

Natural England Board



Meeting: 19
Date: 24 February 2010

Paper No: **NEB PU19 13**

Title: **Natural England Science Advisory Committee (NESAC) Update**

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Natural England Science Advisory Committee (NESAC) continues to meet quarterly and has met twice, in September and October 2009, since the last update to the Board (July 2009).

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board notes the work of the NESAC to date.

3. NESAC September 2009 meeting

- 3.1 The NESAC was asked to consider two issues: a draft of Natural England's report on the value of the natural environment *No Charge?* and a presentation on the Ecosystem Services Pilot Projects in the Uplands.

Professor Macdonald introduced the two papers by noting that conventional site-based approaches to conserving nature were not working and at best delivered a land of beauty spots. The papers addressed the need for thought leadership in trialling new approaches.

3.2 Report: *No Charge? Valuing the natural environment.*

- 3.2.1 A draft version of the report was circulated to the NESAC prior to the meeting. It was noted that this draft was now undergoing a significant restructuring which would benefit from the meeting's discussion.

- 3.2.2 NESAC strongly endorsed the importance of Natural England working on this critical issue and offered a range of advice on presenting this issue in the public arena, including:

- The report should highlight how ecosystems deliver multiple services.
- It should emphasise the costs to the economy of ignoring ecosystem services.
- We should challenge current economic growth models.
- The importance of making the connection to people in urban areas.

- Be clear about the target audience and what changes we are seeking.
- The report should give a positive and empowering message: we can get real benefits from investing in and managing the natural environment.

3.2.3 Overall the NESAC was very supportive of the Valuing the Natural Environment initiative.

3.3 **The Upland Ecosystem Services Pilot Projects**

3.3.1 NESAC received a presentation outlining our ecosystem approach in the uplands, and the chosen project areas in Cumbria, the South Pennines and across the South West Region. The projects were subsequently announced at the launch in December of the Upland Vision and the Atlas of ecosystem services in the uplands.

3.3.2 NESAC welcomed the initiative, stressing:

- The benefits of the links between this project and the valuing the natural environment report (above).
- The importance of engaging the scientific community in the design of the pilot – there was much existing experience from the UK Popnet Research Programme for example, and of insuring strong participation in research and monitoring to support the pilot. NESAC suggested that Natural England would benefit from an external scientific advisory group, either formal or informal.
- Replication between the three upland pilots was an advantage but it is also important to continue to explore the ecosystem approach in other areas.
- Need to build in an experimental approach with a consistent monitoring protocol across all projects, and explore links to other examples externally.
- The crucial importance of gaining the participation of land owners and managers in delivering the vision.
- It is imperative to secure changes in land management practices so the full range of ecosystem services are delivered and the rewards for doing so provide the required incentives.

4. **Annual NESAC science stakeholder meeting October 2009**

4.1 The meeting received two presentations, on Natural England's plans for integrated Long-term monitoring and our vision for 2060.

4.2 **Long-term monitoring**

4.2.1 The monitoring presentation outlined our shift towards integrated approaches and the need for Natural England to increase linkage over long-term monitoring with our partners. Specific emphasis was placed on the role of long-term monitoring in climate change adaptation and mitigation.

4.2.2 The discussion raised the following issues:

- Strong support for integrated monitoring.
 - Need to maximise the use of new technology to support monitoring – invest to reduce cost.
 - Need to retain flexibility within new approaches to allow for site and geographic differences, and note that not all monitoring activities can be fully integrated.
 - We need to be very clear about what we are trying to achieve and ensure our monitoring reflects this.
 - We should focus on monitoring to demonstrate and direct agri-environment spend, and increase our social monitoring.
 - Need to engage with a wider group of people to stimulate innovative solutions.
 - A recognition that we need some new thinking on how to solve the traditional problem of maintaining funding for long-term monitoring.
- 4.2.3 Overall, the stakeholders recognised the need for Natural England to rationalise our inherited approaches, and welcomed the stronger links to external monitoring activities.
- 4.3 ***Vision 2060 – looking after the environment, looking after ourselves***
- 4.3.1 Stakeholders were presented with our draft vision for 2060. This version was shared widely with a range of stakeholders in the previous month, and we shared the views of those stakeholders with the meeting.
- 4.3.2 The meeting was asked to focus on 2 key areas:
- The credibility of vision 2060 - Overall, is the vision credible, given what we know about global drivers? Specifically, does the vision present the right balance between meeting the needs of the natural environment and those of people and society? Is this an achievable vision, with the right balance between inspirational and achievable, and is multifunctionality feasible or a just a pipe-dream?
 - Obstacles & opportunities - Given that scientific and technological change (particularly in terms of food production) is a major critical uncertainty, how does our vision take account of this issue, and what are the main challenges and implications in responding to this vision?
- 4.3.3 The NESAC discussion provided a healthy and constructive challenge to Vision 2060. In summary stakeholders:
- Welcomed the spirit of optimism, ambition and aspiration behind the vision and supported the need for such a product to inspire a shared understanding for the future of the natural environment.
 - Recommended a realistic narrative which describes how we could achieve this vision, to include any trade-offs and difficult decisions, and identify events or decisions that would throw us off course.

- Cautioned that in 2060 we would not necessarily hold the same values as we do in 2009.
- Recommended that we describe the wider context - global and national governance (the balance between market forces versus regulation, etc) and nest the vision for the natural environment within that.
- Suggested a version of the vision be written from a personal perspective, describing what it feels like to live in 2060 and the big challenges in 2060.
- Recommended that the vision would have more resonance if presented in contrast with the four scenarios.
- Identified weaknesses or gaps in coverage of marine networks, biodiversity, and resource exploitation.

5. Future meetings

- 5.1. The meetings for 2010 are scheduled for 9 February, 6 July, 19 October (possible stakeholder event) and 1 December.