

**Commission on Sustainability Data**  
**Minutes of Thursday 2nd May 2024 Meeting**  
**Mawby Room, Kellogg College Oxford**

**Present:**

**Commission Members:** Prof Jonathan Michie (Chair), Prof Jim Davies, Dr Stuart Jenkins, Dr Nigel Mehdi, Dr Ana Nacvalovaite, Mr Ian Robertson (via Teams), Prof Niki Trigoni, Prof Kadriye Bakirci (Commission Researcher & Administrator)

**Working Group Members:** Mr Anders Knox, Ms Cindy Rose, Mr Mazi Zarrehparvar

**Guests:** Mr Ban Ki-moon, Ambassador Sook Kim, Mr Charlie Maeng, Mr Simon Sadinsky

**College Members:** Mr Max Danby, Mr Gary Walker

**Apologies:** Dr Alice Evatt, Dr Bryn Roberts

**Welcome and Introductions**

The Chair noted that the meeting was being recorded, and introduced those present:

**Commission and Working Group Members:**

- i. Professor Jonathan Michie, President, Kellogg College; Chair, Commission on Sustainability Data; Professor of Innovation and Knowledge Exchange
- ii. Professor Kadriye Bakirci, Research Fellow, Kellogg College; Administrator and Researcher, Commission on Sustainability Data, Professor of Law
- iii. Professor Jim Davies, Official Fellow, Kellogg College; Professor of Software Engineering, and Director of the Software Engineering Programme, Department of Computer Science; Director, Oxford EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Health Data Science
- iv. Dr Stuart Jenkins, Oxford University Net Zero Fellow and Kellogg College Research Fellow
- v. Mr Anders Knox, Convenor of the Software and Operations Working Group, Strategic Partner Director, Avalara
- vi. Dr Nigel Mehdi, Ordinary Fellow, Kellogg College; Senior Associate Tutor in Sustainable Urban Development, Department for Continuing Education; and Visiting Lecturer, Software Engineering Programme, Department of Computer Science
- vii. Dr Ana Nacvalovaite, Research Fellow, Kellogg College

- viii. Professor Niki Trigoni, Official Fellow, Kellogg College; Professor of Computer Science, Department of Computer Science
- ix. Mr Mazi Zarrehparvar, Convenor of the Finance Working Group, CEO CENCE INC, Fund Advisor Kurma Partners

**Guests in attendance:**

- i. Mr Ban Ki-moon, Bynum Tudor Fellow, Kellogg College, and 8th Secretary General of the United Nations
- ii. Ambassador Sook Kim, Executive Director, Ban Ki-moon Foundation for a Better Future
- iii. Mr Charlie Maeng, Seoul Bureau Chief, Sky News
- iv. Mr Simon Sadinsky, Executive Director – Education at The King's Foundation

**College Members in attendance:**

- i. Mr Max Danby, IT Officer, Kellogg College
- ii. Mr Gary Walker, Finance Bursar, Kellogg College

The Chair noted that the two main agenda items were:

- 1. to receive a report from Stuart Jenkins on Oxford Net Zero (ONZ); and
- 2. to receive a report from Anders Knox and Cindy Rose, and discuss, the case study the Commission was conducting [on a company whose identity was being kept confidential], where the company had agreed to make its operational data available

Both presentations are available on the Commission on Sustainability Data webpage at <https://www.kellogg.ox.ac.uk/kellogg-centres/centre-for-mutual-and-co-owned-business/commission-on-sustainability-data/meetings/>

**1. Presentation from Dr Stuart Jenkins on Oxford Net-Zero**

The ONZ Initiative was introduced as a multi-disciplinary effort aiming to integrate various net zero-focused research activities across departments within the University. The initiative's primary objective is to operationalise net zero by establishing connections with policymakers, civil society, and businesses, with a vision of moving beyond research to practically implementing net zero strategies in society.

Efforts in the initial years focused on comprehensively defining the concept of net zero, resulting in a paper published in Nature Climate Change in 2022. The definition encompasses urgency, integrity in discussions, and consistency with wider sustainable development objectives.

The initiative is engaged in or leading various projects, including carbon offset regulation, corporate engagement for net zero transition, setting targets and standards for businesses through the Science-Based Targets Initiative, equitable transitions research focusing on African contexts, and collaboration with industries like aviation to address challenges in transitioning to net zero.

Oxford University is evaluating its engagements with companies, particularly regarding their climate transition plans, with appraisal structures being designed to assess research relationships and donations based on companies' net zero transition plans. Transparent data, especially transactional data, is deemed crucial for this appraisal process.

The initiative aims to expand its focus beyond the fossil fuel sector and consider climate compatibility in all research relationships across various sectors, with transparent data and credible transition plans continuing to play a significant role.

## **2. Presentation by Anders Knox and Cindy Rose on company case study**

The significance of accurate sustainability data, especially concerning carbon emissions, in guiding investment decisions was underscored, with concerns regarding the gap between reported emissions by companies and their actual environmental impact, emphasising the need for a paradigm shift in how sustainability data is approached, assessed and reported.

A detailed presentation of the project followed, focusing on the potential of capturing detailed transactional data to drive genuine sustainability change throughout the economy, particularly by making carbon emissions observable. Challenges in obtaining this data, such as companies' reluctance to share control and the lack of interoperability among software systems, were described. A method of allowing companies to retain control of their data while ensuring its accuracy and verifiability was being developed. The potential economic benefits of the proposed solution, including increased supply chain efficiency and transparency, reduced cost of capital for companies, and improved tax compliance, were highlighted.

### **3. Discussion**

The discussion began with an overview of the project's objectives, emphasising collaboration with companies and other organisations. Whether to request Oxford University to be a pilot organisation to test out the Commission's approach was discussed.

Detailed explanations were provided regarding the project's initial phase, focusing on data verification and the attribution of carbon emissions to transactions, with an acknowledgement of the various challenges involved.

The role of the finance working group in engaging investors, including venture capitalists, was discussed, highlighting their influence on promoting sustainability practices among portfolio companies.

Concerns were raised about the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) impacts of investments, focusing on evaluating companies' current carbon footprints and the necessity of efficient data validation methods.

The discussion explored strategies to attract additional capital, particularly from investors previously uninterested in such initiatives, with a focus on certification and compliance.

Insights were sought on persuading governments to participate, acknowledging the challenge but seeking effective strategies to sell the initiative.

Acknowledgement was extended for participants' involvement in the project, highlighting shared commitments to environmental sustainability.

Dissemination strategies were discussed, suggesting engagement with existing initiatives like the Sustainable Markets Initiative to leverage established networks and expertise.

The role of the media in raising awareness about climate change and related initiatives was discussed, emphasising its importance in driving public engagement.

### **4. Ban Ki-moon's contribution**

Ban Ki-moon expressed his gratitude with attendees for their efforts towards achieving carbon neutrality. Recognition was given to the commitment demonstrated by the Oxford University community and their Commission on Sustainability Data towards carbon neutrality, inspiring contributions to the discussion.

Global leadership demonstrated by the UK during COP26 was praised, emphasising the necessity for all international entities to work towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

The importance of setting ambitious targets, including those for 2030, was highlighted, stressing the responsibility of governments, private organisations, and individuals to achieve these targets.

The need for strong political leadership and international cooperation to address the challenges posed by climate change was emphasised, particularly highlighting the significant responsibility of countries like China and the US due to their high greenhouse gas emissions.

Efforts of institutions like Oxford University in spearheading carbon neutrality initiatives were praised, urging global tech industries and universities to follow suit.

The EU's establishment of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) was mentioned, emphasising the importance of such mechanisms in promoting cleaner technologies and reducing emissions.

Examples of companies taking proactive measures to reduce emissions, such as transitioning to hydrogen burners, were cited, stressing the importance of collaboration between governments and businesses.

The role of civil society in driving change was highlighted, encouraging individuals to adopt cleaner energy practices in their daily lives.

The importance of mitigation and adaptation efforts in addressing climate change was underscored, emphasising the need for creative solutions in adaptation projects.

In conclusion, the determination was expressed to continue advocating for change at both governmental and societal levels, appreciating the efforts of the Commission on Sustainability Data and urging other institutions and industries to follow the example of the Commission, and to adopt the Commission's recommendations regarding making transactional data available.

## **5. Next Steps:**

The Chair and Commissioners discussed next steps, including:

- Continuing development and testing of prototypes.
- Maintaining communication and collaboration with stakeholders.

- Providing regular updates on project progress.
- Following up with universities regarding potential engagement as volunteers.
- Further exploring strategies to engage governments in the initiative.
- Investigating collaboration opportunities with existing initiatives such as the Sustainable Markets Initiative.
- Considering media outreach strategies to raise awareness about the project and its objectives.
- Further dissemination of carbon neutrality initiatives to other academic communities.
- Continued advocacy for collaboration between governments, businesses, and civil society.
- Emphasising both mitigation and adaptation efforts in climate change initiatives.

The meeting concluded with gratitude for Ban Ki-moon's contributions and a commitment to further progress the project.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting**

The next Commission meeting was scheduled for Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024.