

Natural England Board



Confirmed minutes of the seventeenth Natural England Board meeting, 29 July 2009

Members attending	Executives:
Poul Christensen (Acting Chair)	Tom Tew
Helen Phillips (CEO)	Guy Thompson
Peter Allen	Robin Tucker
Lynn Crowe	Dave Webster
Michael Depledge	Andrew Wood
Catherine Graham-Harrison	Jim Smyllie
Tony Hams	
David Hill	Secretariat
Doug Hulyer	
David Macdonald	Carolyn Cadman
Christopher Pennell	Roy Hymas
Pam Warhurst	
Andy Wilson	

Prior to the Board meeting, a Board briefing was held at which Board members were updated on Natural England's work in the following areas:

- Strategic Narratives: Telling Our Story;
- Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development Programme for England;
- Environmental Monitoring;
- Climate Change;
- Sustainability: Achieving our 50% carbon emissions reduction target;
- Developing our response to a potential change of Government and the current economic climate.

Welcome from the Chair

Apologies were received from Sarah Burton.

There were no additions to the Register of Interests.

The Chair welcomed Gill Travis, Target Delivery Manager in Landscape, Geology and Soils Evidence Team.

1) Stakeholder Engagements

The Board:

- noted the engagements conducted by Acting Chair in the period between the May and July Board meetings and the appointments scheduled before the November Board meeting, and;
- considered progress on the implementation of the External Affairs Plan over the previous quarter and plans for the next quarter.

Key discussion points were:

- the Board agreed that the programme of stakeholder workshops have been overwhelmingly positive and continue to provide opportunities to develop and cement relations with and between our key stakeholders on strategic issues. Throughout the workshops, stakeholders have called on Natural England to continue to provide environmental leadership;
- a similar programme will be developed and delivered at a more local level through our local teams;
- the Board recognised significant progress on our Environmental Leadership Delivery Plan and its importance in providing an advocacy platform for Natural England to demonstrate its credentials as an environmental champion.

2) Chief Executive's Report

The Board:

a) noted our current strategic issues:

- set aside mitigation;
- Marine and Coastal Access Bill;
- Flood and Water Management Bill;
- National Audit Office's Audit of Organic Entry Level Stewardship, Diffuse Pollution and Coastal Flood Management;
- Ministerial Changes;
- Renewable Energy Strategy / Natura 2000;
- Performance Review with the Secretary of State;
- Water Price Review O9.

b) reviewed performance of delivery against our Corporate Plan in Quarter 1 of 2009/10, and noted:

- out of 34 targets, two are red, two are amber red, eighteen are amber green and twelve are green;
- 88% of our targets are green or amber green compared with 86% at the same stage

last year;

- our four red and amber red targets (protected landscapes, SSSI, biodiversity and agri-environment delivery) will move to monthly exception reporting to put them back on track.
- c) noted the Organisation's financial position at 30 June 2009.

Key discussion points were:

- progress over the last quarter (April to June) on new HLS agreements is behind schedule and this has implications for our RDPE spend in 2010/11 which, given the importance of agri-environment scheme delivery to the success of our work across all our outcomes is critical. We are already implementing a major programme of activity to address this issue including recruiting and training 75 new advisers so that we can increase the number of new agreements from under a 1,000 in 2008/9 to 2,385 in 2009/10. The Board is pleased following the announcement of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment by the agricultural industry, in partnership with Defra and Natural England, to implement the voluntary approach to good environmental management and help to secure the environmental benefits previously delivered by set aside. The Board highlighted the importance of continuing to work together constructively, collaboratively and enthusiastically;
- the timetable for the Marine and Coastal Access Bill is tight and it is unlikely that there will be many further amendments. Nevertheless, we will continue to call for a clause on disturbance and seek changes to the SSSI provisions to ensure that they are workable in practice;
- we are working closely with the National Audit Office (NAO) on three audits currently and progress is good overall. In particular, the Board highlighted the value of working with the Environment Agency to agree the final NAO report of the audit on diffuse pollution;
- we continue to work on a practical level to resolve SSSI condition concerns for the benefit of our other targets and we also need to consider further how we might make use of regulatory levers to ensure that we meet the target for favourable SSSI condition;
- we must continue to work closely with Government to ensure appropriate targets for SSSI condition post 2010.

ACTION: Board Services to include update on RDPE spend and progress on agri-environment scheme delivery on a fortnightly basis via Board Round Up.

3) Natural England's Scenarios for the Natural Environment in 2060

The Board considered and endorsed the Scenario Stories set out at Annex 1 and plans for their wider communication.

Key discussion points were:

- the stories are a valuable communication tool for helping to describe different, plausible scenarios of the future;
- we should be clear that they do not describe predictions or preferences;

- it will be important to develop a comprehensive communications package to maximise public engagement following the launch of the scenarios and beyond to the launch of the Vision where we will describe what the potential implications are of the scenarios on the natural environment.

ACTION: Executive Board to develop comprehensive communications package to maximise public engagement.

4) Natural England's Land Use Strategy 2009 – 13

The Board noted the Strategy, its purpose and how it will be used.

Key discussion points were:

- we should consider how we might condense the Strategy further to make it even more accessible, in particular by focusing on why land use is so important;
- the Strategy should make the link between land use and landscape;
- the Strategy should be for internal use and to enable detailed discussions with key partners and stakeholders;
- the Strategy may be a useful tool for communicating with external audiences in conjunction with a strategic narrative for land that sets the wider context.

ACTION: Executive Board to review and revise the Strategy and draft a 'Land' Strategic Narrative for consideration by Board Outcome Groups.

5) Natural England's Draft Policy on Transport

The Board agreed the draft overarching policy on transport, as set out at Annex 1, following consultation with external stakeholders.

Key discussion points were:

- the final policy should ensure that any references to evidence are clearly available and robust;
- we should explore options to include further evidence of the impacts of transport on the natural environment;
- the policy should be sensitive to the need for people to continue to travel for certain social and economic purposes;
- we will provide feedback to key stakeholders following the Board's discussion of the draft policy.

ACTION: Executive Board to make amendments to draft policy and discuss with key stakeholders.

ACTION: Board Services to arrange for Acting Chair to sign off the final policy.

6) Natural England's Draft Policy on Aviation

The Board noted:

- the draft policy for aviation; and,
- that this is the final policy in a suite of policies under our overarching transport policy.

The Board agreed the draft policy for external consultation prior to final sign-off by Acting Chair.

Key discussion points were:

- the evidence to support Policy 1 should make it clear to what degree or otherwise any expansion in aviation is compatible with achieving UK climate change targets;
- Policy 3 should make it clear that we are talking about net benefits for the natural environment;
- Policy 4 should be strengthened in relation to the role of the airline industry to cover the full costs of its emissions and damage to the natural environment;
- protected landscapes should be afforded the highest level of protection from aviation, both now and in the future;
- we will consult with a wide range of stakeholders including BAA, EA, NGOs, DECC and the MoD.

ACTION: Executive Board to make amendments to draft policy prior to external stakeholder consultation.

ACTION: Board Services to arrange for Acting Chair to sign off the final policy.

7) Natural England's Draft Policy on Road and Rail

The Board noted that two different transport modes are being considered in a single policy as the Department for Transport is developing a national Policy Statement for strategic national highway and rail networks.

The Board agreed the draft policy on road and rail for external stakeholder consultation prior to circulation to the Board and subsequent sign-off by Acting Chair subject to inclusion of further references to new technologies and their contribution to mitigating the environmental impacts of travel and transport.

ACTION: Executive Board to make amendments to draft policy prior to external stakeholder consultation.

ACTION: Board Services to arrange for final policy to be signed off by Acting Chair.

8) Natural England's Draft Policy on the Historic Environment

The Board noted:

- the draft policy for the historic environment;
- its relationship to Natural England's overarching landscape policy; and,
- feedback following internal discussions and consultation with a group of external stakeholders.

The Board agreed the draft policy on the historic environment, subject to some minor amendments, for external consultation prior to circulation to the Board and subsequent final sign-off by Acting Chair.

ACTION: Executive Board to make amendments to draft policy prior to external stakeholder consultation.

ACTION: Board Services to arrange for final policy to be signed off by Acting Chair.

9) Objectives and Principles of Commercial Partnerships

The Board noted and agreed the objectives and principles that will guide our work in this area.

Key discussion points were:

- we should explore commercial opportunities that are consistent with the agreed principles;
- the Board will be informed of future commercial opportunities where any risks are identified beyond those currently anticipated.

ACTION: Board Services to include update on current commercial opportunities that we are exploring in next Board round up.

10) Natural England's Science Advisory Committee Update

The Board noted the work of the Committee to date and the proposals for new members.

Key discussion points were:

- the importance of the Committee's impartiality, its focus on evidence and the calibre of debate and discussion between Natural England and external experts is hugely beneficial;
- the new members: Professor Ken Norris, Professor Sarah Harper and Professor Andy Dobson will bring further balance of expertise and judgement to the Committee;
- the Science Advisory Committee provides Natural England with additional credibility in the field of science, research and evidence and the Board fully support its continuation.

11) Audit and Risk Committee: Report on meeting held on 3 December 2008

The Board noted the report and unconfirmed minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting on 15 June 2009.

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee provided a verbal update to the Board on the June meeting.

Key discussion points were:

- the success of delivering the Annual Report and Accounts this year is a tribute to all the staff involved and the Chair of the Committee asked that these minutes record his appreciation and thanks;
- we are now enjoying excellent working relations with the National Audit Office;
- the Chair of the Committee met recently with the chairs of other audit committees across the Defra family;
- the Committee recently considered emergency planning on a range of potential impacts, including swine flu. The Chair of the Committee noted that a verbal update on any potential impacts of swine flu on Natural England's operations will be considered at the next meeting.

ACTION: Executive Board to prepare papers for next meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee

12) Confirmation of minutes

The minutes of the sixteenth Natural England Board meeting held on 20 May 2009 were confirmed.

The Board thanked Professor Michael Depledge for his outstanding contribution to the Board and Natural England since his appointment in 2006. Professor Depledge is due to step down from the Board on 30 September 2009 to pursue academic interests at the Peninsula Medical School in Plymouth.