

Natural England Board



Title: **Confirmed minutes of the fifty fifth Natural England Board meeting on 15 July 2015**

Members attending	Senior Leadership Team
Andrew Sells (Chairman)	James Cross, Chief Executive
Julia Aglionby	Tim Hill, Chief Scientist (items 1-5)
Andy Clements	Paul Lambert, Chief Finance and Governance Officer
Will Cockbain (items 1-4)	Alan Law, Chief Strategy and Reform Officer
Teresa Dent	Julie Lunt, Chief Legal Adviser
David Hill	Guy Thompson, Chief Operating Officer
Joe Horwood	Invited speakers
Simon Lyster	Andrew Smith, Area Manager Thames Valley (item 3)
Nigel Reader	Simon Sheppard, Director Organisational Development (item 4)
John Varley	Caroline Cotterell, Manager Conservation Strategy (item 6)
	Tim De-Keyzer, Manager, Biodiversity (item 7)
	Laura McDixon, Principal Adviser Health and Safety (item 8)
Apologies	Secretariat
None	Gill Hunt

Welcome from the Chairman

The Chairman extended his welcome and asked for declarations of interest. Declarations were received from:

- Nigel Reader for item 3 - Spending Review 2015 due to being a Board Member for the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).
- Andy Clements in relation to Annex 3 of item 2 due to British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) interests.
- John Varley as a reappointed member of the Board of the Environment Agency for all items and in relation to item 5 due to local interests.

The Chairman was satisfied there were no conflicts of interest but asked that advice be given to John Varley from Nigel Reader on managing multiple Board membership and conflicts of interest.

1. Confirmation of the June 2015 Minutes and Matters Arising (NEB M54 01)

1.1 The minutes of the June Board meeting were confirmed subject to changes:

- Section 17 had been reviewed by Julia Aglionby and amendments submitted.
- 18.1 amend 'halting' to 'reversing'
- 3.4.5, the Board felt the language did not reflect the discussion on the day and asked Alan Law to review the wording of the minute.

Action: Alan Law to review the wording of 3.4.5 and confirm to Board and Executive Services.

Action: Board and Executive Services to amend and produce confirmed June minutes.

1.2 The Board noted the following updates under Matters Arising:

- Action 11 – Great Crested Newts, Julie Lunt gave an update on recent advice from counsel. The Board discussed the need to announce the scheme and agreed to delegate authority for any press release about the project to Chairman, Andy Clements and James Cross.
- Action 22 – it was noted that an update would come to the September meeting in relation to the progress of the Upland Working Group.

2. Chief Executive Report (NEB 55 01)

2.1 James Cross introduced his report and welcomed Andrew Smith, Area Manager for Thames Valley to give a drill down on Area Team activity. In discussion the Board:

2.1.1 Noted the annual report and accounts had been laid before parliament.

2.1.2 Considered the performance report and the reasons for 4 KPIs having a red status and the plans to move into a more positive reporting status.

2.1.3 Acknowledged the morale KPI would not improve until a bench marking exercise such as a pulse or staff survey took place to measure morale but explored ways the Board could assist in boosting morale including visiting Area Teams and delivering consistent, honest messages to staff as leaders of the organisation.

2.1.4 Noted the KPI for income generation and the trajectories for Area Teams and were encouraged by Area Manager leadership but acknowledged a culture shift would be needed within the organisation and training in commercial activity may be of benefit.

2.2 Andrew Smith provided an insight into the issues and challenges of his Area Team and the Board noted:

2.2.1 Area Team staff were able to recognise that Area Managers were empowered in the new model and had control over budgets and resourcing.

2.2.2 Area Team action plans were in place to address morale and income generation.

2.2.3 A large proportion of Area Manager time was spent dealing with high risk casework but the change to an Area Team structure was welcomed by stakeholders and

assisted in resolving issues with high risk attached.

- 2.2.4 Immediate concerns for Area Managers included the delivery of Countryside Stewardship and the resource implications.
- 2.3 The Board noted issues outlined at Annex 2 of the paper and identified the following actions:

Action: James Cross to consider good news stories that can be released especially those which can be done jointly with landowners/stakeholders.

Action: Tim Hill to circulate an update on spraying for Oriental Gall Wasp and any specialist advice about control.

Action: James Cross to ensure each item in Annex 3 contains a summary paragraph with a message that Board members can use.

Action: Tim Hill to provide a Board paper in September or October in how Natural England will address the Climate Change Committee recommendations.

Action: James Cross to bring an update on Gate zero cases to the Board in the autumn of 2015.

Action: The approval for extending the scope of the Discretionary Advice Service was delegated to the Board Innovation Group for consideration at their next meeting.

- 2.4 The Board noted Julie Lunt's update on the legal issues at Annex 3 and identified the following action:

Action: Julie Lunt to circulate an update to the Board on any decision made in respect of the Buzzard Judicial Review.

3. Medium Term Strategy including Spending Review 2015 (NEB 55 02)

- 3.1 James Cross gave an update on recent activity in relation to the Spending Review 2015 (SR2015). The Board noted:

- 3.1.1 James Cross had been asked to sit on the Strategic Implementation Committee (SIC).

- 3.1.2 Andrew Sells had been asked to join the Defra Management Board.

- 3.1.3 Defra had eight key objectives and asked for these to be circulated to Board members.

- 3.1.4 Defra was developing a food and farming strategy and a nature and conservation strategy.

Action: James Cross to circulate the Defra objectives through Board Round-Up.

- 3.2 The Board noted the Natural England Strategy updates within the paper and agreed with the direction of travel for the estates strategy.

4. Emerging Workforce Strategy (NEB 55 03)

- 4.1 Paul Lambert introduced this item with Simon Sheppard who joined. Simon drew the Boards attention to three key points of the strategy which covered the foundations already in place, operational plan for 2015/16 and future thinking. In discussion the Board:
- 4.1.1 Supported the thrust of the paper and recognised the link with other strategies such as estates. The Board noted the progress in identifying and filling resource gaps.
- 4.1.2 Noted the gender balance within the organisation was improving year on year but that it was skewed with more men working at the higher management levels. They were encouraged by the recent appointment of more women at Area Manager and Director level and the proportion of women in the future team leader programme.
- 4.1.3 Noted the paper and strategy was being used by other organisations as an example of best practice.

5. Bovine TB Update (NEB 55 06)

- 5.1 The Board noted Tim Hill's update on Bovine TB and asked for a paper to be circulated with any updates through August as there would be no Board meeting.

Action: Tim Hill to circulate a Bovine TB update paper to Board Members in August.

6. Conservation Strategy Development (NEB 55 04)

- 6.1 Teresa Dent introduced the paper in the context of discussions under item 3. Caroline Cotterell joined for this item. In discussion the Board:
- 6.1.1 Noted an outcome focussed approach was key to securing long term environmental benefits but there was a range of tools which could be used to motivate people to enter into long term environmental management including agri-environment schemes, conservation covenants, Natural Capital Accounting and branding.
- 6.1.2 Recognised a bottom up approach could improve buy in and engagement from stakeholders and landowners rather than a traditional top down prescriptive method of engagement.
- 6.1.3 Explored a variety of ways to motivate landowners and the mix between environmental management and profitability.
- 6.1.4 Noted current examples of good practice across England and noted there might be a difference in motivation for upland and lowland farmers and requested a copy of the report on an example involving farmer clusters and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT).

Action: Teresa Dent to circulate the report on farmer clusters and the GWCT

project.

- 6.2 The Board concluded the next step should be to produce a two page document outlining the major themes in the Conservation strategy and ways to motivate and engage in preparation for feeding into Defra Nature strategy.

Action: Simon Lyster to draft a two page summary and circulate to Board Members.

7. Update on Countryside Stewardship and Legacy Scheme Delivery (NEB 55 05)

- 7.1 Guy Thompson introduced the paper and welcomed Tim De-Keyzer. The Board noted:

7.1.1 Roll out of the mid and higher tier was making good progress and applications were being received.

7.1.2 Focus would remain on producing quality outcomes rather than processing numbers and stakeholders were supportive of this approach and this message would be communicated to staff.

Action: Guy Thompson to distribute an all staff email reiterating the message that the focus will be outcomes and not numbers.

7.1.3 A demonstration of the IT system had been positive and encouraging but staff may have to use the system whilst still learning and testing it.

7.1.4 Dual Use could not be supported by the IT system and work arounds were being explored.

7.1.5 The ARC Chairs group had been dissolved under new governance arrangements for the CAP-D Programme. Consideration would be given to the need to adjust governance arrangements from a Natural England perspective.

Action: Nigel Reader and James Cross to consider further the governance arrangements of CAP-D from a Natural England perspective.

- 7.2 The Board considered the legacy scheme delivery update and in discussion:

7.2.1 Noted 99.7% of claims had been received by the deadline but delays were expected of approx. 2 months when making payments due to issues with the IT.

7.2.2 Recognised there was a duty of care to agreement holders of giving notice of delays to allow for financial planning.

8. Health, Safety and Wellbeing (NEB 55 07)

- 8.1 Paul Lambert introduced the item and welcomed Laura McDixon. The Board:

8.1.1 Noted the addition of a RIDDOR incident which crossed the English/welsh border and were encouraged by the joint working to resolve.

8.1.2 Requested an audit of current risk assessments to give reassurance to the Board these were in place,

Action: Paul Lambert to consider the audit of risk assessments and bring a paper to a future Board meeting.

9. Board Effectiveness Review 2015 (NEB 55 08)

- 9.1 Board Members noted an Effectiveness Review was scheduled for September and agreed to complete the Review using the same process as 2014 to allow for continuity of questions and comparisons of answers.

Action: Board and Executive Services to start the Board Effectiveness Review using the process of 2014.

10. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Update including 2014/15 Annual report (NEB 55 09)

- 10.1 Nigel Reader gave an update on activity within ARAC. In discussion the Board:
- 10.1.1 Noted the ARAC 2014/15 annual report.
- 10.1.2 Approved the reviewed Terms of Reference in the paper.

11. Board Innovation Group Update (NEB 55 10)

- 11.1 The Board noted David Hill's update on BIG activity and the move to ensure ideas are progressed to a deliverable stage.

12. Natural England Science Advisory Committee Update including an update on Climate Change Adaptation Report (NEB 55 11)

- 12.1 Andy Clements gave an update on the last NESAC meeting which covered Favourable Conservation Status, uncertainty and analytical tools. In discussion the Board:
- 12.1.1 Noted the close relationship between business considered at NESAC and items coming to the Board.
- 12.1.2 Approved the recommendation that the next meeting should consider updated conservation advice produced as a result of the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) work.

13. Upland Working Group (UWG) Update

- 13.1 Julia Aglionby gave an update on UWG and the Board:
- 13.1.1 Noted the shift to a delivery stage and the consequent move in lead responsibility from the Strategy team to Operations.
- 13.1.2 Welcomed Amanda Craig as the lead Director for the programme.
- 13.1.3 Noted the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the group were to be reviewed over the summer in line with these changes and that a paper would come to the September Board.

Action: Julia Aglionby and Amanda Craig to develop an update paper including revised ToR to bring to the September Board.

14. Framework Group Update

14.1 Paul Lambert confirmed the Framework Document Group had met and advised the timing for revising the framework document be postponed.

Action: Paul Lambert to seek a side letter agreement with Defra to keep financial delegations up to date.

15. Board Diary 2015

The Board noted the amended 2015 dates and asked for the 2016 locations to be confirmed soon.

Action: Chairman to confirm the 2016 Board meeting locations.

16. Any Other Business

16.1 David Hill raised the reporting to the Board by the Remuneration Committee and apologised for the reporting cycle not being addressed sooner. The Board:

16.1.1 Noted the update on meetings held in March, May and June.

16.1.2 Noted updates will now be provided at each meeting.

Action: BES to include Remuneration Committee updates in all Board meeting agendas.

16.2 David Hill raised his visit to the Great Yorkshire Show where he had been asked about an invasive plant on Lindisfarne – Pirri-Pirri. Guy Thompson agreed to check on the status of this plant and the lessons learned on our Lindisfarne NNR.

Action: Guy Thompson to investigate the status of Pirri-pirri and the lessons on our Lindisfarne NNR.

16.3 The Board recognised the value of Directors and managers coming to the Board meetings but emphasised that it must be of use to both parties and due attention given to each guest.

16.4 Chairman congratulated David Hill on his appointment as Chairman of Plantlife.

Actions log

No	Agenda Item/Paper	Ref	Action	Owner
1	Confirmation of the June 2015 Board Briefing Minutes and matters Arising (NEB M54 01)	1.1	Review the wording of 3.4.5 and confirm to Board and Executive Services.	Alan Law

2	Confirmation of the June 2015 Board Briefing Minutes and matters Arising (NEB M54 01)	1.1	Amend and confirm the June 2015 Board minutes.	BES
3	Chief Executive Report (NEB 55 01)	2.3	Consider good news stories that can be released especially those which can be done jointly with landowners/stakeholders.	James Cross
4	Chief Executive Report (NEB 55 01)	2.3	Circulate an update on spraying for Oriental Gall Wasp and any specialist advice about control.	Tim Hill
5	Chief Executive Report (NEB 55 01)	2.3	Ensure each item in Annex 3 contains a summary paragraph with a message that Board members can use.	James Cross
6	Chief Executive Report (NEB 55 01)	2.3	Provide a Board paper in September or October in how Natural England will address the Climate Change Committee recommendations.	Tim Hill
7	Chief Executive Report (NEB 55 01)	2.3	Bring an update on Gate zero cases to the Board in the Autumn of 2015.	James Cross
8	Chief Executive Report (NEB 55 01)	2.3	The approval for extending the scope of the Discretionary Advice Service was delegated to the Board Innovation Group for consideration at their next meeting.	David Hill
9	Chief Executive Report (NEB 55 01)	2.4	Circulate an update to the Board on any decision made in respect of the Buzzard Judicial Review.	Julie Lunt
10	Medium Term Strategy including Spending Review 2015 (NEB 55 02)	3.1.4	Circulate the Defra objectives through Board Round-Up.	James Cross
11	Bovine TB Update (NEB 55 06)	5.1	Circulate a Bovine TB update paper to Board Members in August.	Tim Hill
12	Conservation Strategy Development (NEB 55 04)	6.1.4	Circulate the report on farmer clusters and the GWCT project.	Teresa Dent
13	Conservation Strategy Development (NEB 55 04)	6.2	Draft a two page summary and circulate to Board Members.	Simon Lyster
14	Update on Countryside Stewardship and Legacy Scheme	7.1.2	Distribute an all staff email reiterating the message that the focus will be outcomes and not numbers.	Guy Thompson

	Delivery (NEB 55 05)			
15	Update on Countryside Stewardship and Legacy Scheme Delivery (NEB 55 05)	7.1.5	Consider further the governance arrangements of CAP-D.	Nigel Reader and James Cross
16	Health, Safety and Wellbeing (NEB 55 07)	8.1.2	Consider the audit of risk assessments and bring a paper to a future Board meeting.	Paul Lambert
17	Board Effectiveness Review 2015 (NEB 55 08)	9.1	Start the Board Effectiveness Review using the process of 2014.	BES
18	Upland Working Group (UWG) Update	13.1.3	Develop an update paper including revised ToR to bring to the September Board.	Julia Aglionby and Amanda Craig
19	Framework Group Update	14.1	Seek a side letter agreement with Defra to keep financial delegations up to date.	Paul Lambert
20	Board Diary 2015	15.1	Confirm the 2016 Board meeting locations.	Chairman
21	Any Other Business	16.1.2	Include Remuneration Committee updates in all Board meeting agendas.	BES
22	Any Other Business	16.2	Investigate the status of Pirri-pirri and the lessons learned on our Lindisfarne NNR.	Guy Thompson