

Natural England Board



Title: **Confirmed minutes of the nineteenth Natural England Board
24 February 2010**

<u>Members attending</u>	<u>Executives:</u>
Poul Christensen (Chair)	Tom Tew
Helen Phillips (Chief Executive)	Guy Thompson
Peter Allen	Robin Tucker
Lynn Crowe	Dave Webster
Catherine Graham-Harrison	Jim Smyllie
Tony Hams	
David Hill	
Joe Horwood	<u>Secretariat</u>
Doug Hulyer	
David Macdonald	Carolyn Cadman
Christopher Pennell	
Andy Wilson	

Prior to the Board meeting, the Board were briefed on Natural England's work in the following areas:

- Natural England's Advocacy Programme
- The Customer Reputation Tracker Survey
- Common Agricultural Policy after 2013

Welcome from the Chair

There were no apologies from Board members, however apologies were received from Andrew Wood.

The Board recorded their thanks to Pam Warhurst, who left the Board in early January 2010. The Board recognised Pam's significant contribution to the Board, to Natural England and to the former Countryside Agency, and to the natural environment. The Board wished Pam every success in her new role as Chair of the Forestry Commission and looked forward to working with her.

There were no additions to the Register of Interests. Andy Wilson declared an interest in items 4 (Stakeholder Working Group on Unrecorded Public Rights of Way; Update) and 7 (Natural England's draft positions on Energy).

In the public gallery, the Chair welcomed Vicki Hirst who was observing the Board as part of a programme to encourage more women to take on non-Executive opportunities and Heloise Tierney from Defra Sponsorship Division.

1. Chair's Engagements

The Board noted the engagements conducted by Chair in the period between the November 2009 and February 2010 Board meetings and the appointments scheduled before the May 2010 Board meeting.

2. Chief Executive Report

The Board:

- a) noted our current strategic issues:
 - Public Value Programme (PVP) –Review of Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and Arms Length Bodies Review;
 - Operational Efficiency Programme;
 - Floods and Water Management Bill;
 - NAO VFM Audit of Organic Entry Level Scheme;
 - Rural Land Register;
 - Uplands Entry Level Scheme;
 - Feedback from mid-year performance review with Secretary of State on 22 February 2010;
 - Environmental Leadership Delivery Plan;
 - Review of England's Wildlife and Ecological Network;
 - Review of the Rural Payments Agency;
 - HM Treasury Review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit arrangements;
 - NAO Review of Information from NDPBs.
- b) reviewed performance of delivery against our Corporate Plan in Quarter 3 of 2009/10, and noted;
 - SSSIs - we are currently at 91.06% and are forecasting 92.8% against a year end target of 93%. It is still possible that 93% will be achieved and we are working hard to achieve the target;
 - Biodiversity – whilst we have achieved targets on habitat creation and farmland birds we still need to make progress on HLS where meeting our end of year targets remains challenging;
 - Carbon – our ability to achieve the 50% target by December 2010 is still achievable but rests on estates moves and decisions by Defra which had affected our achievement of this year's target.
 - The Secretary of State had been pleased with our progress at the regular performance meeting held 22 February 2010.
- c) noted the Organisation's financial position as at 31 December 2009.
- d) noted the request for the development of, and charging for, commercial training products.

Key discussion points were:

- The significant progress achieved in quarter 3 was commended by the Board.

- The greenbelt report was noted as a particular success.
- A full business case including cost benefit analysis would be required in order for the Board to consider the development of commercial training products and associated delegations.
- A refresh of the Financial Memorandum and Management Statement was suggested.
- Board members requested to be kept informed on key developments with the review of Arm's Length Bodies.
- The extent to which performance variances across regions were due to management, geography and climate was explored.
- A recent report had suggested that our robust approach to the delivery of quality environmental outcomes from projects had potentially slowed progress in the delivery of Access to Nature grants.
- The potential impact of our Carbon targets on our ability to achieve our advocacy work through face to face meetings was acknowledged; however the Board agreed the need to continue to show leadership on travel and carbon.

ACTION: The Executive to develop a full business case for the development of commercial training products.

ACTION: The Executive to keep Board members informed of key developments in the review of Arm's Length Bodies.

3. Corporate Plan 2010-13

The Board approved the Corporate Plan for submission to Huw Irranca-Davies, Minister for the Marine and Natural Environment following in-depth review at December 2009 Board meeting.

4. Stakeholder Working Group on Unrecorded Public Rights of Way; Update

The Board noted the excellent progress made in delivering reforms to benefit the regime and endorsed the proposed covering letter, provided the proposals are packaged into appropriate groupings and that the letter makes it clear up front why Natural England is leading on this work and the outcomes and benefits it will bring.

ACTION: The Executive to amend the letter to the Stakeholder Working group to reflect comments made by Board members.

5. One Million Children Outdoors Programme

The Board noted the progress made in developing and implementing the programme to re-connect children and their families with the natural environment and the link to the forthcoming first set of results from the Monitoring Engagement in the Natural Environment (MENE) survey.

Key discussion points were:

- We need to continue to engage traditional partners in the delivery of the target in order to ensure a collegiate approach going forwards and to maximise the links with biodiversity activities.
- It was suggested that further opportunities for publicising the experiences of children in this programme could be explored, which could also apply to the

healthy walking initiative.

- The programme presents an opportunity to research people's experience of nature which could enhance our understanding of the psychology of behaviour and the values associated with the natural environment. It was suggested that Natural England's Science Advisory Committee could be asked to consider a methodological approach.

ACTION: The Executive to reflect on the suggestion to study people's experiences and contact with the natural environment through our own initiatives.

6. Evidence and Analysis Priorities for Natural England 2010/11

The Board endorsed the priorities for our evidence and analysis work for 2010/11 which would frame the positions that we develop to steer our advocacy and delivery work and the evidence which underpins these.

Key discussion points were:

- The activity is comprised of approximately 80% monitoring work and 20% research.
- The timing of development of the priorities had precluded a discussion with Natural England's Science Advisory Committee.
- The importance of the MENE research was emphasised due to its ability to shift Natural England from statements of opinion to evidence based positions.
- The extent to which we measure the impact of management plans on improving the quality of the natural environment was questioned.
- It was recognised that high level priorities set out in the paper were not in order of importance and that there were synergies across them all.

7. Natural England's draft position's on Energy and:

- i) Energy Networks
- ii) Hydropower
- iii) Community-Scale Energy

The Board noted the draft position on energy and raised concerns regarding the stance on nuclear reflected in the paper which did not reflect previous Board discussions on the subject.

The Board accepted an apology from the Chief Executive regarding the stance contained in the position and agreed that a revised position paper should be circulated to Board members for comment by correspondence before proceeding to external consultation. It was also agreed that a recent consultation response to DECC on their draft National Policy Statement for Energy needed to be checked for consistency.

It was suggested that text provided under the heading of 'evidence base' in the position papers was not in fact 'evidence' and would be better presented as a 'rationale' so as to avoid the risk of external perceptions that Natural England considered this type of information as evidence. It was agreed that 'rationale' was a more appropriate title to be included in position statements.

ACTION: The Executive to amend the Energy position and circulate to Board

members for further comment.

ACTION: The Executive to review consultation response to DECC to ensure consistency with Natural England's position.

ACTION: Executive Board to ensure that future position papers to refer to the section on 'evidence' as 'rationale'

i) Energy Networks

The Board approved the draft position on Energy Networks to proceed for external stakeholder consultation, subject to the position being amended to include:

- consideration of the impact of energy infrastructure on the natural environment
- reference to 'protected areas' as well as landscape

ii) Hydropower

The Board approved the draft position on hydropower to proceed for external stakeholder consultation subject to the position being amended to include:

- Reference to landscape and protected areas
- Consideration of how our advice and positions sit alongside those of key partners such as the Environment Agency

iii) Community-Scale Energy

The Board approved the draft position on community-scale energy to proceed for external stakeholder consultation, subject to the position being amended to include:

- Cross referencing to the hydropower position
- Consideration of the potential increase in communities generating power locally and associated issues with planning regulations
- Recognition that schemes build community confidence and capability

ACTION: The Executive to reflect points made on 7i, 7ii and 7iii draft positions before proceeding to external consultation.

8. Natural England's draft position on Urban Areas

The Board approved the draft position on urban areas to proceed for formal consultation subject to the position being broadened to cover the following discussion points:

- The position collates Natural England's agenda for an urban audience and this ambition should be clearly articulated up front.
- Presenting Natural England's agenda for the urban environment in this way forces us to ensure we urban proof our positions and delivery activity
- It was suggested that references to protecting 'in situ' features and attributes of brownfield sites need to be made more sensitive in order not to adversely impact on greenfield sites
- Greater emphasis on quality and access of the urban natural environment is needed within the paper

ACTION: The Executive to amend the draft Urban position before proceeding to external consultation.

9. Natural England's draft position on Freshwater Fisheries

The Board approved the draft position on Freshwater Fisheries to proceed for external consultation, subject to the following comments being reflected:

- Draft position number 6 needs the addition of a verb to strengthen what we are attempting to say.
- The importance of angling as an activity bringing people into contact with the natural environment was recognised.
- Fish represent a clear example of the impact of invasive species.

ACTION: The Executive to amend the draft Freshwater Fisheries position before proceeding to external consultation.

10. Natural England Science Advisory Committee (NESAC) Update

The Board noted the update from NESAC which had met twice (September and October 2009) since the last update provided to the Board.

Chair recorded his thanks to David Macdonald and other members of NESAC for their role in securing and enhancing the robustness of Natural England's evidence base and for the guidance they provide to the Board.

11. Audit and Risk Committee Update

The Board noted the unconfirmed minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 7 December 2009 and the verbal update on the meeting by the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee.

The updated Terms of Reference for the Committee were approved.

The following re-appointments to the Audit and Risk Committee were approved:

- Christopher Pennell as Chair;
- David Hill as member.

The following permanent appointments to the Audit and Risk Committee were approved:

- Catherine Graham-Harrison;
- Joe Horwood.

12. Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the nineteenth Natural England Board meeting held on 25 November 2009 were confirmed.

Actions log

Action	Owner	Status
The Executive to develop a full business case for the development of commercial training products.	RT	Complete
The Executive to keep Board members informed of key developments in the review of Arm's Length Bodies.	GT	In hand
The Executive to amend the letter to the Stakeholder Working group to reflect comments made by Board members.	GT	Complete
The Executive to reflect on the suggestion to study people's experiences and contact with the natural environment through our own initiatives.	GT	In hand
The Executive to amend the Energy position and circulate to Board members for further comment.	AW	Complete
The Executive to review consultation response to Decc to ensure consistency with Natural England's position.	AW	Complete
The Executive to ensure that future position papers to refer to the section on 'evidence' as 'rationale'	AW	Complete
The Executive to reflect points made on 7i, 7ii and 7iii draft positions on Energy before proceeding to external consultation.	AW	In hand
The Executive to amend the draft Urban position before proceeding to external consultation.	AW	In hand
The Executive to amend the draft Freshwater Fisheries position before proceeding to external consultation.	AW	In hand