

APPROVED MINUTES

9th Meeting of The UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group Thursday 7th June 2007 The Forestry Commission, Silvan House, Edinburgh

Present: Peter Costigan (Chair), Richard Ferris (UK BRAG Secretariat), Sallie Bailey (Forestry Commission), Ian Bainbridge (Scottish Executive), Chris Baker (NERC), Mary Gibby (Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh), Scot Mathieson (SEPA), Davy McCracken (Scottish Agricultural College), Greg Mudge (SNH), Paul Rose (JNCC), Andy Stott (Defra), Allan Watt (CEH), Sarah Webster (Defra), Nick Dusic (BES, Guest).

Apologies: Tim Blackstock (Countryside Council for Wales), Mark Bailey (CEH), Kevin Charman (Natural England), Mike Fay (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew), Michel Kaiser (University of Bangor), Pamela Kempton (NERC), Havard Prosser (National Assembly for Wales), Paul Leonard (Defra), Richard Brand-Hardy (Defra), Martin Sharman (DG Research, European Commission), Mark Wright (DOENI), Kevin Watts (Forest Research), Mark Spencer (Natural History Museum), Andrew Pullin (BES).

1. Welcome

Sallie Bailey welcomed members to Silvan House, for the 9th Meeting of UK BRAG, and gave a short overview of biodiversity research undertaken within the Forestry Commission. and the first following the review and approval of the new Terms of Reference by the Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

With a few minor amendments, these were approved as a true record of the 8th UK BRAG meeting, 05 December 2006.

3. Matters arising

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

ACTION 3.1 (previous ACTION 3.1, carried forward): systematics research and mycology research - UK BRAG agreed to keep this action live, maintaining close contact with the GECC Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC) and pending completion of papers for GBSC by the Natural History Museum and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew / Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, respectively.

- The Secretariat is asked to contact RBG Kew, to enquire as to progress on the mycology paper; and
- Establish a sub-group to address taxonomic needs assessment and capacity across the UK.

ACTION 3.2 (previous ACTION 3.3): UK BRAG members to provide the secretariat with a list of key contacts within their organisations, to form the basis of a circulation list, by 30 June 2007.

ACTION 3.3 (previous ACTION 5.2): Peter Costigan to contact Wildlife and Countryside Link, to invite them to continue as members of UK BRAG. Deadline: 30 June 2007.

ACTION 3.4 (previous ACTION 5.3): UK BRAG Business Sub-Group is to be re-named the Country Liaison Sub-Group, recognising the need to maintain a link with the UK BAP groups in each country.

- The Secretariat is asked to put together a draft agenda for the sub-group, in order to clarify its purpose; and
- Country Agency representatives are asked to propose sub-group members (and substitutes) by 31 July 2007.

ACTION 3.5 (previous ACTION 5.6): UK BRAG members to provide the secretariat with a list of key contacts within their communities (as opposed to their own organisations), to form the basis of a circulation list, by 30 June 2007.

ACTION 3.6 (previous ACTION 8.1, carried forward): summary paper in Journal of Applied Ecology – the Secretariat and Davy McCracken to discuss next steps, and agree a timetable for action. Deadline: 31 July 2007.

4. Communication and Knowledge Transfer – Influencing funders

Two key issues were identified, namely:

- How to influence funders, and
- How to track UK BRAG's influence

Chris Baker pointed out that there were opportunities to influence NERC thinking through the consultation over its new Strategy. NERC theme leaders are in the process of being recruited. These act as science advisers, reporting to the Science and Innovation Manager. It was suggested that UK BRAG might wish to invite the Biodiversity Theme Leader to become a member of the group.

ACTION 4.1: the Secretariat to speak to Pamela Kempton, regarding the benefits of inviting the NERC Biodiversity Theme Leader to become a member of UK BRAG.

Chris Baker suggested that UK BRAG could also influence responsive mode applications made to the research councils, achieving this by influencing the research community.

Davy McCracken commented that it would be helpful if UK BRAG had a timeline of the key opportunities to influence a variety of funders. Scot Mathieson asked when the Research Strategies of the main funding bodies are renewed/replaced. In response, Ian Bainbridge pointed out that not all organisations overlap (hence the value of a timeline). Peter Costigan emphasised the difficulty of tracking all of the various organisations with whom UK BRAG might wish to interact. Paul Rose suggested that it might be more effective for UK BRAG to “seed the debate” between the research and policy communities, acting at arm’s length, since it was too much to expect UK BRAG to influence Research Strategies of so many organisations.

ACTION 4.2: Members are requested to notify the Secretariat of times/dates for key decisions in developing strategies of their organisations and, where possible, big, cross-organisational initiatives (i.e. thinking beyond their own organisations), by 30 June 2007.

ACTION 4.3: the Secretariat is asked to produce a paper outlining the opportunities (timelines with key decision points) to inform and influence funders. Deadline: 31 August 2007.

ACTION 4.4: the Secretariat to access both the NERC and BBSRC peer-review college members' database, and contact those with biodiversity interest. Deadline: 31 July 2007.

A short discussion focused on the success of the Non-Native Species Strategy produced by UK BRAG. This recognised that the research and policy communities had already established a close working relationship, with Defra being particularly receptive to the Strategy, and it was timely due to the concurrent development of the UK NNS Strategy.

Sallie Bailey suggested that when UK BRAG papers are issued, their context needs to be set (this may be particularly important for smaller funders), followed by a definite and clear request for funding (from the research community itself). Ian Bainbridge commented that if we are to monitor UK BRAG's influence, researchers need to reference UK BRAG papers. At the same time, funders need to recognise the value of UK BRAG, if this is to have any influence.

Annual Report

The need for an annual report was discussed. This should be short and focused, and be published initially on the website (in pdf form), with an e-mail update to the stakeholder community. Sarah Webster suggested that use could be made of the information contained in the two reports that UK BRAG submits each year to the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee. Ian Bainbridge emphasised the need for the report to be crisp and targeted.

UK BRAG website

The new UK BRAG website was praised for being easy to navigate and being an invaluable source of information.

ACTION 4.5: members to ask their organisations' website managers to make links to the UK BRAG website. Deadline: 31 July 2007.

ACTION 4.6: the Secretariat to submit a short article to "Biodiversity News" about the UK BRAG website. Deadline: 31 August 2007.

ACTION 4.7: the Secretariat to contact Nick Dusic (BES) and discuss submitting an article to the BES *Bulletin*. Deadline: 31 August 2007.

Ian Bainbridge suggested that the Secretariat should produce a more general press release on UK BRAG, and issue this using JNCC's contact list. However, Peter Costigan felt that there was merit in waiting until the 3-year summary report was published.

Journal of Applied Ecology paper

See ACTION 3.6, above. Members were supportive of the idea of a paper.

ACTION 4.8: the Secretariat is asked to draft 3-4 paragraphs on the scope of the proposed paper, and discuss this with Davy McCracken, by 31 July 2007.

Collaboration with the British Ecological Society

Nick Dusic, Science and Policy Manager for the British Ecological Society (BES) gave a short presentation to UK BRAG, giving some ideas as to how the two organisations might work together more closely (paper 9/3). A number of UK BRAG members have indicated that

they will be attending the BES Annual Meeting in Glasgow in September 2007, and the following have agreed to join a panel discussion event: Andrew Stott, Sallie Bailey, Ian Bainbridge, Peter Costigan, Andrew Pullin, and Davy McCracken.

Recognising the need to raise awareness of UK BRAG, Ian Bainbridge suggested that a poster needed to be produced, listing the main themes and top recommendations. Davy McCracken commented that, ideally, the 3-year summary report needs to be available at the event (see later section).

A draft structure for the discussion event was proposed, as follows:

- Introduction to UK BRAG (what it is, its role as National Platform), by Peter Costigan; and
- a brief case study presentations by panel members.

More generally, UK BRAG could benefit from engagement with the BES through workshops or sessions in Annual Meetings. UK BRAG needs to consider whether it wants a separate workshop or a session within the Annual Meeting programme. Ian Bainbridge proposed that every time UK BRAG produces a report, the group could put this forward as a thematic session. However, in order to do this, UK BRAG would need to submit any proposal by September. Nick Dusic informed the meeting that the BES Public and Policy Committee convenes in October each year. At this meeting, they put together a yearly plan. The BES Meetings Committee also meets in October.

Allan Watt raised the question as to whether UK BRAG might wish to initiate a seminar series, based around key issues identified by the group. A joint meeting with the Scottish Action Plan Science Group (APSG) might be a possibility.

ACTION 4.9: Allan Watt to discuss the options for a joint meeting with the APSG with Mary Gibby, and report back to the Secretariat. Deadline: 31 July 2007.

Davy McCracken suggested that UK BRAG should take a 12-month forward look at what meetings and events are taking place. This would identify any opportunities for UK BRAG engagement. Nick Dusic recommended the BES website and the calendar in *The Bulletin* be used for this purpose.

ACTION 4.10: all members to inform the Secretariat of any events they are aware of, in order to draw together an overview of future meetings. Deadline: 31 August 2007.

5. BRAG Report 2003-2006

The Secretariat presented figures for the cost of producing the 3-year summary report in a number of different formats. There was general support for the idea that the report should be eye-catching and needed to be published in hard-copy format in addition to being made available via the website.

Davy McCracken emphasised that the key thing is to get the document out into the research and policy community. Sarah Webster offered to publish it through Defra, with the target date being the UK BRAG discussion at the BES Annual Meeting, on 11 September 2007. The feasibility of putting this into delegates' packs was also raised.

ACTION 5.1: Sarah Webster to investigate the costs and practicality of publishing the report, and report back to the Secretariat by 2 July 2007.

ACTION 5.2: the Secretariat to add a table to the existing text, showing the cross-cutting links between themes, before sending the revised text to members by 29 June 2007.

ACTION 5.3: Members to send comments to the Secretariat by 16 July 2007.

6. Report on Leipzig EPBRS meeting

Andy Stott gave a report on the recent meeting in Leipzig, 4-7 May 2007, as well as informing the members of the next two EPBRS Meetings: Porto, November 2007, and Slovenia, January 2008. The first of these will have a marine theme, although the precise topic is yet to be agreed. The Slovenian meeting is likely to focus on Karst, although representations have been made to broaden the scope to include the Water Framework Directive. Again, confirmation on the precise theme is awaited.

Allan Watt reported that BioSTRAT would probably run both e-conferences in parallel, in October 2007, which would require UK BRAG to undertake two national reviews at the same time (these would need to be available by the middle of September 2007).

Davy McCracken suggested that UK BRAG should publish the national reviews on its website. The issue of improving dissemination of EPBRS recommendations throughout the UK research and policy community was raised.

Due to the marine theme, Allan Watt informed the meeting that he did not wish to attend the Porto EPBRS meeting. Allan has asked EPBRS for approval to send a replacement from a marine background. Scot Mathieson suggested that Mike Kaiser would be the obvious choice on the science side; while Andy Stott reported that either he or Jo Myers (Defra) would attend on the policy side.

ACTION 6.1: the Secretariat is asked to establish a sub-group of UK BRAG to address the marine biodiversity theme, especially if it is focused on goods and services (see later item). Deadline: 31 July 2007.

ACTION 6.2: Andy Stott or Allan Watt to notify the Secretariat of the precise themes of the next two EPBRS meetings, when these are known. Deadline: URGENT – asap.

Scot Mathieson asked whether links could be made between the UK BRAG sub-group report recommendations and EPBRS position statements. Andy Stott suggested that, at the very least, the 3-year summary report should include information on the links between UK BRAG and EPBRS.

ACTION 6.3: the Secretariat to add a section to the draft text (see ACTIONS 5.2 and 5.3, above), by 29 June 2007.

7. BiodivERsA project update

Andy Stott gave an update on the progress of the BiodivERsA ERA-Net project, informing the meeting that a common call for proposals had been agreed by 18 partners from 14 countries, with themes focusing on:

- Global change and biodiversity dynamics
- Ecosystem functions
- Ecosystem services

The common call would be published in Oct/Nov 2007, with an estimated budget of m€ 14-24. Project proposals will be evaluated by an independent panel to be appointed, with reference to criteria for scientific quality, policy relevance, project management and European added value. National funding agencies will be responsible for funding successful bids by their national research teams. Bids will require participation from at least three partner countries. Furthermore, BiodivERsA is seeking to develop a second common call on

global biodiversity and development, with co-operation/participation of international development agencies (in UK, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway). This Work Package is at a preliminary stage.

ACTION 7.1: Andy Stott to send information on the BiodivERsA research database to the Secretariat, asking members to submit information on the research programmes of their organisations. Deadline: 31 August 2007.

8. GECC Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee activities

The Secretariat gave a short report on GBSC activities, focusing on the Biodiversity-Climate Interactions workshop to be held at the Royal Society between 12-13 June 2007. GBSC had previously organised a meeting on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), and this came up with a list of recommendations under the broad headings of:

- Domestic implementation
- Global research issues
- UK research issues

As result of this exercise, which is still under review, there may well be some implications for UK BRAG. The Secretariat would ensure that members were kept informed.

9. Thematic work

A discussion was held, looking at:

- new, emerging issues
- revisiting existing work areas
- climate change risk assessment of UK BAP priorities

Davy McCracken felt that it was important for UK BRAG to maintain its momentum, and therefore it should go ahead with establishing a sub-group to address the marine theme (see ACTION 6.1, above). Ian Bainbridge pointed out that care should be taken to avoid overlap with other initiatives, referring to the Scottish Marine Biodiversity Research Co-ordination Group (MBRCG) which he chairs.

ACTION 9.1: the Secretariat to liaise with Ian Bainbridge over Scottish representation on the sub-group (see ACTION 6.1, above), Deadline: 16 July 2007.

Ian Bainbridge considered that it was too early to start revisiting themes already addressed by UK BRAG. There was general agreement on this point. Paul rose added that UK BRAG needs to focus on communication and promotion as a priority. Revision will happen as consequence of this, anyway.

Peter Costigan felt that there would be merit in setting-up a sub-group to look at how we might derive policy benefit from EU Framework Programmes. Volunteers were sought, with the following agreeing to join a sub-group: Sallie Bailey, Paul Rose, Allan Watt and, in his absence, Mark Stevenson (Defra). Paul Rose and Allan Watt agreed to chair the group between them.

ACTION 9.2: the Secretariat to set up a sub-group to address this issue, and trawl for suitable meeting dates. Deadline: 16 July 2007.

Climate change risk assessment of UK BAP priorities

Paper 9/6 was presented to the meeting. Andy Stott pointed out that many of the recommendations are research related, and that there is a need for someone to coordinate this activity. It was asked whether UK BRAG should take on this role.

Ian Bainbridge suggested that it was necessary to go through the table of recommendations in more detail, identifying the research needs and giving priority to these. The key thing was to drive this work forward, focusing on a few priorities rather than trying to do everything. Paul Rose suggested that UK BRAG should take a look and identify those proposals which are generic in nature, addressing broad issues with little additional cost.

Andy Stott recommended that a sub-group be formed to decide how best to coordinate actions, since this is operational and well-defined work. Sarah Webster suggested that a viable sub-group should involve Mark Stevenson (Defra) and Country Agency representatives. This sub-group would have to maintain close links to the main UK BRAG.

10. Current issues / research needs of Country Biodiversity Groups

There was no discussion on this item, but it was recognised that this should remain as a standing item for future UK BRAG meetings (to be addressed by the Country Liaison Sub-Group).

11. Date of next meeting

The 10th Meeting of UK BRAG will take place on either 4 or 6 December 2007, in either London, Bristol or York. The precise details will be confirmed.

ACTION 11.1: members to confirm their availability on each of the dates suggested, and indicate their preference with regard to the location for the meeting. Deadline: 31 July 2007.