

Natural England Board



Confirmed minutes of the twelfth Natural England Board meeting 16 September 2008

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

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:

- Natural England's Transition Programme: Programme Update;
- Scenarios for England's Natural Environment to 2050 (ScENE 2050);
- Strategic Risk Register;

Following the Board meeting, a further briefing item was considered by the Board on collaboration between Natural England and England's National Park Authorities.

Welcome from the Chair

- a) No apologies were received.
- b) There were no amendments to the Register of Interests.

1) Stakeholder Engagements

The Board noted and agreed the stakeholder engagements carried out by Chair and Deputy Chair between 26 June and 17 September 2008, and planned engagements between 18 September and 5 November 2008.

2) Chief Executive's Report

The Board:

- a) noted our current strategic issues, in particular;
 - we have lined up a full programme of engagement with water companies to further our objectives for PRO9;
 - we will continue to work with Government to seek resolution of a number of outstanding issues relating to the Marine Bill, on marine conservation and coastal access.
 - we will be submitting our response to the Renewable Energy Strategy at the end of September;
 - we will continue to engage fully with the National Audit Office on their value for money report entitled "Are SSSIs effective in protecting England's biodiversity";
 - there is a significant challenge to utilise the full Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) budget for the current year due to lower than expected ELS take up and capital schemes not being implemented or claimed for by agreement holders;
 - there is a significant amount of work being undertaken to develop Upland Entry Level Stewardship (UELS), including setting up a stakeholder group and two pilot projects;
 - there are a number of instances where delivery on outcomes is currently hindered by shortage of skills.
- b) noted our performance against our Corporate Plan in Quarter 1 and that the next full performance report is due at the November Board meeting;
- c) considered the financial position for the first four months of the year;

Key discussion points were:

- the Board requested to be kept informed on all aspects of the Marine Bill in the lead up to the Queen's Speech, in particular, the situation regarding the duty to designate Marine Conservation Zones;
- the Board welcomes the opportunity to discuss wind energy opportunity maps at the November Board meeting;
- The Board supports the steps being taken to review options to utilise the current year budget, including exploring flexibility to encourage more schemes into Higher Level Stewardship (HLS), making ELS and HLS more attractive to more land managers and encouraging and facilitating land managers to implement capital works options;
- the Board expressed disappointment with the decision by the Secretary of State on set-aside. The emerging evidence by the BTO suggests that voluntary measures have not worked and have resulted in a net loss of biodiversity;

- the Board requested to be kept informed of progress with Natural England taking operational control of Genesis.

3) Implementation of Government Policy on badger licensing

The Board considered the implications of the Government's decision that licences should not be issued to farmers to cull badgers to prevent bovine TB.

Key discussion points were:

- the Secretary of State's decision is reliably evidence based and the Board is pleased with the emphasis on the need for further to work to explore vaccines;
- the importance of Natural England providing early advice to the Government on this issue;
- the Board does not agree with the statement by the Efra Committee that the Government has not taken the issue seriously;
- following a number of recent high profile issues concerning the farming community, in particular badgers and bovine TB, the Board would welcome a discussion at a future Board meeting on our relationship and engagement with the farming community.

ACTION: Executive Board to provide an opportunity for the Board to discuss our relationship with the farming community.

4) Natural England's Draft Access Policy

The Board:

- a) considered Natural England's draft policy on access;
- b) noted the nature of stakeholder feedback on our proposed draft policy and welcomed its inclusion in the paper as good practice for the future;
- c) agreed the draft policy for consultation subject to the Board's proposed amendments.

Key discussion points were:

- this is the start of a renewed and exciting public debate about engaging people in the natural environment;
- we are working to address a shortfall of high quality social evidence for our work in this area;
- access to the natural environment is about experience as well as physical access, including interpretation and education;
- there is a need to overcome psychological and economic barriers to access as well as physical ones;
- our access policy is one of a number of policies that will underpin our work to inspire more people to value and conserve the natural environment, positioned within a broad environmental, social and economic context;
- our work in this area provides significant opportunities to develop the Natural England brand.

Action: Executive Board to circulate draft policy for external consultation, prior to sign 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 that we need a further iteration of our draft policy on All Landscapes Matter, prior to external stakeholder consultation. The draft policy will be presented back to the Board at a future date.

Key discussion points were:

- the draft policy should seek opportunities to provide positive messages to developers;
- we should take a lead on providing a geographical framework to ensure that delivery is spatially literate at both a regional and national scale. Our work on regional tactical plans and Character Areas is an excellent example of how this can be achieved;
- we should ensure that the draft policy is grounded in a firm evidence base and that it takes account of future scenarios that may affect operational delivery at a landscape scale;
- the draft policy should make it clear that while all landscapes matter we should also provide a framework for prioritisation for engagement by Natural England;
- it is important to distinguish between landscape quality and landscape qualities;

Action: Executive Board to present revised draft policy to the Board at a future date.

6) Natural England's Draft Policy on Wave and Tidal Energy

The Board considered and agreed Natural England's draft policy on wave and tidal energy for external consultation, subject to amendments, prior to sign off by Chair.

The Board noted:

- we are responding to the Government's consultation on the UK Renewable Energy Strategy, which closes on 26 September;
- the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) is exploring the feasibility of a number of potential wave and tidal schemes, including two options for a Severn Barrage. Other private sector tidal range developments at an early planning stage include proposals for the Wash, Morecambe Bay and Solway Firth.

Key discussion points were:

- we support the Government's stated commitment not to seek derogation of the Habitats Directive and other relevant European Directives in

respect of a Severn tidal power options study:

- the draft policy should be worded to refer more strongly to EU Directives and UK legislation, and state that where the evidence suggests significant adverse impacts on the natural environment, we will oppose wave and tidal energy developments;
- the draft policy should make clear that the current wording of Policy 5 is intended to be sequential (i.e. does not imply choices for developers) as required by the Habitats Directive;
- we need a strategic approach setting out locations for Marine Conservation Zones so that decisions taken on the impacts on the marine environment are made within this framework

Action: Executive Board to circulate draft policy for external consultation prior to sign off by Chair.

6) The Audit and Risk Committee's Second Annual Report to the Board

The Board:

- noted the Audit and Risk Committee's second annual report;
- noted the unconfirmed minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee's meetings on 18 and 30 June 2008 and the Chair of the Committee's verbal update on the Committee's meeting on 10 September 2008.

Key discussion points were:

- there is good evidence that internal control and health and safety is carried out to a high standard, that senior management takes it seriously, and that there are clear benefits to the organisation;
- we enjoyed very successful working relations with the National Audit Office this year;
- there are still very significant concerns about Defra Shared Services and we are not receiving value for money, although there have been some minor performance improvements. We continue to explore alternative provision.

7) Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the twelfth Natural England Board meeting held on 25 June 2008 were confirmed.