

Offsetting – its Role in the Roadmap to a Net Zero Carbon Scotland 2045

In response to requests from members of the Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN), a carbon offsetting workshop was held at the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation (ECCI) to provide a comprehensive overview for public bodies on the role of offsetting as part of their carbon management strategies. **Professor Dave Reay** chaired this interactive workshop and reminded delegates that carbon offsetting remains a ‘live’ discussion and has a role to play in addressing unavoidable emissions to meet Net Zero.

Dr Matthew Brander (University of Edinburgh Business School) explained the terminology around offsetting (e.g. that an offset occurs outside of the boundary of an organisation and can be either an emission reduction or a removal enhancement). Offsets are measured against a baseline, which is what would have happened in the absence of any intervention and must be additional to existing required action to reduce emissions. The importance of considering double counting and ‘additionality’ was discussed within the context of governments’ setting their own Net Zero targets. To reiterate; **offsets must be an additional reduction in emissions instead of helping the government reduce emissions, as this should be happening already.**

Key points from the discussion that followed covered the issues of:

- choosing between international and national offsetting schemes:
- guidance needed from Scottish Government on residual emissions; and
- the advantage that some organisations have of owning land for carbon sequestration opportunities.

Although international offset schemes tend to be cheaper than UK schemes (e.g. the Woodland Carbon Code and the Peatland Code only offset UK based emissions), it is likely that Scottish Government advice would recommend public bodies to use national as opposed to international schemes. It was also noted that carbon sequestration options are finite and limited, especially as many industries are planning on using biomass for their activities and the growing global population will demand more space for agriculture. Therefore, it is essential that organisations do not become reliant on offsets, and instead maintain focus on reducing their operational emissions over time.

Clare Wharmby, (Innovation Manager, ECCI and Carbon Forecast Ltd), led the discussion on developing a Net Zero carbon management strategy for organisations. The importance of setting a strategy that drives the right kind of behaviour within an organisation and the right kind of investment was emphasised. While it was acknowledged that offsetting could have a role achieving Net Zero for residual and resistant emissions, strategy and action to reduce an organisation’s direct and indirect footprint should be the first priority, once the organisation’s boundary has been established. **It was strongly recommended that organisations wait for Scottish Government guidance on offsetting and not to rush into drawing up their own offsetting strategy.**

There was a real enthusiasm amongst workshop delegates for action on carbon emissions and a willingness to engage with the complexities of carbon accounting and offsetting. The public sector is ready to take on the challenges to develop a route map to meet Net Zero within their organisations and are keen to share good practice across the SSN and across sectors.

Next Steps

In advance of forthcoming Scottish Government guidance on offsetting, there are a number of suggested actions for organisations. These actions will help to ensure that offsetting takes its proper and proportionate place in the organisation's carbon management plan going forward.

These are:

- Continue to measure and monitor your organisation's corporate emissions ensuring that you are capturing at least Scope 1 & Scope 2 emissions;
- Explore opportunities to address Scope 3 emissions;
- Determine your reporting boundary (i.e. operational and/or organisational) as this determines which emissions you will report on;
- Establish a new baseline if required (e.g. your organisation has changed scope or remit or the initial boundary of emission sources was too narrow);
- Get familiar with what lies within your reporting boundary (e.g. potential biological sinks for carbon sequestration);
- Establish a GHG inventory for your organisation.

SSN will keep you updated on any guidance produced and are happy to assist with any further queries you may have relating to offsetting.

Key Resources

Event Slides

- SSN offsetting event [slide pack](#)

Resources

- [Carbon Offsetting Guide](#)
- Commission on Climate Change Report, [Land Use for Net Zero](#)
- The [Peatland Code](#)
- The [Woodland Code](#)
- [Forest Carbon](#) (based at ECCI)
- [GHG Protocol](#)
- [Tweed Forum Carbon Club](#)
- [Glossary of terms](#)

Project accounting standards:

<https://ghgprotocol.org/standards/project-protocol>

[PAS 2060:2014 Specification for the demonstration of carbon neutrality \(this is a document that has to be purchased, it is not freely available\)](#)

[ISO 14064-2:2006 Greenhouse gases — Part 2: Specification with guidance at the project level for quantification, monitoring and reporting of greenhouse gas emission reductions or removal enhancements \(this is a document that has to be purchased, it is not freely available\)](#)