

Methodology Review: Woodland Carbon Code Statistics

Introduction

The methodology and outputs relevant to a particular topic are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

A more formal process was introduced in 2012, with one topic to be covered each year. The topics to be covered are: wood production, imports and exports, woodland area, timber prices, environment and climate change, recreation, and FC administrative data. One topic is reviewed every year on a rotating basis. In 2015 as part of environment and climate change, Woodland Carbon Code statistics were reviewed, and the findings are summarised here.

There is a parallel process for methodology and output reviews.

More in-depth reviews, to address specific issues, are undertaken on an ad hoc basis.

The Woodland Carbon Code was initiated in July 2011 and is the voluntary standard for UK woodland creation projects where claims are made about the carbon dioxide they sequester (take out the atmosphere). All projects must be placed on the register of UK Woodland Carbon Projects. An independent certification body validates the claims about potential carbon sequestration of all projects. Validated projects are then verified on a regular basis to confirm the progress of their carbon sequestration. This process provides assurance and clarity about the carbon savings of these sustainably managed woodlands.

Statistics on the Woodland Carbon Code

Statistics on the Woodland Carbon Code are compiled by the Forestry Commission. Woodland Carbon Code statistics include; the number of projects validated and awaiting validation under the Woodland Carbon Code, by country; the area of woodland covered by these projects; and the projected carbon sequestration from these projects over their lifetime. These statistics are used to inform government (central and devolved), woodland owners, carbon investors, non-profit organisations and the general public. The statistics are used to monitor the uptake of this relatively new voluntary standard. The uptake of the Woodland Carbon Code scheme is monitored by Forestry Commission England as part of their Performance Impact Indicators. DEFRA, FC Scotland and the Welsh Government also make use of the statistics. The uptake of the Woodland Carbon

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Code scheme is also monitored by woodland owners (to decide whether to join the scheme), carbon investors (to decide whether to invest in the scheme) and the owners of other carbon schemes (to benchmark their own schemes), and certification bodies (to predict volumes and decide whether to participate).

Woodland Carbon Code Statistics are released on a quarterly basis, in the month at the end of each quarter. Summary results for the period to end June are also published in September in Forestry Statistics. Figures for England are also reported on an annual basis in the Forestry Commission England Performance Indicators.

Methodology

The review was conducted using the Quality, Methods and Harmonisation Tool (QMHT), a self-assessment questionnaire developed by the Office for National Statistics and the Government Statistical Service:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/harmonisation/index.html

The questionnaire covers the entire statistical output production process and helps identify potential issues and suggest improvements. The following areas were examined in this review:

- Establishing user requirements (QMHT Section 3)
- Use of administrative data or data sourced from other organisations (QMHT Section 4)
- Regular analysis in the production of statistical outputs (QMHT Section 10)
- Regular or repeated statistics (time series) (QMHT Section 12)
- Dissemination (QMHT Section 15)

The Forestry Commission Climate Change Analyst was consulted as part of the review process. More information on forests and climate change and the Woodland Carbon Code can be found at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/climatechange>.

Conclusions

The review concluded that the output continues to be required and is fit for purpose.

No major issues arose in the review, but the following area for improvement was identified:

Analysis of statistical outputs (QMHT Section 10):

Additional documentation on the data analysis methods used in the production of the output should be published.

Action plan

The above point will be addressed by December 2016.

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January 2016