

England Biodiversity Group
Meeting 12 December 2003 10.30 am

Present: Brian Harding	Defra (chair)	David Pape	ALGE
Martin Capstick	Defra	Peter Brotherton	English Nature
Martin Harper	Plantlife	Tim Sands	Wildlife Trusts
Richard Wright	English Nature	Paul Raven	Environment Agency
Craig Hitchen	Defra	John Byng	Defra
Shaun Mowat	Defra	Pippa Morrison	MoD
Chris Spray	NWL	Hugh Craddock	Defra
Simon Pryor	Forestry Commission	David Goode	GLA
Mark Avery	RSPB	John Roberts	Defra (left 11.05)
Alex Tait	LGA	John Harvey	National Trust
Doug Hulyer	WWT	Simon Harding	Defra
Hilary Neal	Defra	John Robbins	Defra
Moira Anderson	Defra		
Apologies: Richard Lloyd	CA	John Osmond	Defra
Keith Duff	EN		

Draft Minutes

1.0 Welcome and introductions

2.0 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed

2.2 David Miller reported that action at 7.3 of the minutes was being taken forward by the Local and Regional implementation group and they would report to the EBG at a future meeting.

2.3 Richard Wright reported that English Nature's report on SSSI condition was published on 11 December. Copies could be obtained from EN at Peterborough

3.0 Update on progress (paper EBG/03/12)

3.1 Brian Harding thanked everyone who had contributed to the first annual stocktake of the Biodiversity Strategy which was published on 1 December. The stocktake showed that progress had been made, but the workstreams now needed to give serious consideration to the priorities that could be achieved by 2006.

3.2 The indicators for the England Biodiversity Strategy were also published on 1 December. The publication received a fair amount of press coverage and Brian Harding recorded his thanks to everyone involved, especially Andy Stott and his team.

3.3 Martin Capstick reported that the high-level group had met on 30 September, with representation from a good range of government departments and agencies. This first meeting began a debate on capturing the economic benefits of biodiversity and welcomed the proposal to use the green minister's network to focus action. Martin Capstick hoped to set up a meeting with divisional managers in ODPM and to approach the DTI for a representative on the high-level group. The next meeting was timetabled for 23 February 2004.

4.0 EBS quarterly report (paper EBG/03/13)

4.1 Brian Harding explained that the quarterly report is used as the basis for a report to the Defra management board as well as for the EBG. It was noted that, unlike other key Defra programmes, the EBG does not currently engage with ministers and it was proposed that the group should do so through regular progress reports and meetings with the Defra minister. This would help raise and maintain the profile of the strategy and give implementation group chairmen an opportunity to meet the Minister from time to time.

4.2 Overall the group welcomed the proposal. It was noted that the work of some of the workstreams was relevant to Departments other than Defra and officials from those Departments could be invited to meetings held with the Defra minister when relevant.

Action: Secretariat to initiate meeting with Defra minister

4.3 Tim Sands commented that the quarterly report could usefully use a 'red' assessment more frequently. This would make it easier for future reports to record any progress. Examples where this would be appropriate were for Water Framework Directive regulations and diffuse pollution. It was suggested that diffuse water pollution was an issue that should be taken up at the high-level group. A presentation to the EBG on progress with this issue would also be useful at a future meeting.

Action: Water and wetlands implementation group to consider a presentation on action to address diffuse water pollution

4.4 It was agreed that the next meeting of the EBG should be a facilitated workshop to explore joint working between the implementation groups. A workshop would be a better format to introduce momentum into the process. It could also look at targets and challenges. The secretariat would develop proposals for the event and volunteers to help were welcomed.

Action: Secretariat to scope issues for workshop.

4.5 Concern was expressed that proposals for the Woodland Grant Scheme did not make links with delivery of HAPs and SAPs. It was acknowledged that devolution of WGS funds to a regional level might also result in less integrated delivery of woodland HAPs and SAPs.

4.6 John Byng reported that every effort was being made to ensure that funding for higher tier agri-environment schemes would incorporate biodiversity and HAPs/SAPs. He also noted that there was a degree of uncertainty about the response of farmers to CAP reform. Intensification or abandonment of some agricultural land were possible outcomes.

4.7 It was proposed that the next workshop/meeting could include discussion of the higher tier schemes to provide input to the review process. John Byng would find out if the date of the next meeting in March would be too late for the group to have input to the review. The group was not restricted to quarterly meetings however and, if appropriate, a smaller group could approach John Osmond with EBG views prior to the next meeting.

Action: John Byng to enquire about timing of input to agri-environment scheme review and report back to EBG as soon as possible.

5.0 Information Gaps (paper EBG/03/14)

5.1 Peter Brotherton presented paper EBG/03/14 which provided additional analysis about HAPs and SAPs which were recorded by Lead Partners in the 2002 reporting round as having insufficient data to categorise status. It was noted that there was often a lot of data available at the local level through local record centres but it had not always been accessed in assembling the reports. Surprisingly, woodland habitats were the least known. A reporting 'standard' for future rounds would be useful. The paper suggested a way forward for prioritising resources to address the gaps in knowledge. English Nature could undertake additional analysis of the gaps. It was agreed that the next meeting/workshop should consider how to prioritise and fill information gaps.

Action: Peter Brotherton to refine and update paper

Action: A working group to consider information needs in preparation for workshop (Peter Brotherton, Martin Harper)

5.2 Hilary Neal noted that the UK Partnership Standing Committee had asked BRIG for a report on knowledge gaps. It was considered that the proposals contained in EBG/03/14 provided a useful framework for the BRIG report. The Group agreed that paper should be forwarded to BRIG with a recommendation that it be used in scoping the report for the Standing Committee. The issue of inadequate contact between Lead Partners and local record centres in compiling reports should also be raised with BRIG.

Action: Secretariat and EN to take forward with BRIG

6.0 The economics of biodiversity

6.1 Shaun Mowat gave a presentation on the economic value of biodiversity and made a case for government economic intervention. A copy of the presentation accompanies these minutes. Brian Harding noted that the high-level group would consider this issue, prompted by the Treasury representative. A presentation to the high-level group should have additional concrete examples such as the value people place on the countryside as

demonstrated by the Foot and Mouth outbreak or the flood management value. The benefits gained by 'free-riders' was a good case for economic intervention.

6.2 It was agreed that Defra should engage with the Treasury before the February meeting of high-level group. Volunteers to help in developing the presentation were invited, and any practical examples should be sent to Shaun Mowat or the Secretariat.

Action: Practical examples demonstrating the value of biodiversity to be sent to Shaun.mowat@defra.gsi.gov.uk or to the secretariat.

7.0 EBG Exchange Fair (paper EBG/03/15)

7.1 Hilary Neal explained that in previous years the secretariat had organised separate Lead Partner and LBAP workshops and the new-style event to be held on 2 and 3 March 2004 was a different way of working and bringing both groups together. The networking and information opportunities it offered would be set in the context of the England Biodiversity Strategy. All members of the EBG and their organisations were encouraged to participate and attend.

8.0 AOB

8.1 Tim Sands noted that Hilary Neal was leaving the Biodiversity Policy Unit for a new post in Defra's Global Wildlife Division. On behalf of the EBG he extended thanks for all her hard work, her inclusive approach and her good humour.

9.0 Date of next meeting

Thursday 18 March 2004