



## Natural England Board

### Confirmed minutes of the thirteenth Natural England Board meeting 5 November 2008

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

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

- Transition Programme;
- Climate Change;
- National Audit Office SSSI Value for Money Study;
- Departmental and Ministerial Changes

#### Welcome from the Chair

- a) Apologies were received from Peter Allen, Sarah Burton and Michael Depledge.
- b) A number of amendments to the Register of Interests were recorded.

1) Stakeholder Engagements

The Board noted the stakeholder engagements carried out by Chair and Deputy Chair between 17 September and 5 November 2008, and planned engagements between 6 November and 10 December 2008.

2) Chief Executive's Report

The Board:

- a) noted our current strategic issues, in particular;
- the recent changes in the structure of those Government departments most relevant to Natural England's operations and the subsequent changes in Ministerial appointments and responsibilities;
  - Natural England's climate change work ahead of a number of significant events over the next six months, and emerging priorities, especially in the context of our refreshed Strategy;
  - the opportunities for improving the scope of marine conservation in England through the Marine Bill;
  - new guidance for health professionals from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) which recommends regular participation in local walking schemes as a way to improve mental wellbeing for older people. This is the first time that Natural England's Walking the Way to Health programme has been officially recognised by NICE and there is now significant potential to secure volunteer led walk programmes as a mainstream public health intervention prescribed by GPs;
  - Natural England has established the 'Natural Health Network' to administer research funding of £250k from the Medical Research Council;
  - 76% of staff responded to the recent staff survey. This is substantially higher than the industry benchmark and the results show a clear improvement in the level of positive responses;
  - the results of the recent stakeholder survey are also generally very positive. However, the feedback we have received from stakeholders presents us with two key challenges. The first is that whilst our stakeholders identify us with our designated areas work, they are less aware of our work on spatial planning. The second challenge is to respond to the perception that we are not a confident, active and go-ahead organisation;
  - we are working with the farming and land management sectors to promote agri-environment schemes to deliver across the full range of objectives for the natural environment.
- b) noted our delivery performance against our Corporate Plan in Quarter 2;
- c) considered the financial position as at September 2008 and forecast for 2008/09;

Key discussion points were:

- the detail of recent Government changes is still being worked through, particularly in relation to the climate change adaptation agenda;
- the Board broadly welcomes the new Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC), particularly the scope for closer working with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) in efforts to reduce carbon emissions;
- the creation of DECC should be seen as an important signal from the Government that it takes the climate change agenda very seriously;
- our leadership on climate change adaptation, and the land management dimension of mitigation, will demonstrate that we are a bold, confident, go-ahead organisation;
- the Board acknowledges the importance of Environmental Stewardship (ES) in delivering adaptation and mitigation through land management, and that despite the inherent difficulties in evidencing the impact of ES in this respect, we should continue to deliver practical action through ES targeting;
- we should continue to work closely with Defra and DECC to develop the potential role of ES in delivering climate change adaptation;
- the Board requested an update on the work of the Foresight Land Use Study Steering Group referred to in our written evidence to RCEP;

**Action: Executive Board to provide an update on the Foresight study at a future Board meeting.**

- the Board is very pleased with the results of the staff survey and noted that the acid test of our success in this area is that a high number of staff believe that action will be taken to respond to their concerns;
- one particularly significant area of improvement is the level of understanding among staff of our strategic direction. We now need to focus on improving levels of understanding of our policies and ensure that staff are confident in their role as policy advocates;
- the Marine Bill will provide us with a major opportunity to demonstrate that we are a bold, confident, outcome-driven organisation, thereby enhancing our reputation;
- the results of the stakeholder survey show that we must focus on improving our reputation with customers;
- we are working with Defra to explore an opportunity for the Secretary of State to launch the four Climate Change Character Area reports at Natural England's Uplands Conference on 14 November;
- members of Natural England's Executive Board recently met the Executive Board of the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and agreed that we will work together to ensure that the EU adequately understands any implications for delivery of Environmental Stewardship in England that may result from an EU Accreditation and Control Regulation regarding annual application and claim dates. The Board agreed that if the Regulation presents an issue, it will be considered by Natural England's Audit and Risk Committee;

**Action: Executive Board to keep the Board informed.**

- the low rates of Classic Scheme renewals and uptake of Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship schemes, and a shortage of key skills in marine

science and climate change, are the two most significant factors leading to under-performance against six key targets: protected landscapes; biodiversity, SSSI, draft plan for Marine Protected Areas by 2011, good environmental management at the landscape scale; and sustainability and reduction in carbon emissions. We are working hard to address these issues;

- the Board will consider the 2009/10 draft Corporate Plan at its meeting in February 2009.

### 3) Natural England Science Advisory Committee Update

The Board noted the work of the Natural England Science Advisory Committee (SAC) to date in particular:

- the Committee's input at its April meeting to the development of Natural England's policies and work programmes on non-native species and climate change adaptation indicators;
- the Committee's September workshop to explore what social science can deliver for the natural environment;

Key discussion points were:

- the Board is encouraged that the SAC is independently focused on a very similar range of topics to those discussed as part of the Chief Executive's update on current strategic issues;
- Natural England is leading an application to the Medical Research Council for a research programme (for 3 post-doctoral research posts for 18 months) to develop the evidence base on the health benefits of the natural environment;
- the next meeting of the SAC will focus on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and an update on Natural England's scenarios work.

### 4) Natural England's Draft Policy on Coastal Change

The Board:

- a) considered Natural England's draft policy on coastal change;
- b) noted the nature of informal stakeholder feedback on our proposed draft policy;
- c) agreed the draft policy for external consultation subject to the Board's proposed amendments;
- d) agreed that the revised draft policy following external consultation will be circulated to the Board for comment before being signed off by Chair.

Key discussion points were:

- we have received informal feedback from Defra, the Environment Agency, local authorities, and RSPB that they would be broadly supportive of the policy but would like to reserve comment for the formal consultation;

- we need to consider how demand for aggregate may affect European protected sites in the future;

**Action: Executive Board to consider potential impacts from future demand for aggregate.**

- the policy should acknowledge that coastal change impacts upon people, whether it be a direct impact on people's homes and livelihoods or a less tangible but nevertheless significant effect on the cultural dimension of coastal landscapes;

**Action: Executive Board to circulate revised draft policy for external consultation, then circulate to the Board prior to being signed off by Chair.**

5) Natural England's Draft Policy on All Landscapes Matter

The Board:

- a) considered the draft policy on All Landscapes Matter;
- b) agreed the draft policy for external consultation subject to the Board's proposed amendments;
- c) agreed that the revised draft policy following external consultation will be circulated to the Board for comment before being signed off by Chair.

Key discussion points were:

- the Board welcomes the inclusion of Policy 2: Dynamic and Evolving Landscapes;
- the draft policy should be more explicit about how we would proactively engage the public using a common language;
- Policy 6 should make it clear that where new development is proposed, there is a presumption in favour of enhancing the landscape;
- the draft policy should make it clear that an action plan for England is being prepared in response to the European Landscape Convention;

**Action: Executive Board to circulate revised draft policy for external consultation, then circulate to the Board prior to being signed off by Chair.**

6) Direct Elections to English National Park Authorities – Ministerial Consultation

The Board considered Natural England's proposed response to the Minister's informal consultation on direct elections to English National Park Authorities.

Key discussion points were:

- the response should state clearly that we are not in favour of direct elections and reinforce the importance of National Park Authority members having a national perspective;
- the Board is concerned that this consultation effectively means that the Government is unlikely to instigate any further opportunities for review of

National Park Authorities for some time. Consequently the Board agreed to respond to the questions posed by the Consultation but also importantly, to use this as an opportunity to propose other matters relating to National Park Authority governance that the Minister ought to consider as part of the current review, most notably the importance of regular reviews and the effectiveness of NPA members individually and collectively;

**Action: Executive Board to revise the draft consultation response and circulate to Board members prior to submission to Defra.**

6) The Audit and Risk Committee: Report on meeting held on 10 September 2008

The Board noted the unconfirmed minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee's meeting on 10 September 2008 and that a Board workshop could be held on 15 June 2009 for the Board to consider the Annual Report and Accounts 2008/09.

7) Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the thirteenth Natural England Board meeting held on 16 September were confirmed subject to the following amendment: that the Board formally records its sincere thanks and best wishes to Melinda Appleby, Merrick Denton-Thompson and Roger Clarke for their contribution to Natural England over the last 2 years.

**Action: Board Services to amend unconfirmed minutes prior to publication on the website.**