

**England Biodiversity Group**

**Minutes from  
England Biodiversity Group Meeting  
6<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

**EBG 06-20**

**England Biodiversity Group  
11.00am to 2.00pm , Wednesday 6 September 2006**

**Rm 4, Lower Ground Floor, Page Street, London**

**Minutes**

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**Present:**

John Robbs (Defra, Wildlife & Countryside)	Peter Brotherton (English Nature)
Sarah Webster (Defra, WHB)	David Pape (Hants CC)
Martin Brasher (Defra, WHB)	David Goode (Chair of Urban Group/ UCL)
Kathrina Mannion (Defra, WHB)	Doug Hulyer (Education & Public Understanding)
Steve Marfleet (Defra, WHB)	Paul Cobbing (GO WM and Local & Regional SIG)
Paul Raven (Environment Agency)	Fiona Howie (National Farmers' Union)
John Everitt (Wildlife Trusts)	Simon Pryor (Forestry Commission, England)
Shaun Mowat (Defra, Resource Economics)	Sue Armstrong-Brown (RSPB)
Dennis Morgan (Defra, Resource Economics)	Diane OLeary (MOD)
Helen Dunn (Defra, Resource Economics)	Stephen Grady (JNCC)
Stephen Bass (Defra, Natural Environment Policy)	Martin Harper (WCL)

**Apologies**

Mike Barry	Marks & Spencer
David Henshilwood	EN (Pete Brotherton representing EN)
Diana Linskey	Defra
Pippa Morrison	MOD (Diane O'Leary representing MOD)
Andy Stott	Defra
Alex Tait	East Sussex CC

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

The Chairman, John Robbs, invited members to introduce themselves for the benefit of newcomers

**2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**

**EBG-06-16**

Sarah Webster reported against the action of item 4 of the paper explaining that the farmland indicator differs from the headline indicator in that there are some

species included in the headline figure which are not included for the farmland indicator and that only farmland transects are utilised.

Pete Brotherton reported on the action at item 5 of the paper, that discussions regarding the process for the targets review for marine habitats were ongoing.

Sarah Webster thanked those that had provided comments on the 2006 report (action at item 6).

Pete Brotherton noted that the invitation recorded on page 5 of the paper should be on behalf of BRIG and not EN as stated.

### **3. Progress with EBS 2006 Report and Launch**

Sarah Webster updated the group explaining that a draft programme for the production and launch of the report had been distributed. Sarah advised the group that Central Hall, Westminster had been booked for the launch event on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November and that confirmed speakers included Barry Gardiner, Helen Philips and Graham Wynne. Sarah also said that it was hoped that DfES would supply a speaker, likely to be a 'education out of the classroom manifesto champion'. Martin Harper welcomed the involvement of another department in the launch of the document. Martin Brasher noted that it would be important to 'set the scene' and that it would be best for Barry Gardiner to give a view, leaving it to another speaker to set the scene. John Robbs noted that it would be important to ensure that speakers 'meshed' and invited thoughts and suggestions on this to be passed to the BPU. John Everitt asked what the range of the audience should be. Sarah said that this was currently under review and that ideas were welcomed as it was important to get this right. John Everitt said that it was an opportunity to engage other departments and sectors. This view was supported by David Goode who cited the RDAs as a prime example. Paul Raven noted the link with the health sector and the duty of care. John Robbs welcomed these points but observed that we can invite a wide range of representation but that this does not guarantee attendance.

### **4. On-line Reporting**

Pete Brotherton presented on the use of the Biodiversity Action Reporting System (BARS) to publish the work programmes and progress for each workstream on-line. Pete used a live version of BARS to demonstrate various features, functions and capabilities of the system explaining that it already incorporated features designed for the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. Pete concluded by saying that if the group were happy then the BARS group could work up a specification. John Robbs invited Kathrina Mannion's view in light of her experience with the system through the Scottish Executive. Kathrina reassured the group that in terms of reporting on the strategy BARS is a simple yet powerful tool. Kathrina noted that both the EPU and L&R SiGs had

discussed the need to develop a work programming tool and that BARS could assist with the accountability for delivery. John Robbs said that if the group agreed in principle Pete could proceed with the development of a specification. With the agreement of the group Pete and the BARS group will now work up a specification.

**ACTION: Pete Brotherton to develop a specification for EBS work programme reporting functionality within BARS**

## **5. EU Biodiversity Communication**

**EBG-06-17**

John Robbs noted the challenging timetable associated with the Communication and that there was currently ongoing stakeholder consultation but that this meeting was a good opportunity for this group to discuss and focus on the opportunities and risks that it presented. To inform the discussion John invited Stephen Grady to present on the implications of the communication. Stephen advised that a workshop for NDPBs was planned. A copy of Stephen's presentation material is attached at annex A.

John Robbs asked the group for their views on what this document could offer to add value stressed the need for clarity on risks such as the extent of the reporting burden and the consequent diversion of effort. Stephen stated that JNCC were trying to ensure harmonisation of reporting (ie with CBD reporting requirements) and that the Commission had noted that reporting should not be over-burdensome. Sue Armstrong-Brown encouraged the group not to lose sight of the European level when considering the England focus as this might cloud issues such as funding and raising awareness. Martin Harper expressed concern that this would either be rejected out of hand or accepted and then ignored. Martin suggested that the Action Plan was surprisingly prescriptive, especially when compared to WCL's 5 deliverables. He went on to say that the EU needed to take a more 'light touch' approach. Pete Brotherton agreed with most of the views expressed so far but said he wanted to acknowledge the progress this represented since Malahide. Pete reminded the group that they needed to think of this in the wider perspective: the document was not targeted at England. John Robbs agreed that much of the content was targeted at other Member States but that the group needed to be alert to the implications if signed agreed. Pete noted that the Just Ecology study (Paper EBG-06-17c) shows that a lot of this is already picked up within the EBS. Paul Raven commented that the Just Ecology study did not reflect delivery of the outcomes and that it was important to consider this in light of the current direction that the ecological debate is going i.e. the ecosystem approach etc. John Everitt felt that it was helpful to identify what had already come out of EU documents and where we were on track (either through EBS or other routes), but this did not justify a large round of reporting and that the reporting requirements are not clear. Stephen Grady said that he thought this would use a light touch indicator approach although he agreed that this was not entirely clear and understood the concerns

of the group. Sarah Webster said that if this could be linked to the online reporting then the reporting burden may not be that great. Martin Brasher said that we had a strategy and a process to be proud of which is a good national response and that we need to highlight our contribution to the EU process. John Robbs summed up by saying that there would seem to be a risk of introducing commitments without a proper impact assessment. If this was just a clarification of what is already agreed then that was fine but we needed a clear understanding of any new elements and what they meant for us. Defra will coordinate a clear position representing the views of our stakeholders.

**ACTION: Group members to feed comments to John Angell in time for consideration prior to 18<sup>th</sup> Dec.**

At this point Martin Brasher took the role of Chair as John Robbs had another appointment.

Martin welcomed Stephen Bass to the meeting. Stephen introduced himself explaining that his unit are working through the implications of the ecosystem approach for biodiversity, land management and related strategic areas.

## **6. Valuing the Benefits of Biodiversity**

Martin Brasher introduced this item by explaining that we were under increasing pressure to justify, in financial terms, the protection of biodiversity. Martin asked the group to consider the following questions in relation to this work:

- To whom is it useful ?
- What are the 'problems' with the approach ?
- What needs to be communicated ?
- Where next for this strand of work ?

Martin then invited Stephen Bass to explain how this would link to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). Stephen explained that there are currently 4 pilot case studies underway to help develop tools for the ecosystem approach under the Natural Environment programme and that this would be feeding into the Treasury.

Doug Hulyer noted the strong links that could be made to communications in that different approaches would work with different groups. He went on to point out that the forthcoming communications strategy could help hone the questions that need to be considered. Shaun Mowat agreed with Doug and pointed out that the information that he had presented was just a 'flavour' of the analysis that could be undertaken and that the Economics & Funding workstream are to some extent reliant on the group to identify what is needed.

Paul Raven noted the distinction between value and benefits, that both were required for the development of policy but that benefits were the consideration for delivery. Clear case studies were required to demonstrate these. David Goode supported this citing the example of single page Sustainable Development case studies produced for Local Authorities' (LAs) Chief Executives in the 1990s. Case studies would need to be plain English examples to convince non-specialists of the benefits and value in biodiversity. Martin Harper reinforced David's point and went on to say that we were a long way from impacting on Treasury as they deal with costs not benefits. The communications strategy would be critical for the engagement of internal Defra stakeholders which in turn would be crucial for the CSR. David Pape reinforced the importance that his work could have for LAs and that in the face of increasing pressure to marginalise biodiversity work LAs must be a key priority. A key factor in influencing LAs could be public opinion and the forthcoming Defra Public Attitudes Survey could very usefully link into this work. Helen Dunn said that a specification for work on economic benefits was currently in preparation and that this work would be considered by the Treasury as robust economic evidence. David Goode asked whether there were any public goods more highly valued than biodiversity. Shaun Mowat responded that this had not been considered but that he thought it would be an interesting exercise. Dennis Morgan further noted that this should not be considered in isolation but should also consider the contributions other public goods such as education and health. Paul Raven suggested that local BAP Officers and other regional partners would be able to use this work in formulating the production of economic strategies and that the Local Government Act introducing statutory status for LSPs would be a further opportunity. Pete Brotherton said that an exciting aspect of this work was the costing of benefits and that if this could be driven down to lower levels then there would be huge potential in this as a tool. Helen Dunn noted that there were still a number of steps to understanding the range of BAP target benefits and Stephen Bass went on to say that the research programme reflected the need to bring together the ecology and economics to join the various aspects of benefits and values. The case studies had just commenced and had a duration of 12-18 months so there is still some way to go and there will be gaps for us to address. Simon Pryor commented on the importance of this for the Rural Development Programme budget settlement and that Forestry Commission were keen to demonstrate links between spending and benefits across axis ie joined up delivery. John Everitt said that it was important not to think solely in terms of cost but in terms of cost effectiveness. Sarah Webster said that in relation to the UKBAP study this was quite a challenge so there would be a pilot which would reflected different types of species. Shaun Mowat said that the draft specification had been distributed for comment and that he would circulate this more widely. He thought that it would be impossible to cover all the HAPs and SAPs and therefore the advice of "the ecology side" would be crucial. Shaun said that he and colleagues would consider comments made in the meeting and that the next stage would be to hold meetings with the workstreams.

He would circulate some generic material which would give an indication of the kind of work that could be undertaken.

## **7. Details of future meetings**

Tues 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2006	Rms LG 04 & 05, Page Street, London.
Weds 28 <sup>th</sup> March 2007	Rms A & B, Nobel House, London.
Weds 27 <sup>th</sup> June 2007	Rms A & B, Nobel House, London.
Weds 5 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2007	Rms LG 05 & 06, Page Street, London.

## **8. AOB**

Doug Hulyer said that as the workstream chairs produce reports for the meeting the agenda should give the opportunity to discuss issues raised within the reports. Sarah Webster said that the Secretariat would look at the possibility of this.

**ACTION: Secretariat to consider DH comment when producing next agenda**

Martin Brasher thanked everyone for their contributions and closed the meeting.