

# Natural England Board



## Confirmed minutes of the 94<sup>th</sup> Natural England Board meeting 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020

<b>Members Attending</b>	<b>Guests</b>
Dr Tony Juniper, Chairman	David Hill, Defra Director General Environment, Rural and Marine
Lord Blencathra, Deputy Chairman	Caroline Cotterell, Programme Director, Sustainable Landscapes
Dr Andy Clements	Dr Michael Morecroft, Climate Change Principal Adviser
Teresa Dent	Abdul Razaq, Finance Director
Catherine Dugmore	Ken Roy, Director Corporate Governance
Dr Simon Lyster	Graham Tibbetts, Principal Advisor
Henry Robinson	Mick Oliver, Chief of Staff (Secretariat)
Professor Michael Winter	
<b>Executive Team</b>	
Marian Spain, Interim Chief Executive (and ex-officio Board Member)	
Alan Law, Deputy Chief Executive	
Richard Cornish, Chief Officer Operations	
Dr Tim Hill, Chief Scientist	
Navroza Ladha, Chief Officer Legal and Governance	
Gleny Lovell, Chief Officer Planning and Performance	

## **Welcome from the Chairman and Declarations of Interest**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Teresa Dent and Professor Sue Hartley. The Board welcomed David Hill.

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 farming operation has a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme
  - He is Chair of the Hawk and Owl Trust who are a member of the Hen Harrier Recovery project
  - He has District Level Licence Newt Ponds installed on his farm
  - He is a member of the Deer initiative
  - He is a Director of as a director of a company that is a customer of Natural England's specialist licensing service.
  
- Simon Lyster declared a new interest:
  - He is a member of the Essex County Council Climate Action Commission.

### **1. Confirmation of December Minutes and Matters Arising (NEB M93 01) and January Strategy Session**

- 1.1. The Board confirmed the unconfirmed December minutes with minor amendments.
- 1.2. Under Matters arising, the Board offered congratulations to District Level Licencing team on the previous day's visit and the achievements in progressing a national programme.
- 1.3. Strategy session January notes. The Chairman reflected that this had been a good opportunity for the Board to step back from the shorter-term business and look to the future. The meeting notes were accepted.

**Action:** Send Link Defra policy Health and Harmony publication to Board. **(Ken Roy)**

### **2. Update from Board sub-committees**

- 2.1. **Audit & Risk Committee (ARAC) - NEB 94 01** Catherine Dugmore noted continuing concerns regarding the service levels from some areas of Defra Group Corporate Services. Internal Audit will report to ARAC on their review work in March. More broadly some of the Internal Audit programme is delayed and a further review is needed at ARAC. The Board were provided with an update on the work in developing the 19/20 Annual Report.
- 2.2. **Natural England Science Advisory Committee (NESAC) - NEB 94 02.** Andy Clements updated the Board on the work of NESAC looking at the evidence base related to bTB. This work had been supported by a broader group of relevant academics. The Board welcomed the work, noting the particular importance of understanding the social science evidence (e.g. with regard to biosecurity behaviours)

**Action:** Provide a copy of the draft CE Introduction to the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) to Board Members for comment. **(Ken Roy)**

### **3. CEO report (NEB 94 03)**

- 3.1. Marian Spain provided an update on current issues. With regards to the work on Hen Harrier Brood Management, the Board noted that Brood Management remains only one part of the broader action plan.
- 3.2. Richard Cornish led Board through the quarterly review of Natural England's performance against the agreed 19/20 KPIs. The Board noted some specific areas of interest:
- 3.3. England Coastal Path (ECP): Q2 performance is Red as a result of pre-election purdah delaying notification processes and we are on track to hit full target at end of year.
- 3.4. Alan Law and Tim Hill led the Board through an outline of the overall position on SSSI condition. The Board noted:
  - The history in this area of activity – from the investment since the National Audit Office investigation in 2008 and Public Accounts Committee Inquiry in 2009 through to the diminished levels of investment over recent years as a result of budget reductions.
  - The current reduced levels of confidence in the evidence on the condition of some sites.
- 3.5. Alan Law outlined the initial remedial work intended for 20/21, subject to budget discussions with Defra.
- 3.6. Financial Position. Abdul Razaq reported that we had a balanced position and had a final year-end outturn with Defra.

**Action:** Report to Ministers NE's role in the HHBM action plan, noting the wider scope **(Alan Law)**

**Action:** Ensure that in any public use of current condition data, we are clear about the current quality / currency issues. **(Alan Law/Caroline Cotterell)**

### **4. Corporate Risk Register (NEB 94 04)**

- 4.1. Gleny Lovell and Ken Roy introduced the update of the Corporate Risk Register at the end of Q2.
- 4.2. The Board noted:
  - The significance of the risks captured around Corporate Services provision and the need for this to be kept under active review

- The need for a full refresh of corporate risks to take place at a subsequent Board Meeting

## **5. bTB Update (NEB 94 05)**

5.1. Tim introduced the paper, setting out the background to policy and delivery in this area. The Board noted:

- The current work within Government to review the policy position and the likelihood of an announcement over coming weeks;
- The likely need or wish for Natural England to offer advice on any new detailed policy or guidance;
- The likelihood that current year activities would continue and that any new emphasis would impact in future years;
- The continuing operational challenges for Natural England in delivering the current licensing role, noting the increased scale of the areas currently requesting licensing;
- The potential constraints in Defra funding for this activity.

**Action:** When the government consultation is launched, consider any formal response from NE. **(Tim Hill)**

## **6. Planning for Conference of the Parties [COPs] (NEB 94 06)**

6.1. Mike Morecroft introduced a paper on the issues being discussed at the two COPs planned for 2020. The Board noted:

- The continuing opportunity and need for nature based solutions in the world's response to climate change;
- The opportunity for the UK (with Natural England support) to provide evidence and practical experience in making this connection;
- The centrality of the UK's Nature Recovery Network (NRN) as an example of what might be achieved;
- With specific reference to the biodiversity COP, the need to evolve the language – to move on from halting biodiversity loss to something more ambitious.

## **7. Nature Recovery Network Partnership (NEB 94 07)**

7.1. Alan Law introduced the paper setting out the plans for the partnership and the sequence of activities in the pipeline including major communications interventions (such as the launch of the Purbeck Heath Super National Nature Reserve (NNR).

7.2. The Board noted:

- The need for NRN plans to provide a framework for more local plans noting that different scales will be needed for different interventions and different partnerships;

- The need for a central role for Local Authorities but the risks related to their financial constraints;
- The need to challenge ourselves on the accessibility of the language.

## **8. Business planning (NEB 94 08)**

8.1. Gleny Lovell outlined the current position of financial planning for 20/21. The Board noted:

- The possible areas where additional funding may emerge;
- The range of areas where current shortfalls will continue into 20/21, noting the previous work on the scale of the funding shortfall for all statutory work.

8.2. The risks that the Executive are seeking to manage to ensure that the commitments made for 20/21 are deliverable and in managing the short-term nature of current planning (which only covers one year).

8.3. The Board explored the scale of central costs where the current plan is to invest in additional capacity for planning and operational delivery, specifically corporate areas such as legal and health and safety.

## **9. Governance improvement programme (NEB 94 09)**

9.1. Ken Roy provided a brief update on the overall programme and on the work carried out to develop a refreshed Board Code of Conduct, building on a Cabinet Office template.

9.2. The Board noted:

- The attached guidance with reference to the register of interests and to Board Member obligations regarding information security.

9.3. The Board endorsed the refreshed Code of Conduct for publication.

**Action:** Circulate a note to clarify the detailed guidelines re declarations of changes to business interests. **(Abdul Razaq)**

**Action:** Renew Board Declarations of Interest when new members join. **(Ken Roy)**

**Action:** Review options for secure management of information, for example use of Natural England email accounts for Board Members. **(Ken Roy)**

## **10. Forward look (NEB 94 10)**

10.1. The Board reviewed the programme of forward business.