

Policy nudges to encourage woodland creation for climate change mitigation

Engagement of landowners in woodland creation schemes can be difficult, affecting prospects for meeting national woodland planting targets and climate change mitigation objectives. This project explored and made suggestions about how policy nudges could be applied to encourage woodland creation for climate change mitigation. It concluded that a combination of different nudges may need to be applied as a series of steps combined with other policy instruments.



'tackling problems such as global climate change and biodiversity loss to ensure ecosystem sustainability may require directly influencing values and behaviour'

Background

Woodland creation is generally a cost-effective method of limiting ('mitigating') climate change e.g. by sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. Engagement of landowners in woodland creation schemes can be difficult, affecting prospects for meeting national woodland planting targets and associated climate change mitigation objectives. Reluctance to plant woodland is frequently attributed to the low financial attractiveness of such schemes. However, insights from behavioural economics indicate that individuals are influenced by cognitive factors such as how information is presented and framed when they make decisions, and that certain policy 'nudges' may help direct choices in a particular direction. Nudges are way of influencing people's choices without limiting the options, or appreciably altering their relative costs.

Objectives

This research aimed to (a) examine how policy nudges have been used, (b) identify evidence of their effectiveness, and (c) make suggestions about how policy nudges may be applied to encourage woodland creation for climate change mitigation.

Methods

An examination of work by the UK Government's Behavioural Insight Team and others was undertaken to investigate how 'nudge type policies' have been used and evidence of their effectiveness. Using existing typologies of landowners and land managers, the usefulness of nudge approaches were considered according

to four different landowner/land manager types – (1) Farmers, (2) Estate Owners and Managers, (3) Inward Investors and (4) Socially Responsible Investors.

Findings

Evidence of successes in other policy areas suggests nudge type policies could help to overcome barriers to woodland creation for climate change mitigation. There are a range of nudge types which could be used, with different types of intervention being likely to influence different landowner/manager types. These include the use of:

- 'Prompted choices' and 'simplification' to reduce the bureaucracy of payments;
- The 'messenger', 'social norms', 'networks', and 'priming' to establish a more in-depth, interactive form of outreach work with landowners;
- Notions of 'commitment' and 'exemplify' to support socially-responsible investors needing to sell a positive message about woodland creation;
- 'Mental accounts' to rethink engagement with farmers and estate owners, e.g. to understand how different parts of the farm contribute to the overall enterprise, both economically and culturally;
- 'Framing' to promote the local or personal benefits of woodland creation.

Recommendations

There are a range of nudge type approaches which could be used to encourage woodland creation for climate change mitigation and adaptation. These include addressing perceived barriers to woodland creation, encouraging private woodland creation by highlighting successes and by the public sector leading by example. Implementation of nudge type approaches should be tailored towards different types of landowners and land managers who may vary in their attitudes, motivations for and willingness to plant trees. It is likely that a combination of different nudges may need to be applied as a series of steps in conjunction with other policy instruments. Further thought needs to be given to how they can be implemented, monitored and evaluated.

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