

UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee
8 October 2008
Minutes

Those Present:

John Robbs (Chair)	Defra	Diana Reynolds	WAG
Mark Avery	WCL	Paul Rose	JNCC
Eric Blencowe	Defra	Charles Stewart Roper	SG
Nigel Bourn	WCL	Mark Stevenson	Defra
Martin Brasher	Defra	Andy Stott	Defra
Peter Brotherton	NE	Roger Ward	Defra
Peter Costigan	Defra	Sarah Webster	Defra
Greg Mudge	SNH	Andy Williams	Defra
David Parker	CCW		

Professor William Sutherland, Cambridge University, gave a presentation in the afternoon.

Apologies:

Ken Bradley	DOENI
Bob Brown	NI Biodiversity Group
Steve Lee-Bapty	Defra
Mike Meharg	DOENI
Graham Seymour	DOENI
Richard Weyl	DOENI
Andrew Wood	NE (Peter Brotherton deputised)

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 John Robbs reported that Malcolm Vincent, JNCC had retired and John Everitt (WCL) had moved to a new job at the Nottingham Wildlife Trust. The Committee recorded its thanks to both. John Robbs also mentioned that Andy Stott would be taking up a new post at JNCC.

1.2 John added that the Ministerial reshuffle had resulted in a new Defra biodiversity minister – Huw Irranca-Davies – and that he would use “wildlife” in his title rather than “biodiversity”.

2. Minutes of Last meeting and Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes were agreed subject to the following changes:

- The action at 3.2 attributed to Hazel Drewett should have been attributed to JNCC
- The UK Habitat Groups referred to at 3.3 should be subject to review after a period of time. It was thought that that should be at least two years.

2.2 Pete Brotherton also mentioned that a few entries attributed to him needed a little nuancing. This did not affect the substance and he would address this with the secretariat outside the meeting.

2.3 Sarah Webster reported on the following actions:

Action Point 3.2 [JNCC] to circulate marine habitat definitions to Standing Committee when they were agreed. Habitat definitions (action 3.2) were being finalised by JNCC. Some had already been posted to the UK BAP website with those outstanding expected to be posted by 20 October.

Action Point 3.9: Any comments on redrafting to be sent to Malcolm Vincent by 17 June. Covered at 1st bullet of Agenda item 3.

Action Point 3.10: Malcolm to produce a definitive version of the UK Habitat Groups' Terms of Reference paper, reflecting the Standing Committee's emphasis on light-touch groups focussed on sharing information. Covered at 1st bullet of Agenda item 3.

Action Point 3.17: BRIG to pass the signposting information on to countries, and publish it on the UK BAP web-site or BARS as appropriate. Done

Action Point 3.19: BRIG to organise the collation of information on generic advice on habitat management for species at UK level for all habitat groups. Covered at 2nd bullet of Agenda item 3.

Action Point 3.26: Malcolm Vincent, through BRIG, to consider how success could be determined, and come back to Standing Committee with proposals, including a monitoring and reporting process to capture this. Covered at 3rd bullet of Agenda item 3.

Action Point 4.3: Martin Brasher to report Standing Committee's comments back to John Robbs and proceed subject to approval. With the exceptions of the addition of moths, and water birds to indicator 1, these had been implemented, as part of the 2008 update on International Biodiversity Day, 22 May. The 2009 update was covered at Agenda item 4.

Action Point 5.3: All to note the need to input to the 2008 reporting round in a timely fashion. Covered at Agenda item 5.

Action Point 6.3: Defra to look into the question of OT reporting to CBD, and report back to Standing Committee. Five OTs were included in the UK ratification and Defra would liaise with FCO over their contributions. Resources were an issue for them and it could take the form of case studies. These would be woven into the UK report.

Action Point 7.7: JNCC to take forward the strategy subject to a revision of the paper widening the scope to make stronger links with (a) "core surveillance" – and closely related evidence needs, in particular biological recording /inventories (knowing where things are) and (b) process studies (understanding why things are changing). Covered at agenda item 7.

Action Point 7.8: The terms of reference of the Surveillance Implementation Group needed to come back to Standing Committee for approval. Covered at agenda item 7.

2.4 At action 6.3 - reports by Overseas Territories to CBD, Eric Blencowe added that it was a matter for each OT to decide whether or not it wished to ratify multilateral agreements and that where they did, the Defra family provided what assistance it could.

2.5 Paul Rose added that JNCC continued to promote the benefits of CBD to all OTs. He also confirmed that JNCC provided some assistance with their reporting to the five OTs associated with the UK ratification, and this ensured a certain level of quality. Mark Avery mentioned that there were more globally threatened species in the OTs than in metropolitan UK. He felt that against this background, the UK should be doing more than submitting some case studies. It was agreed that JNCC would investigate what had happened for previous reports, but it was agreed that the UK needed to put in a proportionate effort to secure good reports from the OTs.

2.6 Action: JNCC to investigate how contributions from OTs had previously been incorporated into the UK national report to CBD

3. Conservation Delivery of UK Priority Species and Habitats

UK Habitat Groups – Terms of Reference and Working Procedures

3.1 Paul Rose introduced this item. He explained that the paper was a minor re-draft of a previous paper, adjusted to reflect devolution, but retaining the key elements agreed at the November 2007 meeting.

3.2 The Committee was content with the re-draft.

3.3 On next steps, it was agreed that JNCC would circulate a BRIG paper on timelines for the forward process, including initiating the UK Groups, inviting comments within 3-4 weeks. Greg Mudge confirmed that Scotland were ready to engage in the first meetings at UK level.

3.4 Action: JNCC to circulate BRIG paper on timelines

Habitat Management Plans

3.5 Paul Rose introduced this item. He pointed out that BRIG had discussed the issue of habitat management and had reached the view that collating best practice in the four countries and making it available through a web-based manual would be the best way to proceed. The Committee endorsed this approach. Paul confirmed that the manual would be shared with the Committee in prototype, but that this was unlikely to be ready for another six months.

3.6 Mark Avery welcomed these developments and suggested that the effectiveness of the web-based manual might be reviewed after a period of time. This was agreed by the Committee.

3.7 Action: JNCC, through BRIG, to establish a prototype for the web-based searchable manual of habitat management for species.

Success Criteria

3.8 Paul Rose introduced this item. He reported that BRIG had identified principles to underpin success criteria. He explained that BRIG had left it at the “principles” stage because success was dependent on the targets set for species by individual countries, which could vary under devolution.

3.9 Pete Brotherton thought that the absence of data would make it extremely difficult to undertake assessments for declining priority species. He added that the minimum viable state was a risky starting-point, as minimal viable population size, at least for most vertebrates, was a much smaller number than we could deem to represent conservation success. He did not see why work on country targets needed to hold this up as the success criteria were about de-listing, not meeting targets. He also suggested that the principles should be applied to the existing list where data existed to establish whether a different list would emerge, although Diana Reynolds felt that resource constraints might inhibit such an exercise.

3.10 Greg Mudge was broadly happy with the paper but felt more clarity was needed on the relationship between the success of conservation actions and de-listing. He also queried whether the principles should be applied to habitats as well as species. David Parker expressed concern about countries setting their own criteria for targets and the impact this might have on the ability to aggregate targets at the UK level, suggesting that it would be helpful if JNCC provided some guidance to countries on target-setting, beyond the delisting criteria.

3.11 Mark Avery shared concerns expressed by others, but thought the principles were sensible and that the tasks for determining de-listing showed good thinking. Charles Stewart Roper confirmed that he was happy as long as the criteria applied only to de-listing. Paul Rose added that all habitats would have action plans that contained targets and that the success criteria had originally been developed to cover only species, but he thought it might be developed to cover habitats. Pete Brotherton thought it unlikely that habitats could ever be de-listed as their importance for priority species was a key criterion for listing.

3.12 Summing up the discussion, John Robbs clarified that the current principles set out in the success criteria paper related to the removal of species from the list. They needed some more work to meet concerns raised, for example on minimum viable state. There was also a need for a separate piece of work that would underpin the four countries’ work to develop what would be more political targets for some, at least, of the long list of priorities.

3.13 Action: JNCC, working through BRIG, to re-work the de-listing paper to meet the concerns raised, for example on minimum viable state and, separately, to work up principles to underpin work by the countries on setting targets for priority species and habitats.

Housekeeping

3.14 Sarah Webster introduced this item. She reported that the UK list of priority species contained a few inaccuracies, and required the addition of two species of moth and the removal of one species of fungus. It was agreed that JNCC could correct the list without the need to trouble ministers and that the four countries would amend their respective statutory lists as necessary.

3.15 On the issue of “housekeeping” reviews, it was agreed that these would occur on three-yearly intervals starting in 2009.

3.16 Action: JNCC to correct UK list on the UK BAP web-site and initiate a “housekeeping” review incorporating taxonomic and nomenclatural changes following the 2008 reporting round.

4. Biodiversity Indicators in your Pocket

4.1 Mark Stevenson introduced this item. He ran through the background, progress made in 2008 and plans for 2009. On progress, he mentioned that bats and wintering waterbirds had been added to the indicators and that a measure for water and wetland breeding birds would be added in 2009. He added that moth populations would not be included until after 2009.

4.2 He confirmed that Defra’s European Marine Environment Policy Branch and Marine Strategy and Evidence Branch were content with the work on developing a new indicator on marine ecosystem integrity. On developing an indicator of habitat connectivity, he reported that it was behind schedule and might not be delivered on time. He undertook to follow-up with JNCC whether data existed to allow an assessment of the condition of features in protected areas as both Pete Brotherton and David Parker thought there ought to be sufficient data.

4.3 On plans for 2009, it was agreed to:

- clarify the basis of traffic-light assessments to show that they reflect “change” rather than “status”;
- consolidate the baseline data for HAPs and SAPs to allow for a greater sample size for the 2008 comparison;
- adopt the marine ecosystem indicator based on fish length in the North Sea and work with Defra’s marine fisheries team to investigate similar data from other seas around the UK;
- investigate the scope to publish electronically all fiches that were ready in time to feed into the CBD report and, if necessary, delay printing a

revision of BIYP by a few months to ensure that it captures any late indicators' data, such as that on habitat connectivity.

4.4 Sarah Webster confirmed that BRIG had been tasked to look at reporting against the longer list of priority species and habitats.

4.5 Action: Mark Stevenson to follow up with JNCC on the availability of suitable data to undertake assessments of protected area features.

4.6 Mark Stevenson to consider with Defra statisticians the scope for publishing 2009 fiches electronically in piecemeal fashion in time to allow them to be used in the fourth national report to CBD.

5. 2008 Reporting Round

5.1 Paul Rose reported that 15% of LBAPs, 20% of species leads and 2% of habitat leads had submitted reports. He confirmed that the response rate was a little worse than previous rounds. JNCC were asked to give devolved administrations and country agencies plenty of notice if help was needed in securing a good response.

5.2 Action: JNCC to approach administrations and agencies if help was needed to secure responses for the reporting round.

6. Fourth National Report to CBD

6.1 Eric Blencowe explained that the report would contain four chapters and that the UK had already submitted a sample of the fourth chapter as a suggested model for others to follow. He added that the CBD Secretariat were content to receive the UK report in June, later than the March deadline. He added that 25-30 parties were expected to submit their reports on time, including the EU. A further 30 were preparing reports which would be late.

6.2 For the EU report, it was recognised that the UK timetable would not allow for a complete UK report to be submitted to the EU. It was agreed that the UK would not alter its timetable but submit whatever was available at the time of the requests from the Commission.

6.3 It was also agreed that the UK report should contain a section on the post-2010 target. This would help to shape CBD thinking on the issue.

6.4 Andy Stott reminded countries that they would need to submit case-study contributions to support Chapters 2 and 3. Paul Rose added that the 30 November deadline for responses from each administration to the consultation, providing the specific additional information that would be requested was important because the UK had been invited by Japan to take part in a CBD capacity-building workshop for Asia, and ought to be in a position to set an example.

6.5 Charles Stewart Roper suggested that a meeting between the four countries might prove useful to help explain the report's contents as well as omissions. This would need to take place in the December/January period.

6.6 Action: Countries to submit case studies to support chapters 2 and 3 and specific additional information requested by 30 November. Eric Blencowe to put in place arrangements for a meeting in December/January, should one prove necessary.

7. Surveillance Strategy

7.1 Paul Rose introduced this item. He pointed out that the strategy was "work in progress", but would welcome guidance from Standing Committee of the outline Terms of Reference for the steering group and any other comments.

7.2 It was agreed to include "freshwater" in the title of the strategy. Pete Brotherton raised the point that meeting the needs of UK BAP only appeared to be covered at Objective 3, and deserved specific mention at Objective 1. Paul explained that this was because of the logical structure of the strategy, which started from the general (at Objective 1) and worked towards the more specific (at Objective 3), although he agreed that specific mention of UK BAP could be made at Objective 1. The outline TORs were agreed subject to a minor edit removing the reference to a contribution of data to the Environmental Observation Framework as this does not hold its own data. David Parker welcomed the point on coordination. Andy Stott added that there was an interface with BRAG.

7.3 Action: JNCC to amend outline TORs

8. Research

8.1 Paul Rose reported for information that actions emerging from the signposting exercise not falling to the four countries would be the subject of a workshop which would identify research and one-off survey projects for species and identify groupings of research which could be taken forward collectively in the near future.

9. Post 2010 Targets

9.1 Martin Brasher provided an oral update of events in the pipeline which would provide opportunities to influence the process. These included two technical workshops to be hosted by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre with invitees from around the world in the first half of 2009, an international event which the CBD had invited the UK to lead, and, possibly, a similar event to be hosted by Germany. JNCC were also reported to be considering hosting a '2010' event.

9.2 Martin confirmed that he was drawing up a critical path of key events and other opportunities to influence thinking, such as the UK CBD National

Report. He would circulate this paper to the Standing Committee. He added that we were in touch with the Germans about their thinking and the potential of their event if they held one. Eric Blencowe added that Defra officials would be meeting WCMC on 16 October to discover how we might contribute to their workshops.

9.3 It was agreed that the UK would give a firm commitment to the Secretariat to host an event. Martin's critical-path paper would help determine its timing, but issues to consider were whether to await the outcome of the two WCMC workshops or link to them, possible joint event with JNCC.

9.4 Action: Martin Brasher to circulate critical-path paper

10. Partnership Conference 2009

10.1 John Robbs expressed thanks to Welsh colleagues for hosting the 2008 Conference. The next conference was due to be held in England, and he said that he saw merit in the model of combining a national conference with the UK event, as had happened in Wales. It was agreed that the national/UK model would be adopted for 2009 and that the conference would last two days. Martin Brasher would lead a steering group with Pete Brotherton representing NE.

10.2 It was agreed that careful thought would need to be given to the location, timing and theme as this might help encourage greater participation by UK BAP lead partners.

10.3 Action: Martin Brasher to initiate a steering group meeting

11. AOB

11.1 Diana Reynolds mentioned that there was limited uptake for an annual training course being run in Wales (14-16 October) on biodiversity action plans and the biodiversity duty. She added that the course might have to be cancelled and it might not be possible to run it in the future if there was not greater uptake. She suggested that all countries contribute £2K, which would allow the training to be offered free of charge.

11.2 There were no commitments to contribute financially in the future. Pete Brotherton mentioned that the promotional leaflet had a very strong Welsh flavour, which might need to be amended to help attract participants from elsewhere. He and Greg Mudge from SNH felt it was too late to help drum up participation for a course taking place in the following week, but undertook to do what they could. The Secretariat was asked to notify Northern Ireland colleagues.

11.3 Action: Secretariat to alert NI colleagues of the training event in Wales

12. Date of Next meeting

12.1 23 April 2009, Bristol.

13. Presentation by Bill Sutherland

13.1 Professor Sutherland gave a presentation on responding to the current and future threats facing the UK BAP. He focused on issues, solutions and questions. He referred to the importance of horizon scanning in identifying issues and solutions. He introduced a decision-making model which relied upon reviewing evidence systematically to deliver synopses that in turn would shape interventions for tackling problems.

13.2 He posed five questions on identifying future trends and research gaps, strategies for dealing with issues, and evidence-based practice, including the experience of conservation practitioners.

13.3 A number of Committee members mentioned that they had seen the model or variations of it. They added that triennial reporting rounds identified future threats and that BRAG identified research needs but that funding and access to NERC were stumbling blocks. They also added that policy was rarely based solely on scientific findings.

13.4 One emerging concern within BAP circles was that habitat-creation projects were not based on good evidence leading to habitat that did not benefit a range of species. Bill felt that lessons were not being learnt from poor experiences. David Parker added that projects rarely document failure, from which the best lessons were often learnt.

13.5 There was limited enthusiasm for a proposal to update annually a list of key issues. It was also felt that horizon scanning benefited more from different people looking at issues in different ways rather than the same people doing a regular update.