

# NATURAL ENGLAND BOARD



**Meeting 2**  
**5 December 2006**

Paper No. **NEB M06 01**

Title: **Unconfirmed Minutes of the First Natural England Board meeting**

**17 October 2006, 13.50pm – 17.30pm**

Members attending

Peter Allen  
Melinda Appleby  
Poul Christensen (Deputy Chair)  
Roger Clarke  
Lynn Crowe  
Merrick Denton-Thompson  
Martin Doughty (Chair)  
Tony Hams  
David Hill  
Doug Hulyer  
David Macdonald  
Helen Phillips (CEO)  
Pam Warhurst

By invitation

Peter Fane

Executives

Adrian Belton  
David Webster  
David Young  
Guy Thompson

Secretariat

Becky Rooley  
Emma Bown  
Liz Newton

Apologies

Sarah Burton  
Michael Depledge  
Christopher Pennell

Prior to the Board meeting, a two hour Board Update was held at which Board Members were briefed on Natural England's work in the following areas:

- Coastal access
- Governance Task Group
- Learning and education
- Public Accounts Committee review of open access

1. Welcome from the Chair

- a) The Board confirmed the minutes of the final Natural England Skeleton Board Meeting held on 13 September 2006.

The Board noted that:

- i) All the documents for the Stewardship Statements from English Nature and Countryside Agency have been received.
- ii) The Stewardship Statement from the Rural Development Service has not been received.

- iii) The Board would like to send their thanks to the Founding Body Chairs for their work on the Stewardship Statements.

**Action: Board Services**

- b) Declarations of interests were as noted in the Board Register of Interests.

## 2. Chair's Report

*(Paper: M2 Chair's Report)*

The Board:

- a) Noted the report including the engagements and forward look for Chair, Deputy Chair, and Board Members.
- b) Agreed that Board Member engagements should include only those carried out in a Natural England capacity.
- c) Requested that future Chair's reports should contain a brief summary of key regional events.

**Action: Executive Board**

## 3. CEO's Report

*(Paper: M3 CEO's report, M3 Performance report, M3 Annex A NE 2006 mid year report, M3 Financial report, M3 Financial report annex 1)*

The Board:

- a) Noted the three sections of the CEO's Report:
  - strategic issues
  - performance report
  - financial report.
- b) Noted the strategic issues raised in the CEO's report.
- c) Noted that a Board seminar on SSSI procedures will be held on 4 December 2006.

### Performance report

The Board:

- d) Noted that:
  - i) the mid-year performance report summarised the delivery of the founding bodies against Natural England's Strategic Direction in the first six months of the financial year.
  - ii) performance to date had been assessed against the level of delivery anticipated at the start of the financial year prior to the in-year budget cuts.
  - iii) there were significant risks to delivery against outcome one targets, in particular the delivery of agri-environment schemes and the SSSI target.
  - iv) available resources would be focused on minimising risks to the delivery of agri-environment schemes and SSSI targets, whilst maximising progress towards the other targets outlined in the letter from the Chair to the Minister.
  - v) work would progress across all areas of Natural England's Strategic Direction, however as a result of the budget cuts some activities would need to be deferred.
- e) Agreed that performance for the remainder of the financial year would be reported against a new set of targets established following the in-year budget cuts.

### Financial report

The Board:

- f) noted the result of the negotiation on Natural England's 2006/7 budget including:
  - i) the additional funding secured to cover the over budget expenditure by the Rural Development Service and corporate service costs which were un-budgeted for by the Countryside Agency;
  - ii) the written assurances provided by Defra in relation to cost neutrality for Shared Services, the IBM e-enabling contract and VAT going forward;
  - iii) the additional £1.7m of funding provided for the completion of marine survey work.

- g) expressed its thanks to the Chief Executive and the Executive Board for their efforts in securing the budget outcome.
- h) noted that expenditure at mid year is below forecast, largely as a result of the expenditure moratorium implemented whilst negotiations with Defra over the budget cuts and Natural England's overall budget were proceeding.
- i) noted that the expenditure moratorium had been lifted now that Natural England's budget for 2006/6 had been finalised.
- j) noted that the National Audit Office will carry out the audit of the accounts of the founding bodies at the end of October.

#### 4. Governance Package

*(Papers: M4 Corporate Governance, Annex A1 Natural England's Board Governance Index, Annex A2 Natural England's Executive Governance Index, Annex B Strategic Statement of Role of Board, Annex C Board Standing Orders, Annex D Science Advisory Committee Terms of Reference, Annex E 1 & 2 Freedom of Information, Annex F Health & Safety)*

The Board:

- a) noted the Board and Executive Governance indexes.

#### Role of the Board

The Board:

- b) approved the Strategic Statement of the Role of Board.

#### Standing Orders

The Board:

- c) Approved the Standing Orders with the following amendments.
  - i) the Chair is to be able to call an extraordinary meeting with less than three weeks' notice.
  - ii) that it be made clear that the Standing Orders apply only to the formal open and private meetings of the Board where decisions are taken, not the informal Board seminars and update sessions where information on particular topics is provided.
  - iii) procedures are included for when the Board acts in a quasi-judicial role, such as when members of the public may give evidence on an SSSI case.

**Action: Board Services**

#### Science Advisory Committee

The Board:

- d) Approved the Science Advisory Committee Terms of Reference with the following amendments:
  - i) specific examples of the Committee's work to be removed
  - ii) ensure that scope of the Committee's work includes diversity.

**Action: Executive Board**

#### Whistleblowing procedure

The Board:

- e) Appointed Tony Hams as the designated Board member for the whistle blowing procedure.
- f) Requested that Board members are provided with a note explaining Natural England's whistle blowing procedures.

**Action: Board Services**

#### Access to Information

- g) The Board approved the Access to Information Policy and Access to Information Statement with the following amendment:

- i) That electronic communication be made central to the Policy and Statement,
- ii) that jargon free summaries of scientific research should be produced.
- h) The Board noted the that an information services seminar for the Board could be run in the future.

**Action: Board Services**

#### Freedom of Information

The Board

- i) approved the Freedom of Information Procedure
- j) requested a review of founding body publications.

**Action: Executive Board**

#### Health and Safety

The Board:

- k) approved the Health and Safety Policy.
- l) Noted that a health and safety report will be a standing item on the Board meeting agenda.
- m) Agreed that Sarah Burton will be asked to be the Health and Safety Champion for the Board.

**Action: Chair**

#### Other Governance Matters

The Board:

- n) requested a regular report on customer complaints.

**Action: Executive Board**

- o) Agreed that biographies of Board members on the intranet and internet will be updated and will include the key work areas the Board are involved in.

**Action: Board Services**

- p) Noted that Board business cards will be circulated shortly.

**Action: Board Services**

#### 5. External Communications

*(Paper: M5 External Communications)*

The Board:

- a) Noted that the paper provides an update on external communications activity, and that an external communications strategy will be brought to the Board in February 2007.
- b) Noted that the campaigns were announced, rather than launched, at the Natural England national launch and that partners are invited to develop the campaigns with us.

#### 6. E-nable Business Case

This item was moved to the Private Meeting of the Board due to the commercially sensitive nature of the paper.

#### 7. Policy Priorities

*(Paper: M7 Policy Priorities for Natural England)*

The Board:

- a) Agreed the policy priorities.
- b) Noted that:
  - i) policy areas have clear linkages which will be reflected in policy development;
  - ii) marine policy is a broad area of work with the immediate priority being the Marine Bill;
  - iii) land use policy is also a broad area of work which will include the role of land in providing opportunities for improving public health;

- iv) whilst policy implementation is different to policy development, learning from policy implementation is critical in future policy development;
- v) invasive species and wildlife disease would be included within Natural England's overall policy portfolio.
- c) Agreed that the outcome groupings of Board Members would provide a mechanism for the Board to input into the development of the policy priorities.
- d) Noted that a paper on future policy priorities would be brought to the Board meeting in April 2007.