the deadline for the 2025 Forestry Grant Scheme capital claims to 15 May. There has also been an increase in grant funding to support farmers and crofters.

Pat highlighted that Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan is progressing through parliament and should be published in March.

Wales

Fiona Hay highlighted that the Welsh Government has announced an increase to grant rates to support woodland creation. It will also be launching its first national trial in March.

England

Chris Waterfield and Lauren Dorricott reported there were no significant updates. Lauren offered to provide an update on the Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund at the next meeting.

Action 4: The Woodland Carbon Code team to invite Lauren to present on the Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund at the next meeting.

Northern Ireland

Breandan Mulholland was unable to attend.

8. Any other business

Alex MacKinnon asked if there would be an opportunity to arrange an in-person meeting for project developers and validation and verification bodies. Andy Grundy agreed it would be useful to get different stakeholders together.

Action 5: The Woodland Carbon Code team to explore the possibility of setting up an in-person meeting.

Robert South highlighted a government report on global biodiversity loss and suggested this could be helpful to request for funding support.

Clara Guttman Belling suggested it would be helpful to have clarity on frameworks like SBTi perhaps by developing a research paper.

Action 6: Clara and Pat to meet to discuss developing a paper on carbon market integrity frameworks.

Andy Grundy shared feedback that some buyers don't understand how carbon units can be used. Susan agreed and shared plans to work collaboratively to share consistent messaging on the code.