

Natural England Board



Title: **Minutes of the ninth Natural England Board meeting -
13 February 2008**

<u>Members attending</u>	<u>Executives:</u>
Martin Doughty (Chair)	Adrian Belton
Peter Allen	Andrew Wood
Melinda Appleby	Dave Webster
Sarah Burton	David Young
Poul Christensen (Deputy Chair)	Guy Thompson
Lynn Crowe	Tom Tew
Merrick Denton-Thompson	
Tony Hams	<u>Secretariat:</u>
Doug Hulyer	Becky Jones
David Macdonald	Roy Hymas
Christopher Pennell	
Helen Phillips (CEO)	
Pam Warhurst	

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

- State of the Natural Environment report;
- Transition Programme;
- Badgers and Bovine TB;
- Natural England Science Advisory Committee;
- Natural England's Engagement with International Issue.

1) Welcome from the Chair

- a) Apologies from Roger Clarke, David Hill and Michael Depledge.
- b) There were no amendments to the Register of Interests.

2) Stakeholder Engagements

The Board noted:

- a) steps taken to develop a co-ordinated programme of advocacy activity for 2008/09, linked to our strategic outcomes, for Board members at a national and regional level;
 - b) engagements carried out by Chair and Deputy Chair between 12 December and 30 April 2008.
- 3) Chief Executive's Report

The Board:

- a) noted the summary of the current strategic issues:
 - i) Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and budget issues:
 - we expect to receive an agreed budget from Defra for 2008/08 by the end of February, and an indicative figure for the subsequent two years by the end of March;
 - Defra have a significant overspend in 07/08 and are still considering a further three to five per cent reduction for Natural England;
 - we have received expressions of interest in Voluntary Early Redundancy and Voluntary Early Severance (VER/VES). We have been informed by PPPA, our pension provider, that Defra have a significant workload from their own redundancy programme and this is due to be delivered before Natural England's redundancy programme can be considered. This will result in significant delays for staff in receiving final pension estimates and confirming departure dates and will cost natural England £1.6 million in staff costs for that period. The Board expressed disappointment and concern of the effect that this may have on staff who are faced with important decisions about their future;
 - we have received no additional funding from Defra for redundancies other than £2m remaining in the Modernising Rural Delivery (MRD) budget. We will therefore have to raise the £9m - £11m required from our own existing resources.
 - ii) Secretary of State meeting on 29 January 2008:
 - this was our first performance review with the Secretary of State. In future these meetings will take place twice a year;
 - discussion items included:
 - SSSI target;
 - Agri-environment schemes;
 - Farm advice;
 - Our role as an influential advisor;

- Our role in the regions.
 - the Secretary of State congratulated us on establishing the organisation, the progress we have made so far and expressed a desire to get out and about to see more of our work. The Secretary of State subsequently reported to the House in an oral response to a Parliamentary Question from Peter Ainsworth that he had met with Natural England and was pleased with our progress.
- iii) Price Review 2009 (PRO9):
- we are in close discussions with Ofwat and the water companies to seek greater commitment to securing environmental benefits from the PRO9 process.
- iv) Marine Bill:
- we are expecting a draft Marine Bill by early and continue to work very closely with Defra on the development of the marine conservation provisions of the Bill. We have provided advice to them on the planning provisions as follows:
 - the draft bill will lack a strong, statutory driver, in the form of a duty on Natural England, or on the Secretary of State, for putting the network in place;
 - the process for taking account of socio-economics and making the final decision on Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) designation will be open ended with no defined timescale within which the process will operate.
 - the process for decision making will not be transparent so that it remains unclear how socio-economic considerations have influenced the decision on designation.
- v) Climate Change Bill:
- with others, we have successfully influenced the final package of amendments that the Government introduced on adaptation. A key measure of our success is the new power for the Secretary of State to be able to require particular Government agencies and utilities to carry out risk assessments, put in place an adaptation programme and report on progress.
- vi) Biodiversity Action Plan:
- Defra have now formally asked Natural England to undertake the role of lead delivery body for the England Biodiversity Strategy (EBS), as set out in PSA Delivery Agreement 28, including the assimilation of work under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) in England under the devolved framework. We are exploring with Defra how best to make this work. We will provide formal advice to Defra on the Statutory list of priority habitats and species to help demonstrate how species targets can be met through habitat scale action.

- b) reviewed performance of delivery against our Strategic Direction and noted:
 - i) at our third quarter review of our 63 targets none were red, 80% were amber and 20% were green. Overall, we are scheduled to deliver on 90% of our targets by the end of the financial year;
 - ii) the date of handover of Genesis from Defra to Natural England is now expected to be mid May, in the light of the revised testing timetable and closure of the Guildford site where the system is hosted; and that date of Maintenance Release 5, including Moorland Line changes, remained on track for end March.
- c) noted the financial position for Natural England as at the end of December 2007 and the forecast for the remainder of 2007/08;
- d) noted that approval was given by the Chair on the on 24 January, under delegation from the Board, to a protocol between Natural England, Defra and the Big Lottery Fund regarding the £25m Access to Nature Grants Scheme.

4) First Draft Strategic Direction

The Board:

- a) noted the first draft of the Strategic Direction 2008 – 2013 and agreed that we will undertake a formal consultation exercise. The Board made the following points:
 - i) there has been significant benefit from discussions at Board Outcome Groups and early engagement with key stakeholders;
 - ii) the emphasis of Outcome 2 should be as much upon 'engagement with and by people' as physical 'access' i.e. developing both demand and supply;
 - iii) we should work with others to share best practice in developing measures of success, particularly around ecological resilience and changing behaviours towards the natural environment;
 - iv) the Strategic Direction should emphasise the importance of geographical literacy and local decision making in the delivery of our objectives;
 - v) the Strategic Direction should fully reflect our aspirations for a distinctive public body including the recent work to further develop the strategic shifts;
 - vi) we have engaged strategic partners in a very proactive way in developing this draft. The Strategic Direction should recognise that we will work in partnership with others to deliver our objectives and seek commitment and ownership of shared objectives.

5) Policy Development Priorities in Natural England 2008/09

The Board:

- a) discussed the priorities and timetable for Natural England's policy development for 2008/09 and made the following points:
 - i) there is a significant amount of policy development activity scheduled for this year and additional time will be needed for Board Outcome Groups to meet;
 - ii) the Board welcomed a proposal to describe the relationship between related policies in diagrammatic form;

ACTION: Executive Board.

- iii) requested a policy to be developed on the Sub National Review (SNR).

ACTION: Executive Board.

- b) the Board agreed the policy priorities as set out in the paper.

6) Advocacy Priorities for 2008/09

The Board:

- a) discussed the proposed priorities for Natural England's advocacy programme in 2008/09 and made the following points:
 - i) that the policy position statement on coastal access should reflect the need to promote better understanding of the marine environment;
- b) agreed the advocacy priorities set out in the paper.

7) Natural England's Policy on More Sustainable Agriculture – a scoping paper

The Board:

- a) discussed the potential scope of Natural England's policy on more sustainable agriculture. The policy should:
 - i) focus on environmental sustainability;
 - ii) take account of our policy on organic farming;
 - iii) consider the longer term context of social and economic change and key trends;
 - iv) consider the need to reconnect the public with food and farming;
 - v) utilise language that describes land management in terms of environmental value and benefits.
- b) agreed to:
 - i) at a future date, consider a draft policy on organic farming;

ACTION: Executive Board.

- ii) the scope of the policy and development of a draft policy for consideration by the Board at a future date.

8) Natural England's Draft Policy on Health and Wellbeing

The Board:

- a) discussed Natural England's draft Health and Wellbeing policy and made the following points:
 - i) current lack of robust evidence needs to be addressed and appropriate caveats built into our policy but this should not prevent us from developing our work in this area;
 - ii) we should maximise existing opportunities to develop the evidence base through our own delivery work e.g. the Access to Nature grant scheme and Environmental Stewardship;
 - iii) we should consider the potential for all policies to include an analysis of their contribution to people's health and wellbeing;
 - iv) the policy should stress the links between health inequalities and access to high quality natural environments.
- b) agreed the draft policy for consultation, with the final version circulated to the Board for comment, to be signed off by Chair.

ACTION: Executive Board.

9) Natural England's Draft Policy on Housing Growth and Green Infrastructure

The Board:

- a) discussed Natural England's draft policy on future housing growth, including the provision of green infrastructure, and made the following points:
 - i) the key principles for green infrastructure, as set out at Annex 2, should include community engagement with maintaining and managing greenspace;
 - ii) the policy should seek to deepen our understanding of technological solutions, including at an international level;
- b) agreed the draft policy and definition of green infrastructure, subject to the above points, and that following consultation, the final version will be circulated to Board members for comment and the policy signed off by Chair.

ACTION: Executive Board.

- c) Christopher Pennell requested that the minutes of this meeting record that his dissatisfaction was with the handling of the Board's discussion of this topic in October, rather than the substance of the draft policy.

10) Natural England's Policy on Landscape

The Board:

- a) discussed Natural England's landscape policy and detailed policy positions, and made the following points:
 - i) our stakeholders are pleased to see Natural England developing an overarching landscape policy and the suite of detailed policies and there is a great appetite for engagement in the development of detailed policies;
 - ii) the policy will be a very important tool for us in influencing the planning system;
 - iii) that whilst all landscapes matter, they are all different and have varying levels of environmental, social, economic, cultural and historical significance;
- b) agreed the policy and noted the revised programme for detailed policies.

11) Discovering Lost Ways

The Board:

- a) discussed the findings of the Discovering Lost Ways (DLW) project and supported our proposed way forward;
- b) noted that we will advise Defra on our proposed approach and work with them to find a pragmatic solution that will support others in their efforts to retain historic rights and provide improvements to the rights of way network through Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs).

12) Confirmation of minutes

- a) The minutes of the eighth Natural England Board meeting held on 11 December 2007, were confirmed.