

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Biodiversity Targets Advisory Group

Title: Biodiversity Targets Advisory Group (BTAG) Minutes

Meeting Date: 14th January 2022

Attendees: Charlies Godfray, Ian Hodge, Penny Johnes, James Wood, Melanie Austin and Defra group officials. Due to unforeseen circumstances Rosie Hail (Chair) was unable to attend.

1. Target Setting Update

- 1.1 BTAG asked whether consideration had been given to the proportion of species within species targets that are being delivered by the habitat target, reiterating that targets should not be siloed, but complement each other. BTAG also highlighted the importance of priority and protected sites contributing to the species targets. Work on determining the potential delivery pathways continues with Natural England and external organisations.

2. Species Extinction Risk Update

- 2.1 Natural England presented on progress to date on the extinction risk target and methodology
- 2.2 BTAG raised the issue that the index had too low of a representation of freshwater or coastal species. Natural England explained that the index used only species that had formal red list assessments at the Great Britain (GB) level. While some freshwater species are red listed at the European level it would not be appropriate to use this data for an England level target. BTAG mentioned that there is a lot of data collected and in appropriate format for species to be assessed but formal assessments haven't been made. Natural England noted the possibility that species Red List assessed in the future could potentially be added into the target.
- 2.3 BTAG raised an issue that scenario work didn't have uncertainties associated with the probability that actions will work. Currently the scenario and target work assumes that actions outlined will have 100% success, however past experience indicates this isn't always the case. Funding considerations should also be taken into account
- 2.4 BTAG mentioned that an alternative target could consider the extinction risk of a sample of species judged to be most important and influential.

3. Evidence Planning

- 3.1 BTAG mentioned that data gaps can never be totally filled and that the main question is how to deal with decisions when there is so much uncertainty in the evidence. Ecological resilience was raised as a key aspect to address and to ensure thinking is focused on places opposed to necessarily just species.

- 3.2 Collaborations were discussed as being very important for improvements in biodiversity, for example where both biodiversity and carbon capture can be improved opposed to one being prioritised to the detriment of the other.
- 3.3 Broader perspectives were seen as necessary, opposed to species specifically. BTAG also mentioned that there are already a lot of outputs, tools and models that could be better utilised rather than commissioning new work. But that there needs to be a move away from focusing on terrestrial over freshwater, coastal and marine.
- 3.4 Monitoring and evaluation was seen as an important aspect to focus on, BTAG members suggested carrying out a meta-analysis of monitoring datasets across the country to determine what the current landscape was, what monitoring data we have, what we don't have and where improvements can be made. Multiple agencies are collecting data, joining this up will help determine where the patches of information that are unconnected are in the knowledge network.
- 3.5 BTAG recognised that it is difficult to do all things with a limited pot of money but felt there were areas that could be focused on for maximum benefit and ways to get more value for money on collating evidence, e.g. more collaboration with research councils.

4. AOB

- 4.1 There was a discussion of the role for expert advice following public consultation with a slightly revised ToR for any new group to include representatives from freshwater and marine. It was agreed this group would have a broader focus than targets.