

UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee

UKBSC/03/3
Report on progress with
Biodiversity Research Advisory Group

30 April 2003

Report on Biodiversity Research Advisory Group

The Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG) met for the first time on the 6 March 2003. Minutes of the meeting can be found in Annex A and the current membership of the group is given in Annex B. Membership is still open for consideration so any suggestions would still be useful.

The group agreed a draft remit given in Annex C to be confirmed at their second meeting, scheduled for July 2003, which will also discuss a more detailed work programme that is currently being developed. They also agreed to commission work on the extent to which the six existing research themes, developed by the Biodiversity Research Working Group (BRWG), deal with socio-economic aspects of biodiversity research, and will use this as a basis for considering options for dealing with socio-economic research in the future. This will also be discussed at the second meeting.

It was agreed that the alien species research theme should be further developed as an example that the group can use to inform debate about the way they deliver future work, measure its success and communicate it.

Presentations were made to the group on the European biodiversity research agenda, the NERC science strategy and the DEFRA horizon scanning programme which will all be further explored in terms of their potential to contribute to and be assisted by the work of BRAG.

Draft Minutes

UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (UK BRAG)

11.00 am, 6th March 2003
Ministerial Conference Room (8th Floor),
Noble House, Smith Square, London

Attendance:

Miles Parker, DEFRA (Chair)	Carl Cilenti, JNCC (Secretariat)
Stephen Albon - CEH	Ian Bainbridge - Scottish Executive
Tim Blackstock - CCW	Kevin Charman - English Nature
Caroline Fenwick - NERC	Tony Hawkins - Plymouth Marine Lab
Andrew Jackson - RBG Kew	Michael Kaiser - University of Bangor
David MacDonald - University of Oxford	David McCracken - SAC
Gordon Patterson - FC	Beth Power - DEFRA
Andrew Pullin - Wildlife Link & BES	Paul Rose - JNCC
Jane Sears - Wildlife Link	Pete Robertson - CSL
Fred Rumsey - NHM	Martin Sharman - European Commission
Andrew Stott - DEFRA	Michael Usher - University of Stirling
Johannes Vogel - NHM	Allan Watt - CEH Banchory

Apologies:

Richard Brand-Hardy - DEFRA	Paul Leonard - DEFRA
Scot Mathieson - SEPA	Hilary Neal - DEFRA
Howard Platt - EHS NI	Geeta Puri - NAW
Kevin Watts - Forestry Commission	

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Background to establishment of UK BRAG

Andrew Stott informed the group of the origins of UK BRAG, the work of the former Biodiversity Research Working Group (BRWG) and the current UK biodiversity process within which UK BRAG is placed. Some discussion followed on how the relationships between BRAG and other UK Biodiversity Groups need to be taken into account in setting the terms of reference for BRAG. The group felt the relationship with the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG) was of particular interest.

Action 2.1 Secretariat to circulate Terms of Reference and membership for the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG), to assist in defining the role and membership of BRAG and to help maintain communications and sharing of information between the two groups.

3. Status and draft remit of UK BRAG (paper BRAG 1/1)

The draft remit of BRAG was accepted subject to some minor amendments. Some concern was expressed about only two meetings per year given that this would leave only 5 more before the first three year review. The following suggestions were made:

- i. The meetings schedule should be reviewed in light of the final three year work programme.
- ii. Consideration should be given to having longer meetings.
- iii. Communication between meetings needs to be given high priority to help counter the problems caused by infrequent meetings.

The OST code of conduct was accepted as a useful guide but being very extensive the secretariat was requested to highlight the relevant sections for group members to read.

A suggestion to review the remit for the group after three years was accepted.

Membership was felt to be central to the success of the group. The business sector, Local Biodiversity Action Plan representation, outstanding invites to the first meeting of the group, the British Ecological Society (BES), Marine biodiversity, Sustainable Development and Social Sciences were all felt to be potential gaps or weaknesses in the current membership. A number of potential individuals who could be invited onto the group to represent these areas were suggested. Andrew Pullin kindly agreed to represent both Wildlife Link and the British Ecological Society (BES).

Action 3.1 All to comment on the revised remit for BRAG when circulated by the secretariat with the draft minutes.

Action 3.2 Secretariat to make members of the group aware of the relevant sections of the OST code of conduct and members to read these sections.

Action 3.3 All to send any suggestions for additional members of the group to the secretariat who will compile a minimal list of invitees to agree with the group by correspondence in order that new members can be present at the second meeting.

4. Draft BRAG work plan (Papers BRAG 1/2 and 1/2b)

Discussion focused on the objectives and their order, the redundancy of the word cross-cutting, the need to set ourselves measurable targets and whether to extend the work beyond the scope of the UK BAP to cover all aspects of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The objectives, targets and workplan were also agreed to be essential to the overall remit of BRAG so the remit (paper 1/1) and workplan (papers 1/2 and 1/2b) should be combined for submission to the UKBSC. Further work will be needed to ensure measurable products are identified within the work of UK BRAG.

The most difficult area to resolve was the extension of the scope of the group to cover all aspects of the CBD. While welcome in principle, an extension of scope would take the work of BRAG beyond the remit of the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee (UKBSC) to which BRAG is accountable. It is possible that the UK BAP will increasingly align itself with the work programmes of the CBD so reducing this conflict but at present this is not the case. A compromise was to make a small addition to the wording of the over-arching objective for BRAG to reflect the dual relevance of BRAG work to the CBD and the UK BAP. An additional objective was also proposed to cover advice around scientific and technical CBD issues.

A new order for the objectives was agreed and the word 'cross-cutting' was generally felt to be redundant in most places that it occurred. The need to fulfill the role of a national biodiversity research platform was felt to be part of the overarching objective of BRAG but it was necessary to further define what was meant by the term 'platform' or define an alternative term.

Some clarity was also needed around use of the word 'programme' as this was central to the level at which BRAG was going to work. The word theme was generally thought to be better. For example, BRAG would look to see if new biodiversity research themes needed to be addressed as opposed to developing new research programmes.

Communication was often mentioned as critical to the success of BRAG and communication requires a clear understanding of the audience BRAG wants to deliver its advice to. Consequently, the community BRAG represents, and therefore delivers advice to, needs to be defined within the remit and workplan.

Tasks as outlined in paper 2b tabled were discussed. Detailed comments were invited in writing in order to agree a set of tasks in time for the May meeting of UKBSC. A general point was the need to agree measurable targets for the work of BRAG and to communicate our work as widely as possible based on outcome orientated targets and not on the action we take to reach them.

A lot of debate also focused on the need to include socio-economic aspects of biodiversity and whether this should be a component of all biodiversity research themes BRAG addresses or a theme in its own right. It was also noted that most research programmes, especially programme six '*Developing tools to optimise policies to favour biodiversity*', already dealt with this issue to some extent. The group felt ill equipped to decide and called for work to be commissioned for the next meeting to inform BRAG's debate on socio-economic aspects of biodiversity research. This work should identify the extent to which the existing 6 research programmes developed by BRWG address socio-economic aspects of biodiversity research and in light of what has been achieved in this research area in the past, suggest options for dealing with socio-economic aspects of biodiversity research in the future.

There was general agreement however, that aspects such as health and quality of life had a large biodiversity component and that socio-economic considerations were consequently important.

It was also requested that the next meeting be provided with a review of progress and an implementation plan for the existing 6 research programmes (themes) developed by BRWG.

Action 4.1 Secretariat to amend the remit and provisional workplan in light of BRAG discussion, combine these into a Terms of Reference, agree this by correspondence and submit it to the May 2003 meeting of the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee.

Action 4.2 Secretariat, in collaboration with DEFRA and members of the group, to commission work on the socio-economic areas of biodiversity research and the

options for dealing with this type of research in future, to be presented as a workshop session at the next meeting of BRAG.

Action 4.3 Secretariat to provide an update on progress and draft implementation plans for the 6 research programmes proposed by BRWG in time for consideration at the next meeting of BRAG in June 2003.

Action 4.4 Secretariat to liaise with DEFRA about appropriate publicity to announce the establishment of BRAG. All to ensure that awareness of BRAG is raised within their respective organizations and communities.

5. Proposed programme on introduced species (BRAG 1/3)

There was some concern expressed as to whether BRAG should be giving priority to the programme of research for introduced species. It was agreed that the programme could be developed as a model to assist BRAG in developing the approach. A sub-group was set up to work with the secretariat to assess relevant research initiatives already implementing the programme and to identify what, if anything, additional was required.

Steve Albon, Ian Bainbridge, Kevin Charman, David MacDonald Pete Robertson and Michael Usher volunteered for the sub group and others were invited to contact the secretariat if they wished to be involved.

Action 5.1 Secretariat to review proposals for an introduced species programme, taking account of recent policy developments and other ongoing and planned initiatives: establish and consult a BRAG sub-group to determine whether to proceed, and if so best approach to implementation and involvement of partners.

6. Development of information exchange system (BRAG 1/4)

Kevin Charman raised the issue that the information needed for the work of BRAG was of many and varied types that the system we put in place needs to take this into account and at the same time be useful to research needs other than those of BRAG. Some of the work English Nature are doing on evidence based decision making is relevant to this.

Action 6.1 Kevin Charman to liaise with the secretariat over the development of the information exchange system to ensure that all requirements for information are met. Secretariat to update the paper subsequently and circulate to all for confirmation by correspondence.

7. European Initiatives - Martin Sharman and Allan Watt.

Martin Sharman and Allan Watt presented information on the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS) and invited the group to consider what role they could play with regard to the forthcoming EPBRS meeting in Greece. The meeting will discuss draft statements prepared for each of the main topics on the November 2003 CBD SBSTTA meeting. The themes are protected areas, sustainable use, ecosystems approach, indicators, climate change, mountains and diseases. This related closely to the previous discussion about the remit of BRAG and the group wanted to reconsider how it might best contribute to European and UK input into

SBSTTA in light of the final remit and emerging work programme.

Action 7.1 Secretariat to make available draft EPBRS statements and to establish arrangements for consultation with BRAG on EPBRS issues.

Action 7.2 Secretariat to inform the group of the current processes by which the UK engages with SBSTTA both directly and through the European.

Action 7.3 Andrew Stott and Allan Watt to provide a report of the next meeting of EPBRS in Lesbos to next BRAG meeting.

8. Information items

8.3 NERC Science Strategy - Caroline Fenwick

Caroline Fenwick presented information on NERC's science strategy. BRAG was interested to know how much the strategy had been influenced by the work of BRWG but this was difficult to quantify. A consultation mechanism for the strategy had not yet been formulated but there was likely to be a role for BRAG. The research councils were developing a major joint programme on Rural Economies and Land Use and there might be a role for BRAG in providing advice on priorities for biodiversity. In working out how BRAG could be of most value it was thought to be important that we keep the next 2004 spending review in mind.

8.4 DEFRA Horizon Scanning - Beth Power

Beth power introduced DEFRA's Horizon Scanning programme which does not have an explicit biodiversity workstream but does have strong biodiversity components within many other workstreams.

Action 8.1 Secretariat to liaise with Beth Power to link the horizon scanning and BRAG websites.

Action 8.2 Secretariat to liaise with Beth Power to develop an approach for BRAG to provide advice on Horizon Scanning biodiversity projects.

9. Short announcements - update on relevant events and initiatives (round table)

Michael Usher provided copies of the Scottish Biodiversity Forum Research Strategy and expressed a wish to integrate more closely with BRAG in the future.

Andrew Pullin informed BRAG of a series of meetings being arranged by BES on the subject of the critical skills gap in biological recording and monitoring. The first meeting is on the 3 April at Birmingham University.

Martin Sharman emphasised that there was a great deal of useful work that BRAG could engage with in Europe and internationally and offered to send BRAG a list of the current fifth framework projects with UK involvement (attached).

Action 9.1 Secretariat to create a bulletin board for UK BRAG within the UK biodiversity website to facilitate consultations with the group, to receive papers such as the EPBRS statements, to distribute information such as the presentations given to BRAG and to help communicate the work of BRAG.

10. Review of action points.

The following 14 actions were agreed:

Action 2.1 Secretariat to circulate Terms of Reference and membership for the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG), to assist in defining the role and membership of BRAG and to help maintain communications and sharing of information between the two groups.

Action 3.1 All to comment on the revised remit for BRAG when circulated by the secretariat with the draft minutes.

Action 3.2 Secretariat to make members of the group aware of the relevant sections of the OST code of conduct and members to read these sections.

Action 3.3 All to send any suggestions for additional members of the group to the secretariat who will compile a minimal list of invitees to agree with the group by correspondence in order that new members can be present at the second meeting.

Action 4.1 Secretariat to amend the remit and provisional workplan in light of BRAG discussion, combine these into a Terms of Reference, agree this by correspondence and submit it to the May 2003 meeting of the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee.

Action 4.2 Secretariat, in collaboration with DEFRA and members of the group, to commission work on the socio-economic areas of biodiversity research and the options for dealing with this type of research in future, to be presented as a workshop session at the next meeting of BRAG.

Action 4.3 Secretariat to provide an update on progress and draft implementation plans for the 6 research programmes proposed by BRWG in time for consideration at the next meeting of BRAG in June 2003.

Action 4.4 Secretariat to liaise with DEFRA about appropriate publicity to announce the establishment of BRAG. All to ensure that awareness of BRAG is raised within their respective organizations and communities.

Action 5.1 Secretariat to review proposals for an introduced species programme, taking account of recent policy developments and other ongoing and planned initiatives: establish and consult a BRAG sub-group to determine whether to proceed, and if so best approach to implementation and involvement of partners.

Action 6.1 Kevin Charman to work with the secretariat in the early stages of development of the information system to share best practice and to ensure that all requirements for information are met.

Action 7.1 Secretariat to make available draft EPBRS statements and to establish arrangements for consultation with BRAG on EPBRS issues.

Action 7.2 Secretariat to inform the group of the current processes by which the UK engages with SBSTTA both directly and through the European.

Action 7.3 Andrew Stott and Allan Watt to provide a report of the next meeting of EPBRS in Lesbos to next BRAG meeting.

Action 8.1 Secretariat to liaise with Beth Power to link the horizon scanning and brag websites.

Action 8.2 Secretariat to liaise with Beth Power to develop an approach for BRAG to provide advice on Horizon Scanning biodiversity projects.

Action 9.1 Secretariat to create a bulletin board for UK BRAG within the UK biodiversity website to facilitate consultations with the group, to receive papers such as the EPBRS statements, to distribute information such as the presentations given to BRAG and to help communicate the work of BRAG.

11. Date and venue for next meeting.

There was some concern about whether 6 monthly meetings were frequent enough given the quantity of work BRAG had to do. A longer meeting in July with a half day workshop on socio economic aspects was suggested. Scotland (Ian Bainbridge) offered to host the next meeting of the group.

Action 11.1 Secretariat to agree dates for the next meeting with Ian Bainbridge, confirm dates with BRAG members and work with Ian to organize the meeting.

Membership of UK BRAG as off February 2003

Chair: Miles Parker (DEFRA)

Secretariat: Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)

Stephen Albon	Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH)
Ian Bainbridge	Scottish Executive
Tim Blackstock	Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)
Richard Brand-Hardy	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
Kevin Charman	English Nature
Caroline Fenwick	Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)
Tony Hawkins	Plymouth Marine Laboratory
Andrew Jackson	Royal Botanic Gardens - Kew
Michael Kaiser	University of Bangor
Paul Leonard	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
David MacDonald	University of Oxford
David McCracken	Scottish Agricultural College (SAC)
Scot Mathieson	Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
Hilary Neal	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
Gordon Patterson	Forestry Commission
Howard Platt	Environment and Heritage Service - Northern Ireland
Andrew Pullin	Wildlife Link - University of Birmingham
Geeta Puri	National Assembly for Wales
Paul Rose	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
Jane Sears	Wildlife Link - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Pete Robertson	Central Science Laboratory
Martin Sharman	European Commission
Andrew Stott	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
Michael Usher	University of Stirling
Johannes Vogel	Natural History Museum
Allan Watt	Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) - Banchory
Kevin Watts	Forestry Commission

Draft Remit for UK BRAG

1. Background

a. *Biodiversity Research Working Group (BRWG)*

The BRWG was established in 1998 to identify and prioritise 'cross-cutting' research needed to support Government commitments under the UK BAP. A full report on the work of BRWG is available from the UK Biodiversity Website. This report includes a general overview of cross-cutting biodiversity research in the UK organised under 6 major research themes covering:

- i. Science for the conservation of genetic and native species diversity.
- ii. Addressing the impacts of introduced species.
- iii. Understanding the roles of biodiversity in ecosystem function.
- iv. Science-based monitoring of biodiversity and evaluation of actions.
- v. Science-based management of habitats and ecosystems.
- vi. Developing tools to optimise policies to favour biodiversity.

These themes were based on the results of 5 workshops and follow-up activity taken forward by the BRWG covering:

- i. Biodiversity and agriculture: focus on pastoral systems
- ii. Introductions, translocations and genetic conservation
- iii. Marine and coastal issues
- iv. Landscape ecology, habitat fragmentation and land use change scenarios
- v. Biodiversity monitoring and indicators.

b. *UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG)*

The BRWG recommended that its work be continued under the direction of the proposed UK Biodiversity Partnership and this has been endorsed by the UK Biodiversity Group in its report (Sustaining the Variety of Life) and confirmed by the first meeting of the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee (UKBSC) on 5 September 2002. At this meeting, DEFRA's Director of Science was invited to establish a UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG) and develop a plan of work.

c. *Defra/JNCC Service Level Agreement (SLA)*

BRWG also recommended that Defra and JNCC should support a biodiversity research co-ordination mechanism to follow-on from BRWG. In response to this recommendation DEFRA and JNCC have signed a Service Level Agreement to Co-ordinate Biodiversity Research Activity (CoBRA). This agreement will support the

employment of a co-ordination officer and creation of an information exchange mechanism.

2. Overall purpose and aims of the UK BRAG

The overall purpose of the Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG) is to provide advice to the community of biodiversity research funding bodies, research users and research institutions about biodiversity research priorities and co-ordination in the UK.

UK BRAG aims to:

- d. To promote and facilitate research that seeks to support the delivery of UK BAP objectives, and hence implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), including the needs of species and habitat action plans and cross-cutting issues.
- e. To enable effective and efficient UK engagement with European and international biodiversity research initiatives and hence fulfil the role of a national biodiversity research platform.

3. Way of working

a. Accountability

UK BRAG will report through its chairman to the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee.

b. Meetings

UK BRAG will meet at least twice a year alternating between a London and non-London venue. Meetings will be supported by a secretariat service provided by JNCC under the terms of the DEFRA/JNCC Service Level Agreement. Wherever possible BRAG will try to work between meetings electronically or by convening sub-groups but recognises that extra meetings might sometimes be necessary.

c. OST Code of Conduct

The code of conduct for scientific advisory committees was published by the Office of Science and Technology (OST) in December 2001 and can be found in full at the following web address (<http://www.ost.gov.uk/policy/advice/copsac>). Strictly speaking this guidance does not apply to the UK BRAG as UK BRAG reports to the UK Biodiversity Partnership through the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee and the Group provides advice on research co-ordination rather than scientific results. It does however seem sensible to follow the guidance as much as possible but avoid any unnecessary formalities. Consequently, all members of UK BRAG are encouraged to read the relevant sections of the document. The sections on the responsibility of members (paras 25-32), working practices (paras 46-54) and publishing advice (paras 76-89) might be most useful.

3. Membership

The membership of UK BRAG should represent the UK biodiversity research and practitioner community including members from Wildlife Link, statutory conservation agencies, academia, the collections, NERC and government departments. However the Group needs to be limited to a manageable size. Members of BRAG will be expected to represent and promote the work of BRAG within their organisations and wider whenever the opportunity arises. Wider participation will be facilitated through workshops on particular themes and the development of a website. It is important that membership is regularly reviewed to ensure that sufficient and appropriate expertise is available to implement the work plan.

Duration

The UK BRAG will undertake a comprehensive review of its outputs, remit, objectives and membership and report on the findings to the UKBSC in March 2006.

4. Activities

To fulfil its objectives UK BRAG will undertake the following activities:

- f. Advise on the work of the CoBRA SLA.
- g. Provide a forum for sharing ideas and information across the biodiversity research and practitioner community and advise on development of associated information systems.
- h. Advise on, and facilitate, the implementation of the six BRWG recommended research themes and identify new themes as necessary.
- i. Advise on appropriate mechanisms for co-ordination and collaboration.
- j. Consider and advise on UK's engagement with European and international biodiversity research issues.
- k. Promote the work of BRAG as widely as possible.

A work plan, including milestones and deliverables, will be prepared following further discussions at the second meeting.

5. Profile and communications

UK BRAG will aim to develop a high profile within the biodiversity research and biodiversity practitioner communities of the UK and Europe. It will do this through wide dissemination of results by websites, newsletters, publication and if appropriate workshops. It is an integral part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) infrastructure and will feature prominently in the work of the UK BAP.

Work will be reported regularly to the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee.