

## *Minutes*

### **5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of The UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2005 WildCRU, Tubney House, Oxon.**

**Present:** Peter Costigan (Chair), Richard Ferris (Secretariat), Andrew Pullin, Ian Bainbridge, Kevin Charman, Niall Moore, Andrew Stott, David Macdonald, Tim Blackstock, Kevin Watts, Paul Rose, Mike Fay, Pamela Kempton, Richard Berridge (observer).

**1. Apologies:** John Baxter, Steve Albon, Melanie Austen, Sallie Bailey, Richard Brand-Hardy, Michael Usher, Michel Kaiser, Peter Robertson, Mary Gibby, Paul Leonard, Scot Mathieson, Davy McCracken, Havard Prosser, Jane Sears, Sarah Webster.

#### **2. Minutes of the last meeting**

These were approved as a true record of the 4<sup>th</sup> BRAG meeting, 10/11/04.

#### **3. Matters arising**

The majority of these had been dealt with, with the following still to be addressed in full:

**ACTION 3.1** (previous action 8.2): although the need had passed for a working group to develop proposals prior to the UKBSC on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2005, it was recognised that there was a general issue regarding the requirement for a working group to align BRAG's work with European initiatives. The Secretariat would seek volunteers to join such a working group.

**ACTION 3.2** (previous action 10.1): Sarah Webster sent her apologies that an outline paper for the *Developing tools to optimise policies to favour biodiversity* theme had yet to be drafted. This action point would be revisited, and members would be informed of progress.

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

Andy Stott gave a verbal report outlining the main issues:

- The UK BAP 2005 Report on Progress
  - The Targets Review of HAPs and SAPs
  - Priorities – are any changes needed?
  - UK Biodiversity Partnership conference
  - European and CBD progress
- } details handled by BRIG

A report was given to the UKBSC on the four research themes so far addressed by BRAG, plus European engagement. It was recognised that the UKBSC needed to engage more closely with BRAG, providing some direction to the Group's work.

The view was expressed that we need to look at how BRAG synthesises sub-group reports, in order to use and promote them in the most effective manner. These are ongoing activities for BRAG, which go beyond identifying research priorities, and represent a possible change of emphasis for the Group over the next 12 months.

## **5. Sub-group reports**

Each of the three sub-groups that had recently undertaken a research prioritisation exercise, presented a summary of the main points from their draft Research Strategies.

Reference was made to the recent British Ecological Society meeting to identify the top 100 ecological questions (to be published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*). Should BRAG sub-groups consider submitting their Research Strategies to a suitable journal, e.g. *Biological Conservation*?

A general discussion considered the audience for the Research Strategies. The primary audience comprises the organisations represented on BRAG, and so members are asked to ensure that they promote their recommendations within these bodies. The Research Strategies should also be promoted more widely, i.e. from Ministers to research groups, Research Councils UK, etc. In order to maximise the impact of the Research Strategies, a suggestion was made that they could be summarised in the form of a glossy publication.

For all three Research Strategies, it was felt useful if:

- (a) some means of establishing priorities for these research areas could be developed;
- (b) it could be flagged which (if any) could be taken forward from within any existing programmes, or whether new funding programmes need to be targeted towards these; and
- (c) a knowledge transfer strategy can be included to help fuse these different elements together.

It was also felt that BRAG should be explicit about how the Group will attempt to influence future funding through the production and promotion of the Research Strategies.

### **5/1 Non-native species (NNS)**

It was suggested that the Research Strategy needed to address legislation, e.g. socio-political research.

**ACTION 5.1:** Ian Bainbridge/Secretariat to draft a section on legislation within the Research Strategy.

It was considered essential to identify activities in Europe, to decide on issues to address at a UK level or those for action at European/international level. The position of the Overseas Territories was raised, and it was felt that these would be addressed by the GECC Global Biodiversity Sub Committee (which has a shared Secretariat with BRAG).

The inclusion of surveillance and monitoring for NNS was discussed. This was considered important to retain, recognising that monitoring is a component of research, and is an essential part of adaptive management. The role of NERC in funding monitoring research was questioned. It was pointed out that the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the USA refers to “observatories”, a re-badging exercise to ensure that monitoring is not seen as a mundane activity.

It was considered important that the Research Strategy should emphasise links between monitoring of NNS and datasets held by the Biological Records Centre (BRC) and the National Biodiversity Network (NBN).

In order to engage the wider public with NNS issues, there is a need to identify the key species about which we are concerned. Is this really a role for the BRAG sub-group? Our role should be to provide the appropriate signals for others to take this forward. Consideration should be given to asking the ecological community to undertake this task.

The general consensus was that the Research Strategy was a valuable document, requiring only a few changes. Members were asked to feed any ideas through the Secretariat, to enable the document to be edited prior to it being made available via the BRAG webpage.

**ACTION 5.2:** All BRAG members to submit comments to the Secretariat by 31<sup>st</sup> July.

**ACTION 5.3:** Ian Bainbridge and the Secretariat to review and revise the Research Strategy by 31<sup>st</sup> August, and make this document available via the UKBAP website.

## **5/2 Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Research Strategy needs to consider:

- Where are the major sources of expertise?
- What ongoing activity exists?
- Where does research interest lie?
- Where has BRAG got something to offer?

Some concern was expressed that the Research Strategy had not gone far enough in identifying research needs. It also appeared to focus on habitat monitoring, and the concern was raised that (key) species should be considered, either in their own right or as a proxy for habitat. It was felt useful to improve the focus on incorporating information on how habitats are being managed or impacted upon. Without this information, it will be difficult to make links between habitat condition and wider socio-economic drivers.

A particular need was identified for the marine environment, for which inadequate information exists. Much of the data that do exist are for offshore systems, but many of the conservation agencies deal with and need information for inshore systems. However, it was also felt that a systematic review would be helpful, since this would help highlight any data gaps and actions required to fill these.

The need for an integrated, overall approach to monitoring was identified. This almost amounts to a universal system which is statistically robust. An overarching

classification that draws all existing schemes together is needed, rather than any new classification. However, concern was voiced that there is a marked reluctance for anyone to fund this work. The point needs to be made that all conservation management actions must be based on monitoring and surveillance data. Natural resource protection is a Defra strategic priority, requiring the development of a sound knowledge base; this is reliant on monitoring). The Government must take responsibility for identifying gaps, taking a rational overview. Adaptiveness is a key requirement, since it is not necessary to carry on monitoring *ad infinitum*; we need to know when to stop and divert resources.

Guidance is needed on which existing monitoring techniques to use, rather than any research aimed at developing new techniques.

**ACTION 5.4:** all BRAG members to consider the key issues in relation to monitoring and evaluation, and links to existing work. Please submit comments to Paul Rose before 31<sup>st</sup> July.

**ACTION 5.5:** Paul Rose and the Secretariat to review and revise the Research Strategy by 31<sup>st</sup> August, and make this document available via the UKBAP website.

### **5/3 Management of habitats and ecosystems**

It was proposed that the Research Strategy should be refined in order for it to demonstrate relevance for each Habitat Action Plan.

A number of members felt that the Research Strategy should start by addressing the landscape scale, working down through habitats to individual sites; at the same time considering the key drivers of change. It should begin with an additional paragraph or two, explaining the value of managing at the landscape scale. There was a need to consider more explicitly the bigger, cross-cutting issues. Habitat management should focus on techniques that can be applied at any spatial scale.

It was pointed out that, because the UKBAP doesn't address the landscape scale, the UKBSC would like to focus on HAP delivery. The need to tabulate information for all 45 HAPs was recognised. However, UKBSC has recognised that the UKBAP is moving towards an improved recognition of landscape-scale, cross-cutting issues.

The Targets Review, although not related to ecological data, should consider fundamental information needs. For example, we need research on minimum areas, and whether we can use keystone species as indicators of habitat condition. This information is needed in order to provide guidance for HAP Lead Partners.

**ACTION 5.6:** all BRAG members to send comments to Andrew Pullin or Kevin Charman by 31<sup>st</sup> July.

**ACTION 5.7:** The Secretariat, Andrew Pullin and Kevin Charman to reconvene during August, to restructure the Research Strategy by 31<sup>st</sup> August.

**ACTION 5.8:** The Secretariat to reissue the revised Research Strategy to sub-group members, for agreement prior to making it available on the UKBAP website.

## **6. Climate Change**

Following a meeting on 7/06/05 to consider coordination of scientific advice on climate change and biodiversity, the Secretariat was asked to carry out a compilation of research priorities emerging from current initiatives. This could be linked usefully to the BES workshop (28 & 29<sup>th</sup> June), adding outputs to the BRAG paper.

**ACTION 6.1:** the Secretariat to undertake a review of existing climate change initiatives, in order to identify research needs, for delivery to BRAG in December/January. The Secretariat to discuss with Andrew Pullin the possibility of utilising BES workshop information.

Although BRAG has not been asked to consider climate change explicitly, the Group will continue to consider climate change-related research needs within existing cross-cutting research themes.

**ACTION 6.2:** the Secretariat to provide the links to key climate change websites from the UK BRAG page on the UKBAP site.

## **7. Action Plan for Biodiversity Research in Europe**

Andy Stott introduced this item, which featured three components:

- The EPBRS meeting in Aviemore, 2-5<sup>th</sup> October
- BiodivERsA, an ERA-Net for biodiversity research
- The Action Plan

The strength of the Action Plan is that it provides a European, all-embracing framework, and could be used as a justification for biodiversity research funding at national and European levels.

Members felt that the structure was difficult to understand and prioritise, but it was considered essential that some attempt should be made to agree some prioritisation of the issues addressed. It could also be looked at from a different perspective: UK BRAG could serve as a delivery mechanism for the Action Plan, rather than using it as a source of ideas.

**ACTION 7.1:** the Secretariat to provide the link to the EPBRS website and the Action Plan on the BRAG page of the UKBAP website.

**ACTION 7.2:** the Secretariat to provide the link to the BiodivERsA website on the BRAG page of UKBAP website.

## **8. The Environmental Research Funders' Forum**

Members were reminded that BRAG had been invited to feed ideas on research priorities through to ERFF's Research Coordination Working Group by 29<sup>th</sup> September. This is an important opportunity, as ERFF will be making submissions for Spending Review 2006. At the last Spending review, ERFF had quite a successful impact. It was reported that the new NERC Chief Executive has an interest in climate change, so it would be useful to build on this, and lobby for biodiversity research to play a key role.

The benefits of BRAG producing a “glossy” overview document were discussed, but it was recognised that this would not be possible within the timeframe of delivery for Spending Review 2006.

**ACTION 8.1:** the Secretariat to convene a meeting with all sub-group Chairs (to include socio-economic issues – seek involvement of Kerry Turner (UEA) as a replacement for Charles Perrings), in order to formulate a submission based on the completed Research Strategies. This will take place in late August / early September, to deliver a synthesis before 29<sup>th</sup> September.

It was recommended that BRAG should recommend which mechanisms might be used in order to deliver its research priorities, as this would be extremely helpful for ERFF. It is important to promote cross-disciplinary approaches, to provide support for Research Council collaboration.

In order to identify the key drivers of biodiversity change, reference should be made to Defra’s Horizon-Scanning work on impact drivers. It would be valuable to consider how the GECC Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC) might contribute to this process. Climate change was identified as an overarching theme, applicable to all BRAG research themes.

**ACTION 8.2:** The Secretariat to draft a generic structure for sub-groups chairs to use for summary submissions to ERFF (note: it is vital that this should maintain links to the original Research Strategies, and utilise the framework of the BRWG Report “Science in action for Biodiversity”). A first draft will be prepared by Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July, and circulated to all BRAG members.

## **9. BRAG Work Programme**

The discussion focused on three elements:

- A synthesis of each research theme completed to date
- Addressing the three remaining themes
- Undertaking a review exercise, to assess BRAG’s performance

The syntheses are addressed in Agenda Item 8, above.

The three remaining themes – *Conservation of genetic and native species diversity*, *The role of biodiversity in ecosystem function*, and *Developing tools to optimise policies to favour biodiversity* – are to be addressed in the next 6 months.

The first of these will be taken forward with a UKPopNet-funded workshop between 19-21<sup>st</sup> October, followed by a synthesis report which can serve as the starting point for subsequent sub-group discussion. The ecosystem function theme will be taken forward through a short review exercise, followed by a sub-group; while the policy tools theme is to be addressed through a sub-group Chaired by Sarah Webster (Defra).

**ACTION 9.1:** The Secretariat to issue an invitation to BRAG members for nominations to each of the three sub-groups.

**ACTION 9.2:** The Secretariat to invite Allan Watt to Chair the sub-group concerned with ecosystem function.

**ACTION 9.3:** The Secretariat to identify a suitable social scientist to replace Charles Perrings as a member of the full BRAG (approach Kerry Turner, UEA).

#### **10. BRAG Evaluation and Review**

The importance of presenting a review of BRAG's work to the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee (UKBSC) was stressed. An internal review was considered to be the appropriate approach. It was suggested that a separate meeting, with a number of invited "outsiders" (Standing Committee members?), could conduct a SWOT analysis. The timing of such an exercise would be determined by the UKBSC meeting in March 2006, i.e. during the first quarter of 2006.

**ACTION 10.1:** The Secretariat to invite BRAG members to join a small sub-group, and to revisit this issue at the 6<sup>th</sup> BRAG meeting in December.

#### **11. A.O.B.**

##### The Rural Economy & Land Use Programme (RELU) 3<sup>rd</sup> Call

BRAG members were informed of the opportunity to submit proposals for broad topics to be addressed as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> RELU call.

##### The role of BBSRC in biodiversity research

BBSRC has recently issued a draft paper, outlining areas of interest in biodiversity research. This was circulated to BRAG members, who were invited to submit comments.

**ACTION 11.1:** BRAG members to submit their comments on the BBSRC paper to The Secretariat by 15<sup>th</sup> July, for collation and submission to BBSRC by 31<sup>st</sup> July.

#### **12. Date of the Next Meeting**

This was set for Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> December, to be held at The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew.