

**UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee**  
**25<sup>th</sup> April 2007**  
**Minutes**

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**Present**

John Robbs	Defra (Chair)	Hazel Drewitt	CCW
Martin Brasher	WHB, Defra	Ian Hooper	SE
Bob Brown	NIBG	Julian Hughes	RSPB
Greg Mudge	SNH	Michael Dunn	NAWAD
Felix Otton	SE	Paul Rose	JNCC
Malcolm Vincent	JNCC	Mark Stevenson	LLSSD, Defra
Nigel Bourn	WCL	Sarah Webster	WHB, Defra
David Henshilwood	NE	Richard Weyl	DOENI
Steve Lee-Bapty	WHB, Defra	Paula Hendy	Minutes

**Apologies**

Mark Avery	RSPB	represented by Julian Hughes
Ken Bradley	DOENI	
Graham Seymour	DOENI	} represented by Richard Weyl
Jeff Watson	SNH	represented by Greg Mudge
Peter Costigan	LLSSD, Defra	
Glenys Parry	WHB, Defra	
David Parker	CCW	represented by Hazel Drewitt
Kim Fellows	SE	represented by Felix Otton
Andy Stott	LLSSD, Defra	represented by Mark Stevenson
Deryck Steer	JNCC	
Ant Maddock	JNCC	
John Everitt	WCL	represented by Nigel Bourn

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**1 Welcome**

1.1 The chair welcomed all present.

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

2.1 Action points arising from last meeting had been circulated with the agenda (Annex A) and contained details of action taken to avoid need to go through actions at this meeting.

2.2 October 2006 Minutes agreed

2.3 Only one point needed to be discussed – action point 2.12 - *JNCC to keep detailed timeline and notify devolved administrations of any significant dates.* A timeline had been produced and was attached with paper UKSC 07-08 BRIG report to Standing Committee.

- 2.4 Malcolm Vincent explained that the 2008 reporting round was timed to tie in with the CBD 2009 timetable (March 2009). Timeline clearly shows when JNCC intend to approach lead partners for material and allows a month or so for chasing. John Robbs commented that December would be a difficult time for chasing missing material due to the holiday period. Malcolm agreed that JNCC could begin earlier to ensure all relevant information received before deadline.

### **3 Climate Change Impacts on UK BAP Targets**

- 3.1 Mark Stevenson presented paper UKSC 07-02. He explained work had been undertaken by an *ad-hoc* Working Group in consultation with BRIG, and had relied heavily on expert consultation. Assessment was carried out in two parts – review by an expert panel and review by lead partners or agencies.
- 3.2 Mark said the working group found that there was fairly limited (5-25%) risk to BAP species targets in the short-term, those with a restricted range or Northerly distribution being the main ones affected. Coastal habitat targets would increasingly depend on support for re-alignment work, while wetland habitats such as floodplain grazing marsh would dry out unless hydrological processes were supported. However, there was a need for greater understanding linked to quality/management. Given the level of uncertainty identified in their report, the group had adopted a risk assessment approach and provided a table of recommendations for the committee to consider.
- 3.3 John Robbs thanked Mark and the working group for their efforts, and in light of the difficult subject area, felt the report to be very helpful.
- 3.4 John recommended that the Committee concentrate on the recommendations table and asked if any members wished to comment.
- 3.5 John asked if any additional resources were needed to carry out recommendations. Mark confirmed that the Science Division considered that much of the work was covered by programmes planned under existing budgets, but would depend on the necessary priority being given to these budgets, which were under some pressure.
- 3.6 The final box in the recommendations table, ‘Developing an improved evidence base for future target setting’ (point 1) mentioned the development of an observatory of climate change impacts on biodiversity to allow rapid identification of threats and appropriate responses. Some committee members were a little uneasy about this wording and the Chairman recommended slight rewording to clarify that what was intended was a “virtual” observatory based on the collation of observations largely already under way or planned.
- 3.7 It was clarified that Mark Stevenson would be the ‘action officer’ responsible for ensuring recommendations from the Standing Committee were taken forward.
- 3.8 ACTION POINT: Mark Stevenson to reword ‘observatory’ recommendation**
- 3.9 ACTION POINT: Mark to have further discussions with the devolved administrations to discuss what work is involved.**

#### **4 Strategic Statement on UK Biodiversity and feedback from 1<sup>st</sup> March workshop**

- 4.1 At the UKSC meeting last October, Committee agreed the framework for short strategic statement, making link between country strategies and UK, European, and International objectives, making clear where action to achieve the objectives would be driven at country level, but also where there were benefits from UK wide action.
- 4.2 John Robbs asked if there were any recommendations or comments. Greg Mudge felt that the document was too long and suggested keeping to broad principles and philosophy. Julian Hughes felt that it placed too early emphasis on legislation and that key messages needed to come to the fore, but welcomed the Annex, which he felt met an important need.
- 4.3 John Robbs thought the six element approach was OK but emphasised the need to make them sharper. Climate change, in particular the role that biodiversity plays in mitigation was a bit buried – and perhaps merited a box. Marine only seemed to get a passing mention so John asked if the Marine leads had shown any interest in this statement. Sarah confirmed that this had been passed to Marine leads, and thought that subject should be integrated. John was keen that subject should get it's fair share of coverage and suggested Marine could have its own box.
- 4.4 Bob Brown felt that there should be a statement right at the beginning of the document to the effect that biodiversity comprised the diversity of habitats, species and genetic diversity. He also felt the document should be more punchy for wider circulation and make clear that the ecosystem includes the air as well as land and water.
- 4.5 On the whole, the statement was well received by the Committee with only a few suggestions on contents, and the need to make points sharper/crisper. John was keen that the statement should be an inclusive framework but that it was not necessary to feature a box from every NGO; we should concentrate on the process and principles.
- 4.6 David Henshilwood sought clarification on the intended audience. The chairman clarified that this was anyone with a policy interest in biodiversity, including other Government Departments and NGOs, as it was important for us all to have a shared understanding.
- 4.7 Committee discussed the Annex: 'Summary of responsibilities at different levels in the UK'. John Robbs explained that Ministers were keen to give prominence to the implications of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and that this meant that in future there would be a shift in emphasis towards taking an ecosystem approach, seeking to meet the needs of as many species as possible through habitat-based work. There was an issue with how we continued to reflect the fact that implementation of nature conservation was now a devolved matter, and as to how far it was practical to develop action plans at UK rather than country level. The annex opened up these questions especially in light of the new priority habitats and species lists.

- 4.8 Michael Dunn proposed a pragmatic approach as there would be cases where it would be duplicative to have separate country action plans if all covered the same habitat. He emphasised that he would not want anything to appear in the annex that would tie Wales into an action being carried out in a particular way. Felix agreed.
- 4.9 Richard Weyl pointed out that Northern Ireland had led the way on embedding devolution, at least as far as biodiversity was concerned, as they had already published their own action plans and were setting up implementation groups. Steve Lee-Bapty proposed a half-way house in which planning at UK level would be explicit about what could and couldn't be organised at that level, for example, specifying the type of mechanism required (agri-environment, etc), but without prescription about the detail.
- 4.9 John Robbs agreed that it was important to avoid duplication, not least because of resource issues, and suggested that where it made good sense, 2, 3 or 4 countries could work together on an action plan. Sarah Webster mentioned that one of the points of consensus at the 1<sup>st</sup> March workshop had been that people wanted a very clear idea of responsibilities at different spatial levels (UK, country, regional, etc).
- 4.9 John recognised that Committee members had limited resources and hoped that devolved colleagues would be able to share in the findings/results from the work that Defra had commissioned from Natural England to review the functioning of HAPs in England. He asked NE to keep in close contact with devolved partners and NGOs in undertaking this review.

**ACTION POINT: Contributions/comments needed from devolved administrations by 9<sup>th</sup> May (Section 4).**

## **5 Priority Species and Habitats Review**

- 5.1 Steve Lee-Bapty gave the Committee an overview of the work the Priority Review Group (PRG) has been taken forward, paying tribute to the 650 or so people that had contributed to the review work.
- 5.2 Steve informed the Committee that there were a few species that still required further consideration which PRG could deal with at their next meeting. He also mentioned that concerns had been expressed by the Environment Agency over the new 'Rivers' priority habitat.
- 5.3 The PRG asked the Standing Committee to consider the six recommendations put to them in the covering papers (UKSC07-10).
- Looking to move ahead on publication, success criteria and the refinement of signposting and seek UKSC go ahead. Steve stressed that any concerns the UKSC may have could be discussed at the next PRG meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> May.
- 5.4 Implementation was not currently in the remit of the PRG. BRIG was asked to take this away and come back with recommendations of how signposting should be allocated i.e. suggestions as to who lead partners should be for species/habitats appearing for the first time.

5.5 John Robbs thanked Steve and his group for the huge amount of undertaken.

He confirmed the next steps would be:

- Report to be finalised on 18<sup>th</sup> May and published on the UK BAP web-site as soon as possible thereafter, assuming agreement could be reached with the Environment Agency, and outstanding species could be sorted out by then; and
- Administrations to put list to their respective Ministers and seek approval for it to be published along with signposting.

While appreciating that the priority list might not be at the top of any incoming minister's 'to do' list the chairman asked members to commit to seeking approval, and to keep each other informed of progress. It was important to ensure that Ministers clearly understood the significance of a species or habitat appearing on the list.

5.6 David Henshilwood asked if it were possible provisionally to agree lists straightaway. The chairman said that in light of outstanding issues, he would be hesitant to sign off an incomplete list. He appreciated that we were under some pressure to produce the list quickly, but people would need to wait a little longer for final sign off.

*To note: The remainder of the meeting was chaired by Martin Brasher.*

5.7 Martin Brasher clarified the proposed timetable for agreement of lists as follows:

- Resolve outstanding issues and finalise report at PRG meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> May;
- Put final report of priorities group, including the draft list, on UKBAP website as soon after 18<sup>th</sup> May as possible;
- Submit to Ministers for approval.

1<sup>st</sup> July was suggested as a target date for receipt of Ministerial approval. Colleagues from the devolved administrations agreed but stressed that they were unable to guarantee anything especially in light of possible new Ministers. The chairman asked that any slippage to this timetable be highlighted as soon as possible.

5.8 Steve Lee-Bapty confirmed that the formal/electronic publication of the UK list of Priority Species and Habitats, together with the indicative draft of signposting (including descriptions of the actions, not just the categories), would trigger a six-month consultation process on the actions.

5.9 David Henshilwood asked if Lead Partners were content that their chosen species/habitats were being removed from the list. Steve was keen to stress that process had been criteria driven, not consultation driven. Proposals had been assessed against certain criteria and the group had endeavoured to include all species/habitats that met the criteria.

- 5.10 Nigel Bourn commented on the wording used in the report. He felt that when a species had been downgraded it was important that the reasons for its downgrading were clearly stated e.g. species recovery had been successful.
- 5.11 Martin Brasher asked if the recommendations made by the PRG were acceptable to the Committee. Group were content although there were one or two concerns raised over the resource implications of the revised list.
- 5.12 Julian Hughes thought it was important that BRIG should have a clear timetable for taking this work forward. A JNCC paper would go to BRIG on draft workplan, spelling out the detail. BRIG would be asked to organise delivery and devise timetable. Martin asked that BRIG should circulate the timetable as soon as possible.

**ACTION POINT: BRIG to draft timetable and forward to Secretariat as soon as possible.**

- 5.13 Julian Hughes stressed the importance of a partnership approach and suggested that if the UK Standing Committee were to provide Lead Partners with the opportunity to come forward and get involved with their chosen subjects, they would be keen to take the conservation effort forward.
- 5.14 Martin asked if there were any other issues to discuss in relation to the PRG work. The matter of an appropriate title for the list arose and Committee agreed on the UK List of Priority Species and Habitats.

## **6 The UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference – Progress report**

- 6.1 A draft conference programme had been circulated. Martin asked if anyone had any comments to make with regards to structure, content, timing, etc. Bob Brown commented that he felt the presentation slots on day one might be longer as there didn't seem to be any time built on for questions.
- 6.2 Committee agreed that they would like to see someone enthusiastic from the voluntary sector give a presentation on day 1. The general approach was supported.
- 6.3 **ACTION POINT: Any further suggestions for presenters, workshop hosts, etc should be sent to the Secretariat by COP Friday 25<sup>th</sup> May.**

## **7 Any other urgent business**

- 7.1 No other business

## **8 Dates of future meetings**

- 8.1 The next meeting is currently booked for 11.00am to 2.30pm, Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2007 in Conference Room 4, Temple Quay House, Bristol. However, please note we are looking into changing date of next meeting to avoid clashing with school holidays in Scotland.