



Minutes

2nd meeting

UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (UK BRAG)

10.15am, 19th September 2003
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh,
Inverleith Row, Edinburgh

Attendance:

Miles Parker - Defra (Chair)
Richard Ferris - JNCC (Secretariat)
Niall Moore - CSL
Steve Albon – CEH
Paul Rose – JNCC
Kevin Watts – Forest Research
Andrew Pullin – University of Birmingham (WCL and BES Rep.)
Jane Sears – RSPB (WCL Rep.)
Tim Blackstock – CCW
Allan Watt – CEH
Des Callaghan – Just Ecology
Andy Stott – Defra
Ian Bainbridge – Scottish Executive
Davy McCracken – SAC
Martin Sharman – European Commission
Michael Usher – University of Stirling
Hilary Neal – Defra
David Macdonald – Wildcru, University of Oxford
Kevin Charman – English Nature
Mark Crane – Crane Consultants
Caroline Fenwick - NERC
Scot Mathieson – SEPA

Apologies:

Gordon Patterson – Forestry Commission (Scotland)
Tony Hawkins – Plymouth Marine Laboratory
Richard Brand-Hardy – Defra
Paul Leonard – Defra
Johannes Vogel – Natural History Museum
Michael Kaiser – University of Bangor
Andrew Jackson – Royal Botanic Garden Kew
Howard Platt – DOENI

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

These were taken as read and accepted as an accurate and true account of the previous meeting

3. Matters Arising (paper BRAG 2/1)

A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting. Most of the required actions had been successfully discharged, and others were followed-up in the meeting.

4. Remit and Membership (paper BRAG 2/2)

A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting, in which members had been directed towards the Terms of Reference laid down in the Office of Science & Technology document (*Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees*). Richard Ferris presented an updated members' contact list and made recommendations regarding the size and scope of the group on behalf of the Secretariat.

SNH had nominated John Baxter as their representative, which strengthened marine expertise on the Group. BRAG also approved nominations of Prof Charles Perrings (Environment Department, University of York) and Dr Mary Gibby (Director of Science, RBGE). Full membership now stands at thirty-three (including Chair and Secretariat) and it was agreed that no further additions would be sought.

Action 4.1 Secretariat to inform Charles Perrings and Mary Gibby.

5. Communication

Richard Ferris (JNCC/Secretariat) made a short presentation about the current and future levels of communication between UK BRAG members, and between UK BRAG and the wider research community. It was felt by members that the use of e-mail for circulating papers was good. Following an issue raised at the first full UK BRAG meeting, it was suggested that Secretariat should develop a bulletin board within the UKBAP website.

Action 5.1 Secretariat to set up a bulletin board within the UKBAP website (www.ukbap.org.uk/Groups/BRAG.htm)

6. Socio-economic research

Des Callaghan (Just Ecology) gave a presentation of the findings of a brief review of the coverage of socio-economic research needs in the UK BRAG research themes. Concern was voiced that the definition used emphasised economic issues, but there was a strong acceptance that UK BRAG needed to address both social and economic issues in more depth. This must draw on the needs of the country biodiversity strategies. There was some discussion of US experience of integrating socio-economics with biodiversity conservation. Michael Usher highlighted that social themes feature more prominently in UK. Mark Crane referred to the problems of giving too much attention to social issues, based on US experience, resulting in overly

prescriptive approaches. Scot Mathieson suggested that public participation was already becoming an issue in UK, citing the Water Framework Directive as an example; and reported that a research proposal with a strong socio-economic emphasis was going into the SNIFFER programme. It was agreed that this paper would be circulated to members. Andrew Pullin recognised public health as an important socio-economic issue, particularly initiatives linking public health and biodiversity, and notified the meeting of a future workshop organised by English Nature (EN), the British Ecological Society (BES) and the UK Public Health Authority, to bring together ecologists and public health experts. Hilary Neal pointed out that social and economic issues should not be viewed separately. Ian Bainbridge reminded the meeting that the key task was to deliver the UKBAP, so it was necessary to identify the socio-economic tools needed to do this.

The group was invited to consider a number of options: (1) to set up a sub-group and/or (2) produce a more detailed paper of issues/questions to present to the sub-group. A recommendation was made to set up a sub-group on socio-economics within UK BRAG. Allan Watt recommended that the group should be a mixture of practitioners and researchers.

Action 6.1 Secretariat to seek nominations for a group, to flesh out and clarify priorities according to the 6 UK BRAG research themes (bearing in mind the Country Strategies).

Action 6.2 Socio-economic issues sub-group to meet and develop a response for presentation to the 3rd full UK BRAG meeting

Action 6.3 Scot Mathieson to circulate a paper submitted to the SNIFFER programme to all UK BRAG members.

7. Wildlife and Countryside Link (BRAG paper 2/4)

Jane Sears and Andrew Pullin presented a paper on behalf of WCL. Research, survey and information were recognised as the key constraint on SAPs and HAPs in the last reporting round. Jane proposed that UK BRAG should examine how research resources are allocated, and how to encourage the scientific community to address the basic research needs of HAPs and SAPs. It was suggested that UK BRAG should develop a framework for research, survey, and monitoring, recognising that there was currently a lack of field skills, taxonomic skills, and training.

Andrew outlined an evidence-based approach to establishing biodiversity policy, and requested that UK BRAG should be involved in its promotion. Although information may exist, it may not be available to decision makers. Consequently, most decision making is currently based on experience rather than evidence. It was argued that a structure was needed, linking the research community – a review and dissemination unit – and decision makers. The unit would need to be linked to a network of experts. The advantage of this approach would be its efficiency, unbiased nature and systematic delivery. It would also provide a formalised way of flagging up where evidence is missing, and could establish a clear standard for best

practice (c.f. kite mark). This would also establish a basis by which to move research funding towards a more needs-led approach, and to feed funds back to the research community. To this end, a pilot centre has been set up at Birmingham University, funded by English Nature.

UK BRAG was asked to do two things: (1) develop a framework for co-ordinated survey and monitoring (2) help establish an evidence-based system. Andrew Stott reminded members that a UK BRWG research programme already existed, but suggested that it needed re-focusing. David Macdonald referred to the danger of making a false distinction between monitoring and research, pointing out that long-term studies are one of the most important aspects of research and effectively provide monitoring. A need for a co-ordinated approach with UK BRIG was identified. The Chairman suggested that there was scope for a second sub-group to look at science-based monitoring and management. If UK BRAG was to take this forward, it should do so in conjunction with UK BRIG. Paul Rose considered the logistics of a joint sub-group with UK BRIG to be very attractive, and presented a good opportunity to bring the groups together. It was agreed that Paul should convene a sub-group.

Action 7.1 Secretariat to consult with UK BRIG, to establish a joint “Monitoring and Management” sub-group, and make this a firm recommendation to the UK Standing Committee meeting on 29/09/03.

Action 7.2 Monitoring & Management sub-group to meet and report back to the 3rd full UK BRAG meeting

8. Non-native species research

Des Callaghan (Just Ecology) gave a presentation of the findings of a short contract to review the research priorities for the non-native species theme, plus feedback from the previous day’s sub-group meeting. Research priorities were presented using the driver-pressure-state-impacts-response (DPSIR) framework:

Drivers and Pressures

Understanding longer term changes and large-scale processes, e.g. economic, social, demographic, technological. Identifying and understanding trends in: (1) pathways and vectors, (2) latent invasive species, and (3) environmental change.

State

Priorities for action were: (1) quantitative audit (geographical range, population size, trends); surveillance (early detection); and monitoring (a review of gaps, new schemes, and status); and (2) improvements in taxonomy and nomenclature.

Impacts

Research on impacts needed to be species and pathway specific: e.g. health impacts, biodiversity impacts, economic, ecosystem services impacts.

Responses

Priorities for action were: (1) generic needs (research assessment method), broad and rapid assessment of species and pathways; fuller assessments of highest risk species & pathways; development of action plans; codes of conduct; and (2) specific needs, e.g. incentives and disincentives, action plans, substitution of aliens with natives, control techniques and habitat management.

Michael Usher pointed out that audit must come first, followed by a broad, rapid risk assessment, and prior to detailed risk assessment. Specific species and pathway research should follow on from this. Ian Bainbridge added that parts of the process can run in parallel. David Macdonald commented that large-scale experimental work should be included, and fitted into a modelling component. It was also recognised that a socio-economic element needed to be embedded in the programme. There was a general consensus that the sub-group should be re-named, replacing the word “aliens” with “non-natives.”

The sub-group noted that several ongoing research projects were already addressing these needs. In particular the Defra Horizon Scanning project on Biosecurity would look at future trends in driving forces and pressures (i.e. pathways and vectors). New EU and Defra projects would be developing risk assessment methods. Other research on specific impacts and responses was ongoing on particular problem species (e.g. Japanese Knotweed, Mink) and pathways (e.g. ballast waters). A stepwise approach was needed to develop and test a risk assessment methodology and then apply this to known and potential invasive species. The major gap identified at this stage was co-ordination. Responsibility for co-ordination of work on non-native species would be considered in the Government response to the Non-Native Species Policy Review Group, expected shortly. In the meantime it was proposed that the UK BRAG Secretariat could play a useful role in co-ordinating ongoing research and that the sub-group would review progress in 12 months time (with a meeting between the 3rd and 4th full UK BRAG meetings in 2004). The Chairman emphasised the need to get the report onto the UKBAP website, in order to influence and inform research funding bodies.

Action 8.1 UK BRAG Secretariat to publish a report based on the work undertaken by Just Ecology (use UKBAP website).

Action 8.2 UK BRAG Secretariat to have an ongoing role in facilitating communications between different projects.

Action 8.3 UK BRAG Secretariat / JNCC to develop a web-based catalogue of research on non-native species (as a prototype for a wider research catalogue).

Action 8.4 UK BRAG Secretariat to liaise with Phil Hulme (CEH) and Andrew Pullin (University of Birmingham) re. proposal for a conference (possibly with the BES) on non-native species; and assist in developing an agenda for this meeting.

9. Presentation on the work of RBGE

Mary Gibby, Pete Hollingsworth, and Chris Ellis gave a brief overview of biodiversity-related research carried out by RBGE. RBGE has well-developed taxonomic expertise and is a lead partner on many SAPs, especially lichens.

10. Other items

A series of presentations were made to update UK BRAG on a number of related research programmes and meetings.

UKPopNet

Steven Albon (CEH) outlined this new initiative, set up in response to a NERC call for a centre of excellence in population biology. The need for population biology to have linkage with ecosystem science was emphasised; as was the need to develop a skills and knowledge base for microbial population biology (in soils and water). UKPopNet was seen as representing a network of excellence, with broad vision, a breadth of skills, flexibility, and inclusivity (giving it genuine national status). English Nature have agreed to co-fund the project. Kevin Charman (English Nature) commented that English Nature backing was given because UKPopNet appeared to support some of the issues covered in UK BRAG's 6 work themes.

Projects had originally been intended to include other partners in addition to the six institutes, but this would require more funding. UKPopNet begins work in April 2004, concentrating research effort on understanding, predicting and managing change. All projects will be inter-institutional, but managed by a coordinator. International workshops would be held, giving an opportunity to track new science. Steve then showed how UKPopNet programmes could be mapped onto BRAG programmes (see appendix of BRAG paper 2/7).

The Chairman asked how UK BRAG should link to UKPopNet, and asked whether there was interest within the membership for specific links. Steve stated that UKPopNet was looking to increase the funding base, and asked whether UK BRAG could help facilitate this.

Action 10.1 Secretariat to consult UK BRAG members about interest in funding UKPopNet

UKBAP update

Paul Rose presented a brief paper (BRAG paper 2/8), specifically updating UK BRAG on the work of UK BRIG. BRIG's work was all very process oriented, and was seen as complementary to the work of UK BRAG, and the idea of a joint sub-group on monitoring was very welcome. The importance of the UKBAP website as a service to both groups was emphasised, and members were encouraged to make greater use of the internet for accessing and exchanging information. Andrew Stott asked how UK BRAG should develop relationships with the country biodiversity groups? Hilary Neal remarked that it was important to avoid the country groups reinventing the wheel. There needed to be mutual recognition, and dialogue was to be encouraged. Related to this, Michael Usher raised the question of how UK BRAG should report to the UK group.

Action 10.2 Secretariat to evaluate the country strategies to identify research ideas coming out of these.

Action 10.3 Secretariat to write to the Chairs of each country group, to outline what UK BRAG is doing, and invite them to consider how BRAG can assist their work.

Defra Horizon Scanning

Mark Crane gave an overview of the Horizon Scanning (HS) programme. Beth Power had left the post, to be replaced as coordinator by Rohit Talwar. Scanning stage 1, the baseline scan, involves identification of a long list of relevant recent studies; shortlisting the most credible and making a database of main trends; and selecting and evaluating key trends. Research activity has 5 core themes – (1) future landscapes, (2) environmental constraints, (3) re-thinking the food economy, (4) coping with threats, and (5) meeting people's future needs. A call for proposals within the environmental constraints theme had been placed in *New Scientist* and *Nature* on 18/09/03, with a submission deadline of 13/10/03. Most projects were expected to run for approximately 6 months. Contracts would be awarded in December 2003. The next steps for HS were (1) to deliver and apply baseline survey; (2) define and launch stage-scanning activity; (3) explore more radical research themes; (4) focus on risk and contexts; (5) commission further research under the 5 core themes; (6) enlarge the networking; (7) initiate training activities; and (8) engage the organisation. Tim Blackstock (CCW) asked whether there was any backward looking to see if opportunities had been missed? It was recognised that there may be a relationship between past missed opportunities and initiatives that should be introduced in HS programmes. The Chairman asked whether any UK BRAG members would be interested in acting as peer-reviewers for HS proposals?

Action 10.4 Mark Crane to contact all UK BRAG members to invite applications to act as per-reviewers for HS proposals

Action 10.5 Secretariat to meet with HS co-ordinator, Rohit Talwar, and establish links between UK BRAG and Defra HS Programme..

European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS)

Andrew Stott, Allan Watt and Martin Sharman each gave an update on the EPBRS programme (BRAG papers 2/9a and 2/9b), covering the recent meetings in Lesbos, Greece and Bialowieza, Poland (the latter was in support of , not organised by EPBRS). In his overview of EPBRS, Martin Sharman explained that it served as a forum to ensure that research makes a contribution to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. It provided an opportunity to develop strategies for biodiversity research, to ensure that research is relevant to policy, and to ensure effective communication. Members considered the relationship between UKBRAG and EPBRS, and it was suggested that UK BRAG should establish links to other national platforms. An opportunity might exist for a presentation on UK BRAG at the EPBRS meeting "Genetic biodiversity in agricultural and natural systems:

measurement, understanding and management” to be held in Florence, Italy, from 20-24 November 2003. An electronic conference would be held prior to this meeting, starting in October (www.bioplatform.info/index.htm). The Chairman asked whether the meeting would address the GM debate. Allan Watt (CEH) replied that he did not think this was covered in the meeting, and Martin Sharman added that it had been the intention to avoid the conference becoming swallowed up by the GM debate. The Chairman proposed that Allan Watt and Richard Ferris should attend the Florence meeting.

Action 10.6 Secretariat to prepare a presentation for the EPBRS meeting in Florence, and establish contact with other national platforms.

Action 10.7 Secretariat to consult BRAG members on specific agenda items, in preparation for the EPBRS meeting.

Rural Economy and Land Use (RELU) programme update

Paul Rose reported on RELU Strategic Advisory Committee meeting, held the previous week. This had four main themes: (1) integrated solutions for land use and water resource use and management; (2) the environmental basis of rural economies and regeneration; (3) successful and sustainable food products and food chains; and (4) economic and social interactions with the rural environment. A call for proposals will go out on 22/09/03 for the third theme. The appointment of a Programme Director was still underway. Steve Albon asked whether biodiversity would be involved in these themes. Paul Rose replied that biodiversity components existed in all four themes. Caroline Fenwick (NERC) announced that regional warm-up activities would be launched during October, and encouraged members to see the website (www.esrc.ac.uk/relu/warmup.htm).

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA)

Paul Rose presented a paper (BRAG paper 2/10) outlining UK participation and possibilities for UK BRAG involvement. Members were updated on activities of relevance to UK BRAG. UK BRAG could get involved in case studies, enhance rosters of experts, provide advice, and make an input to the development of UK and EC positions. All papers are available on the CBD website, but the UK BRAG website could also be utilised to give notification of their publication. Martin Sharman commented that in order to give a coordinated response for UK BRAG, it would be necessary to include a schedule in the UK BRAG timetable. Paul Rose felt that this would be difficult, and so it was suggested that he could notify UK BRAG when appropriate for it to engage with CBD (only on certain issues). The Chairman reminded members that UK BRAG's remit was to advise on research, and so the group should not try to address all issues. However, individual UK BRAG members might be able to comment. Andrew Stott suggested a more strategic approach, linking the BRAG work programme to SBSTTA topics. The Chairman proposed that members should make direct contact with Paul Rose, rather than the Secretariat.

Action 10.8 Paul Rose to keep members informed about CBD issues of relevance to UK BRAG (i.e. when to look at the CBD website).

Action 10.9 Secretariat to review SBSTTA meeting schedule and identify scope to link future BRAG agendas.

11. UK BRAG workplan

Richard Ferris presented a revised workplan for UK BRAG activities. The general consensus of members was that there was no need for a third full UK BRAG meeting in December 2003, as the bulk of the work for the next 9 months would now involve sub-group activities.

Socio-economic issues sub-group: Andrew Stott suggested that the socio-economic issues sub-group should be set up and allowed to make its own decisions on addressing and reporting on issues. Members proposed that sub-group meetings should be held before the third full UK BRAG meeting, to be held in June 2004. It was recommended that Charles Perrings would be asked to convene the sub-group, and report on progress in June 2004. Martin Sharman suggested that UK BRAG needed to inform Charles of the type of people, and range of expertise that should be involved in the sub-group.

Monitoring and management sub-group: Paul Rose agreed to take the lead on this group, acting as a convenor to ensure a link between UK BRIG and UK BRAG.

Non-native species sub-group: The Chairman asked whether this sub-group could be re-convened in the future. As noted under Agenda Item 8, it was agreed to review progress in about 12 months' time. Ian Bainbridge suggested inviting Mary Gibby onto the sub-group, plus a socio-economist.

Action 11.1 Secretariat to invite nominations from UK BRAG members, and establish a socio-economic sub-group, in parallel to a monitoring and management sub-group. UK BRAG members to submit nominations (UK BRIG members to submit additional nominations for the latter sub-group).

Action 11.2 Secretariat to invite Mary Gibby, plus a socio-economist, onto the native –species sub-group. UK BRAG members to offer suggestions.

12. Date of next meeting

Members agreed that the third full UK BRAG meeting would be postponed until June 2004. The venue would be outside of London, and a number of offers were received – York, Oxford, Sandy, Farnham.

The socio-economic issues sub-group would meet beforehand, and give feedback to the full UK BRAG meeting. The monitoring and management sub-group would also meet in the intervening period.

Action 12.1 Secretariat to canvas members regarding dates for the full UK BRAG meeting

Action 12.2 Niall Moore, David Macdonald, Jane Sears and Kevin Watts to liaise with Secretariat to agree a meeting venue.

13. Any other business

There being no other business, the Chair closed the meeting at 1505

14. Summary of action points

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