

Natural England Board



Title: **Unconfirmed minutes of the fourteenth Natural England Board meeting
10 December 2008**

<u>Members attending</u>	<u>Executives:</u>
Martin Doughty (Chair)	Robin Tucker
Peter Allen	Andrew Wood
Sarah Burton	Dave Webster
Poul Christensen (Deputy Chair)	Jim Smyllie
Lynn Crowe	Guy Thompson
Michael Depledge	Tom Tew
Tony Hams	
David Hill	<u>Secretariat:</u>
Doug Hulyer	
David Macdonald	Becky Jones
Christopher Pennell	Roy Hymas
Helen Phillips (CEO)	
Pam Warhurst	

Prior to the Board meeting, a Board briefing was held at which Board members were updated on Natural England's work in the following areas:

- Reputation Tracker Survey;
- Natural England's Transition Programme;
- Political Outlook;
- Peter Boggis v Natural England Judicial Review.

Welcome from the Chair

- a) There were no apologies.
- b) An addition to the Register of Interests was recorded by Sarah Burton. There were no further amendments.

1) Stakeholder Engagements

The Board noted the engagements conducted by Chair and Deputy Chair in the period between the November and December Board meetings and the appointments scheduled before the February Board meeting.

2) Chief Executive's Report

The Board:

a) noted our current strategic issues, in particular:

- a Ministerial meeting is scheduled for week beginning 15 December to consider policy proposals for mitigating the environmental impacts of the ending of set-aside. This will be followed by another meeting of Sir Don Curry's group on 7 January. A Ministerial announcement on the agreed way forward is expected mid-January and we are anticipating a good outcome for farmers and the natural environment;
- Defra are close to finalising the design for Uplands Entry Level Stewardship (UELS) and gaining Ministerial approval. We have been closely involved in implementation aspects of the Scheme design. £23.7 million will be needed to provide a similar level of support to the Hill Farm Allowance (HFA), in return for environmental benefits. We have worked with Defra to maximise environmental support for the uplands through UELS and assess further opportunities for HLS. We remain keen to implement the scheme at the earliest opportunity to deliver our long term vision for a sustainable future for the uplands;
- recent experience concerning proposals to reintroduce Sea eagles to East Anglia has demonstrated the benefits of a consultative approach to such programmes. We will factor this into any future reintroduction programmes for species conservation e.g. reintroducing hen harriers into lowland England;

Action: Executive Board to brief Board members on rationale and benefits of species reintroduction programmes.

- we have decided to withdraw from next year's Royal Agricultural Show in order to target our efforts at events which maximise opportunities to engage with the farming community, in particular, beef, cereal and sheep farmers;
- the Character Area reports are currently being reviewed by the Secretary of State and we anticipate that they will be launched early in the new year. We will keep the Board updated with progress and any implications for Natural England;

Action: Executive Board to update the Board on progress with launching the Character Area reports, at the February Board meeting.

- we are continuing to work through a number of issues concerning the Marine Bill, particularly in advance of its second reading on 15 December;
- the list of National Policy Statements (NPS) has been launched and we will publish this on the Board Library;

b) noted our delivery performance on our monthly exception reporting targets;

c) noted progress on the 2009/10 Corporate Plan;

- d) considered our financial position as at October 2008 and forecast outturn for 2008/09;
- e) noted the spend and commitments made on the RDPE budget.

Key discussion points were:

- we are in a sound financial position, on target with Grant In Aid expenditure and made good progress with managing RDPE funding;
- a sub-group of the Board will convene in January to consider the draft Corporate Plan ahead of the February Board meeting;
- the Executive Board will consider a Shared Services options paper at its January meeting, with a view to presenting it to a future Board meeting.

3) Transfer of Operational Control of Genesis

The Board agreed:

- the principle of the transfer of operational control of Genesis to Natural England and the contract extension to Atos Origin;
- the licence agreement for transfer of control of Genesis to Natural England.

Key discussion points were:

- the Agreement is expected to be finalised in December 2008;
- Natural England's Audit and Risk Committee has scrutinised the proposals and is content with the proposed arrangements;
- the Board asked that the minutes of this meeting recognise the efforts of staff in getting us to this stage.

4) Evidence and Policy Priorities

The Board endorsed the evidence and policy priorities for 2009/10, subject to consideration of a further paper at a future Board meeting outlining our social evidence needs and opportunities.

Key discussion points were:

- we are now able to present our evidence priorities alongside policy priorities;
- the Board will have an opportunity to consider further priorities at future meetings;
- there is good synergy between the four priority areas for evidence and the

five policy priorities;

- we are taking a close interest in the key stages of the development of National Policy Statements (NPS);
- the Board welcomes the priority given to policy work that contributes to Outcome 2 and is very supportive of evidence work to value the wider social and economic benefits of the natural environment, subject to available funding. The Board asked that we work in partnership with others in this field and identify potential, additional funding to make the best use of available resources, particularly to support environmental monitoring requirements.

5) Natural England's Draft Policy on Inspiring People to Value and Conserve the Natural Environment

The Board approved the policy for external consultation subject to the Board's discussion.

Key discussion points were:

- the policy was warmly welcomed by the Board and it provides the framework for developing the partnerships we need to deliver in this area;
- the policy should be clear about developing people's understanding of the natural environment as opposed to simply developing awareness;
- it is important that delivery programmes developed in line with the policy are underpinned by evidence;
- the draft policy should refer to evidence needs, discuss volunteering in a broad context, and include examples of where Natural England can provide leadership and advocacy;
- the delivery programme opportunities should be captured in the consultation letter, which should be targeted at a broad range of stakeholders, including those who we would not necessarily normally engage with.

Action: Executive Board to revise draft policy prior to external consultation.

6) Natural England's Draft Policy on Transport and the Natural Environment

The Board endorsed the two stage approach to developing our policy and agreed the draft policy for external consultation.

Key discussion points were:

- the Board recognises the importance of Natural England publishing its Transport policy to respond to increasing pressures on the natural environment;

- the policy must relate closely to a number of our other policy areas, most notably those relating to Outcome 2;
- the policy should seek to take account of external factors where appropriate;
- the policy should make it clear that we are concerned about quality of life implications of transport development and that concern about the impact on the natural environment goes much beyond protected landscapes to include all our landscapes.

Action: Executive Board to issue revised draft policy for external consultation.

7) Natural England's Draft Policy on Port Development

The Board approved the draft policy for external consultation subject to the Board's discussion.

Key discussion points were:

- the policy seeks to strike a balance between the need to consider impacts of individual port developments and the need for a strategic approach to port development;
- any strategic assessment of the need for port development should take account of the European dimension and the potential impacts of climate change;
- the policy should make it clear that we want to see environmental enhancement resulting from all port developments and that there may be times when the potential impacts of development on the natural environment are so great that we will object to development proposals;
- the policy provides opportunities for us to engage with port developers regarding coastal access implementation;
- the Board requested a draft policy on airports and the natural environment at a future Board meeting.

Action: Executive Board to issue revised draft policy for external consultation.

Action: Board Services to add Natural England's Draft Policy on Airports and the Natural Environment to the Board Forward Look.

8) Natural England's Draft Policy on Future Landscapes

The Board agreed the draft policy for external stakeholder consultation subject to the Board's discussion.

Key discussion points were:

- the breadth of stakeholders to be consulted should be widened;
- the policy should be aligned with the findings of the Character Area reports to ensure that due consideration is given to climate change issues;
- the policy should recognise that different interventions in the landscape have different consequences, particularly those arising from human action.

Action: Executive Board to issue revised draft policy for external stakeholder consultation.

9) Natural England's Draft Policy on Non-native species

The Board agreed that the draft policy be circulated for external stakeholder consultation, including Natural England's Science Advisory Committee (NESAC), subject to the Board's discussion.

Key discussion points were:

- this is a very complex area and it will be important to ensure a high degree of scientific scrutiny of the final policy;
- the policy should make it clear that there will be some species that migrate here, particularly as a result of climate change, that may be beneficial. It should therefore take account of the implications for the natural environment of both malign and non-malign species.

Action: Executive Board to issue revised paper for external consultation, including NESAC.

10) Audit and Risk Committee: Report on meeting held on 3 December 2008

The Board noted the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee's verbal update on the Committee's meeting on 3 December 2008, in particular that:

- the Committee considered, and with minor amendments agreed, the revised Strategic Risk Register following the September Board meeting;
- the Committee recommended that we should explore alternatives to Shared Services;
- the National Audit Office are satisfied with our work and timetable for producing International Financial Reporting Standards shadow accounts;
- the Committee had considered six Internal Audit reports and had asked for updates on progress for the next meeting on Emergency Response and Information Security;
- the Committee considered the interim Statement of Internal Control and

noted that the level of assurance is improving;

- the Committee had reviewed its effectiveness and was generally performing and acting in line with good practice, and noted the significant and effective support received from staff. Some areas were identified for improvement;
- the Committee would be reviewing its Terms of Reference before submitting them to the Board for endorsement.

11) Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the thirteenth Natural England Board meeting held on 5 November 2008 were confirmed.