

UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee
25th October 2006
Minutes

Present

John Robbs	Defra (Chair)		
Martin Brasher	WHB, Defra	Steve Marfleet	WHB, Defra
Bob Brown	NIBG	David Parker	CCW
Peter Costigan	LLSSD	Glenys Parry	WHB, Defra
Susan Davis	SNH	Deryck Steer	JNCC
Michael Dunn	NAWAD	Andy Stott	LLSSD, Defra
Kim Fellows	SE	Malcolm Vincent	JNCC
Martin Harper	WCL	Sarah Webster	WHB, Defra
David Henshilwood	NE	Richard Weyl	DOENI
Steve Lee-Bapty	WHB, Defra	Paula Hendy	Minutes

Apologies

Mark Avery	RSPB	
Ken Bradley	DOENI	
Mike Meharg	DOENI	represented by Richard Weyl
Graham Seymour	DOENI	
Jeff Watson	SNH	represented by Susan Davies

1 Welcome

- 1.1 The chair welcomed all present especially Kim Fellows of the Scottish Executive, who was joining the group for the first time.

2 Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

- 2.1 The majority of action points had been actioned or were covered by today's agenda.
- 2.2 Action point 2.1 was covered by agenda item 3
- 2.3 Action point 3.1 - Report from BRIG: Committee asked to comment on draft report. This was launched at Partnership Conference in June.

ACTION POINT: Should anyone require additional copies of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Highlights from the 2005 reporting round, please contact the Secretariat.

- 2.4 Action point 3.4 – Report from BRIG: Secretariat to take lead in preparing key messages. Key messages were included and highlighted in report; overall, the proportion of species and habitats showing a positive trend is greater than the proportion for which decline is continuing or accelerating. However, the trends for

some species and habitats continue to be a cause for concern. Perhaps the biggest concern is the limited progress made towards our BAP targets for habitat restoration and expansion. While targets for cereal field margins and lowland calcareous grassland have been achieved through the support of agri-environment schemes, progress is behind schedule for a majority of the habitats, for a variety of reasons. Lead Partners had identified habitat loss/degradation, infrastructure development and climate change as the key drivers of adverse change

- 2.5 Action point 3.6 – Report from BRIG: This repeats action 3.1
- 2.6 Action point 3.12 – Report from BRIG – Targets Review Group: Secretariat to approach marine policy leads to request timetable for Marine Bill, etc. Policy lead estimated this *may* take up to 5-6 years.
- 2.7 Action point 3.22 - Report from BRIG – PSHRG: to be covered by agenda item 4
- 2.8 Action point 3.23 – Report from BRIG: Consider additional meeting between April and October. This was considered but discounted mainly due to pressures of briefing new Ministers and preparing for the partnership conference.
- 2.9 Action point 3.27 – Report from BRIG – Information Gap sub-group: covered by agenda item 4
- 2.10 Action point 4.1 – Complete
- 2.11 Action point 5.6 – The Future Direction of UK Biodiversity: to be covered by agenda item 5
- 2.12 Action point 5.6 -The Future Direction of UK Biodiversity: Secretariat to produce detailed timeline to enable preparation of effective communications plan to end of 2006.

ACTION POINT: JNCC to keep this up-dated and notify devolved administrations of any significant dates.

- 2.13 Action point 6.7 – Report from BRAG: to be covered by agenda item 7
- 2.14 Action point 7.3 – Complete
- 2.15 Minutes were agreed by Standing Committee.

3 UK Indicators for 2010

- 3.1 Andy Stott presented a progress report on UK BAP 2010 target indicators. This included summary of outcomes resulting from CBD COP 8 conference in March, and how decisions would impact on our domestic indicators. One of the means of reporting on progress towards the 2010 target would be the National reports in March 2009, and it was envisaged that the UK indicator work would be a key feed into this.

- 3.2** The UK Biodiversity indicator Forum had met on 16th October to discuss Global/European initiatives, proposals for UK indicators, etc. A note of this meeting would be prepared, highlighting key points resulting from discussion
- 3.3** With regard to the UK Biodiversity indicators for 2010 work programme, it was expected that of the 18 headline indicators previously agreed by the UKSC, 15 would be ready for publication in spring 2007, the remaining 3 requiring further work. It was hoped that these indicators would be published in time for the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference 2007. Andy Stott added that many of the 15 have already been published.
- 3.4** Andy Stott put proposed that the indicators be published in summary as 'National Statistics' in an A6 booklet of approximately 40 pages. There was a further option to produce a single page folded A4 leaflet with headline/'traffic light' summary of trends. The implication of a 'National Statistics' publication is that it is a factual, objective, quality assured assessment undertaken by government statisticians. Andy added that such a publication would not address specific policy commitments or policy responses at the UK or country level.

Action Point: Andy would appreciate comments on proposed publication e.g. style, format, etc in time to feed into the steering group meeting on 30th January 2007.

- 3.5** The process will be overseen by a steering group chaired by Sarah Webster to include representatives of the devolved administrations, WCL, a technical advisor, and a statistician.

Action Point: Andy would appreciate the UKSC's comments on planned structure of steering group.

- 3.6** The group deliberated over the size, shape, and contents of the publication emphasising the need to consider proposed audience. It was suggested that the publication be launched at the UK Biodiversity Conference in 2007. John Robbs was keen that there should be no delay to production of publication due to conference being moved from Summer to Autumn. Andy Stott confirmed that if the UKSC were to sign off publication at next meeting on 25 April 2007, then publication could occur a few weeks later.
- 3.7** John Robbs asked that the steering group consider whether publication be available just in hard copy or also online. He felt that all supporting documentation behind it should be made available especially in light of some information having a short shelf-life. Andy confirmed that he had the decisions he needed to take the work forward.

4 Report from BRIG – 2005 Reporting Group

- 4.1** Malcolm Vincent presented paper from the 2005 reporting sub-group. He confirmed that the UK BAP summary report, 'UK Biodiversity Action Plan:

Highlights from the 2005 reporting round', had successfully been launched at the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference in June. There had, however, been a delay in producing the final, fuller web based report. It is hoped that this will be published on the website before end of 2006.

The group asked that JNCC give the UKSC notice of when the report is due to appear on the website.

4.2 Report from BRIG – Targets Review Group

- 4.3** BRIG's work in relation to the targets review had now been completed. A full set of revised targets were now awaiting the approval of Ministers in each of the four countries to publish.

The targets would be published on the UK BAP website, hosted by the JNCC.

Sarah Webster confirmed that as soon as Ministers in the four administrations had opined she would inform Pete Brotherton as Chairman of the targets group and through him, Malcolm Vincent.

- 4.4** The UK Standing Committee recorded their thanks to BRIG and the targets review group for completion of this significant piece of work.

4.5 Report from BRIG – Priority Species and Habitats Review Group

- 4.6** Steve Lee-Bapty had chaired two meetings of the original Priority Species and Habitats Review Group. The membership had now been reviewed and a new group, The Priorities Review Group, has been formed.

- 4.7** Steve Lee-Bapty confirmed that the identification of the list of species and habitats selected according to scientific criteria was almost complete, and that the original PSHRG would conclude its business via email.

- 4.8** The Priorities Review Group had met for the first time on 18th October and discussed how it would go about the signposting exercise to identify key delivery mechanisms. They had created an initial product in respect of terrestrial and freshwater species which they hoped would be acceptable to the UKSC.

- 4.9** It was suggested that each species on the list would have a short data-sheet describing the geographical extent of the species, and include up to three of the most important delivery mechanisms. For each proposed mechanism, a two-line description would be provided setting out what was needed, together with an assessment of whether it was best managed at a UK, country or local level.

- 4.10** There would also be success criteria, describing the conditions under which the species was in sufficient health to be removed from the list. They will therefore be a kind of strategic target, but aspirational, and not timetabled.

- 4.11** Samples of the proposed format were circulated at this meeting. A paper version of the verbal update given by Steve Lee-Bapty, together with the samples, are circulated with these minutes.
- 4.12** Steve Lee-Bapty hoped that if the group made particularly good progress, they would be able to provide the Standing Committee with provisional signposting at the next meeting in April. Steve warned that it would be imperfect, incomplete, and may or may not include the success criteria. Despite this, he felt it should not deter us from on-line publication at that stage of the final list of species, with its provisional signposting. He explained that the signposting should be an open and iterative process, and to publish what was in effect a consultative draft was not a problem.
- 4.13** Steve felt there was every likelihood that the group would be in a position to publish the list of terrestrial and freshwater species in January 2007
- 4.14** Steve acknowledged that the work regarding habitats was different from the work needed for species. The Priority Review Group (PRG) is due to meet on the 19th December and will discuss what it thinks the new style HAPs should look like.
- 4.15** The SC were enthused by Steve's suggestions for taking the work forward, and impressed at the speed in which progress so far has been achieved.
- 4.16** Steve said that the PRG were under pressure from external stakeholders to publish list as soon as possible as previously unmentioned habitats were due to appear. John felt that this pressure needed to be managed and a balanced decision taken, looking at all the issues in the round. Ministers would need to take all the suggested changes into consideration.
- 4.18** Steve Lee-Bapty emphasised that the main argument in favour of early publication was that species and habitats that would remain under threat for at least as long as it took us to draw them to peoples attention.
- 4.19** PRG have been unable to make any further progress with Marine as they need to discuss with the sector before moving forward. John suggested that Steve give us an update on Marine priority species and habitats at the next UKSC in April.

Action Point: Steve Lee-Bapty to present update on Marine at next UKSC meeting on 25th April 2007.

- 4.20** Steve felt that decisions on publication of the list would not be able to be made by email but needed the SC to confirm this. John agreed and proposed that the SC should have a substantive discussion on this matter at their next meeting in April.
- 4.21** Deryck Steer asked whether there was a risk of premature publication of the lists once they were in the public domain. Steve replied that in light of the favourable way the update news had been received today, and the

committee's acknowledgement that nothing would be published before April, he believed that the risk could be managed.

4.22 Deryck asked whether Steve would delay work/progress because he was waiting to present latest draft to the UKSC. Steve replied that he was keen to keep the exercises as integrated as possible, and that it was important that a decision be made by the committee rather than by an individual. It was therefore preferable to wait for a Steering Committee decision.

4.23 Malcolm Vincent suggested that a decision be taken at the next UKSC meeting in April. John felt this might not be convenient as Ministers had an interest and the timeline might be too tight to get a ministerial decision in time for April's meeting. John suggested that if papers were ready in advance of the April meeting, then they should be circulated to the committee early.

John Robbs added that while we are unable to promise a Ministerial decision at the next meeting, we could certainly work towards reaching a firm decision to that timescale.

Action Point: PRG to prepare and circulate detailed paper for discussion at next UKSC meeting.

4.24 Report from BRIG – Climate Change Group

4.25 Two separate issues were discussed under this item: first, the analysis of the risks to priority species and habitats targets posed by climate change, and secondly, the publication of guidance for biodiversity practitioners.

4.26 On the risk assessment of BAP targets in the context of climate change, Andy Stott described proposals that had been drawn up to look at the risks to priority species and habitats posed by climate change. In most cases, the evidence was generic, rather than specific; lead partners had taken these into account in so far as was possible, although the forthcoming publication of the MONARCH report would add to the evidence available. Looking beyond that, it would be important to acquire the right sort of evidence to be able to set realistic targets in the light of climate change. The proposals had been discussed at BRIG where a number of concerns had been raised, mainly about the extent to which this exercise could be made specific, rather than generic. Andy was planning a meeting with the Climate Change subgroup of BRIG to resolve issues of concern.

4.27 The Chairman felt this was an important priority and urged Andy to resolve the necessary issues to enable this piece of work to be taken forward.

Action Point: Andy Stott to consult BRIG and prepare further advice on interpretation and application of targets in context of climate change.

- 4.28** On the publication of guidance for practitioners, a draft of the publication '*Conserving Biodiversity in a changing climate: building capacity to adapt*' had been circulated with the papers for the meeting. The production of a short, accessible guide to climate change and biodiversity had originally been suggested at the UKSC meeting in September 2005. The climate change group had discussed a fourth draft via video conference in July 2006 having received feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. Outline approval from UKSC was sought so that the publication could fine-tuned plenty of time for the May 2007 deadline. BRIG considered that the work should be published as a UK BAP Partnership paper in time for Biodiversity Day on 22nd May 2007.
- 4.29** Sarah Webster clarified that the publication would be a guide aimed at practitioners and as such would avoid giving policy advice.
- 4.30** John Robbs felt that we needed to do more to set the guidance in the context of the need to avoid wasting resources on conserving species and habitats that will be unsustainable in the long term in the light of predicted climate change. John felt that the advice to increase resilience was fine as far as it went, but the report needed to reflect the point that there might be cases where it was pointless trying to hold back the tide and we should hint at the question as to whether some of the measures we use (in terms of protected areas and so on) needed to be re-thought.

Given that the main audience for this publication was practitioners, these arguments did not need to be fully developed in the guidance, but this needed to refer to what the issues are and perhaps refer to work such as the "towards adaptation" report in England and explain that policy-makers were beginning to consider how we design conservation measures and protected area networks to protect the ecosystems and biodiversity that will be there given climate change, rather than just trying to protect what we have now.

Andy replied that we there would remain considerable uncertainty for the foreseeable future over the impacts climate change. Under the circumstances, it is difficult to guarantee what would or would not work. He agreed that it was unwise to recommend a course of action if we were unsure of the impacts.

- 4.31** Malcolm Vincent thought that ultimately we were asking too much of climate change scenarios. He felt that while they highlighted the importance of bolstering resilience in light of stress (e.g. climate change), they were unable to give us specifics.

Action Point: Sarah Webster to pass on UKSC comments on practitioners' guide to Hilary Allison.

Action Point: Comments/suggestions to be sent to Sarah Webster by COP Wednesday 29th November.

4.32 Report from BRIG – Information Gap sub -group

- 4.33** At their last meeting in April, the Standing Committee tasked JNCC to prepare a paper outlining how to take forward work to fulfil the UK BAP surveillance information gaps. Malcolm Vincent presented the paper asking that the group feed back comments on the suggested approach.

John Robbs considered that this was part of JNCC's core business and asked why they had not deployed the necessary resources. Deryck Steer emphasised that this work would either need additional resources or a reprioritisation of existing plans.

- 4.34** The Standing Committee confirmed that they were content with JNCC's analysis, but asked JNCC to bring forward costed proposals for meeting the information needs, particularly on BAP priority habitats.

Action Point: JNCC to bring forward prioritised and costed proposals for closing the information gap, to the next meeting of UKSC.

5 Future of UK Partnership Conference

Please note agenda order altered slightly to allow for discussion before members had to depart

- 5.1** John Robbs opened discussions by announcing that Scotland had offered to host next years Biodiversity Partnership Conference. Scotland had stressed the need to the purdah period surrounding Scottish elections in the spring and therefore recommended sometime in the autumn.
- 5.2** The Standing Committee were asked what themes they wished to pursue. They were reminded that the conference was aimed at the biodiversity partnership community and had proved a useful tool for updating practitioners. John asked what else could usefully be done?
- 5.3** The group emphasised the need to thank people for their contributions. Felt it was important to inspire community effort – perhaps exploring how we can embed biodiversity into community thinking. Martin Harper suggested that if the new BAP list was available, the conference might provide a good opportunity to say how the broader biodiversity community could assist with delivery.

Action Point: Sarah Webster to liaise with Susan Davies with regard to the setting up of a conference steering group. Timing would need to take account of planned date for the next meeting of the UK Standing Committee.

6 Strategic statement on UK Biodiversity

- 6.1** Sarah Webster presented a paper outlining a draft framework for UK biodiversity. This was structured to highlight six key elements: ensuring

that the UK plays a proactive role in influencing the development of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, and contributes fully to their domestic delivery; protecting the best wildlife sites; targeted action for threatened species and habitats (and alien invasive species); embedding biodiversity and ecosystem services in all sectors of policy and decision-making; engaging people and developing the evidence base.

- 6.2** John Robbs asked whether the Standing Committee had said what they wished to do with the framework once it was completed. Malcolm Vincent said that the group had discussed whether it would be useful to have an outline of our commitments, etc and suggested that the framework would be an ideal vehicle.
- 6.3** Following discussion, group were relatively happy with outline but keen to stress that framework should be snappy/to the point, and concentrate on where we're going rather than where we've been.

Action Point: Sarah Webster to continue working on framework and present progress report at next UKSC meeting in April.

7 Report from BRAG

- 7.1** Peter Costigan presented two papers from BRAG. Recognising time constraints, Peter did not go into detail with the first paper, explaining that the paper (UKBPSC 06-13(a)) was a straightforward factual account.

The second paper (UKBPSC 06-13 (b)) laid out suggested structure, TOR, etc for BRAG in the future. Following strong endorsement that BRAG should continue following their review at the end of last year, Peter had been asked to set up a small sub-committee¹ to review where BRAG resources could be better deployed.

The revised TOR set out the level that BRAG ought to operate at. They had been under pressure from NGO's for address more specific HAP/SAP issues – a role that BRAG were not well constituted to fulfil. This will allow BRAG to concentrate on more cross-cutting, generic issues.

- 7.2** Peter asked that the UKSC endorse the new TOR. The group agreed and endorsed BRAG's new TOR.
- 7.3** BRAG acknowledged that it needed to adopt a stronger approach to communication. A sub-group containing representatives from the devolved administrations has been formed to ensure effective communication between BRAG and the country groups.
- 7.4** BRAG recognised there was a role for them in the facilitation of funding for biodiversity research. They acknowledged there was often frustration at perceived inability to secure funding from major players such as the Research Councils.

¹ Sub-committee including Joanna Robertson, Susan Davies, Keith Duff, Paul Rose

7.5 Peter confirmed that Wildlife Countryside Link would no longer be represented on BRAG. BRAG would also be reviewing their membership to improve focus and level of representation.

7.6 It was felt that the most effective way to gauge BRAG's impact would be to carry out a consultative review process. Success could be judged on a number of criteria including improving networking between researcher, policy maker and practitioner communities; and increased capacity for biodiversity research in the UK.

8 Any other business

8.1 Malcolm Vincent raised the question as to who was responsible for biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories as John Robbs had emphasised they did not form part of the remit for the UKSC.

Action Point: Martin Brasher to look into the constitutional position regarding responsibility for biodiversity in the Overseas Territories.

8.2 Sarah Webster wished to draw to the Scottish Executives notice that the 2nd meeting of the UKSC for next year was on the 17th October.

9 Dates of future meetings

9.1 11.00am to 2.30pm, Wednesday 25th April 2007 in Conference Room 4, Temple Quay House, Bristol

11.00am to 2.30pm, Wednesday 17th October 1007 in Conference Room 4, Temple Quay House, Bristol