



## Minutes of ICARB Community Groups Workshop

Wednesday 14th September 2011, University of Edinburgh

### Summary

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The following document provides minutes from the ICARB community groups workshop. The workshop discussed carbon accounting for community groups. Communities across Scotland are taking action on climate change, and their role is recognised as important if we are to achieve the targets set out in the Climate Change Act. The aim of the event was to raise and start to explore some of the challenges relating to carbon accounting and community groups. While there have been a number of events and programmes addressing the role of community groups in climate action, this event was the first to focus on challenges of carbon accounting per se and to explore developments needed in this area. Osbert Lancaster, of [Changemaking](#), led the workshop and is a consultant and facilitator for sustainability, a member of the Climate Challenge Fund Grants Panel, and lead author and editor of the [Low Carbon Route Maps](#).

The format of the event was three short presentations by way of setting the scene and raising provocative challenges – and opportunities – followed by facilitated discussion. The workshop was well attended, with participants from academia, the private sector and government. Attendees discussed the intended role of carbon accounting for community groups. Community engagement and communication, regional data collection and the management of carbon accounting throughout a project's lifetime were particularly noted as three areas to focus upon.

A copy of the agenda and presentations are available on the ICARB website: [www.icarb.org](http://www.icarb.org)

### Present

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Osbert Lancaster, *Changemaking*  
David Gunn, *Keep Scotland Beautiful*  
Matthew Brander, *Ecometrica*  
Alan Brown, *Transition Linlithgow*  
Suzy Goodsir, *SISTech @ Heriot-Watt*  
Ruth Gibson, *Transition Edinburgh South*  
Hannah Neufeld, *The Bike Station*  
Wendy Graham, *A Better to Work*  
Pam McLean, *Transition Stirling*  
Samuel Chapman, *Heriot-Watt*  
Andrew Faulk, *Consumer Focus Scotland*  
David Somervell, *University of Edinburgh*  
Adrian Shaw, *Church of Scotland*  
Alice Hamling, *Crichton Carbon Centre*  
Keith Baker, *Glasgow Caledonian University*

## Minutes

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### Welcome and Introduction

Osbert Lancaster welcomed everyone to the event and thanked the University of Edinburgh for the venue. The attendees introduced themselves and noted any particular interest of carbon accounting in community group projects or their own experience. Some comments were made such as the importance of coherence across sectors and also the need to formalise baselines and performance indicators within carbon accounting. Dr Keith Baker introduced ICARB.

### Presentation 1: David Gunn, Climate Challenge Fund (CCF), outlines the CCF's forthcoming new carbon accounting guidance

A copy of David Gunn's presentation is available from the ICARB website. Summary points are as follows:

- There is no one useable, accepted counting model for emissions at both a community level and strategic level. This is key to link community work to regional and national carbon accounting.
- There is a need to ensure that a balance is struck in carbon accounting of community group projects between usability, workload and accuracy.
- GHG (carbon associated) emissions should be monitored and support to communities should be present throughout the project's lifetime. Monitoring versus engagement is an importance balance to be struck.
- There is still uncertainty in data on GHG emissions associated with food consumption within community group projects.
- How useful is it to expect communities to account for their own carbon impact? There may always be a tendency through the reduction commitments to under-account.
- The issue of "carbon literacy" has been raised. Awareness and understanding over accounting is growing.
- The CCF has valuable lessons from project monitoring and they already have developed accounting guidance that would be particularly useful to further develop through ICARB's working groups.

### Questions

1. Is there a consistent protocol for groups in the challenge fund? This relates to whether there are penalties in poor accounting or not reducing their GHG emissions?
  - a. The scrutiny on a project comes from the CCF panel. Very often the panel look at applications for the fund and can see some areas of doubt in the carbon accounting but generally, the panel act favourably in that even if the reductions don't meet targets, some reduction is considered a good thing so there is judgement and discussion around each individual project.
2. Are there a range of conversion factors published for waste and what may be considered the most appropriate?
  - a. Zero-Waste Scotland publish good figures on this but they also align well with Defra/DECC figures. Consistency should be remembered when using factors throughout a project.



## Presentation 2: Matthew Brander, Ecometrica, presents the insights for community carbon accounting from their review of CCF projects

Good sources for emissions factors and secondary data are provided at the end of the presentation. Summary points are as follows:

- Quantifying emissions helps in project design, i.e. allows efforts to be focused where the biggest emission reductions can be achieved, and helps to identify (and then address) project activities which increase emissions.
- Getting feedback on actual savings achieved can motivate the community. It also provides information to funders on project impact. Emissions assessments could also feed into wider regional and national planning but as mentioned in previous talk, greater work is needed on developing models for these purposes.
- Baseline emissions – project emissions = emissions saving (Project saving)
  - Care must be taken when calculating a baseline since it is not always obvious what the baseline is.
  - Where possible it is better to use representative baseline activity data, and the relevant emission factor for the activity in question.
  - However, in some cases it may not be practical to collect data for a more accurate estimate and “emission saving factors” will be the best available option.
- Looking at the lifetime of an intervention is necessary to quantify the **total savings achieved**. It is important to know both annual and lifetime savings in order to make an informed decision over interventions.
- Balance between measurement and implementation must be reached. Weigh up the time required for better measurement and the value of increased accuracy. Sometimes better quality data doesn't take longer to collect. Mixing and matching primary and secondary data can help here.
- It was found by CCF that actually, data quality was affected by the questions asked by the assessor. This may suggest that careful planning may prevent excessive project times.
- Linking reported carbon savings from communities to regional or national carbon accounts. There is distinction between emission inventories (e.g. national inventories) and quantified reductions (e.g. for climate change mitigation planning).
- Many community project savings will be captured by other schemes, e.g. FIT, RHI, CERT or EST reporting – but lots will not. There is a possibility of double-counting. Some reductions will occur outside Scotland – so will reduce someone else's production-based national inventory emissions (but will reduce Scotland's consumption based inventory)
- Uncertainty about the stickiness/lifetime of behaviour change. We need good longitudinal studies on how long behaviour change lasts for – to estimate the carbon savings from behaviour change projects.

## Presentation 3: Alan Brown, Transition Linlithgow, suggests practical steps needed to increase the accuracy and impact of community carbon accounting.

Summary of presentation:

- We need to focus on what's worth measuring and do it really well. Decisions should be made on whether measuring is absolute, incremental or both.
- Decisions should be made on what to present to the public and what to remain “hidden” from those not engaged with carbon accounting. It will not always be beneficial to over-complicate assessment outcomes.

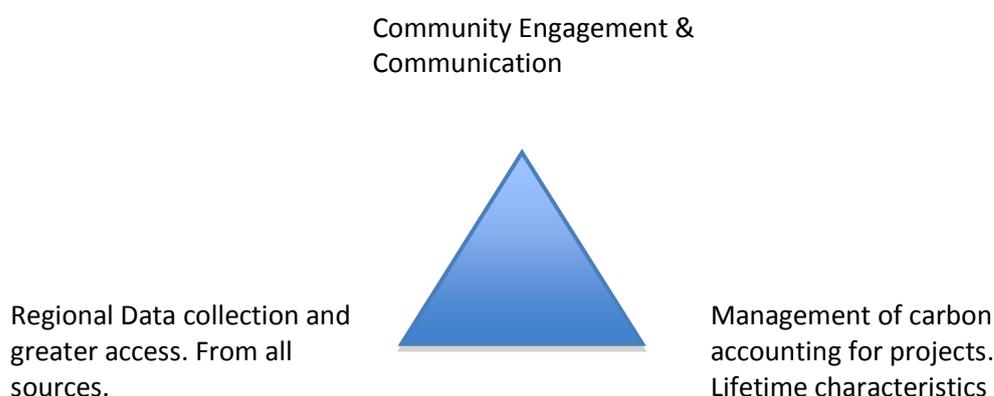


- We need to learn how to market our progress. We must avoid complex language and confusing/conflicting advice. This is a four-cornered triangle of Government, Business, Community and Individual.
- Feedback loops relating cause and effect are critical and still not well developed. Much uncertainty exists. Transparency is key in furthering this assessment.
- Use of national and regional data is useful and important but more data should be easily available to community groups and assessors on carbon associated data. Key datasets should be merged.
- Don't presume that a community understands the problem, the challenge or the opportunity. Language is key to conveying the message and currently, it is not doing so effectively. More thought should go into presentation, language, story-telling etc.

### Summary from facilitated discussion

The main focus moving forward should be the purpose of carbon assessments for a community group.

- Language is a major issue for community group projects. Carbon can be a turnoff if discussed in a purist manner, but environmental discussions and the benefits of using projects for education and community engagement in a broader sense. Other indicators drawn from carbon assessments should be presented. Discussing the change you want to happen rather than simply discussing what you count can improve communication.
- It is still difficult to specify a case study for community group projects. Two projects are difficult to compare. However, in terms of methodology, there should be scope to incorporate best practice advice into projects. CCF should aim to further highlight the impacts of reduction projects.
- A good deal more should be done on communication of progress and indicators of reduction progress. "Benefit-buy-in"
- Data gathering from communities should not be an intrusive exercise. Greater access and use of regional and national datasets must be achieved.



### Final Summary

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ICARB has a role to play specifically in a number of the summary points. These are:

- Connection of agendas should be continuously strived for. Sustainable development as a whole should be a better goal for communicating. Social and economic aspects must not be ignored.
- Language advice and indicator presentation



- Lobbying on data access at governmental level.
- Bringing together similar working groups to further the work done in CCF and similar and move forward with their methodology guidelines as a basis for formalising methods and indicators.

### **Further Information**

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These minutes, copies of the presentations, details of other ICARB events, and other useful information can be found on our website at: [www.icarb.org](http://www.icarb.org)

