

England Biodiversity Group 4 September 2003

Present:	Brian Harding	Defra (chair)	Hilary Neal	Defra
	Martin Harper	Plantlife	John Harvey	National Trust
	Tim Sands	Wildlife Trusts	Chris Mahon	Cheshire WT
	Mark Avery	RSPB	Paul Raven	EA
	David Goode	LA	Alex Tait	LGA
	Chris Spray	NW	John Roberts	Defra
	John Byng	Defra	Shaun Mowat	Defra
	Keith Duff	EN	Keith Porter	EN
	Jane Goodwin	Defra	Doug Hulyer	WWT
	Moira Anderson	Defra		

Apologies :	David Miller	Durham CC	Richard Lloyd	CA
	Pippa Morrison	MoD	John Osmond	Defra
	Simon Harding	Defra	Simon Pryor	FC

Minutes

1.0 Welcome and introductions

1.1 The chair welcomed all present including the new members of the group John Roberts, chair of the Marine and Coastal implementation group, and David Goode, chair of the urban and development implementation group. John Byng was the new leader of the agriculture implementation group.

2.0 Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed. Matters arising would be dealt with under other items on the agenda.

3.0 England Biodiversity Strategy - structures and governance

3.1 It was noted that since the previous meeting the strategy had been adopted as one of Defra's key projects and programmes. This was a significant development since it increased the profile of the strategy within the Department and would mean additional technical programme support from the centre of Defra.

3.2 Paper EBG/03/06 set out the key people and responsibilities in implementing and reporting on the strategy. A clear difference between this and many of the other Defra programmes was that the strategy took a multi-stakeholder approach and relied on delivery across government and a wide partnership. The membership of the high level group outlined at paragraph 4 had been agreed and it would hold a first meeting on 30 September. This was an important step for delivery of the Strategy. It was important to use the high-level group effectively and the EBG should identify issues for its consideration.

3.3 It was argued that there was a great need for ownership of the strategy within local government. This was being pursued through the Local and Regional (LR) group and through the high-level group which had representation from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The LR group would produce information and guidance for LAs on incorporating biodiversity into Community Strategies. The revision to PPG9 should also provide an opportunity to raise the profile of biodiversity alongside social and economic issues. Hilary Neal reported that the revised PPG was under active development and a consultation draft should be available before the end of the year.

3.4 The chair noted that other governance arrangements could be considered if the current proposals proved to be inadequate.

4.0 England Biodiversity Strategy – progress report.

4.1 An addendum to paper EBG/03/07 on progress with implementation of the strategy was circulated. It summarised the issues identified by the implementation groups as 'red' and the key issues they had identified for consideration by the EBG. It was agreed that, although the use of the RAG reporting system was not precise, it was useful and should be used to monitor progress with implementation group work programmes. In future, progress reports should say why the items are identified as red.

4.2 The EBG agreed that the detailed progress reports were useful and that they should be received at each meeting. The EBG should retain the capacity to challenge and question the reports and the assessments. Workstream leaders should be clear what action would be needed to get the assessments out of 'red'. They should also not hesitate to use the 'red' assessment where they genuinely felt it to be justified. It was unwise to be over optimistic.

4.3 It was also agreed that although the 'red' assessment should be noted they were not necessarily issues for discussion by the EBG. Workstream leaders should identify and filter those key issues that would benefit from EBG consideration and develop a brief for consideration by the EBG setting out the main concerns. The EBG would then agree action or further referral to the high level delivery group.

Action: HN to expand on RAG definitions for workstream leaders

Action: Workstream leaders and HN to assess and prepare key issues for EBG consideration in advance of subsequent meetings

4.4 Of the key issues in the progress report EBG/03/07 development control issues, land management, incentives to combat diffuse pollution and action outside designated sites were identified as the ones that would benefit from consideration by the high level group.

4.5 David Goode reported that the Urban and Development group had held a first meeting on 19 August and a work programme had not yet been prepared. Issues identified at the meeting were

- Mainstreaming biodiversity into development
- The place of biodiversity in strategic planning given the pressure for housing

- Non-statutory sites
- Links with PPG9
- Influencing CABEspace agenda

4.6 John Roberts reported that the Marine and Coastal group was to meet in October to consider its work programme.

5.0 England Biodiversity Strategy – annual stock take

5.1 The first annual stock-take would be published in October 2003, coinciding with publication of the indicators document. Paper EBG/03/08 set out a proposed outline and timetable for publication. It would be a low-key document published on the UKBAP and Defra websites. The timetable set out in the paper should be adhered to. Workstream leaders would be the main contributors. The EBG would see drafts for comment through correspondence.

Action: HN to circulate additional guidance by 10 September

Action: Workstream leaders to submit progress report to HN by 15 September

Action: Publication of stocktake at the end of October

6.0 England Biodiversity Strategy – Indicators

6.1 Jane Goodwin requested feedback from the group on paper EBG/03/09 which set out the indicators for measuring progress with implementation of the strategy. Comments, including on objectives, assessment and key messages, should be received by 19 September. Subject to comments, the group was asked to agree publication of the indicators which formed a base line assessment.

Action: All to send any comments on indicators document to JG by 19 September

6.2 The group expressed its appreciation for all the hard work put into development of the indicators. It was agreed that:

- indicator A6 on the number of farmers participating in voluntary biodiversity schemes should be removed and the concept should be included in the current publication as 'under development' only;
- indicators T3 and F6 were relevant to public enjoyment as well as to the sectoral themes and this should be made explicit within these indicators;
- the figures for indicator P2 needed to be checked for accuracy; and
- the summary of indicators should use symbols to indicate trend instead of text.

6.3 Publication was agreed subject to these and further comments received by 19 September.

7.0 Area Based Initiatives

7.1 Hilary Neal reported that the Ecosystem Approach (EA) was discussed at the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference. There was a lot of consensus on the importance of taking forward a landscape scale approach to the conservation of

biodiversity using EA principles. Paragraph 8 in paper EBG/03/10 set out ideas for developing the concept and its application in and across initiatives.

7.2 Keith Porter said that EA is a challenging concept and English Nature's (EN) area based initiatives were examples of the application of EA principles. EN was well placed to provide information to help people reach decisions about landscape, to advise on options, to facilitate a cross-sectoral approach, to provide additional funding for projects and to measure outcomes. This is additional to EN's work on designated sites and recognises the importance of people, of broadening partnerships and working with a wider range of organisations.

7.3 Some concern was expressed that the social and economic strands of EA would take precedence over the environmental strand but overall the group considered that EA was an opportunity to maintain the profile of biodiversity. The simple check list proposed in paragraph 8 of the paper would be a useful tool. It was agreed that the local and regional group would prepare a paper on how the group can support implementation of the EA philosophy and this would be presented at a future meeting.

Action: Local and regional group to prepare a paper on how EBG can take forward the EA philosophy

8.0 England Information Group

8.1 Paper EBG/03/11 set out proposals for an England Information Group to support the implementation of the England Biodiversity Strategy and the implementation of the UKBAP in England. Socio-economic information was identified as an area where the proposed group could offer additional support. Concern was expressed about what this group would add to the BRIG and how best to use the resources available.

8.2 The need for this information was recognised but the detailed proposals for a group were not agreed. The chair proposed that EN and Defra should provide an information service for the strategy, but a formal group should not be established at this stage. The arrangement could be reviewed if it appeared not to be working satisfactorily.

9.0 2002 HAP and SAP Reports

9.1 It was noted that detailed analysis of HAPs and SAPs in England is shown in paper EBG/03/09 on indicators. Some further analysis was being done by English Nature, particularly of the gaps in knowledge to make a status assessment and what needed to be done to address them. More information would be available at the next meeting.

10.0 AOB

10.1 KD reported that in November English Nature will publish a condition assessment for all SSSIs in England.

11.0 Date of next meetings

Friday 12 December 2003
Thursday 18 March 2004