

AFG Briefing Note

EWGS Grant Suite Update

Planning Grant

The planning grant guidance and template has been updated to ensure it meets the Category B, Woodfuel grant and 10 year felling approval requirements. An 'update module' has recently been published so existing approved management plans can include the extra sections and hence meet the requirements

Regeneration Grant

A summary of the value of WRG and other EWGS grants approved since April 2011 is in the table at the end of this paper

Creation Grant

Since we introduced simplified rules and more available Additional Contributions in Spring 2011, there has been healthy demand but we are still keen to encourage more applications. Anecdotally, feedback has been positive that the simplification of the grant and more relaxed approach to species choice has been beneficial to owners and met the adaptation agenda.

Whilst removal of a WCG application deadline is helpful in some ways, we are concerned that owners will delay applications until the last minute. This creates additional pressure on FC staff trying to approve applications to allow planting this season, and the risk that owners will not get approval in time to plant this season. We would be grateful if AFG members and their representative organisations could help encourage early applications from their members/clients through their own communication routes

Work has now started on how the 2012 WCG round will be run. This will include changes to reflect the FC structural changes and merger of some regions, plus a desire to simplify the WCG mechanism (scoring etc) further

Management Grant

Given our experience in recent years, we decided to introduce a 31st December 2011 deadline for WMG applications looking for first payment in October 2012. This reflects the 15th May application approval rules we had to introduce a couple of years ago to meet EU SPS timetable requirements. We feel setting the deadline is reasonable to ensure it can be approved by 15th May, and just a reminder that owners who struggle to meet the 31st Dec deadline can often get support for 2012 operations via WIG

Improvement Grant

Support for rhododendron clearance in plant health affected areas has been widened to more woodlands in the SW and to woodlands in the NW where phytophthora has now been found. The higher payment rates reflect the extra costs of clearance due to factors such as biosecurity measures, and hope expansion of the support will assist our disease management strategy

Woodfuel WIG

The development and launch of this new grant has occupied the majority of FC grant team time in recent months. The grant launched in September 2011, with all regions open for applications from the 1st October 2011. Regional and national staff have been trained on the new grant, and Woodland / Woodfuel Officers have been trained on forest road and track building

In summary, the grant supports work that will increase the production of wood from woodlands, particularly undermanaged woodlands or woodlands where operational access has been a limiting factor. Support is divided into:

- Timber fund – to support work such as inventory and harvesting contract management, machinery delivery costs. This work is based on standard costs
- Road fund – to build roads and other infrastructure such as timber transfer points to help ensure efficient harvesting. We expect the majority of funding to be spent on this work. The grant offer is based on the provision of 3 quotes for the work

It is an exciting grant because it has an economic focus in a bid to increase sustainable woodland management, help the rural economy and deliver our renewable energy targets

Whilst the contribution rate is 60% and hence lower than many biodiversity WIG funds we operate, a key difference is that the timber income derived from the harvesting operation is not factored into the grant offer. For example, a project that costs £10k with £6k grant support would require £4k investment by the woodland owner, but the subsequent harvesting operation may yield significantly more than £4k and so the costs to the owner are recovered

The guidance and forms are all on the [Woodfuel WIG webpage](#). Initially we produced a rather detailed cost calculator to try and assist the grant application / quote process but following advice, we have simplified the process a little. The work will be described in simpler terms, focussing on what the use of the road/track will be, with an expert (normally professional civil engineer) drawing up the road design details. The design work by the civil engineer can be included in the costs and hence will be supported through the grant. The change in calculator reflects feedback regarding excessive complexity and legal advice on CDM regulations

Another different aspect of the grant is that the application and claim process will be handled by 3rd party (Ngage) staff in SW, SE and NW region. They will effectively take on the processing role that FC staff would normally do, but will work closely with the Woodland Officer

A communications plan has been produced with Ngage to ensure promotion is coordinated and consistent. Initial effort will focus on existing FC customers i.e. those that we have live grant schemes/felling licences with, followed by efforts with previous customers, and then with woodland owners that we have not had previous contact with. The latter is a key target but we recognise will take more resource to approach and attract

Next steps are to run external events on Woodfuel WIG, including training on forest roads/tracks. Given the grant is new and a different process, we will be monitoring progress at the early stages and will modify it based on progress and feedback

Grant processes

WCG 2nd instalment

This autumn is the first year for payment of 2nd instalment WCG, for early EWGS cases planted in 2005/2006. Owners and agents should have received claim forms recently for cases that are due payment, which should be completed and returned. Payment will be made in the Autumn payment run, at the same time Farm Woodland payments are made

A key aspect of this process is that claimants should keep the FC informed whether they wish to claim the grant or not. In the past, the FC spent a lot of time chasing unreturned claims, not knowing why they hadn't been returned. For EWGS 2nd instalments, claimants should keep the FC informed even if they aren't claiming the grant. We hope this will avoid unnecessary time chasing nil responses, and would urge AFG members and their representative organisations to encourage the message that claimants should keep FC informed whether they intend to claim or not

Change of Ownership

We published revised Operations Note 14 to clarify the rules regarding change of ownership and the implications for grant payments and liability. The update is in light of recent legal guidance on Farm Woodland legacy scheme rules, and our desire to make the rules more consistent and clear. Where possible we have applied the same rules across all schemes but are bound by the rules of some, so the Operations Note has been divided into:

- Ops Note 14 = general guidance on grants and liability for all FC schemes, with a summary of key rules and differences between schemes
- Ops Notes 14a-14e = specific guidance for specific schemes e.g. 14a is for EWGS

Key points to note are:

- We have introduced a rule that if there are outstanding grant payments due to the seller, the seller must inform us of the land sale and claim the grant within 3 months of land sale
- If the buyer wishes to receive any remaining grant payments due under the original contract, they must apply using a successor form within 12 months of the land sale
- The buyer can enter into a totally new grant scheme with the FC, subject to the current grant eligibility, rules and funding availability
- The FC will use its EIA enforcement powers and associated cross compliance penalties, if the buyer removes trees or anything that compromises the original grant contract
- Grant liability rules for the seller/buyer vary from scheme to scheme

- We will continue to strongly recommend private liability agreements as part of the land sale, irrespective of the particular scheme rules, to ensure the seller passes his liabilities to the buyer

We appreciate that despite our best efforts, the legalities of land sale are complicated and it's important that owners understand what they are entering into from the start. We would encourage AFG members and their representative organisations to raise awareness of the key principles surrounding change of ownership and FC grant scheme implications

Grant Literature & Communications

Summary of Email Alerts since last meeting:

- 15th May – changes to Woodland Regeneration Grant
- 18th July – changes to WPG plan template to meet Category B and Woodfuel needs; Operations Note 22 update on category B; clarification of rules regarding change of ownership
- 9th September – Woodfuel WIG open for applications
- 15th September – reminder to submit Woodland Creation Grant applications; 2nd instalment WCG process starting
- 13th October – WMG application deadline 31st December; Moratorium on larch felling; grants for plant health affected woodlands; RLR and EWGS application requirements; Woodfuel WIG reminder

Literature / Website Update

Changes since the last AFG meeting:

- WPG guidance & form, plus the management plan template and guidance
- Woodfuel WIG guidance and forms
- Minor updates to the website, reducing the amount of text and simplifying language where possible
- Email alerts are in a more attractive style with relevant pictures

Future plans:

- We hope to significantly improve the look and feel of the G&R webpages over the coming months, building on previous work
- Much of the literature will need updating to reflect FC organisational changes
- EWGS 1 e.g. double funding rule clarification
- WMG guidance - to reflect application deadline rules and adherence to the SPS timetable
- EWGS summary - reflect recent and future changes e.g. WRG new rules/rates

Summary of EWGS approvals between 1st Apr 2011 and 31st October 2011, by value

Grant Value Region	Grant Type						Grand Total	Cumulative total for year	
	FWP	WAG	WCG	WIG	WMG	WPG			WRG
EE		1,420		337,924	13,643	8,072	19,051	380,110	1,440,098
EM	80,531		72,284	68,142		2,329	7,265	230,550	1,998,952
NE	6,975		55,330	23,200		10,636	48,785	144,926	622,003
NW	15,205		58,910	94,115	1,311	2,000	10,569	182,109	2,289,671
SE	9,064		10,764	50,612	14,681	8,089	32,242	125,451	2,754,645
SW	25,236	857	13,561	139,943	79,662	10,196	23,895	293,350	2,756,029
WM	10,404		31,546	82,640		4,000	1,248	129,838	902,603
Y&H	45,495		147,445	159,320		2,000	46,437	400,697	1,685,908
Grand Total	192,909	2,277	389,840	955,895	109,297	47,321	189,491	1,887,031	14,449,908