

Minutes

4th Meeting of The UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group Wednesday 10th November 2004 Board Room, The Natural History Museum, London

Present: Miles Parker (Chair), Richard Ferris (Secretariat), Andrew Pullin, Ian Bainbridge, Kevin Charman, Niall Moore, Richard Brand-Hardy, Caroline Fenwick, Jane Sears, Andrew Stott, David Macdonald, Tim Blackstock, Kevin Watts, Sarah Webster, Paul Rose, Steve Albon, Davy McCracken, Allan Watt, Johannes Vogel, Havard Prosser.

1. Apologies: Brigid Primrose, Sallie Bailey, Tony Hawkins, Michael Usher, Michel Kaiser, Peter Robertson, Mary Gibby, Charles Perrings, Martin Sharman, Scot Mathieson.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

These were approved as a true record of the 3rd BRAG meeting, 10/06/04.

3. Matters arising

The majority of these were to be covered by subsequent agenda items.

ACTION 3.1 (previous action 4.10): Jane Sears asked for the original text to be amended, as she is not a member of BRIG.

ACTION 3.2 (previous action 6.1): BRAG members were reminded to submit weblinks for addition to the *research catalogue* on the BRAG webpage.

4. Feedback from the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee (UKBSC)

Sarah Webster gave a verbal report outlining the main issues: a paper on indicators, a report of BRIG's progress, discussion of *Favourable Conservation Status* (FCS) – should this be linked formally to UK BAP targets? The two key items for BRAG concerned attendance at and reporting to the next meeting of the UKBSC; and the 2005 UK Biodiversity Partnership (UKBP) conference.

The UKBSC will meet on 09/03/05. BRAG has been invited to consult UKBSC on emerging research priorities as a substantive item for discussion.

The UKBP Conference is to be held in early June 2005, probably in Bristol. It will focus on what the UK is doing in order to meet the European and Global 2010 targets. The conference will focus on actions (current, planned, required). BRAG agreed that this should include research needs.

ACTION 4.1: BRAG Secretariat to liaise with Defra BPU about a possible BRAG component.

5. Socio-economic research

A short presentation served to remind the Meeting of the main research needs identified in the *sub-group* report, and described an approach taken by Defra to identify priority themes and funding options (using a series of assessment criteria).

ACTION 5.1: Secretariat to issue an electronic version of the presentation to all BRAG members.

A proforma was issued, and it was acknowledged that individual organisations may wish to use alternative criteria. Furthermore, BRAG members would be free to add any other themes to the proforma list. The funding column was most important because it could be used to identify shared interests and potential for collaboration between BRAG members. considered to have particular value, as it would help BRAG to communicate more effectively.

ACTION 5.2: Secretariat to send an electronic version of the proforma to all BRAG members. Responses would form a 1st round to the consultation process, and should be returned by Wednesday 1st December. Following collation of these responses, the Secretariat will circulate a summary for a discussion of the outcomes.

The absence of any socio-economic link to biodiversity and health was noted, and it was suggested that this be revisited by BRAG. *Environment and Human Health* has been identified by NERC's Strategy Board as a priority theme, but emphasises the negative health impacts of pollutants rather than the positive benefits of biodiversity on health (BRAG's concern).

ACTION 5.3: Andrew Pullin to circulate ideas on biodiversity and health to all BRAG members.

A more general discussion focused on the need for BRAG to produce a position statement on each of the key research themes. This should be produced by sub-groups at the outset of work for each theme, with revision as work progresses. Each statement could be made available on the UK BAP website, and would be used by the Secretariat to represent BRAG and to respond to consultations. When finalised, the statements could also be submitted to appropriate publications (e.g. *NERC News*) in order to reach the wider scientific community. Such position statements would help to make BRAG advice more consistent and effective, thus meeting concerns expressed by UKBSC.

Action 5.4: Secretariat and sub-group Chairs to ensure that position statements are drafted and made available on the UKBAP website. Their status should be clearly marked (eg. interim, final etc).

6. Management of habitats and ecosystems sub-group

A report was presented by the sub-group Chairs (paper 4/2). The proposed workshop approach was questioned, but it was agreed that a major problem concerned the lack of coordinated information, and that this could best be brought together through a workshop identifying the big issues. Concern was voiced that addressing the high-level, cross-cutting research issues don't help at the local level (i.e. how to manage on the ground, at a specific site). This was noted, and it was agreed that the sub-group would consider ways of applying their recommendations across a range of spatial and organisational scales. Quality assurance was seen as

a key issue, and the sub-group was reminded of the need to distinguish between anecdotal evidence and high-quality research.

It was recommended that the sub-group should work with the Steering Groups for the HAPs that are finally selected for workshop discussion. The workshop should generate a priority list for incorporation into a proforma for consulting BRAG members, highlighting the need for a systematic review of cross-cutting issues.

Action 6.1: Sub-group Chairs and Secretariat to produce a proforma shortly after the workshop (21-23 February 2005)

7. Monitoring of biodiversity & evaluation of actions sub-group

A report was presented by the sub-group Chair (paper 4/3). There was discussion concerning the terms of reference for the sub-group. Initially these had concentrated on the gaps in monitoring HAPs and SAPs, but the sub-group had agreed at the first meeting to a broader scope as set out by the Biodiversity Research Working Group. There was a concern that topic was now too broad and it was therefore

recommended that the sub-group should revert to the earlier terms of reference

Action 7.1: the sub-group Chair to correspond with sub-group members prior to the 2nd meeting on 13th January, to agree the issues for discussion (based on a completed BRIG review of information needs).

Concern was voiced over progress. Specific information is required on how to deliver against UK BAP targets, plus more general issues, e.g. monitoring genetic changes, including individual genes. Information gaps may be due to a lack of coordination (not a BRAG issue) or lack of technical knowledge (a BRAG issue). It was recognised that BRAG needs advice from BRIG as to where the gaps are, and can then consider what research is needed to address these.

The sub-group Chair assured BRAG that a focused approach would be taken, ensuring immediate action at the 2nd meeting, in order to present a report to the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee (UKBSC) meeting on 9th March. He also suggested that the broader issues would be tackled by the sub-group at a later stage.

8. Europe

Objective 16 of the "Message from Malahide" and the Killarney Recommendations were presented, and lessons for BRAG were considered. Objective 16 included targets to improve research and institutional capacity in Europe and it was noted that BRAG had not yet addressed these issues. It was also noted that the 2010 target now provided a strong focus for EU work and such a focus may also be a benefit to BRAG. Objective 16 and the Killarney Recommendations gave a clear and concise message about research needs and might be regarded as a model for BRAG. Superficially there was a good correspondence between the Objective 16 targets and the BRAG themes but it would be important to look at this in more depth in each of the sub-groups.

Action 8.1: Secretariat to ensure that the sub-groups take full account of the "Killarney Recommendations" and the "Message from Malahide".

It was agreed that some further thinking was needed to determine how far BRAG should align its work with Objective 16 and the Killarney Recommendations, and how BRAG could best contribute to delivery of the 2010 target in the UK. This exercise needed to link-up with plans for the UK Biodiversity Partnership conference (see Minute 4 above).

Action 8.2: a working group comprising Allan Watt, Andrew Stott, Richard Ferris and 2-3 additional members to develop proposals prior to the UKBSC on 9th March.

The theme for the EPBRS meeting under the UK's Presidency of the EU was discussed. Possible themes under discussion are:

- The science of ecological networks
- Climate change and biodiversity
- Favourable Conservation Status

9. Climate change

A short presentation was followed by discussion.

Existing sub-groups were asked whether they had taken account of climate change in their deliberations. It was felt that BRAG needed to be "plugged in" to the wider debate, concentrating on the prediction of outcomes of climate change on biodiversity and, more importantly, managing change (a topic which has so far attracted rather less research).

Members asked whether there was a genuine lack of research co-ordination in the UK; had any analysis been undertaken? UKCIP are working on an integration report, and will include a component on biodiversity impacts. This is due for publication in March/April 2005. Defra is also planning to commission a review of existing evidence, recognising the need to engage with the user community. Policy responses must be based on a review of the evidence. It was pointed out that UKCIP does not have a comprehensive picture of the range of climate change research underway in relation to biodiversity, and so it is timely for BRAG to take this on. In view of this, there is clear scope for BRAG to consider working with UKCIP in organising a joint workshop.

Action 9.1: discuss a BRAG strategy in relation to climate change research, as a substantive item on the agenda for the 5th BRAG meeting. 2-3 additional speakers to be invited to the 5th BRAG meeting.

Action 9.2: BRAG members to come to the 5th meeting, fully briefed on key issues for their own organisations (addressing the following: how to move forward, who to work with, and setting priorities for BRAG).

10. Work programme

The Chair raised the need to start correspondence on the *Developing tools to optimise policies to favour biodiversity* theme, as a forerunner to any sub-group addressing the issue. In response, it was pointed out that this theme requires a rather different composition from other BRAG sub-groups.

Action 10.1: Sarah Webster to produce an outline paper for electronic consultation (with the aim of producing a draft Terms of Reference for the 5th BRAG meeting), by 31st March 2005.

11. Information exchange

Environment Research Funders' Forum (ERFF) – a presentation was made to BRAG by Mary Barkham (ERFF Secretariat).

Action 11.1: Mary Barkham to send templates used in the ERFF SWOT analysis to the BRAG Secretariat, to allow BRAG members to contribute ideas.

UKPopNet – Andrew Pullin presented a paper on an evidence-based framework, asking BRAG members to consider engagement.

Action 11.2: BRAG members to respond to Andrew Pullin.

GECC Global Biodiversity sub-committee – Andrew Stott outlined the background to GECC and this sub-committee.

Action 11.3: Richard Ferris to circulate the Terms of Reference for the sub-committee to BRAG members.

Global Taxonomy Initiative – Alistair Taylor (Natural History Museum) gave a short presentation on the UK assessment of taxonomic research needs. The full paper will be available by the end of December 2004.

Action 11.4: Alistair Taylor to circulate the paper to BRAG members, when available.

Ecological Continuity Trust – this proposal was introduced by Richard Ferris and Kevin Charman, but it was decided that BRAG members needed more time to consider.

Action 11.5: BRAG members to submit comments to Kevin Charman.

12. Date of next meeting

This was provisionally agreed for Thursday 23rd June, with Oxford proposed as a venue (to be confirmed).