

England Biodiversity Group

**Minutes from
EBG Meeting
December 4th 2007**

EBG 08-01

**England Biodiversity Group
11.00am to 2.00pm , Tuesday 4th December 2007**

Rooms A &B, Nobel House, London

Minutes

Present:

John Robbs (Defra, Wildlife & Countryside)	Paul Cobbing (GOWM/Defra)
Martin Brasher (Defra, WHB)	Rebecca Isted (Forestry Commission, England)
Sarah Webster (Defra, WHB)	Sue Armstrong-Brown (RSPB)
Andy Stott (Defra, NESD)	John Everitt (WCL)
Steven Marfleet (Defra, WHB)	Amy Coyte (WCL)
David Henshilwood (Natural England)	David Goode (UCL)
Pete Brotherton (Natural England)	Ruth Waters (Natural England)
Julian Hughes (RSPB)	Richard Wright (Natural England)
Roger Ward (NE/Defra)	Richard Cowan (Defra, MFB)
Lara Clements (Defra, CD)	Rob Cooke (Natural England)
Tony McDougal (Defra, CD)	Helen Dunn (Defra, FFG)
Caroline Cowan (Defra, ACC)	
Alistair Burn (Natural England)	

Apologies

David Bullock	NT	
Shaun Mowat	Defra	
Pam Whaley	Defra	
Pippa Morrison	(MoD)	
Paul Raven	EA	(Alistair Burn representing)
Andrew Wood	NE	
Mark Tollitt	Defra	(Tony McDougal representing)
Simon Pryor	FC	(Rebecca Isted representing)

1. Welcome and Introductions

John Robbs welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

EBG-07-19

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted without amendment.

Action point 2 (i): David Henshilwood to provide a note setting out the rationale for the regionalisation of the targets

NE had not provided any additional explanation regarding the regionalisation of targets.

Action: David Henshilwood to provide a note setting out the rationale for the regionalisation of the targets

Action point 2 (ii): Andy Stott's team to provide advice on climate change on a targeted basis

Andy Stott had provided a response to NE.

Action point 2 (iii): Comments to be returned to David Henshilwood and copied to Gavin Measures No comments had been received as yet. However, Local and Regional workstream members had been tasked to speak to their respective regional partnerships and come back to the workstream meeting in February. Further work was being undertaken in NE and the results would be circulated in due course.

Action point: David Henshilwood to report to NE the concerns of EBG that adequate resource be identified for urban conservation

NE were considering the best approach to addressing this concern.

Action: Pete Brotherton to update the next meeting on NE's progress

Action point: Secretariat to consider how to encourage engagement from CLG

Contacts within CLG had been identified and the new PSA targets would help foster this engagement.

Action point: Sarah Webster to convey EBG's messages to Steve Lee-Bapty (this relates to EBG Advice to BRIG on treatment of habitats and species requiring action plans)

Sarah Webster had completed this action. However, the consultation had already been issued, and the closing date for the consultation period remained 1st Feb 2008.

3. Quarterly Workstream Achievement Reports

EBG-07-20

John Robbs noted that there would not be time for a detailed discussion on all the reports and asked if there were any particular points of concern that had not been raised in the written reports. He also invited workstream leaders to suggest substantive issues that should be discussed under this item at the next meeting.

On the Water and Wetlands workstream report, Pete Brotherton welcomed the fact that Defra would be setting annual targets for BAP habitat creation by flood operating authorities and noted that Internal Drainage Boards had their own BAP strategies and programmes alongside other water management work and this was pleasing progress. There would be potential risks/issues in connection with Defra publishing its expectations relating to flooding; these would need to be sufficiently ambitious to allow SSSI aims to be met or authorities would put the resources into other areas.

Paul Cobbing noted the move to reporting through BARS and the opportunity that this represented. He suggested that the group could have a future item on the national indicator for local government performance and how we could provide support to maximise our outcomes associated with this. John Robbs welcomed the suggestion and encouraged group members to use BARS for reporting. He said that the inclusion of the biodiversity in the Local Authority performance framework was an important step that had taken some considerable effort to achieve. The Defra model was based on getting key policies into the infrastructure to drive decisions at the regional and local level, although the difficulties in achieving this were noted. At local and regional level it was then for NE to consider how best to use the opportunity that this would represent.

Richard Wright advised that the Coasts & Seas workstream had now been split; Richard would lead on Seas whilst Rob Cooke would be the lead for Coasts. These areas would be refreshed over the coming months.

Helen Dunn advised that Aberystwyth University had been commissioned to undertake a study on the value of the UKBAP; the study would complete early 2009 and would be a useful future agenda item.

Action: Secretariat to place item on next EBG agenda on the national biodiversity indicator for local Government performance and how to maximise associated outcomes.

Action: Secretariat to place item on EBG agenda for March/June 2009 to report on outcome of valuation of UK BAP.

4. Mainstreaming climate change adaptation in the EBS EBG-07-21

Andy Stott introduced paper EBG-07-21.

The CCA workstream had set a deliverable for 2008 to ensure that other workstreams' deliverables and action plans were 'climate change proofed'. It was noted that this was a challenging timescale. The paper proposed an action plan which had two aspects: principles and process. To integrate CCA into

workstreams' action plans the workstreams would need to take ownership of this and recognise that it may be necessary to amend the deliverables in light of CCA considerations. Once CCA had been integrated into the EBS then it would effectively become an adaptation strategy.

The CCA workstream had been working on a set of shared principles with the plan of testing this in a practical exercise (workshop) with two pilot workstreams; the principles would be presented to the England Biodiversity Group in due course. The pilot workshops would take the Woodland & Forestry and Water & Wetlands workstreams through the process of 'proofing' their programmes. Workshops for the other workstreams would be designed using the knowledge gained from the pilots. The first workshop was planned to take place between January and March 2008 and the second between April and June 2008. Workstreams would then be expected to take ownership of this and, where necessary, bring in their own experts to proof their programmes with the CCA workstream providing a support and challenge function.

John Robbs said that this was a fundamental piece of work which could not be left to the CCA workstream alone; it was a cross-cutting issue which would need to be absorbed into each of the workstreams.

Rebecca Isted gave the support of the Woodland & Forestry workstream, noting that a date for the pilot workshop should be set soon and that papers supporting the workshop should be promulgated early to allow full consideration to be given the issues. Alistair Burn gave support to these comments on behalf of the Water & Wetlands workstream.

Paul Cobbing asked whether it is the intention to focus on habitats and species within this work. Andy Stott said that each workstream would have its own considerations and hence different approaches would be required, particularly given resource constraints.

David Goode noted the strong links for the Towns, Cities & Development workstream with other work on green infrastructure and eco-towns, and was keen to follow in the footsteps of woodlands and wetlands workstream, perhaps combining with local and regional for a workshop.

John Everitt was generally supportive but noted that there would be some issues that may not sit readily with a single workstream and that we needed to ensure that these cross-cutting aspects would be picked up.

John Robbs summarised by saying that the CCA workstream had the full support of EBG and that they should proceed with arranging the pilot workshops.

ACTION: Andy Stott to take forward with the support of the CCA workstream

5. Defra's new Public Service Agreements

EBG-07-22

John Robbs introduced the paper on Defra's Natural Environment PSA, noting that Defra was the lead department on two PSAs, on the Natural Environment and Climate Change.

Alistair Burn observed that several of the underpinning indicators were more linked to human health aspects rather than the health of the natural environment. John Robbs noted this, saying that the group needed to recognise that these only provide a very broad picture, were produced according to HMT guidelines as a simple level summary for HMT and that the rest of us needed to look deeper.

Asked about governance structures, John Robbs said that they had yet to be determined; a Programme Board would meet in early 2008 to discuss this and the PSAs would take effect from 1st April 2008.

Martin Brasher highlighted that these were very important documents as they set the direction for all departments over the next 3 years; they are the end product of a lot of hard work and negotiation and it was pleasing that the Natural Environment had been accorded such a high status. These contained important levers for Defra when dealing with other departments.

John Everitt asked if there was an explicit relationship between the indicators in the paper and the new biodiversity indicator for Local Government. John Robbs pointed to paras 3.35 and 3.36 of the PSA 28 publication which clarified the role of local and regional Government and Local Area Agreements in ensuring that natural environment considerations are taken into account in regional strategy development and implementation.

6. Feedback from UK Standing Committee meeting on the forward process for UK list of priority species and habitats

EBG-07-23

John Robbs explained the purpose and composition of the UK Standing Committee (UKSC) and that the paper was an extract from the draft minutes of its last meeting which considered how we adapt our delivery structures to implement the new UK priorities within a devolved framework. The Committee had sought to agree a process that met the combined challenges of a longer list, the need to embed the ecosystem approach, climate change, and some frustration with the current level of bureaucracy. The UKSC had reached a consensus on the 8 steps, noting that they were not necessarily sequential. Comments on the paper were invited noting the link to the next item which was about the practical application of this.

No points were raised.

7. Review of Habitat Action Plans – appropriate brigading of groups at country level

EBG-07-24

Pete Brotherton introduced the paper which had been produced following discussions with HAP groups. There had been some concern, particularly with regard to the level of bureaucracy, but also a recognition of the need for change. Most HAP groups had welcomed the suggestion of closer links with the EBS workstreams. Comments had been taken on board and the paper brought together 4 elements:

- Integrated biodiversity delivery groups, which would need to ensure that there was coordination of delivery for species through habitats;
- Workstreams also needed to change; workstreams should be driving delivery and be informed by ‘people on the ground’;
- Targeted species recovery, noting that habitat work would not ‘do it all’, some species required very specific action and
- Delivery through local and regional BAPs; better recognition of this was required and would require us to rethink how to align national bodies/groups with LBAPs.

NE were pleased to be acting as lead partner in England and the paper represented the NE thinking on this. Comments were invited.

Amy Coyte said that the role of WCL would be key in this, welcomed the fact that a meeting had been called but expressed concern that a clear process for this partnership was required.

Sue Armstrong-Brown felt that there were concerns that there might be a loss of focus and momentum, if the agriculture-related HAPs were to merge into a single, enlarged HAP/workstream group. Pete Brotherton shared these concerns noting agriculture might be the workstream where there was most merit in having several HAPs (or integrated biodiversity delivery teams) working together.

John Everitt welcomed the greater recognition of the importance of local and regional aspects. Pete noted this saying that how this would work in practice would be developed at the workshops.

Pete welcomed Andy Stott’s point that a further complexity was the issue of ‘climate change proofing’ and that this would need to be taken into account during planning and development.

There was some concern that there was no formal way for the HAP groups to be sure that their views would be taken into account. This was understood and it was recognised that this may be linked to some resistance to change. Pete

advised that the intention was to hold a series of workshops with habitats and species representatives to help formulate a way forward.

David Henshilwood noted that considerations at the UK level were driving this forward at a time when we were still formulating our thinking. John Robbs said that there remained a UK function and that the UKSC had set some deadlines to ensure a continuation of forward progress. Annex 3 of the paper was intended to address some of the concerns and could be amended to place more emphasis on species aspects. Amy Coyte felt this would allay some concerns and asked to what extent more NGO engagement could be accommodated in the concept of lead agencies. Pete Brotherton thought that it would be possible to have joint leads and that species representatives could take a role in this. It was important to note there was a difference between lead agencies and lead partners. The aim of this was to ensure that there was flexibility within the framework, and whilst we didn't have all the answers at this point, the goal was to work to increase the capability of groups to deliver.

ACTION: EBG members to comment on the paper direct to Pete Brotherton by COP Fri 14th December.

8. NE advice on Habitats and Species of principal importance under s.41 of the NERC Act **EBG-07-25**

Ruth Waters introduced the paper and updated the group on discussions that had been held and options that had been considered (although not all of these were presented in the paper).

John Robbs clarified that the Secretary of State was required to publish the list of species and habitats of principal importance and that the Minister for Biodiversity had written to NE requesting their advice on its formulation. The legislation stated that the list must be published but did not make any mention of the format this should take.

David Henshilwood told the group that the advice to ministers was nearing completion and that any further views or comments were needed very soon.

The following points were noted:

- Whatever the content, it was important to make the list useful and that splitting the list into sectors may be a useful way of achieving this;
- Some felt that the UK list and the s.41 list should be identical;
- Planners liked the sectoral approach as it showed which species/habitats were relevant to them;

- The signposting exercise currently underway for the UK list would assist this work although the timescales did not aid this;
- Added value would come from the highlighting of rare species/habitats or of opportunities via a regionally specific web-based tool;
- Although important to the planning sector, this sector should not be the sole driver of decisions as the list had wider application;
- Need to clarify with Defra lawyers the scope for structuring the list and providing guidance that contained selective lists;

ACTION: Sarah Webster to clarify points with Defra lawyers

John Robbs said that NE obviously had much to consider in preparation of the advice and that it was understood that any response before the end of the year might be interim advice requiring further work.

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With regard to Countdown 2010 funding, Julian Hughes asked whether the 'window' would be open for new applications over the next two years. Pete Brotherton said that most present would be aware of the current uncertainties relating to NE's budget and that, whilst there had been a lot of hard work to protect this funding, he could not give a definitive answer at this point. John Robbs said that he was sure we all understood NE's position and that following the Secretary of State's review in light of the CSR settlement it was hoped that the position would be clarified before the start of the next financial year.

9. Dates of future meetings

4th March 2008

10th June 2008

9th September 2008