

Board meeting



Minutes of the **Natural England** Board meeting held on 22 February at the Roots and Shoots, Lambeth, London

Board Members

Dr Tony Juniper	Chair
Lord Blencathra	Deputy Chair
Rosamund Blomfield-Smith	
Dr Andy Clements	
Catherine Dugmore	
Dr Clare Fitzsimmons	
Kerry ten Kate	
Henry Robinson	
Kim Shillinglaw	
Peter Unwin	

Executive Team

Marian Spain	Chief Executive (and ex-officio Board Member)
Kirsty Carter-Brown	Chief Officer, Business Management
Oliver Harmar	Chief Operations Officer
Tim Hill	Chief Scientist
Navroza Ladha	Chief Officer, Legal, Governance and External Affairs
Alan Law	Chief Officer, Strategy

Guests

David Hill	Defra, Director General, Environment Rural and Marine
Pete Brotherton	Director, Science
Claudia Chambers	Director, National Operations
Ilana Conn	Defra Group- Director, Communications
Sean Cornall	Director, Corporate Governance
Rob Gornall	Manager, Operations (East Midlands)
James Marshall	Manager, Protected Sites
Laura McDixon	Manager, Health and Safety
Mike Morecroft	Principal Specialist, Climate Change
Mick Oliver	Chief of Staff, Legal and Governance
Abdul Razaq	Defra Group – Director of Finance
Laura Steuart	Lead Adviser, East Midlands team

Apologies

Professor Michael Winter

Item 1 Welcome from the Chair and declarations of interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Board Executive and guests to the 114th Board meeting; specifically Kirsty Carter Brown as Chief Officer for Business Management.

1.2 Andy Clements declared an interest as Chair of the England Species Reintroduction Task Force

Action: Governance Team

Item 2 Review of 18 January 2022 minutes and matters arising

2.1 The Board approved the minutes, subject to these amendments:

- Kerry ten Kate requested that her Record of Interest be amended from 'Member of Finance Earth' to 'on the Board of Finance Earth'
- Tony Juniper requested that COP26 be amended to COP15 in item 3.13
- Board approved the use of interactive links as a permanent feature within Board minutes to increase accessibility to the public
- Kerry ten Kate highlighted that item 6.13 be brought back as a Matter Arising to the next Board

Action: Governance Team

Item 3 Board sub-group updates

3.1. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC)

3.2. Catherine Dugmore provided an update on their ongoing discussions with the external auditors, noting that Natural England will shortly receive a report from KPMG containing their recommendations. Catherine stressed the need for Board to review the report recommendations before the next ARAC meeting on 9th March.

Action: Catherine Dugmore /Abdul Razaq

3.3. Natural England Science Advisory Committee (NESAC)

3.4. The meeting on 6th February, focussed on development of an indicator to evaluate changes to landscape and waterscape character in relation to [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza](#). The Board noted the transmission between wild birds and the prevailing focus on poultry and farming. David Hill recommended discussions between Gideon Henderson (Defra) and Tim Hill, to continue to build the evidence base.

3.5. Remuneration Committee (REMCOM)

3.6. No meeting since last Board.

- 3.7. Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- 3.8. JNCC met on 23rd November 2022 and focussed on its new environmental strategy. The meeting on 9 March was expected to focus on the Avian Influenza Task Force.
- 3.9. Natural England Landscape Advisory Panel (NELAP)
- 3.10. The last meeting was held on 7th February 2023 and focussed on landscapes and their meaning to people, history, sense of place, importance of access and urban and peri-urban space. The meeting on 14th March 2023 was expected to focus on [30 by 30](#).
- 3.11. Following an observation that the National Landscapes Parks and Trails partnerships had no reference to National Nature Reserves (NNRs), the Board asked Caroline Cotterell to ensure NNRs are considered within the correct forums. **Action: Caroline Cotterell**

Item 4 Quarterly health and safety update and report

- 4.1 The Board reviewed the incident statistics and analysis for quarter three, particularly noting the progress that had been made and steps still required. To address some of the steps required the Board was told about mandatory H&S training for senior staff and the development of a simpler and clearer framework for reporting. The Board would role model the importance of H&S by asking questions on site visits and feedback observations.

Item 5 Chief Executive's report

- 5.1 Marian Spain presented an overview of the significant and timely issues that had arisen since the last meeting. Particularly significant were the publication of the [Environmental Improvement Plan](#); two possible new roles for Natural England: water company fine delivery and a Marine Compensation Fund; the launch of the [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) (BNG) scheme; and an update on the [Nutrient Mitigation Scheme](#). On the latter, Alan Law agreed to share correspondence sent to landowners and developers. **Action: Alan Law**
- 5.2 On BNG, the Board noted the risk on delivering a robust system in time for the roll out. Alan Law confirmed systems would be in place. The Board requested an update on the system and approach as well as information on where the projects would be carried out later in 2023. **Action: Alan Law**
- 5.3 On the potential two new roles, the Board highlighted a need for multi-year financial flexibility and discretion to allocate resources. David Hill agreed –

noting NE would need the capacity - and advised that this would be looked at by the Secretary of State.

Item 6 Quarterly performance report

6.1 Oliver Harmar explained to the Board that the performance data had been scrutinised and was as expected given the new measures were only launched in the New Year and that the organisation was in a stable position going into Q4.

6.2 It was recognised that work was needed to determine what additional management information was needed underneath the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Progress Indicators (PIs) and that there should be an alignment of reporting and risks.

Action: Kirsty Carter-Brown

6.4 Abdul Razaq assured the Board that, although there was a slight financial overspend, the organisation was within allowable budget limits set by Defra. There was an in-year financial spend risk each year. Business delivery risks for the year ahead would be built into the profiling.

Action: Abdul Razaq

Item 7 Quarterly corporate risk review

7.1 The Board welcomed Kirsty Carter-Brown's plans to review and refresh the Risk Register. The Board asked for consideration of opportunities as well as threats, for regular horizon scanning and inclusion of risks relating to our partnership work. The Board discussed the increasing risk relating to Natural England's brand and it was agreed that brand management should be reflected in NE's risks.

Action: Kirsty Carter-Brown

7.5 Risk Deep Dive: People

7.6 The Board reviewed the risks to the skill, capability, attraction and retention of staff. The Board agreed the following:

- Introducing exit interviews for all leavers
- a refresh of the staff framework for 2024
- a review of the pay offer and pay flex;
- a reinvestment in staff training and apprenticeships;
- an increase in speed of recruitment and onboarding.

Action: James Diamond

Item 8 Natural England's approach to tackling climate change

8.1 The Board welcomed the opportunity to discuss NE's own approach and contribution to tackling climate change. The Board agreed that NE should aim to deliver its work in a way that was described as 'high nature, low carbon'.

- 8.2 The Board advised that implementation of the plan should include:
- Working closely with partners;
 - Defra group alignment to create more joint outcomes from the same effort;
 - Strong connections with communities; and
 - Good internal communications about embedding this in our approach, particularly at June’s all staff event.

Action: Tim Hill/Navroza Ladha

- 8.5 It was agreed that a revised plan would be developed and approved by the Executive Committee.

Action Pete Brotherton / Mike Morecroft

Item 9 Lincolnshire Coast NNR proposal and Approved Body recommendation

- 9.1 The Board approved the declaration of the Lincolnshire Coast National Nature Reserve (NNR). In addition, the Board agreed Northeast Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire County Council as the Approved Bodies for management of the NNR. Tony Juniper summarised the proposal as “fantastic”, tying it in to John Lawton’s principles of nature recovery, and praising it for its partnership working, social and economic dimension and thanked the team for bringing the proposal to the Board.

The Board made the following suggestions:

- for NExCo to consider creation of an NNR budget to allow more streamlined financing of such projects;
- for the Area Team to consider adding in KPIs such as numbers of visitors, species, to measure the success of the project.
- creation of KPIs and case studies on green finance, development of heritage work.

- 9.6 Tony outlined plans to align the announcement of the NNR declaration with the coronation of HM King Charles III in May 2023. The Area Team will discuss with the communications colleagues and partners.

Actions: Oliver Harmar

Item 10 Forward look

- 10.1 Sean Cornall presented the forward look of meetings for the remainder of 2023.