

# NATURAL ENGLAND BOARD

**Meeting # 1**  
**17 October 2006**



*Item M7*

## **Title: Policy Development in Natural England Priorities**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to outline the proposed priorities for Natural England's policy development for the remainder of the 2006/7 financial year.

### **Recommendation**

1. That the Board endorse the policy development priorities.

### **Introduction**

At the first meeting of the Natural England Skeleton Board a policy development, process was agreed. A copy of the process is provided at Annex A.

This paper summarises the results of an initial assessment of policy development needs for the remainder of 2006/2007 (the first stage of the policy development process).

In developing these priorities the following factors have been taken into consideration:

- Natural England's Strategic Direction
- The Minister's priorities for Natural England
- The Defra Strategy Refresh process
- Opportunities for Natural England to influence current outcomes and decisions
- The need to prepare policies to reflect future issues and challenges;
- Natural England's campaign themes

It is proposed that Natural England focus its policy development work on following:

#### 1. CAP Reform

There is a need to build on the initial direction provided by the Board on our work on the UK Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy. Natural England needs to develop a compelling case for continued reform. A key target for our policy development in this area will be the 2007/2008 review of the EU Rural Development budget.

There is also a short term need to develop Natural England's policy position on the new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), particularly in relation to improved targeting of Environmental Stewardship.

#### 2. Coastal Access

There is an urgent need to develop Natural England's policy position in relation to improving access to the coast, in order to be in a position to advise the Minister on options by the end of December 2006.

This will be Natural England's key priority for policy development for the next three months. A Board seminar to explore the issues and options is proposed between the October and December Board meeting with a policy for decision submitted to the December Board meeting.

### 3. Marine

There is a need to further develop Natural England's policy position on progressing the establishment of a coherent network of marine protected areas. Building on Natural England's submission on the Marine Bill, there is a need to consider the options available for establishing and managing these areas. There may also be a need to develop Natural England's policy on particular elements of the Marine Bill as it progresses.

### 4. Climate Change

There is both an urgent need and a major opportunity to lead the development of policy thinking on the adaptation of the natural environment to climate change. A substantial new area of work for Natural England, our policy development will need to influence planning and landuse decisions to improve the resilience of landscapes and ecosystems.

Natural England also needs to develop its policies in relation to the location of sustainable energy infrastructure such as windfarms and other elements of the UK's response to climate change including energy crops and other biofuels. It is proposed that an initial scoping paper be brought to the December Board meeting setting out the parameters and focus of this work.

### 5. Land Use

The Secretary of State has indicated the need for a new direction around the future of land use in England. Natural England is well placed to develop policy in this area. It is however a big agenda but with potentially profound consequences which could shape the purpose for which land is used in the future.

It is proposed that Natural England commence its policy development work on land use in two areas:

- Green infrastructure, with a particular focus on Growth Areas which would link closely with our health and the environment campaign;
- Land use and environmental services.

Initial scoping papers would be submitted to the February Board meeting.

### Future Policy Priorities

A further paper to the Board will be presented in March 2007 outlining policy development priorities for the 2007/8 financial year.

## **Annex A Natural England Policy Development Process**

### Stage 1: Policy needs analysis

This stage should result in agreement by the Board to Natural England's policy development priorities. It involves:

- Horizon scanning and scenario planning for the long term future of the natural environment.
- An analysis of the key areas where significant change is needed in order to advance our outcomes and objectives.
- An assessment of the current opportunities to influence government policy, regulation and spending priorities in these key areas.

### Stage 2 : Policy scoping

This stage will result in agreement on the scope of individual policy positions. It will ensure that Natural England's policy development is focused on the conservation, management and enhancement of the natural environment. It will also provide a focus for the development the evidence base needed to support our policy position.

### Stage 3: Policy position development

This stage will result in agreement by the Board of Natural England's policy position on a particular issue. This policy position will be underpinned by evidence and used as the basis for our policy advocacy.

### Stage 4: Policy advocacy

This stage will result in the development and implementation of a policy advocacy programme. It will target current opportunities to advance debate on the issue both within government and more broadly. The programme will involve partnerships with other organisations with related interests and be supported by an effective communications strategy.

### Stage 5: Policy review

This stage will result in an assessment of the effectiveness of our policy development and advocacy work. It will provide a key input into future policy development priorities.