

Natural England Board



Title: **Confirmed minutes of the 90th Natural England Board meeting 17th July 2019**

Members attending	Guests
Tony Juniper, Chairman	Mel Hughes (item 3)
Lord Blencathra, Deputy Chairman	John Holmes (item 3)
Catherine Dugmore	Dr Pete Brotherton (item 3 and 4)
Teresa Dent (For items 1-3, inclusive)	Christine Robertson (item 7)
Henry Robinson	David Askew (item 4)
Dr Simon Lyster	Andrea Ledward (Defra)
Professor Sue Hartley	
Senior Leadership Team	Secretariat
Marian Spain, Interim Chief Executive (and ex-officio Board Member)	Olivia Heston, Legal and Governance Team
Alan Law, Deputy Chief Executive	
Richard Cornish, Chief Officer Operations	
Ken Roy, Director Corporate Governance	
Navroza Ladha, Chief Officer Legal and Governance	
Dr Tim Hill, Chief Scientist	

Welcome from the Chairman and Declarations of Interest

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Board Members Prof Michael Winter and Dr Andy Clements and from Gleny Lovell (Chief Office Planning and Performance) and Abdul Razaq (Director Finance).

In response to the Chairman's invitation for any perceived or potential declarations of interest in respect of the Board agenda, Henry Robinson declared his standard interest in Environmental Stewardship work and Teresa declared her standing interests regarding the uplands work.

1. Confirmation of June Minutes and Matters Arising (NEB M89 01)

- 1.1 The Board discussed the unconfirmed June minutes and made some suggested detailed amendments.

ACTION: Legal and Governance Team to make necessary amendments to June Board minutes and produce confirmed minutes.

2. Chief Executive's Report (NEB 90 01)

2.1 Defra Group Awards

- Tim Hill presented an award at the Defra Group Awards. Natural England picked up two awards. Graham Irving received an award for 'Breaking the Mould' for work boosting curlew productivity. The Marine Protected Areas team won an award for Top Team, which included individuals in NE alongside colleagues from Defra, JNCC and Cefas.
- The Board recognised their hard work and expressed their congratulations to those who won awards.

2.2 Secretary of State speech

- The Board discussed the speech at Kew Gardens on 16th July 2019 by Mr Gove. Topics covered included the agenda for the Environment Bill, the Stacey Review, and restrictions on burning.

2.3 Wellbeing

- The Natural England People Strategy has been published. This recognises and seeks to respond to issues impacting on staff wellbeing, including pay, change and uncertainty.
- The Board discussed the need for longer term proposals for an in-year bonus scheme.

2.4 Roadmap

- The Board noted:
 - The graphical presentation of the organisation's strategic documents and plans. This was well received.
 - The overall focus of the Roadmap programme which was to change internal organisational and delivery structures.

ACTION: Alan Law and team to work on the wording for the vision statement

2.5 KPIs

- The Board looked at the End of May report on this year's performance. They noted the need for longer term goals to show whether the organisation is heading in the right direction.
- The Board discussed:
 - The drop in the target for Higher Tier applications from 500 to 300, which is due to

lower demand from RPA, not NE's ability to deliver. It was acknowledged that some current demand is reflected in internal HLS extensions.

- This year is the peak point of HLS expiries. Richard Cornish is putting a paper together on how Area Teams will cover this demand.
- The challenges of the payment-by-results schemes, and how trials may inform the design of ELMS.
- The success of Natural England's marine work over the last year and the need to ensure that progress is maintained.

2.5.3 With reference to the overall performance report, the Board noted:

- The need to distinguish between the short-fall in achieving longer term outcomes and in meeting the full range of statutory obligations and the in-year performance reporting where objectives have been set to reflect the agreed financial allocation.
- The need in the future reporting to capture both long and short-term performance with continued investment in ensuring that our longer term metrics capture real on the ground change in outcomes.

ACTION: Gleny Lovell to further develop the presentation of short and long term organisational performance

2.6 Finance

- The Chief Executive summarised the financial position for 19/20 which remains challenging hence the necessity of further in-year measures including Voluntary Exit (VE). With regards to VE, it was recognised that we must make sure that we do not lose people with the technical skills needed by the organisation over the next 5 years.
- Overall, in terms of pay and programme spend, the tightness of the 19/20 settlement means that any pressures that arise beyond immediate control will require a priority piece of work to be cut. We have already raised a number of pressures as needing central funding from Defra.

2.7 Legal Cases Report

- Navroza Ladha noted recent cases and brought these before the Board for their attention.

3. Programme Deep Dive: Sustainable Development (NEB 90 02)

3.1 Mel Hughes, John Holmes and Pete Brotherton were introduced to present the paper on the Sustainable Development Programme which includes the delivery of Natural England's statutory planning and licensing duties.

3.2 The presentation noted:

- Natural England's role as a statutory consultee for planning work and our current triage approaches for different types of case.
- The fact that money is in the planning system but often not in the correct place for us to fully deliver the best environmental outcomes.
- The great opportunities to deliver the 25 Year Plan outcomes through more strategic engagement with planning.
- The need for NE to be clear about where we believe the best places are to develop and where the risks lie.

and

- The broad scope of Natural England's wildlife licensing work (covering education,

science and conservation activities)

- The desire to move away from site based licensing to strategic licensing, which will change the scope of engagement.
- The expectations around both statutory services and the continued risk of customer pressure (and reputational damage) given our current levels of resourcing.

3.3 The Board welcomed this strategic approach and recognised that resources must be shifted in order to maximise the benefit from this work.

3.4 The Board noted the need for clarity on the purpose of increased levels of charging and the need for investment in building chargeable services.

ACTION: Circulate NE's case for changes to the Environment Bill regarding our charging powers.

3.5 The Board expressed full support for officers driving forward the overall approach. They suggested work with the communications team to be proactive in explaining the way that wildlife licensing works.

4. Science Strategy Session (NEB 90 03)

4.1 Pete Brotherton and David Askew joined to present the item.

4.2 The presentation summarised some of Natural England's current and recent work on science and evidence, including:

- eDNA work which has allowed developers to save money by improving the way in which surveys are carried out for Great Crested Newts. These surveys are underpinning District Level Licensing and assists in identifying where new habitat should be created. The largest freshwater survey in the world has been carried out through a survey of 7,000 ponds.
- An uplands evidence review which confirmed the damaging impacts of burning on deep peat involving uplands work sets up what was known about uplands and our confidence in our evidence base. New ways of collecting data and applying new techniques is part of the monitoring program for uplands work.
- Evidence giving us data as to the economic impact of the coastal path. MENE data surveys over nearly 10 years have given a real insight into the engagement in this area.
- Evidence on climate change impacts and adaptations.

4.3 The Board noted the two main functions within the Chief Scientist Directorate (CSD): evidence services and specialist services.

- Evidence services - focuses on capturing and managing data. This involves a lot of long term activity such as NNR based data collection to show impacts of environmental change and Open Data work.
- Specialist services – specialists within the organisation including climate change specialist, deep habitat specialists, species specialists, soil specialists etc.

4.4 The Board noted:

- that scientific expertise and evidence was a “unique selling point” and that our communications and engagement needed to continue to present Natural England as an evidence led organization.

- That an important aspect of the work from CSD staff was in providing scientific leadership in developing new thinking and approaches to our work that shapes future delivery and future priorities.
- The need for evidence programmes to be adequately funded.

4.5 Tony Juniper ended this discussion by summarising key points:

- The need to integrate our use of evidence with the wider Defra group and the 25 Year Plan.
- The ongoing need for building baseline evidence and for working in partnership with NGOs and species groups in this area.
- The specific and increasing challenge around monitoring and maintaining SSSIs and the need to look to broader partnerships to address this need.
- The fact that funding opportunities for our science and evidence work may become available through projects involving natural capital and human health.

5. Corporate Risk Register (NEB 90 04)

5.1 Ken Roy introduced the item. This is the first review point for the revised Corporate Risk Register put in place following the Board workshop in June 2019.

5.2 The Board endorsed the draft risk register with some further steers:

- The need to further explore and unpack the risks around the match between Natural England's current positioning and resources and wider external ambitions and expectations.
- The specific need to explore risks related to the increased likelihood and severity of environmentally related incidents (wildfires, flooding etc).

5.3 Tony Juniper advised that the Board should review this regularly to check it remains up to date. Additions can be made as and when appropriate.

6. Health and Safety (NEB 90 05)

6.1 Richard Cornish informed the Board of the current Health and Safety position.

6.2 There had been an incident reported to HSE but this has been resolved and NE were found to be correct in their procedures.

6.3 There has been a rise in near hit reports. This includes normal seasonal factors as well as some more specific drivers (e.g. notifications of stress caused by some customer behaviours related to General Licensing work). There are other broader stress related illnesses reported, some linked to work loads and some to problems with specific elements of corporate services support. The Board advised that this position needs to be monitored closely.

6.4 There was discussion about making sure incidents and outstanding investigations are not delayed or left unfinished. There was reassurance that this is not the case, incidents are reviewed weekly and in some cases it is just a matter of concluding the paperwork. It was agreed that it would be helpful to have a note as to how old investigations are.

7. Stakeholder Engagement Plan (NEB 90 06)

7.1 The Board were asked to give their initial thoughts as to the plan, looking at what they need to act in their capacity as ambassadors.

- 7.2 The Board agreed that a “key message” document should be created which gives a few key points about subjects they can be approached about but are not necessarily familiar with. This would be a core resource which is generic in nature, and it may be useful for other members of staff who are not familiar with every aspect and piece of work NE is involved in.

ACTION: Key messages document to be produced, working with Defra communications team to create this.

- 7.3 The Board should be sent our “lines to take” documents and press releases.

ACTION: Board to receive “lines to take” documents and press releases as appropriate.

8. NNR Declarations (Saltwells and East Devon Pebble Beds) (NEB 90 07)

8.1 Saltwells

- Amended maps were produced.
- The Board discussed the significance of the proposed site, noting that the area is of significant geological interest due to the juxtaposition, quality and size of two geological layers. The site has important woodland habitat, 16 species of dragonfly present and other rich invertebrate interest. There is a community connection here as well. The site surrounds a housing estate. This NNR declaration helps secure greenspace for the community.
- There was a discussion as to the potential for any research opportunities looking at those who live in such close proximity to the proposed NNR declaration.
- The Board approved the NNR declaration for this site.
- The Board also agreed that the Canal and Rivers Trust be an Approved Body for the purposes of the s35 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

8.2 East Devon Pebble Beds

- The Board discussed the significance of the proposed site, noting that the area has high quality heathland and damselflies of European significance present at this site. This partnered with the high quality of management and environmental resources available makes the site suitable for declaration.
- The Board approved the NNR declaration for this site and Clinton Devon Estates as an Approved Body.

ACTION: The central NNR team to complete required actions following NNR and Approved Body decisions.

9. Board sub group updates (NEB 90 08)

9.1 NESAC

- The minutes for the most recent NESAC meeting were given to the Board in Andy Clements’ absence.

- The Board discussed:
 - The important recognition that MENE data has received.
 - An upcoming piece about People in Nature.
 - The need to be truly an evidence led organisation, even where results may include unexpected, uncomfortable findings.

9.2 JNCC

- There were no updates to report since the last Board meeting.

9.3 BIG

- The Board discussed:
 - One of the current areas of focus for BIG, which is to provide steers to the organisation's work on income generation.
 - Natural Capital plans and focusing on the areas where these can add value. There is some confusion amongst farmers about the way that this can work in their favour, for example because of the jargon used.
 - Opportunities such as Ox-cam corridor which support our strategic approach.

9.4 ARAC

- Following Julia Aglionby's departure as a Board Member, the board approved appointment of Teresa Dent to ARAC.

ACTION: Legal and Governance to complete required actions to formalise Teresa's appointment to ARAC.

10. **Board Diary and Forward Look (NEB 90 09)**

- 10.1 The Board noted a potential clash with JNCC meetings.
- 10.2 Placeholders have been issued for further meetings. There was discussion to come as to how many meetings a year are required.
- 10.3 Tony Juniper reflected on the meeting and the papers that had been produced. It was agreed that Board dinners are a great opportunity in terms of networking and content as part of stakeholder engagement.

Actions log

No	Agenda item/paper	Ref	Action	Owner
2	Confirmation of June minutes and matters arising	1.1	Produce confirmed June Board minutes.	Legal and Governance team
3	CEO Report	2.4.1	Review wording of for Mission Statement	Alan Law
4	CEO Report	2.5.2	Review presentation of KPIs	Gleny Lovell / Alan Law
5	Sustainable Development	3.6	Circulate NE's case for changes to the Environment Bill regarding our charging powers	Alan Law
6	Stakeholder Strategy	7.6	"Key messages" document to be produced for the Board	Alan Law
7	Stakeholder Strategy	7.7	Board to be sent "lines to take" documents and press releases as appropriate	Ken Roy
8	NNR Dedications	8.	Legal actions following designations to be completed	Central NNR Team
9	NNR Dedications	8.	Comms actions following designations required	Richard Cornish
10	Board sub group updates	9.4.1	Confirm Teresa Dent's appointment to ARAC	Legal and Governance Team