

# Natural England Board



Meeting: 17  
Date: 29 July 2009

Paper No: **NEB PU17 01**

Title: **Stakeholder Engagements**

Sponsor: **Guy Thompson, Executive Director External Affairs**

## **1 Purpose**

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to apprise the Board of progress on the implementation of the External Affairs Plan over the previous quarter and plans for the next quarter; to provide the external context for External Affairs activity; and to provide details of the stakeholder engagements carried out by the Acting Chair between 21 May and 28 July 2009 and planned engagements between 29 July and 25 November 2009.

## **2 Recommendations**

2.1 It is recommended that the Board notes progress with the implementation of our External Affairs Plan for 2009-10.

## **3 External Affairs Plan 2009-10 – overview of progress to date**

### *Outcome One – A Healthy Natural Environment*

3.1 Following the Secretary of State's formal announcement of the South Downs National Park in March, our decision to resume work on identifying gaps in the National Park coverage specifically in the area between the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales was well received by stakeholders and received much attention in the media, coming as it did during this year's celebrations to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1949 Act. Related activity included our speech at the Europarc dinner in May and our announcement in June of the *Landscape Photographer of the Year* competition in association with the English National Parks Authorities designed to highlight the importance of the relationship between people and places and, in particular through our new award focusing on Landscape on Your Doorstep, our message that all landscapes matter. This competition will culminate in a touring exhibition and a coffee table book with the AA. Our work in this area is designed to promote recognition of the achievements over the past 60 years but also to promote debate about the future priorities and challenges for conservation.

- 3.2 Our efforts to keep biodiversity high on the agenda have been supported by some excellent media coverage of both good news and bad news stories. Good news stories included the return of the short-haired bumble bee from New Zealand, the feasibility study into the re-introduction of the European beaver, and the celebrations to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the return of the large blue butterfly, all of which are a tribute to the effectiveness of targeted conservation partnerships underpinned by sound science. On the bad news side, the plight of some of our once common breeding birds has been highlighted with the addition of several familiar names to the red list of *Birds of Conservation Concern*. In May, we published our major report into the potential impact of invasive, non-native species on our native wildlife and ecosystems and the need for targeted action to control them. We also held a successful lunch with senior figures from a number of species NGOs to discuss the future direction of biodiversity conservation, landscape scale action and valuing ecosystem services. We also made a special presentation at the Mineral Products Association's annual awards dinner to the best quarry restoration of the past 40 years. We were able to announce a new *Natural England Biodiversity Award* to be presented at next year's event. Our purpose in all this is to stimulate widespread support for successful biodiversity action and for the public investment and voluntary effort that it requires.
- 3.3 The passage of the Marine Bill through its various parliamentary stages has been closely tracked and, in June, we held a well-attended reception to reinforce our key messages to parliamentarians just before the Bill went to the House of Commons. As part of our engagement of the fishing industry, we met a range of regional marine stakeholders in the South West to help our advocacy that effective marine protection and sustainable use of marine resources are in the wide public interest and the long-term interests of commercial industries. At the same time, the publication of the Marine Climate Change Impacts 'report card' reinforced the scale of the marine challenge. Our regulatory role in the marine environment has also been brought to wider attention by coverage of the legal challenge against fish farming in the Fal-Helford SAC.

*Outcome Two – People are Inspired to Value and Conserve the Natural Environment*

- 3.4 The launch in early April of our One Million Children Outdoors initiative found resonance with a range of stakeholders. Our survey evidence about the extent of the disconnect between children and the natural world (the generation of 'cotton wool kids') has resurfaced regularly in the media throughout this period (in publications as diverse as the Daily Mail, Good Housekeeping, Mother and Baby magazine and Q&A Education) and continues to play in trade press. The national launch was also replayed in several regions where we were able to give local expression to some of the solutions that we are providing to foster a reconnection.

*Outcome Three – Sustainable Use of the Natural Environment*

- 3.5 Our sustained advocacy about the importance of green infrastructure in the urban regeneration and growth agendas was given a boost with the publication in May of the Government's *Strategy for Improving Quality of Place*. Following active engagement and advocacy with the PM's Policy Unit, the report included a welcome commitment to produce planning guidance for local authorities on green infrastructure. We attended the official launch and formally endorsed the report. Our call for sustained investment in green infrastructure was the lead story in Planning magazine, following wide-ranging coverage (in the trade press and the Guardian) of the ParkCity conference we sponsored in February. We have taken the opportunity of the LGA's annual national conference and our sponsorship of their *Green Council Worker of the Year Award* to reinforce the core role of local authorities in delivery of key environmental objectives across their functions.

- 3.6 The publication of the Government's draft *Flood and Water Management Bill* enabled us to advocate some clear messages about the importance of sustainable flood risk management and the key role of the natural environment in helping to manage flood risk. We are working closely with a range of stakeholders to influence the content of the Bill that will be published in due course.
- 3.7 Our work to secure an effective means to safeguard the legacy of set aside has been a major focus for our agricultural policy work again this quarter. Our 'twin track' approach of pressing for a robust and effective regulatory solution whilst working closely with agricultural stakeholders to help develop a workable, alternative, voluntary solution has been challenging but will we hope prove worthwhile when the Secretary of State announces his preferred option before the summer recess. We have secured slots in the farming press for us to present Natural England's position when the announcement is made.
- 3.8 We have been actively engaged with some key agricultural stakeholders this quarter, holding several bilateral meetings and hosting a lunch on the subject of food security. We were widely praised in the sector for giving open and honest answers to some challenging questions in an interview with *Farmers' Weekly*, which reinforced Natural England's commitment to work with the sector to support them in their efforts to protect and enhance the environment, and feed the nation. We were also interviewed by the *Farmers' Guardian*. *Open Farm Sunday* provided an excellent opportunity for the organisation to work with its farming partners around the country to showcase their many environmental achievements.

*Outcome Four – A Secure Environmental Future*

- 3.9 The launch of the latest *UK Climate Programme* scenarios in June dramatically reinforced the urgency and scale of the anticipated impacts on the nation (its people, economy and national environment) of climate change. Our key messages were highlighted through an opinion piece article published in the *Guardian*, letters to the *Times* and farming press and in an interview on Channel 4 News. Our recent efforts to reinforce our commitment to support the renewables sector to deliver effective and sustainable renewable energy schemes has won some positive response from key stakeholders as evidenced in the reaction to our widely praised presentation to the industry's premier renewables event in Aberdeen.
- 3.10 Our relationship with industry more widely has been boosted by the announcement of our sponsorship of a Green Business Award as part of our business engagement programme later in the year.

*Quantitative Summary*

- 3.11 Over 90 stakeholder meetings have been held by Chair, Chief Executive and Executive Directors during Quarter 1 as part of an extended structured engagement programme with our priority stakeholders. These have included a series of lunches/dinners which enable us to more effectively engage with a wide range of stakeholders and a programme of engagements with politicians from the three main parties.
- 3.12 This has been our most successful quarter to date for national print media (comprising national newspapers, consumer magazines and trade magazines) with overall volumes 2% higher than Q1 2008-09 (a quarter that featured our State of the Natural Environment (SONE) report launch and extensive coverage around the Norfolk Broads). The bulk of the volume uplift was accounted for by trade (13% up) and consumer press (10% up); whereas total national newspaper volumes were 19% down on the same period last year reflecting the 'SONE effect', but were still comfortably ahead of any other quarter. Broadcast performance has been encouraging (volumes 21% higher) and measures of article significance (which

take account of article size, position in paper and title circulation) are at a record high and 29% up on last year. Regional print media volumes were 14% down year on year, with Norfolk and SONE the main factors in the elevated numbers for last year.

#### **4. External context**

- 4.1 The economic crisis continues to dominate events here and across the world. The UK's output has declined 4.9% since the recession began in April 2008 – a sharper decline than the recession of the early 1980s and early 1990s. Unemployment reached 7.3% in April 2009 and is forecast to hit 10% in 2010. It is still too early to say if the UK will experience a V-shaped recession, with an early return to growth, or a far more severe 'double-dip' recession, with far more severe consequences. Whichever scenario prevails, it is now clear that government spending will be severely constrained with cuts expected in the Comprehensive Spending Review that follows the 2010 General Election, regardless of who wins it.
- 4.2 Natural England's partners in the voluntary sector are already feeling the impact of the recession with donations and legacies falling. This will have a knock on effect on delivery for the natural environment, although it is too early to predict which areas will be worst hit.
- 4.3 The European Elections saw a shift away from centre left parties towards the centre right (and beyond). Although the policy implications of this political swing will only become clearer in the Autumn, it is likely that the CAP will come under increased scrutiny, Pillar 2 in particular.
- 4.4 There are signs of elements in the farming industry hardening their position on both CAP reform and set aside. Their position is that concerns over food security and sovereignty trump 'over prioritised' biodiversity concerns.
- 4.5 The ongoing furore over the 'MPs expenses' saga has added to an already febrile political atmosphere. Originally focused on Westminster, the story has now spread to Whitehall and beyond.
- 4.6 All of which puts increased pressure on Natural England to continue to demonstrate its commitment to being a distinctive public body with continuous improvement in the efficiency of our delivery, and to demonstrate the relevance of our outcomes to the long term economic recovery.
- 4.7 The UK Climate Impact Project's report (June) suggests that climate change is happening faster and more severely than previously thought. The localisation of the projections, while questioned in some circles, might help people to begin to understand more directly the impact of climate change on their lives.
- 4.8 The UK government, responding to strong positive signals from across the Atlantic where the US administration passed (just) its first legislative steps to tackle rising carbon emissions, continues to make the case for concerted, coordinated international action to tackle climate change. Calls have been made by government for the environmental and third sectors to better make the case for tough, and in some cases unpopular, policy decisions to be taken for the greater good.
- 4.9 The combination of factors above presents considerable challenges to the environment sector. But it also presents a significant opportunity if Natural England can set out both its vision for a model of national development that values people's well-being and environmental security above measures of economic growth such

as GDP AND practical, value for money steps that would make a difference on the ground. Our focus on delivering for local communities and transforming local environments points the way.

## **5. External Affairs Plan 2009-10 – forward look to end September 2009**

### *Outcome One – A Healthy Natural Environment*

- 5.1 The celebrations to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Parks Act continue through Quarter 2 with further events on NNRs around the country and two significant set piece speeches at the Association of National Park Authorities and National Association of AONBs respectively on what the next 60 years holds for the natural environment.

### *Outcome Two – People Inspired to Value and Conserve the Natural Environment*

- 5.2 We will be making a major announcement with DoH to mark the launch of our Natural Health Service programme and following this up with further media coverage during Quarter 2. We will also be holding a major event to promote the detail of the coastal access provisions in the Marine Bill.
- 5.3 We will be launching the *Big Wildlife Garden* at a school in Oxfordshire – a new interactive website that aims to create a large online community for gardeners. At its heart will be a wildlife-friendly gardening and green space accreditation scheme where people of all ages will be able to create their own content and share it with others, and where their efforts can be acknowledged by Natural England and celebrated with the public.

### *Outcome Three – Sustainable Use of the Natural Environment*

- 5.4 We will be launching our sustainable fisheries report at a supper for key players in the marine fisheries field. This report will draw on an extensive evidence base to provide a compelling narrative showing the way towards more sustainable use of our marine resources.

### *Outcome Four – A Secure Environmental Future*

- 5.5 We will be holding a series of stakeholder workshops over this period to develop and refine our future scenarios for the natural environment which we will be launching later in Quarter 3.

## Annex 1

### Engagements attended – 21 May to 29 July 2009

#### Acting Chair - Poul Christensen

<b>May</b>	
25	Europarc Dinner, Losehill Hall, Derbyshire
28	English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) London
28	Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM), London
<b>June</b>	
2	The Wildlife Trusts, with Helen Phillips, London
4	Mineral Products Association, Awards Presentations, London
8	Crop Protection Association with Huw Irranca-Davies, Minister for Marine and Natural Environment, London
9	Country Land and Business Association (CLA), with Helen Phillips, London
9	Natural England Parliamentary Reception, London
10	NGO Stakeholder meeting, with Helen Phillips, London
10	Huw Irranca-Davies, Minister for Marine and Natural Environment and Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Minister for Food, Farming and Environment, with Helen Phillips, London
15	Launch of Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA), York
22	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Haverfordwest
29	Cambridge Sustainability Programme event, including Reception with HRH Prince Charles, London
30	Tim Yeo MP, Chair of Environmental Audit Committee, with Helen Phillips, London
30	Anne Macintosh MP, Shadow Defra Minister, with Helen Phillips, London
30	Expert Group meeting, with Helen Phillips, London
<b>July</b>	
1	Sustainable Development Commission Conference, with Helen Phillips
2	Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) Strategy Group Meeting, London
8	Access stakeholder workshop, with Helen Phillips, London
8	Energy stakeholder meeting, with Helen Phillips, London
8	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), with Helen Phillips, London
9	Food Security Stakeholder meeting, London
10	Hampshire Rural Forum, Hampshire
14	Barry Sheerman MP, Chair of Children Schools and Families Select Committee, London
14	Joint Natural England/Environment Agency Board Meeting, with Helen Phillips, London
20	Stuart Burgess, Commission for Rural Communities, London
20	Dr Greg Clark MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, London
20	Nick Herbert MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, London
21	NGO stakeholder meeting, with Helen Phillips, London
21	Developers stakeholder meeting, with Helen Phillips, London
22	Launch of Natural Health Service (to be confirmed)

22	Performance Review with Secretary of State, with Helen Phillips, London
24	Secretary of State visit to Peak District (Lynn Crowe to attend in place of Acting Chair)
25	CLA Game Fair – Re-Wilding Debate and Presidents' Reception, Grantham
28/29	Natural England Board Meeting

### Forward Look of Engagements 30 July to 25 November 2009.

#### Acting Chair - Poul Christensen

<b>July</b>	
31	Coastal Access Launch - Preparing to Deliver, London
<b>August</b>	
	No scheduled engagements
<b>September</b>	
2	Tim Farron MP, Liberal Democrat spokesman for Defra, North West visit (to be confirmed)
4	Nick Clegg MP, Leader, Liberal Democrats, Whirlow Hall Farm visit
7	Stakeholder Workshop, Vision 2060, London (to be confirmed)
8	RSPB, with Helen Phillips, London
8	Sustainable Fisheries meeting, with Helen Phillips, London
14	Meeting with Nick Herbert MP, (Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), West Sussex (Board Dinner)
15	Natural England Board site visit, South East region
21/22	Liberal Democrats Party Conference, with Helen Phillips, Bournemouth
23	Association of National Park Authorities (ANPA) Conference, Snowdonia
28/29	Labour Party Conference, with Helen Phillips, Brighton
<b>October</b>	
1	Meeting with Baroness Andrews, Chair of English Heritage
5/6	Conservative Party Conference, with Helen Phillips, Manchester
7	Annual UK BAP conference, York
8	Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust Members' Conference, London
14	'No Charge' Report Launch, with Helen Phillips, London
14	Plantlife 20 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Parliamentary Reception, London (to be confirmed)
19	South Downs National Park event, Pulborough
20	Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust – "Flora Locale, Food farming and Conservation", Hampshire
21	Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, with Helen Phillips, London
21	Caroline Spelman MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, with Helen Phillips, London
<b>November</b>	
3	Green Infrastructure Event, with Helen Phillips, O2 Centre
3	Natural England Parliamentary Reception, with Helen Phillips, London
3	Environmental Data Services Green Business Awards (to be confirmed)
12	Uplands Vision Launch (to be confirmed), with Helen Phillips
17	State of the Green Belt event (to be confirmed), with Helen Phillips
24/25	Natural England Board meeting

