

Minutes

7th Meeting of The UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group Thursday 8th June 2006 National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff

Present: Peter Costigan (Chair), Ian Bainbridge (Scottish Executive), Kevin Charman (English Nature), Mike Fay (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew), Richard Ferris (JNCC), Amanda Gregory (JNCC), Pamela Kempton (NERC), Harvard Prosser (National Assembly for Wales), Andrew Pullin (Wildlife & Countryside Link and BES), Andy Stott (Defra), Michael Usher (University of Stirling).

Apologies: Steve Albon, Mark Bailey, Sallie Bailey, John Baxter, Tim Blackstock, Richard Brand-Hardy, Mary Gibby, Michel Kaiser, Paul Leonard, David Macdonald, Scot Mathieson, Davy McCracken, Peter Robertson, Paul Rose, Jane Sears, Martin Sharman, Mark Spencer, Kerry Turner, Allan Watt, Kevin Watts, Sarah Webster, Mark Wright.

1 Welcome

Harvard Prosser welcomed members to the National Assembly of Wales and provided members with copies of the new Welsh Environment Strategy (20 year plan) and action plan (short term) which has biodiversity elements.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

These were approved as a true record of the 6th BRAG meeting, 08 December 2005

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 7.1): RF advised that a native species conservation sub-group had not been created but may be reviewed following discussion of item 5 UKPopNet Genetic and Native Species report.

ACTION 3.2 (previous ACTION 10.1): The secretariat to discuss taking forward systematics research with the GTI National Focal Point and with the National Biodiversity Network (as the node for GBIF in the UK). BRAG agreed to keep this action live.

4. Biodiversity and ecosystem Function – Sub-group Report

Michael Usher presented paper 7/1 explaining that the sub-group had met three times and thanked the Secretariat, especially Julie Robson, for the hard work that had gone into producing a good working document on such a huge subject. He went on to summarise that two research reviews and six research areas with recommendations had been identified.

It was accepted that the recommendations were not exhaustive and were driven by the membership of the sub-group. Similarly, the focus on 'soils' within the report represented the membership interests and the availability of review material on the subject.

Members agreed that an executive summary was required to highlight the 6 research areas as signals to the research community (ie headlines messages) and the 2 reviews. Of the reviews members felt more focus should be placed on the second review as this was an area where research and reviews could be undertaken immediately.

ACTION 4.1: The secretariat to produce an executive summary before 30 June 2006.

ACTION 4.2: The Secretariat to include a section stating that recommendations listed are not exhaustive, but are examples of research required to meet the headline messages. The recommendations listed should also be acknowledged as reflecting the membership of the group.

ACTION 4.3: The secretariat to include a paragraph reflecting the use of soils within the paper - again reflective of the group's membership but also that a huge amount of NERC funded research had been undertaken on soils with related reviews already produced that can be used now.

ACTION 4.4: The Secretariat to ask Dave Raffaelli for sight of the paper by Balverna *et al.*, to inform decisions on any review.

As this is a rapidly moving area, there is a danger that any redraft would soon be out of date. Members agreed that the document needed taking forward as soon as possible with the current Version 1 being sent to the Royal Societies as it stands.

ACTION 4.5: Andy Stott to forward Version 1 to the Royal Societies (London and Edinburgh).

ACTION 4.6: The Secretariat to seek comments from BRAG members by 16 June 2006.

ACTION 4.7: The Secretariat to produce a revised version by 30 June 2006.

The revised paper is to be put on the website and forwarded to other bodies and agencies in July.

5. Conservation of Genetic and Native Species Diversity – UKPopNet Workshop Report

Richard Ferris introduced the paper 7/2, a report of the proceedings from the workshop which was designed to be accessible to conservation practitioners and policymakers. The report is due for publications within the next month.

To take the report forward members agreed a BRAG research paper was required with more background. Links need to be considered with the Ecological Genetics Group of the British Ecological Society, and with the Plant Conservation Working Group with further references to native species and conservation aspects. Members agreed that the production of a handbook for conservation practitioners and workshops to help promote knowledge transfer would be a valuable output.

Members agreed to form a Genetics sub-group to produce a BRAG research strategy paper to develop research priorities from the UKPopNet workshop report. Mike Fay agreed to lead. Possible members of the sub-group could include: Richard Ferris, Pete Hollingsworth,

Stuart Piertney, Mike Bruford, Robbie Macdonald, Barbara Jones, Ian Taylor, and Nigel Maxted.

ACTION 5.1: The Secretariat to liaise with Mike Fay regarding the formation and composition of the Genetics sub-group.

ACTION 5.2: The secretariat to draft a scoping statement/ToR, and circulate to BRAG members by 30 June 2006.

6. Climate change and Adaptation paper

Andy Stott introduced paper 7/3. This was a report of a joint EBG and BRAG workshop held on 9th March. The aim of the workshop was to review the EPBRS recommendations on climate change and adaptation and to develop more specific research projects relevant to the UK. CEH had prepared the report as part of a larger review study funded by Defra on behalf of the England Biodiversity Group

A number of concerns were raised about the paper in its context as a CEH report and as a BRAG report. Members agreed the paper required additional work in a number of areas:

- the commentary in Appendix 2 to be synthesised main body of the report,
- review timescales for projects – over half were recorded as urgent,
- review projects as a number had already been undertaken elsewhere;
- review the quality of the 9 priority areas for research and, if necessary, create new ones, eg uplands/montane areas;
- develop links between the 9 project areas;

Members recommended that the redrafting task should be taken forward through BRAG.

ACTION 6.1: Secretariat to lead, with co-opted members, to critically appraise the 9 themes, in the light of the detailed information in Appendix 2, and turn the report into a BRAG Research Strategy (Andy Stott and Michael Usher offered to assist the Secretariat with this task) for the next BRAG meeting, in December 2006.

7. Cross-cutting synthesis of BRAG research priorities

Richard Ferris presented paper 7/4 explaining that the secretariat had undertaken a task to try to map, by broad theme, all the recommendations from the 6 research areas. The aim was to identify any obvious links between themes to be fed into a synthesis document. This paper was a first attempt to show the extent of the work BRAG has undertaken over the last three years.

Members felt the broad themes needed breaking down further into rows, or blocks of rows, that have a common descriptor. Links between recommendations were seen as a valuable tool eg 4.3 in the Ecosystem Function paper and 2.1.3 the impact of Climate Change on goods and services in the CEH report. These links need to be developed further with a column describing what has been achieved and what else needs to be achieved.

Normalisation or a common language needs to be adopted within the document with an overview to be produced (state of knowledge, this is what has been achieved and this is what needs to be addressed).

ACTION 7.1: Secretariat to send A3 hard copies to BRAG members, asking for comments, including issues, cross-cutting themes and how this information could be better presented. NOTE: this is not to be seen as a substitute for a final report on BRAG's work.

ACTION 7.2: Secretariat to prepare a draft final report on BRAG's work to circulate before the next meeting.

8. UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee feedback – discussion of the BRAG review

Peter Costigan provided a verbal update of feedback from the UKBSPC on the BRAG review. A number of areas were considered where changes are required.

Funding

NGOs had reportedly been frustrated with BRAG's lack of effectiveness in identifying areas for potential funding for project work.

HAPs and SAPs

NGOs highlighted BRAG's involvement in the detailed work of HAPs and SAPs as an issue; however this has been clarified in BRAG's new Terms of Reference.

Monitoring BRAG achievements

UKBSPC highlighted an issue of the lack of traceability of funding of project work back to BRAG and how BRAG communicates its findings and to which groups. Monitoring and measuring the impact of BRAG was seen as very challenging. Some aspects would be easily monitored eg where BRAG has directly influenced Defra's own evidence and information strategy and the EPBRS, whilst in other areas the influence may not be as obvious. However, members agreed that more of this information needed to be captured.

Overseas Territories

Concern was raised over BRAG's relationship with the UK Overseas Territories (OT's). This is a position which needs to be clarified, although it was recognised that OT's are considered within the remit of the Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC) of GECC.

Communications and knowledge transfer

There needs to be a shift in the emphasis of BRAG's work, from identification of research by sub-groups, to communication and knowledge transfer. This could be facilitated by producing an annual periodical and outreach activities such as promoting BRAG within the British Ecological Societies meetings and newsletters and speaking to other councils.

Website

Whilst the BRAG website was seen as a useful resource members felt that it could be better sited with a main frame presence. This would enable papers to be presented earlier and on better public display.

Future BRAG membership

Some discussion was held concerning membership of BRAG, but any decision over consulting current members re: their desire to continue should await a response from the UKBSPC, later in the year.

However, there is a need to maintain some balance between scientific and science advisory representation, in order to ensure an effective strategic overview of key issues.

Terms of Reference

In response to the BRAG review the UKBSPC produced revised ToR for BRAG (including identifying that BRAG has no funds of its own but that it can influence external organisations), clarifying its non-executive role and highlighting the importance of knowledge transfer and communicating findings. The revised Terms of Reference are to be presented to the Partnership Board in October.

ACTION 8.1: Peter Costigan to report back to Standing Committee

ACTION 8.2: Secretariat to undertake an analysis of the last Reporting Round data on knowledge gaps, in order to identify generic messages (cross-cutting research themes).

ACTION 8.3: Secretariat to produce a circulation list for BRAG outputs. This should include all members of NERC's Science & Innovation Strategy Board.

ACTION 8.4: Secretariat to add a standing item on the BRAG and GECC agendas reporting on each others activities.

9. Feedback from EPBRS and European issues

Andy Stott provided feedback from the EPBRS, BiodivERsA and on European issues.

European issues

Andy Stott informed members that the long awaited EC Biodiversity Communication was published last week, Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 - and beyond; sustaining ecosystem services for human well-being http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2006/com2006_0216en01.pdf and more information at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/current_biodiversity_policy/biodiversity_com_2006/index_en.htm. Specific elements include research, sustainable use of biodiversity in the EU and globally.

EPBRS:

Andy Stott advised that the last EPBRS meeting was held in Vienna in March and was attended by Allan Watt and Ian Strachan (JNCC). The main them had been Europe's mountain biodiversity – monitoring, research management. The related research priority outcomes on mountains and sea mounts are to inform and to influence research to EU member states. Members will be advised when the recommendations are available (copy circulated with these minutes).

The next EPBRS meeting will be held under the Finish presidency with the main theme, 'How to reach 2010 targets, research influencing policy and science policy interface'. Breakout groups will included; best practice, communication gaps, the use of biodiversity, and sub-themes on youth and biodiversity, new energy, schools as activators, urban ecology and biodiversity, amongst others.

BiodivERsA

Andy Stott advised that BiodivERsA has membership from 14 countries and 19 partners which are all different councils/agencies/research councils, etc. The aim is to look at sharing best practice in research commissioning, what research is being undertaken and how much it costs. The move is towards trying to identify common calls, combining resources between member states with common criteria for research funds. The Porto workshop identified potential areas of common priority for collaborative research: understanding biodiversity change on ecosystem function and goods and services, step up to species population and community level in Europe and scientific contribution to policy and conservation actions.

He advised the themes and funding mechanism was still under discussion and BiodivERsA are looking to extend membership across Europe. However it is hoped that by identifying common priories and spending money in a unified way will lead to improved European co-ordination in Biodiversity science and conservation.

10. Any other business

- *NERC Biodiversity strategy development panel*
Andy Stott informed members that he had been invited to join the NERC biodiversity strategy development panel and had attending the first meeting. The meeting had identified 12 science challenges.
- *NERC Sustainable Use of Natural Resources development panel*
Peter Costigan informed members that he had been invited to join the NERC natural resources development panel. Four areas of priority had been identified; novel resources (energy – methane hydrates), evaluation society approach, integrated systems (better linkage, monitoring and linkage of land systems) and stewardship of the biotic heritage (genetic biodiversity in terms of functions and sustainable use of biotic heritage).

Both advised that all the areas are to be honed down and a revised NERC document would then be open for consultation.

- *DIVERSITAS*
Richard Ferris provided an update on the recent Bio-sustainability meeting. He advised that whilst DIVERSITAS has no research budget it does facilitate good networking opportunities. Actions arising include;
 - the creation of a one-stop-shop where a network of trained inter-disciplinary scientists inform policymakers (based on the USA model where 50-60 scientists are trained to advise the government on biodiversity alone, however, social scientists are not engaged in this process);
 - the creation of a pan-European overview of links between science and policy and formal and informal interfaces.

ACTION 10.1: Richard Ferris to forward minutes of DIVERSITAS, bio-sustainability meeting to BRAG members.

11. Date of next meeting

Tuesday, 5 December 2006: Defra, London (Location to be advised).