# Defining ‘Robust Environmental Schemes’ – private and public – for the WWF Basket Metric

## Call for Proposals to Appoint a Consultant or Consultancy Consortium

WWF-UK are interested in the criteria for defining the “Robust Environmental Schemes” used in the WWF Basket Metric within a UK context.

The goal is to enable retailers and food service businesses to measure and report the proportion of their UK sourced food stemming from supply chains/producers participating in “Robust Environmental Schemes”. Robust environmental schemes is the proxy in the WWF Basket Metric for the conservation of biodiversity and soil health in their food. This project will define what combinations of private and public schemes relating to food production are ‘environmentally robust’ and provide a tool for ongoing assessment of such schemes. By aggregating farm-level data on scheme participation through the supply chain, businesses will be able to set out the how much of the food they buy/sell robustly contributes to biodiversity and soil health goals. It will also contribute to the definition of environmental aspects of ‘better meat’.

The core of this consultancy will therefore be:

* To define “Robust Environmental Schemes”: the environmental outcomes that farm schemes need to specify and assure in order to be considered, wholly or in part, a “Robust Environmental Scheme”.
* To assess the degree to which existing agricultural certification and incentive schemes assure the delivery of environmental outcomes, especially for biodiversity and soil health, with reference to the Robust Environmental Scheme definition.
* To generate a tool demonstrating the assessment above for ongoing use, development and review.
* To set out the means for identification of the amount of food production that comes from farms meeting the definition of being in ‘Robust Environmental Schemes’, such that they themselves and/or food businesses can report this.
* To generate outputs tailored to the audiences relevant to the project.

## Summary of WWF’s proposed deliverables

We are open to and welcome consultants’ own well-justified proposals for achieving goals of the project with alternative but analogous outputs. WWF’s own view of the elements of successful project delivery is as follows:

* Defining the level of environmental outcomes that will constitute being “Robust Environmental Schemes” (‘RES’), assuming suitable operational assurance is in place.
* Assessing the likely environmental benefits of available private and public sector agricultural standards/certification schemes/incentive schemes, in terms of operational systems and of performance requirements across biodiversity and soil health, in particular, as well as other factors including social, water, air and climate
* Creating and providing an analytical tool, populated with the assessment above, by which to determine whether participation in a given scheme or combination of schemes constitutes meeting the ‘RES’ threshold and/or for some flexible schemes the extent or ambition required to constitute meeting the ‘RES’ threshold. The tool would be dynamic to enable modification in the event of changes to individual private/public schemes or the introduction of new schemes
* Stakeholder consultation on the ‘RES’ definition, to refine/validate benchmarking, to inform tool development, and, to define aggregated reporting metrics
* Generating guidance outputs on how to use the tool and delivering training
* Costed options paper for the maintenance of a ‘RES panel’ to maintain and review the tool
* Dissemination outputs tailored to the audiences relevant to the project

## Background

#### The WWF Basket Metric – Halving the environmental impact of UK baskets by 2030

WWF have set out an approach to identify the most pressing issues in the food system and what needs to be done to address them.

The WWF Basket is a set of Outcomes and Measures to track progress, and a Blueprint for Action, laying out the priority actions which WWF-UK believes UK Food Retailers should take to tackle the climate and nature crises. Retailers may take other actions to achieve the targets, but in signing up to the overall ambition it is expected that they will take action. Retailers will be asked to supply information on their actions so WWF can measure progress against the ambition to halve the environment impact of UK Baskets.

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/basket-metric>

#### Targets in the Agriculture Pillar of the Basket Metric

Biodiversity and water:

* At least 50% of whole produce and grains certified or covered by a robust environmental scheme
* 100% meat, dairy and eggs, including as ingredients, sourced to ‘Better’ standard
* At least 50% of fresh food from areas with sustainable water management

Agricultural Emissions & Land Use:

* Agricultural emissions lowered in line with 1.5-degree SBT

This project is needed for both the ‘whole produce and grains’ and the ‘meat, dairy and eggs’ targets.

The wider rationale for this target is set out in 3 Keel’s report for WWF “Halving the environmental impact of the UK shopping basket: Targets and metrics technical background and rationale”. The relevant section of the report and the full agriculture pillar for the Shopping Basket Metric are available on request to eligible bidders.

## Scope

We require a combined approach relating environmental payment scheme participation to private standards/certification in the application of the ‘Robust Environmental Scheme’ target.

The contribution of existing public ‘agri-environmental’ schemes to biodiversity restoration is hard to prove and specific evidence is variable. However, large scale/long term studies show that they do contribute positively to at least some biodiversity objectives[[1]](#footnote-2). The ‘Conservation Evidence’ website also covers science on this topic well.

Meanwhile, certification schemes offer commercial food buyers and the public assurance of adherence to a wide range of production standards. To varying degrees, these may cover regulatory requirements, food safety, animal health and welfare and environmental performance.

Both types of scheme are interfaces between a farm and an external buyer/commissioner of goods and services. All schemes for UK producers need to be assessed, and consultants should allow for important schemes that may be made available, including new SFI standards, during the consultancy to be included (pricing extras separately, if necessary).

This project is limited to UK agricultural food production, and all associated schemes (certification/public payments/ etc.). Where schemes, such as LEAF Marque, have a UK and international presence, only the UK element is to be included in the project. There are several reasons why we exclude overseas production/supply chains from this study, primarily around the scale of the task, geographic differences in environmental issues, production types and opportunities for securing environmental performance, and, engagement with the most appropriate stakeholders. However, we would like the consultants to develop a tool and processes for using it that could be adapted for use in other countries/regions, both for UK food businesses to report on imports and to meet domestic reporting objectives. In the short term, principles for UK food businesses to consider when considering overseas supply chains should be highlighted.

## Content of outputs / deliverables

Proposals for delivering this consultancy will include the following or clearly justified alternatives for achieving the same ends:

1. *Definition of the level of environmental outcomes that will constitute being “Robust Environmental Schemes” (‘RES’)*

The Basket Metric ambition is to halve the environmental impact of the typical UK customer’s food shopping by 2030 on 2018 levels.

The consultant will research and engage stakeholders on the appropriate levels of action required to get on track for halving the impact of given agricultural sectors/product categories on biodiversity and soils by 2030. This level of action needs to be translated into a scoring or benchmarking of certification standards and farm payment schemes and expressed in the analysis tool. Consultants will need to consider aspects like proportion of the farm/production unit where action is taken (other than ‘whole farm schemes’), ambition, etc., or, consultants could propose an alternative ‘comparison currency’.

The definition will also need to include the schemes’ implementation of suitable operational systems scoring appropriately against recognised benchmarks, with private certification also recognised by assurance standards (UKAS accredited).

1. *Assessing the likely environmental benefits of available private and public sector agricultural standards/certification schemes/incentive schemes covering both produce and grains, and, meat, dairy, and eggs in line with WWF-UK's Basket Metric agriculture targets.*

Assessment should include both operational systems, and, performance requirements across biodiversity and soil health (for which ‘Robust Environmental Scheme’ is the proxy metric), as well as other factors including social, water, air and climate. Although the other factors are covered elsewhere in the Basket Metric, it is critical that a ‘robust’ soil/biodiversity scheme should not have perverse consequences for other social and environmental imperatives, even if modest trade-offs are sometimes inevitable. Adaptation of an existing framework/tool will probably be the most efficient approach to this deliverable.

Although the consultant(s) will compare only operational processes and environmental/ sustainability expectations of what in some cases are broader schemes, they will need to consider how to address the great variability between them, be they based on practices or processes and the differing objectives of certification and incentive schemes. We are asking for a comparison between primarily agricultural, health and safety and partially regulatory compliance-based certification schemes (e.g. Quality Meat Scotland, Red Tractor), environmentally-focussed schemes (e.g. Fair to Nature), those that balance the two (e.g. organic certifications, LEAF Marque), and, quite different CAP pillar 2 legacy/new devolved land management payment schemes (e.g. SFI standards, Glastir). The WWF Network has existing publications in this field, and we are conscious of analogous work, with somewhat different objectives and/or scope, such as Hestia agri-environmental data, SAI Platform’s Farm Sustainability Assessment and the Sustainable Food Trust’s Global Farm Metric. We would recommend engagement with these at an early stage.

The extent to which the standards bodies have sought to evaluate the environmental impact of their scheme should be considered within the evidence base.

1. *Stakeholder consultation on the ‘RES’ definition, to refine/validate benchmarking, to inform tool development, and, to define aggregated reporting metrics*

With a view to securing the legitimacy and acceptance of the benchmarking process and to improving the relevance and feasibility of the analysis tool itself.

This might include the establishment of an expert panel. While this panel would be recruited for timeframe of this project, the delivery of this project is the first step in a process, and such a panel may be necessary to maintain the tool.

Stakeholder consultation must include a broad range of stakeholders from across the four UK countries.

Deliverables 1 and 2, and partially 3, need to be completed by mid-January 2023, for an interim output with the definition of ‘Robust Environmental Schemes’ and what data retailers/ food business need to collect from their supply chains in order to be able to assess current percentages of their sourcing that meet the ‘RES threshold’, for reporting against the Basket Metrics.

1. *Creating and providing an analytical tool, populated with the assessment above, by which to determine whether participation in a given scheme or combination of schemes constitutes meeting the ‘RES’ threshold*

Our vision is of a farm scale tool to determine whether the farm or its produce meets the ‘RES’ threshold. This would then be aggregated up through the supply chain to give a figure for the proportion of food that meets the ‘RES’ threshold. Metrics for this reporting will need to be defined. This directly links to the Basket Metric commitments that “At least 50% of whole produce and grains certified or covered by a robust environmental scheme”, and “100% of meat, dairy, and eggs sourced to ‘better’ standards”.

The tool must enable comparison, benchmarking and/or assessment of overlap between different schemes, potentially using metrics or costings to achieve this. This must enable ‘stacking’ for members/participants of multiple schemes such that combinations can meet the ‘RES’ threshold where the individual elements (uncombined) would not.

WWF-UK currently uses the Eating Better Sourcing Better Framework to promote holistic action on ‘better’ meat, dairy, and eggs. We would like to add to the operation of this framework supply chain action and the management of trade-offs between indicators (e.g. climate, animal welfare, biodiversity). We envisage the ‘RES’ tool and outputs contributing by enabling stakeholders to:

* + identify whether particular certification schemes meet ‘better’ standards, with regard to biodiversity impacts and soil health
  + understand and manage trade-offs between different indicators

For fresh produce, grains and meat/dairy/eggs, the consultant will need to consult stakeholders on and answer issues around decisions taken, recording the rationale within the tool. For example, comparison of ‘whole farm schemes’ with those that require action on part of the landholding. Expected issues should be discussed in consultants’ proposals.

The consultant will need to engage with an existing consultant and stakeholders who are developing the way ‘Basket’ metrics can be aggregated and reported by retailers/food businesses.

Consideration should be given to continuous improvement and/or a scored or tiered metric in future and how such an approach could be expressed within the Basket Metric agriculture pillar.

1. *Generating guidance outputs on how to use the tool and delivering training*

We require a clear written guide giving all the information needed to operate the tool successfully, followed by 2 training sessions with feedback from those sessions used to generate a final version of the written guide.

1. *Costed options paper for the maintenance of a ‘RES panel’ to maintain and review the tool*

Making reference to ISEAL[[2]](#footnote-3) and other reports, a paper for stakeholders setting out costed options for the long-term management and updating of the analytical tool as schemes are changed and new ones emerge, and with a view to continuous improvement in standards. Improved understanding and measurement of environmental data (e.g. soil health) may also warrant modified RES processes.

1. *Dissemination outputs tailored to the audiences relevant to the project*

We see the need for communication of the results and implementation requirements flowing from this project with at least three external audience groupings, requiring at least two different output streams. We look forward to seeing consultants’ proposals for addressing this need.

## Optional Biodiversity add-on

The main proposal provides retailers and food businesses with a proxy for reporting against the ‘halving the impact’ biodiversity and soil health ‘basket metrics’. The ‘biodiversity add-on’ would a) extend that assessment to higher and longer-term ambitions in England – namely the relevant Environment Act targets and E.L.M. outcome ambitions and the targets advocated to Defra in Wildlife and Countryside Link’s consultation response (to which WWF contributed), and, b) estimate the gap between the level of public goods provision that may be expected through E.L.M. and certification scheme participation scenarios and the those targets set out in a).

The Environment Act provides for a nearer-term target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. Other relevant targets Defra propose include:

* + increase species abundance by at least 10% by 2042, compared to 2030 levels.
  + improve the England-level GB Red List Index for species extinction risk by 2042, compared to 2022 levels.
  + create or restore in excess of 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites by 2042, compared to 2022 levels.
  + (under Defra’s E.L.M. outcomes policy paper) “bring up to 60% of England’s agricultural soil under sustainable management through our schemes by 2030”.

Consultants have the option to provide a costed approach to delivering the biodiversity add-on in their proposal. This will not be assessed during the initial shortlisting of tenders, but where proposed, would be included in the ‘second round pitch’. For procurement reasons, consultants that do not submit a proposal for the add-on would very likely be barred from bidding in any separate procurement exercise for this work, should that be necessary.

## Contract Management, Evaluation Approach, Formats, Timeline and Budget

The preceding section is WWF’s suggestion of how we envisage delivery of this contract, but may be adapted by in proposal documents. In any case, as part of the consultant’s submission, we require a proposal with a reasonably detailed approach to the consultancy and a proposed methodology set out for assessment in the selection process.

#### Contract Management

We would expect:

* The consultancy will commence with an initiation meeting
* The consultant will undertake a desk-based review of academic and grey literature, on which subsequent work should draw and which the output report should cover
* Elements of the consultancy will be participatory in nature for key stakeholders, with WWF able to provide key contacts with retail/food sector stakeholders, some government contacts, but much more limited contacts with certification bodies
* A Consultancy Steering Group will be established with regular progress/decision meetings chaired and minuted by the consultant, and more frequent update meetings between the responsible contact points for the consultant and WWF-UK
* The Consultancy Steering Group will discuss outputs and agree steps for their sign-off by WWF

To ensure successful delivery, WWF shall:

* Work closely with the selected supplier
* Be on hand to answer queries
* Provide feedback on draft versions of the outputs

#### Evaluation approach

Proposals will be assessed on the basis of their fit to the goal, methodological approach, cost, experience of the consultancy and team and organisational sustainability. As such, proposals must include:

* a breakdown of the cost of each output/deliverable (1–7 + optional biodiversity add-on) and any ‘extra cost’ that would be attached to inclusion of certification/public payment schemes expected, but not published as of 1 September 2022
* a schedule detailing the consultants’ team, their role in the project, and the amount of time each person will allocate to delivery
* background of the consultancy and CVs of each member of the team
* detailed timeline for delivery of the interim output by mid-January 2023 and project completion by end May 2023

In addition, consultants should return a completed Sustainable Procurement Questionnaire with their proposal.

#### Output format

Outputs 1 to 4 focus on the ‘Robust Environmental Schemes’ tool, which must be fully operable in a widely-used software application, e.g. MS Excel or Access, such that WWF-UK and/or other ongoing management structures can use and further develop it free-of-charge for the foreseeable future without programming expertise.

The overall results from Output 2 and 4 must delivered in the form of a printable ‘report’ that the tool can generate, or a graphical representation produced by the tool, or similar approach set out in consultants’ proposals. In any case, web-based communication of this output must be straightforward.

Textual rationale needs to be provided for decisions made throughout these outputs and a record of discussion, decisions and rationales emerging from output 3 is required. Where appropriate these may take the form of ‘meta-data’ or other tabs in a spreadsheet, but a written output embedded in or alongside the tool may be better for longer text such as output 3.

Note the definition of ‘Robust Environmental Schemes’ and data collection requirements for retailers need to be circulated as an interim output by mid-January 2023. This means that deliverables 1 & 2 need to be complete including the incorporation of changes resulting from stakeholder engagement (deliverable 3, in part).

Consultants should propose the most appropriate format for output 5, but this must include a comprehensive guide in a widely-used software application, and one or more interactive training sessions, which it may be helpful to video as a deliverable.

Outputs 6 & 7 should be tailored to the audience and include materials both for widespread dissemination e.g. PDF report/booklet and for presentation of key points e.g. Powerpoint slides. We would expect each of these to be approximately 10-25 pages text and graphics, but could consist of more shorter outputs.

#### Timeline

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| Closing date for return of submissions: | Midday Weds. 5th October 2022 |
| Second round pitch from shortlisted consultants: | 14–19 October 2022 |
| Contract Initiation meeting: | ASAP after award and by 1 November 2022 |
| Initial Stakeholder Engagement: | By mid-December/early January 2023 |
| Interim Output (RES definition & data collection requirements): | By mid-January 2023 |
| Draft outputs: | By end of April 2023 |
| Final completion and training provision: | By end of May 2023 |
| Completion of Biodiversity add-on, if applicable: | By end of July 2023 |

#### Guidance on Budget Available

£70,000 including VAT; excluding ‘Biodiversity add-on’

## Eligibility, contact and terms and conditions

WWF-UK reserves the right to reject proposals from organisations who WWF-UK has reason to believe are affiliated with, or have a vested interest, commercial or otherwise, in one or several existing or planned public or private Environmental Schemes. Any such connection and the nature of it should be made clear in the proposal.

WWF’s Standard Terms and Conditions apply and may be accessed via the link on the contractsfinder listing.

**Date:** 5 September 2022

**Commissioned by:** WWF-UK, Living Planet Centre, Brewery Road, Woking, GU21 4LL

**Contact person:** Tom Stuart [tstuart@wwf.org.uk](mailto:tstuart@wwf.org.uk)

**Alternative contact:** Procurement Team [procurement@wwf.org.uk](mailto:procurement@wwf.org.uk)

1. For example, Dadam (2019) Agri-environment effects on birds in Wales: Tir Gofal benefited woodland and hedgerow species (BTO), and, Redhead (2022) The effects of a decade of agri-environment intervention in a lowland farm landscape on population trends of birds and butterflies (UKCEH). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. ISEAL (2020) Sustainability Benchmarking. Good Practice Guide. <https://www.isealalliance.org/about-iseal/our-work/benchmarking> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)