

Natural England Board



Confirmed minutes of the sixteenth Natural England Board meeting 20 May 2009

<u>Members attending</u>	<u>Executives:</u>
Poul Christensen (Acting Chair)	Tom Tew
Helen Phillips (CEO)	Guy Thompson
Peter Allen	Robin Tucker
Sarah Burton	Dave Webster
Lynn Crowe	Andrew Wood
Michael Depledge (present for items 1 to 6)	Jim Smyllie
Catherine Graham-Harrison	
Tony Hams	<u>Secretariat</u>
David Hill	
Doug Hulyer	Carolyn Cadman
David Macdonald	Roy Hymas
Christopher Pennell	
Pam Warhurst	
Andy Wilson (not present for item 5)	

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:

- Strategic Narratives;
- Confirmation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI);
- Reputation Tracker Survey Action Plan 2009.

Welcome from the Chair

The following additions to the Register of Interests were noted:

Sarah Burton is an employee of Greenpeace International.

Christopher Pennell and Andy Wilson requested the minutes record that, in relation to items 4 and 5, they have additional interest as a currently serving National Park member and National Park Authority Chief Executive respectively. In addition, Andy Wilson noted his intention not to be present for the Board's discussion of item 5.

The Chair welcomed Richard Partington, Natural England's Senior Landscape Advisor.

1) Stakeholder Engagements

The Board:

- noted the engagements conducted by Chair and Deputy Chair in the period between the February and May Board meetings and the appointments scheduled before the July Board meeting, and;
- considered progress on the implementation of the External Affairs Plan over the previous quarter and plans for the next quarter.

Key discussion points were:

- the Board welcomed the announcement by the Government to designate the South Downs National Park and acknowledged the efforts of our staff and partners in achieving a good outcome;
- Board members indicated strong support for the level and frequency of media briefings currently provided;
- we recently co-launched the Greener and Wiser Initiative with Help the Aged, Age Concern and Green Alliance, to promote the role of older people in relation to the natural environment;
- the Board are pleased with the new format of the Stakeholder Engagements paper which allows the implementation of our advocacy plans to be followed;
- the Board welcomed the agreement to hold a joint meeting with the Environment Agency Board on 14 July.

2) Chief Executive's Report

The Board:

- a) noted our current strategic issues:
- set aside mitigation;
 - Marine and Coastal Access Bill;
 - Floods and Water Bill;
 - Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill;
 - Delivery of the Environmental Leadership Delivery Plan;
 - NAO Audit of Organic Entry Level Stewardship;
 - National Park Authority appointments.

- b) reviewed performance of delivery against our Strategic Direction in Quarter 4 and in 2008/09, and noted:
- by the end of Quarter 4, out of 35 targets, none were red, one was amber red, 5 were amber green and 29 were green;
 - at year end, 97% of our targets are green or amber green, up from 86% at Quarter 3 and exceeding our forecast of 89%;
 - our Marine Protected Areas work is at Amber Red due to further work needed on the submission of Departmental Briefs to Defra for two new Special Protection Areas (SPA).
- c) noted the Chief Executive's summary presentation of performance in 2008/09. A copy of the presentation is available on our website;
- d) noted the organisation's Financial Position to 31 March 2009, in particular:
- we have delivered to our total revenue budget of £231m and our £6.1m capital budget;
 - the final outturn on RDPE is £155.4m, 100.4% of the budget for the year.

3) Annual Report

The Board reviewed the first drafts of the Annual Report and Annual Review and agreed that revisions made after the special Board teleconference on 15 June shall be approved by Acting Chair and the Chief Executive. No comments were received on the current drafts.

4) Towards a Future Designations Strategy

The Board noted our intention to consider the need for a review of designations, in particular:

- the potential for an overarching designations strategy to provide a framework for our policy on Protected Landscapes and our strategies for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserves (NNR);
- the benefits of an integrated approach to the way designations are considered for landscape, conservation and recreation;
- the need to ensure that protected areas are capable of responding to future challenges and pressures on the natural environment.

Key discussion points were:

- the Board welcomed the opportunity to have an informed and transparent debate about the future of protected areas;
- the Board recognises that protected areas deliver significant environmental, social and economic benefits, and that they have evolved into a complex multi-layered system of designations;
- the IUCN categories do not necessarily provide an appropriate framework in an

England and UK context of protected areas where wildlife, landscape and people co-exist in close proximity;

- whilst the current system has stood the test of time, any review would be likely to lead to a better system that is more future-proof, whilst retaining the robustness of the current system;
- any review would not necessarily imply criticism of the current regime; moreover it would acknowledge that the world is changing and that we should therefore consider strengthening protection through a more integrated and simplified approach;
- a review would need to assemble sound evidence and a strong narrative to outline clearly the issues that should be addressed;
- we should be mindful of the sensitive nature of this debate and in particular the views of key stakeholders and the public;
- the Board agreed that while a full review is needed, the time is not right given current political and economic uncertainties and the need to bring partners fully into our thinking.

The Board concluded that a review of evidence is necessary before developing further any proposals to review designations in the future.

5) English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA)/Natural England Shared Outcomes Agreement

The Board:

- noted progress towards a Shared Outcomes Agreement with the English National Park Authorities Association;
- considered related work on our statutory duties with respect to National Parks;
- agreed that the Shared Outcomes Agreement should be signed off by the Chief Executive in consultation with Acting Chair, subject to minor drafting points.

Key discussion points were:

- the Agreement should reflect the role of Natural England in appointing National Park Authority members, the importance of public understanding of the natural environment, the breadth of our shared agenda on access and recreation, and the importance of climate change mitigation alongside adaptation;
- whilst we work very closely with National Park Authorities and their umbrella bodies, and enjoy good relationships, there is greater scope for collaboration to integrate our roles more effectively;
- the Board agreed we should retain the duty on the Secretary of State to consult Natural England before determining National Park Authority funding.

6) Natural England's Draft Policy on Protected Landscapes

The Board noted:

- the draft policy for protected landscapes and our informal consultation with external stakeholders;
- that this policy is the fourth in a suite of policies under the auspices of our overarching landscape policy;
- the close relationship between this policy and our work in relation to all protected areas.

The Board agreed the draft policy for external consultation prior to circulation to Board members and final sign-off by Acting Chair.

Key discussion points were:

- the evidence to support Policy 1 should emphasise the importance of enjoyment and understanding of protected landscapes, and public support for them;
- Policy 2 should strengthen the reference to the potential for protected landscapes to contribute to climate change mitigation and reflect the importance of sustainable development and cultural heritage;
- Policy 3 should reflect the full range of public bodies' responsibilities to support good stewardship of protected landscapes;
- overall, the policy should reflect the importance of achieving greater clarity and strengthening of the "have regard to" duty to ensure higher levels of landscape protection.

7) Natural England's Draft Policy on Soil

The Board agreed the draft policy on soil for external stakeholder consultation and subsequent sign-off by Acting Chair.

Key discussion points were:

- the importance of soil cannot be overestimated and we need to know more about the ecosystem services and functions it provides as part of a healthy natural environment, particularly in relation to climate change;
- given the importance of soils relative to their common appeal and interest level among the general public, it is important that we find ways of communicating our messages and engaging a much wider audience;
- the policy should emphasise the threats to soils, the costs of poor management, and describe what our environment would be like with poorly managed and impoverished soils;
- the policy should note that soil erosion is likely to become increasingly important in mountainous areas as well as in agricultural landscapes.

8) Natural England's Draft Policy on Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture

The Board agreed the draft policy on marine fisheries and aquaculture for external consultation prior to final sign-off by Acting Chair.

In particular, the Board welcomed the tone of the draft policy and the unambiguous messages it presents with respect to marine environment protection and sustainable management of the marine environment.

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

The Board noted the report and unconfirmed minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting on 18 March 2009.

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee provided a verbal update to the Board on the March meeting and invited all Board members to attend a briefing session on corporate performance management.

10) Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the fifteenth Natural England Board meeting held on 11 February 2009 were confirmed.