

## *Minutes*

### **UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (UK BRAG)**

11.00 am, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2003  
Ministerial Conference Room (8<sup>th</sup> Floor),  
Noble House, Smith Square, London

#### **Attendance:**

Miles Parker, Defra (Chair)  
Carl Cilenti, JNCC (Secretariat)  
Stephen Albon - CEH Banchory  
Ian Bainbridge - Scottish Executive  
Tim Blackstock - CCW  
Kevin Charman - English Nature  
Caroline Fenwick - NERC  
Tony Hawkins - Plymouth Marine Lab  
Andrew Jackson - RBG Kew  
Michel Kaiser - University of Bangor  
David MacDonald - University of Oxford  
Davy McCracken - SAC  
Gordon Patterson - FC  
Beth Power - Defra  
Andrew Pullin – Wildlife & Countryside  
Link / British Ecological Society  
Paul Rose - JNCC  
Jane Sears – Wildlife & Countryside Link  
Pete Robertson - CSL  
Fred Rumsey – Natural History Museum  
Martin Sharman - European  
Commission  
Andrew Stott - Defra  
Michael Usher - University of Stirling  
Johannes Vogel – Natural History  
Museum  
Allan Watt - CEH Banchory

#### **Apologies:**

Richard Brand-Hardy - Defra  
Paul Leonard - Defra  
Scot Mathieson - SEPA  
Hilary Neal - Defra  
Howard Platt - EHS NI  
Geeta Puri - NAW  
Kevin Watts - Forestry Commission

## **1. Welcome and introductions**

### **2. Background to establishment of UK BRAG**

Andrew Stott informed the group of the origins of UK BRAG, the work of the former Biodiversity Research Working Group (BRWG) and the current UK biodiversity process within which UK BRAG is placed. Some discussion followed on how the relationships between UK BRAG and other UK Biodiversity Groups need to be taken into account in setting the terms of reference for UK BRAG. The group felt the relationship with the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG) was of particular interest.

*Action 2.1 Secretariat to circulate Terms of Reference and membership for the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG), to assist in defining the role and membership of UK BRAG and to help maintain communications and sharing of information between the two groups.*

### **3. Status and draft remit of UK BRAG (paper BRAG 1/1)**

The draft remit of UK BRAG was accepted subject to some minor amendments. Some concern was expressed about only two meetings per year given that this would leave only 5 more before the first three year review. The following suggestions were made:

- i. The meetings schedule should be reviewed in light of the final three year work programme.
- ii. Consideration should be given to having longer meetings.
- iii. Communication between meetings needs to be given high priority to help counter the problems caused by infrequent meetings.

The OST code of conduct was accepted as a useful guide but being very extensive the secretariat was requested to highlight the relevant sections for group members to read.

A suggestion to review the remit for the group after three years was accepted.

Membership was felt to be central to the success of the group. The business sector, Local Biodiversity Action Plan representation, outstanding invites to the first meeting of the group, the British Ecological Society (BES), Marine biodiversity, Sustainable Development and Social Sciences were all felt to be potential gaps or weaknesses in the current membership. A number of potential individuals who could be invited onto the group to represent these areas were suggested. Andrew Pullin kindly agreed to represent both Wildlife and Countryside Link and the British Ecological Society (BES).

*Action 3.1 All to comment on the revised remit for BRAG when circulated by the secretariat with the draft minutes.*

*Action 3.2 Secretariat to make members of the group aware of the relevant sections of the OST code of conduct and members to read these sections.*

*Action 3.3 All to send any suggestions for additional members of the group to the secretariat who will compile a minimal list of invitees to agree with the group by correspondence in order that new members can be present at the second meeting.*

#### **4. Draft BRAG work plan (Papers BRAG 1/2 and 1/2b)**

Discussion focused on the objectives and their order, the redundancy of the word cross-cutting, the need to set ourselves measurable targets and whether to extend the work beyond the scope of the UK BAP to cover all aspects of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The objectives, targets and workplan were also agreed to be essential to the overall remit of UK BRAG so the remit (paper 1/1) and workplan (papers 1/2 and 1/2b) should be combined for submission to the UKBSC. Further work will be needed to ensure measurable products are identified within the work of UK BRAG.

The most difficult area to resolve was the extension of the scope of the group to cover all aspects of the CBD. While welcome in principle, an extension of scope would take the work of UK BRAG beyond the remit of the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee (UKBSC) to which UK BRAG is accountable. It is possible that the UK BAP will increasingly align itself with the work programmes of the CBD so reducing this conflict but at present this is not the case. A compromise was to make a small addition to the wording of the over-arching objective for UK BRAG to reflect the dual relevance of UK BRAG work to the CBD and the UK BAP. An additional objective was also proposed to cover advice around scientific and technical CBD issues.

A new order for the objectives was agreed and the word 'cross-cutting' was generally felt to be redundant in most places that it occurred. The need to fulfill the role of a national biodiversity research platform was felt to be part of the overarching objective of UK BRAG but it was necessary to further define what was meant by the term 'platform' or define an alternative term.

Some clarity was also needed around use of the word 'programme' as this was central to the level at which UK BRAG was going to work. The word theme was generally thought to be better. For example, UK BRAG would look to see if new biodiversity research themes needed to be addressed as opposed to developing new research programmes.

Communication was often mentioned as critical to the success of UK BRAG and communication requires a clear understanding of the audience UK BRAG wants to deliver its advice to. Consequently, the community UK BRAG represents, and therefore delivers advice to, needs to be defined within the remit and workplan.

Tasks as outlined in paper 2b tabled were discussed. Detailed comments were invited in writing in order to agree a set of tasks in time for the May meeting of UKBSC. A general point was the need to agree measurable targets for the work of UK BRAG and to communicate our work as widely as possible based on outcome orientated targets and not on the action we take to reach them.

A lot of debate also focused on the need to include socio-economic aspects of biodiversity and whether this should be a component of all biodiversity research

themes UK BRAG addresses or a theme in its own right. It was also noted that most research programmes, especially programme six '*Developing tools to optimise policies to favour biodiversity*', already dealt with this issue to some extent. The group felt ill equipped to decide and called for work to be commissioned for the next meeting to inform UK BRAG's debate on socio-economic aspects of biodiversity research. This work should identify the extent to which the existing 6 research programmes developed by BRWG address socio-economic aspects of biodiversity research and in light of what has been achieved in this research area in the past, suggest options for dealing with socio-economic aspects of biodiversity research in the future.

There was general agreement however, that aspects such as health and quality of life had a large biodiversity component and that socio-economic considerations were consequently important.

It was also requested that the next meeting be provided with a review of progress and an implementation plan for the existing 6 research programmes (themes) developed by BRWG.

*Action 4.1 Secretariat to amend the remit and provisional workplan in light of UK BRAG discussion, combine these into a Terms of Reference, agree this by correspondence and submit it to the May 2003 meeting of the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee.*

*Action 4.2 Secretariat, in collaboration with Defra and members of the group, to commission work on the socio-economic areas of biodiversity research and the options for dealing with this type of research in future, to be presented as a workshop session at the next meeting of UK BRAG.*

*Action 4.3 Secretariat to provide an update on progress and draft implementation plans for the 6 research programmes proposed by BRWG in time for consideration at the next meeting of BRAG in June 2003.*

*Action 4.4 Secretariat to liaise with Defra about appropriate publicity to announce the establishment of UK BRAG. All to ensure that awareness of UK BRAG is raised within their respective organizations and communities.*

## **5. Proposed programme on introduced species (BRAG 1/3)**

There was some concern expressed as to whether UK BRAG should be giving priority to the programme of research for introduced species. It was agreed that the programme could be developed as a model to assist BRAG in developing the approach. A sub-group was set up to work with the secretariat to assess relevant research initiatives already implementing the programme and to identify what, if anything, additional was required.

Steve Albon, Ian Bainbridge, Kevin Charman, David MacDonald Pete Robertson and Michael Usher volunteered for the sub group and others were invited to contact the secretariat if they wished to be involved.

*Action 5.1 Secretariat to review proposals for an introduced species programme, taking account of recent policy developments and other ongoing and planned*

initiatives: establish and consult a UK BRAG sub-group to determine whether to proceed, and if so best approach to implementation and involvement of partners.

## **6. Development of information exchange system (BRAG 1/4)**

Kevin Charman raised the issue that the information needed for the work of UK BRAG was of many and varied types that the system we put in place needs to take this into account and at the same time be useful to research needs other than those of UK BRAG. Some of the work English Nature are doing on evidence-based decision making is relevant to this.

*Action 6.1 Kevin Charman to liaise with the secretariat over the development of the information exchange system to ensure that all requirements for information are met. Secretariat to update the paper subsequently and circulate to all for confirmation by correspondence.*

## **7. European Initiatives - Martin Sharman and Allan Watt.**

Martin Sharman and Allan Watt presented information on the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS) and invited the group to consider what role they could play with regard to the forthcoming EPBRS meeting in Greece. The meeting will discuss draft statements prepared for each of the main topics on the November 2003 CBD SBSTTA meeting. The themes are protected areas, sustainable use, ecosystems approach, indicators, climate change, mountains and diseases. This related closely to the previous discussion about the remit of UK BRAG and the group wanted to reconsider how it might best contribute to European and UK input into SBSTTA in light of the final remit and emerging work programme.

*Action 7.1 Secretariat to make available draft EPBRS statements and to establish arrangements for consultation with BRAG on EPBRS issues.*

*Action 7.2 Secretariat to inform the group of the current processes by which the UK engages with SBSTTA both directly and through the European.*

*Action 7.3 Andrew Stott and Allan Watt to provide a report of the next meeting of EPBRS in Lesbos to next UK BRAG meeting.*

## **8. Information items**

### **8.3 NERC Science Strategy - Caroline Fenwick**

Caroline Fenwick presented information on NERC's science strategy. UK BRAG was interested to know how much the strategy had been influenced by the work of BRWG but this was difficult to quantify. A consultation mechanism for the strategy had not yet been formulated but there was likely to be a role for UK BRAG. The research councils were developing a major joint programme on Rural Economy and Land Use and there might be a role for UK BRAG in providing advice on priorities for biodiversity. In working out how UK BRAG could be of most value it was thought to be important that we keep the next 2004 spending review in mind.

#### 8.4 Defra Horizon Scanning - Beth Power

Beth power introduced Defra's Horizon Scanning programme which does not have an explicit biodiversity workstream but does have strong biodiversity components within many other workstreams.

*Action 8.1 Secretariat to liaise with Beth Power to link the horizon scanning and UK BRAG websites.*

*Action 8.2 Secretariat to liaise with Beth Power to develop an approach for UK BRAG to provide advice on Horizon Scanning biodiversity projects.*

#### **9. Short announcements - update on relevant events and initiatives (round table)**

Michael Usher provided copies of the Scottish Biodiversity Forum Research Strategy and expressed a wish to integrate more closely with UK BRAG in the future.

Andrew Pullin informed UK BRAG of a series of meetings being arranged by BES on the subject of the critical skills gap in biological recording and monitoring. The first meeting is on the 3 April at Birmingham University.

Martin Sharman emphasised that there was a great deal of useful work that UK BRAG could engage with in Europe and internationally and offered to send UK BRAG a list of the current fifth framework projects with UK involvement (attached).

*Action 9.1 Secretariat to create a bulletin board for UK BRAG within the UK biodiversity website to facilitate consultations with the group, to receive papers such as the EPBRS statements, to distribute information such as the presentations given to UK BRAG and to help communicate the work of UK BRAG.*

#### **10. Review of action points.**

The following 14 actions were agreed:

*Action 2.1 Secretariat to circulate Terms of Reference and membership for the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG), to assist in defining the role and membership of UK BRAG and to help maintain communications and sharing of information between the two groups.*

*Action 3.1 All to comment on the revised remit for UK BRAG when circulated by the secretariat with the draft minutes.*

*Action 3.2 Secretariat to make members of the group aware of the relevant sections of the OST code of conduct and members to read these sections.*

*Action 3.3 All to send any suggestions for additional members of the group to the secretariat who will compile a minimal list of invitees to agree with the group by correspondence in order that new members can be present at the second meeting.*

*Action 4.1 Secretariat to amend the remit and provisional workplan in light of UK BRAG discussion, combine these into a Terms of Reference, agree this by correspondence and submit it to the May 2003 meeting of the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee.*

*Action 4.2 Secretariat, in collaboration with Defra and members of the group, to commission work on the socio-economic areas of biodiversity research and the options for dealing with this type of research in future, to be presented as a workshop session at the next meeting of UK BRAG.*

*Action 4.3 Secretariat to provide an update on progress and draft implementation plans for the 6 research programmes proposed by BRWG in time for consideration at the next meeting of UK BRAG in June 2003.*

*Action 4.4 Secretariat to liaise with Defra about appropriate publicity to announce the establishment of UK BRAG. All to ensure that awareness of UK BRAG is raised within their respective organizations and communities.*

*Action 5.1 Secretariat to review proposals for an introduced species programme, taking account of recent policy developments and other ongoing and planned initiatives: establish and consult a UK BRAG sub-group to determine whether to proceed, and if so best approach to implementation and involvement of partners.*

*Action 6.1 Kevin Charman to work with the secretariat in the early stages of development of the information system to share best practice and to ensure that all requirements for information are met.*

*Action 7.1 Secretariat to make available draft EPBRS statements and to establish arrangements for consultation with UK BRAG on EPBRS issues.*

*Action 7.2 Secretariat to inform the group of the current processes by which the UK engages with SBSTTA both directly and through the European.*

*Action 7.3 Andrew Stott and Allan Watt to provide a report of the next meeting of EPBRS in Lesbos to next UK BRAG meeting.*

*Action 8.1 Secretariat to liaise with Beth Power to link the horizon scanning and brag websites.*

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*Action 9.1 Secretariat to create a bulletin board for UK BRAG within the UK biodiversity website to facilitate consultations with the group, to receive papers such as the EPBRS statements, to distribute information such as the presentations given to UK BRAG and to help communicate the work of UK BRAG.*

## **11. Date and venue for next meeting.**

There was some concern about whether 6 monthly meetings were frequent enough given the quantity of work UK BRAG had to do. A longer meeting in July with a half day workshop on socio economic aspects was suggested. Scotland (Ian Bainbridge) offered to host the next meeting of the group.

*Action 11.1 Secretariat to agree dates for the next meeting with Ian Bainbridge, confirm dates with UK BRAG members and work with Ian to organize the meeting.*