

Board Meeting

Minutes of the **Natural England** Board meeting held on 21 February in London

Attending

Dr Tony Juniper	Chair
Lord Blencathra	Deputy Chair
Prof Mel Austen	
Rosamund Blomfield-Smith	
Prof Lynn Dicks	
Catherine Dugmore	
Prof Clare Fitzsimmons	
Kerry ten Kate	
Henry Robinson	
Kim Shillinglaw	
Dame Caroline Spelman	
Peter Unwin	
Lizzy Campbell (Apprentice)	

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

Claudia Chambers	Director, National Operations
Ilana Conn	Defra Group, Communications
Sean Cornall	Director, Corporate Governance
David Drake	Director, Planning and Performance
Matt Heard	Director, Planning and Strategy
David Hill	Defra, Director General, Environment Rural and Marine
Jen Garrett	Defra Group, HR Director
Abdul Razaq	Defra Group, Director of Finance
David Renwick	Regional Director, North
Vicky Manton	Deputy Director East Midlands

Item 1 Welcome from the Chair and Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the Board, Executive and guests to the 120th Board meeting.
- 1.2 Board members made the following comments on the Register of Interests
- Henry Robinson requested a correction to record that the ‘test and trials’ for landscape recovery is not remunerated; and that his farming enterprise is remunerated.
 - Rosamund Blomfield-Smyth flagged up her interest in bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) matters as she is a cattle farmer.
 - Kerry ten Kate declared herself as a donor to Lyscombe project.
- (Governance Team to update ROI – immediate)**

Item 2 Review of November Minutes and Matters Arising

- 2.1 The Board approved the minutes and matters arising with no comments.
- 2.2 The Board asked that there be a review of the cycle of meetings as part of Forward Look update, to ensure that the Board was meeting sufficiently regularly.
- (Governance Team – immediate)**

Item 3 Chief Executive’s Report

- 3.1 Marian Spain presented her report to the Board and outlined three additional areas for discussion: the role of Consultees in planning and the lack of resources within Local Authorities meant that more work was being directed towards Natural England (NE); the absence of a Defra decision on Green Social Prescribing; the need to be mindful in external discussions that there would be a General Election this year. Marian gave detailed updates on the following topics.
- 3.2 **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):** Mandatory BNG for major developments commenced on 12 February together with the opening of the national Biodiversity Net Gain register and statutory biodiversity credit sales service. Respective accountabilities had been agreed with Defra, noting that responsibility for delivery and compliance rests with Local Planning Authorities (LPAs). Alan Law outlined that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) had been signed off on 10 February. NE had received written assurance with Defra but there are two ongoing risks: firstly, the need for a programme for monitoring onsite and offsite work; secondly, the need to provide scrutiny in relation to the statutory credits, which would be monitored through the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee.
- 3.3 **Hoads Wood, Kent:** The issue of illegal dumping on the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which had significantly raised the ground levels, was outlined. Navroza Ladha highlighted that NE was working closely with the police

and the Environment Agency (EA) on the legal steps to prevent the problem from reoccurring. NE officers had been central to the enforcement action and it was intended that NE will continue to be involved in the remediation stages. The Board supported the work done by NE to address the issue. Clear external messages were needed to the public regarding the actions taken to address the problem. (Internal Communication team to work with Navroza)

- 3.4 **Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB):** Marian Spain and Tim Hill highlighted the key points from Defra's consultation document and the potential new policy. It was noted that NE's analysis of evidence was ongoing, with close liaison with Defra and APHA to try to achieve shared view of the evidence. Tim Hill further explained that NE would not have an active role in implementing the potential new policies. The Board felt that it was important to continue to develop the science and evidence and to highlight the legal challenges and any concerns with the proposed new approach. With regards to sign off of the NE response to the consultation, the Board agreed to delegate this to Chair in consultation with Natural England Science Advisory Committee (NESAC) Chair.
- 3.5 **Landscape Recovery (LR):** Marian explained that LR is the part of Defra's Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) which will fund long-term, large-scale, bespoke projects designed to enhance the natural environment and deliver significant environmental benefits, alongside the sustainable production of food. It was proposed that NE be the joint lead delivery partner for the enrolment and development phases with EA; and recommended that NE CEO be the Accounting Officer (AO) for the Project Implementation Phase (PIP). This represents an estimated £10+ billion investment in nature recovery and will enable NE to deliver nature recovery at scale. Alan Law stated that the LR project was scheduled to be launched in May 2024 and work was ongoing to produce an MOU with Defra and NE.
- 3.6 The Board supported the proposal and commented that the work on LR would offer NE the opportunity to build good working relationships with the farming community. The Board asked that NE would clear on the required resources, as well as the accountability and the governance for the work.
- 3.7 The Board raised the following areas in relation to the CEO Report.
- **Penwith Moors appeals:** Navroza highlighted that Defra had received seven appeals in relation to conditioned consents. Four of these would be dealt with by written representations and one was progressing as a hearing. NE was waiting for confirmation from Defra regarding the remaining two.
 - **Hen Harriers:** Marian confirmed that NE had extended the trial, as more evidence was required.
- 3.4 The following requests were made by the Board:
- Hen Harrier management trial: Chair and CEO to raise results and issues of the trial with Ministers when they next meet. **(Alan/Tim to provide briefing - immediate)**

- Hoads Wood: Produce Comms Plan which sets out the steps being taken by NE to restore the site. (**Oliver Harmar – May/June 2024**)
- Conservation Covenants: A written briefing for Board (including narrative on strategy; how planning to use; likely demand etc). (**Alan Law / Graeme Kerr - immediate**)
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): Monitoring and results to be included in future CEO report; and for Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC) to maintain visibility of progress and risks around statutory credits. (**Alan Law – ongoing during 2024**)
- Nature Cities: To provide confirmation of the number of sites in the first tranche of Nature Cities. (**Alan Law - immediate**) [*Post meeting note: Alan subsequently confirmed that there would 50 participating sites and five to be accredited*].
- bTB consultation: The preparation of a response to Defra’s bTB cull consultation paper by a Board task and finish group by the end March 2024. Membership of that group to include Henry, Peter, Lynn, Caroline and Clare. One Board member flagged up previous related business interests. The Board asked Navroza to review the Board member’s current situation to check for any potential conflict of interest.
- Landscape Recovery: To organise a Board briefing webinar followed by and extraordinary ARAC with broader Board membership. (**Governance Team - immediate**)
- Good news stories – To organise a media handling plan to highlight good news stories for Natural England. (**Ilana Conn – June 2024**)

Item 4 Quarter Three Performance Report and Finance Report

Performance Report

4.1 Oliver Harmar summarised the key headlines from the report, which were that the organisation:

- is starting to make good progress on initiatives that will deliver nature recovery locally at scale and across the connecting people with nature work.
- is maintaining customer service levels across licencing, planning and farm advice despite increased demand; further reform needed to make this sustainable.
- continues to be challenged by SSSI condition and Marine Protected Areas, exacerbated by inexperience across many frontline teams. Recovery plans are in place.

- faces a significant resource budget pressure, largely due to assumptions in our start-of-year position that latterly have become unsafe, rather than a general failing in budget management and forecasting.

4.2 Claudia explained that some RAG statuses have been downgraded this quarter in response to Board feedback at the previous quarterly reporting meeting. She highlighted the main delivery risks and issues as: High turnover in some technical niches and geographies impacting delivery for some key work areas; challenges achieving the pace of reform needed to deliver next year's Action Plan; concerns about Defra Corporate Services capacity; and potential reputational issues.

4.3 Claudia presented the 'Measures of Success' in-year progress metrics reports. The Board highlighted the need for clarity between 'net' and 'absolute' species figures and stressed that the metrics needed to make sense if reviewed externally. The Board asked for the Measures of Success for 2024/25 to be reviewed with regards to species to ensure that they were applicable strategically for both stopping nature decline and for encouraging nature recovery. **(Alan Law / Matt Heard & David Drake – April 2024).**

4.4 The Board discussed the merits of increased use of technology, e.g. iPads on site and remote sensing data, and noted this could be explored further by NESAC if required.

Finance

4.5 Kirsty Carter-Brown explained the factors which had led to the resource budget pressure:

- Business Planning and Q1 assumptions around budget flexibility (as presented to the Board in May 2023) had resulted in circa £5m impact.
- Deliberate and planned over-programming of programme spend aimed at managing an anticipated underspend risk based on previous years' experience had resulted in circa £5m impact.
- A shortfall in non-Grant-in-Aid (GiA) income due to fewer full-time equivalent (FTE) staff delivering fees and charges than planned, and reduced external funding linked to project delays (caused by staffing levels and gaining permissions), had resulted in circa £2m pressure.

4.6 Kirsty described the actions in hand to mitigate the pressure. These included procurement controls; possible capitalisation of pay costs; and restrictions on travel and subsistence. In assessing the progress to date, she explained that Directors had been given revised FTE targets, which were being supported by recruitment controls and a review of fixed-term and short-term contracts. There was increased analysis of funding streams and agreed financial reporting and plans for 2024/25. This included new reporting processes and a review of the coding on the ORION time recording system. The plans had been scrutinised by Delivery Committee and Defra colleagues.

4.7 The Board queried the impact that these controls were having on delivery and whether better training was needed by staff on budget management. There was also some nervousness expressed over the short timescale and limited

resource allocated to driving forward efficiencies in 2024/25. The Board asked that ARAC scrutinise the Efficiencies Programme for efficacy.

(Kirsty Carter-Brown / David Drake – March 2024).

- 4.8 David Hill stressed that there were likely to be RDEL pressures across the whole Defra Group in 2024/25, with a change from recent years' growth pattern into more resource constraints.
- 4.9 Alan Law reflected on the likely picture in the third year of the Spending Review programme. He noted areas for which reductions may be expected were pay, Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), the biodiversity budget and social prescribing. He noted that the move from expansion to contraction offered opportunities to focus on efficiencies and transformation to delivery outcomes. He stressed that the organisation would need to exercise caution on any additional in-year requests. He committed to return to the Board in April with a fuller picture, which would include a much tighter control regime for 2024/25.
- 4.10 The Board stressed the need for clarity on how the efficiencies will play out and impact on staff, being mindful of staff stress levels considering the high percentage of absence currently attributed to stress. The staff attrition rates were also referenced. It was noted that the forthcoming People Survey would provide valuable insight.
- 4.11 The Board requested that the Strategic Workforce Plan be scrutinised by Remuneration Committee (REMCOM) to ensure it addresses capacity, capability and shape and that Business Planning reflects the workloads via prioritisation **(Kirsty Carter-Brown / James Diamond & Mike Cuthbert – June 2024)**; and then for this item to return to the Board for further consideration **(Governance Team to schedule)**

Item 5 Quarter Three Health and Safety Report

- 5.1 Claudia Chambers introduced the session and highlighted that the purpose of the paper was to provide the Board with incident reporting for quarter three (Q3), a summary of significant incidents, the current position on the Health and Safety (H&S) strategy, the next steps and a review of progress against the 23/24 action plan.
- 5.2 Claudia outlined that NE was making progress on the organisation's H&S culture through initiatives such as the H&S Strategy. However, she explained that there was still more to do, as demonstrated by the incident investigation and near hit reporting statistics.
- 5.3 Claudia highlighted that four significant incidents were reported in Q3 and one in Q4. Safeguarding reporting had remained steady through the year, but there had been more cases than the previous year (15 compared to 11 in 2022/23). The Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) and Human Resources teams will continue to provide support and further communications were in progress to help staff recognise safeguarding concerns in different work-related settings.

- 5.4 The Board raised the issue of staff working over 40 hours per week and queried whether this related to the increase in stress reporting. Claudia Chambers confirmed that stress was likely to be linked to excess hours and the H&S team were working with Team Leaders to address the demands on their staff.
- 5.5 The Board highlighted the importance of the refurbishment of the NE offices. The Board also noted a possible issue with the rates of near hits reducing. Oliver Harmar outlined that the H&S team were working to address the near hits reporting and would continue to raise the importance of staff reporting these incidents.

Item 6 Quarter Three Risk Report

- 6.1 Sean Cornall explained that the Board were asked to review the strategic risk report and consider: (a) the framing of the main themes that may affect NE success in the next 1-2 years; (b) the proposed response given the severity and likelihood of the risks; and (c) the appropriateness of the mitigations which had been put in place.
- 6.2 The Board were further asked to consider: the recommended new approach and format for the strategic risk report; and renaming the 'geopolitical landscape' risk as 'operating context'.
- 6.3 The Board noted the severity of the Digital Security risk and asked that Sean clarify with Defra colleagues the actions needed to enable effective mitigation. **(Navroza Ladha / Sean Cornall)**
- 6.4 The Board felt that it would be important to address the political and economic mandate and to ascertain how the findings from the Dasgupta Review can assist NE in their approach. The Board asked the Executive to explore how the organisation could work with banks and insurance companies on the business case for investing in the communities they serve to secure environmental outcomes; and to work with the industry on how to better evidence and communicate how nature contributes to growth. Rosamund and Kerry agreed to support by providing potential industry contacts. The Board also suggested that this could form the basis for a large-scale stakeholder event or conference later in the year. Navroza was asked to consider this further. **(Navroza Ladha – September 2024)**
- 6.5 The Board were assured that The Executive have the correct range of activities and tools in place for a risk analysis. They approved the renaming of the 'geopolitical landscape' risk as 'operating context'.

Item 7 Tools for Delivering the Nature Recovery Network (NRN)

- 7.1 Alan Law introduced the paper which asked to the Board to note the main mechanisms owned or significantly influenced by NE to deliver the Nature Recovery Network; and comment on how these mechanisms should be

prioritised and deployed to support the Government's nature recovery ambitions.

- 7.2 Caroline Cotterell outlined the three main elements of the NRN: highest value nature sites at the core (mainly Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)); important wildlife-rich areas connecting and buffering the core aimed at achieving the 30by30 targets; and a wider more benign environment, taking nature to 15 mins of where people live. She described the NE levers which related to each of these including Landscape Recovery within Environmental Land Management (ELM); National Nature Reserves (NNRs); land acquisition and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs). She explained next steps would include progressing the LNRSs to spatially map and co-ordinate local action to achieve the NRN; further discussions with Defra on the contribution of different levers to achieve Biodiversity targets; and the development of investable projects.
- 7.3 The Board commented on the benefits of having a strategic grid to set out each of the tools and how best to use them; and to consider how to link this to delivery of KPIs. It was suggested that tying this into a Land Use Strategy could be helpful, supporting integrated planning which would be science based, factual and linked to development plans. The Board welcomed the maps that illustrated how nature and growth levers were being deployed in combination to achieve nature recovery at scale in places. It was noted that other beneficial spatial modelling had been carried out by the RSPB which NE might usefully consider. The prospects for blended finance were also noted.
- 7.4 Whilst good data was held on 'supply standards' (baselines, metrics and performance) it was felt more could be done on the equivalent 'demand standards'. The need to extend this approach to include marine areas was also highlighted, and it was noted that this was the intention if the Board considered the approach helpful.
- 7.5 The Board requested a further refinement of the proposals to also include details such as 'purpose, extent, cost and funding'; to apply to marine; and to consider whether this could be developed into a decision tree tool for future designations work. Progress will be reported back as part of the next KPI A deep dives **(Alan Law / Caroline Cotterell – November 2024)**

Item 8A Proposed NNR Declaration: Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood

- 8.1 Vicky Manton and Ian Evans explained that the purpose of the item was to seek approval from the Board for the declaration of Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood as a National Nature Reserve. This would be a creation of a new National Nature Reserve (NNR) which would be a part of The King's Series. The total area would be 439ha, of which 428ha is notified as SSSI. In addition, the Board were asked to approve Bradgate Park Trust as a new Approved Body to hold and manage land within NNR.

8.2 Vicky outlined that Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood, met the NNR selection principles in these respects:

- Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Recovery: Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood were nationally and internationally important sites for Precambrian, Cambrian and Quaternary geology.
- Research, Experimentation, Data collection. Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood, were amongst the most important sites, globally, for research into Precambrian environments and palaeontology.
- Access, Engagement, Inclusion. Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood are popular destinations for visitors from Leicester and surrounding areas. There is a visitor and interpretation centre and a long history of successfully engaging the public in the site's wonderful geology and biodiversity, as well as its rich archaeological heritage. The Trust's strategic aims include the provision of high quality, accessible and diverse opportunities for all people (regardless of age or ability) to discover and enjoy the site, and the delivery of informal and formal educational and other learning experiences for visitors of all ages.

8.3 Board members felt that the presentation provided a good illustration of the principles of the NNRs, but they queried the resource implications. Vicky reassured the Board that Area Team staff were working closely on the NNRs, with partners and the NE NNR Team and had enough resource to complete the declaration work. After declaration, the work with the Bradgate Park Trust, would be delivered through normal day to day resourcing of work on SSSIs.

8.4 The Board appreciated the proximity to areas of deprivation and the diverse range of visitors; and that City and County Councils, the National Forest and the National Trust were all involved in the governance of the Trust. It was thought that this would help steer the Trust's future vision and priorities to build on and deliver a high-quality experience in a high-quality environment rich in geodiversity, biodiversity and historic heritage for all its visitors, regardless of age, ethnicity and social background.

8.5 The ability of the Bradgate Park Trust to raise income through on and off-site facilities such as the car parks, commercial activities and their sensitively located cafés was noted. As a result, the Bradgate Park Trust would not be solely dependent on grants from external bodies as only a small proportion of their funds is gained from these sources.

8.5 The Board approved the proposal and the Area Team was asked to take forward the designations. **(Oliver Harmar / Vicky Manton – immediate)**

Item 8B Proposed NNR declaration: Borrowdale Rainforest

8.6 David Renwick and Jean Johnston explained the purpose of the paper was for the Board to approve the declaration of the Borrowdale Rainforest as a National Nature Reserve. This would be the creation of a completely new NNR, that

would be entirely managed by the National Trust. The National Trust was already an 'Approved Body' for the purpose of holding NNRs.

- 8.7 They explained that Borrowdale meets the selection principles for an NNR for the following reasons:
- The area contains the greatest concentration of temperate rainforest in England, long recognised as one of England's finest sites for nature. It is the most important locality in England for Atlantic mosses and liverworts and the most important site in Northern England for oceanic lichens.
 - It also contains high quality wood pasture, numerous ancient and veteran trees, and transitions to valuable grassland, upland and wetland habitats; contains sites of national geological importance; and helps correct the under-representation of upland habitats in the NNR series.
 - It will be a place where diverse people can come to enjoy nature in its richest form. There are already high visitor numbers to much of the site and the emphasis will be on increasing inclusivity and on improving the quality of people's experience and understanding of the natural world; and will become a hub for research into the management of temperate rainforests, in particular (but not only) the impacts of atmospheric nitrogen deposition.
- 8.8 The Board appreciated that the Area Team has managed the risk of negative reaction from the farming community positively, by outlining the opportunities, such as those arising through agri-environment agreements, and working with younger farmers, who could switch from sheep to cattle. It was noted a programme of farmer engagement and a dedicated post were in place to support this.
- 8.9 The Board also felt that it would be important to have the full support of the National Trust, especially in relation to tenant farmers. However, although the National Trust were an important partner, the partnership could also be expanded to include other organisations in the local area. The Board asked how the Area Team were managing the high number of deer on the land. It was confirmed that the deer population was effectively managed by the National Trust, but that more control could be beneficial.
- 8.10 The Board approved the declaration of the Borrowdale Rainforest as a National Nature Reserve and the Area Team was asked to take forward the designation. **(Oliver Harmar / David Renwick – immediate)**

Item 9 Key Performance Indicator KPI D Deep dive

- 9.1 The ambition for KPI D is to 'work with a wider range of local partners and diverse communities to create wildlife-rich, accessible, characterful places for people to live and work underpinning economic sustainability'.
- 9.2 The Board reflected on the previous day's stakeholder event, positively noting stakeholders' willingness to engage; the impact that could be unleashed by

having the right partnerships; and the scope to build capability and capacity. The need for blended finance was flagged up; as was the need to clearly demonstrate the significant value of this work. David Hill recognised this as a Defra Group challenge and agreed to share Defra's comments on the McKinsey finance report with the Board for information. **(David Hill - immediate)**

- 9.3 Matt Heard opened the presentation by describing the key priorities and progress against the metrics. It was noted that there were 49 'Priority Places' where NE was actively working with partners; and there were 12 live Nature Recovery Projects with 13 more to be added under the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). Oliver Harmar noted that the challenges for the organisation included: the complexity of the funding landscape; how best to work with Defra to give assurance and deliver in a place; opportunities for efficiency; and issues with staff turnover and the need to secure longevity.
- 9.4 After further presentation, the conversation examined cross-Government drivers and how Nature Recovery could possibly be accelerated. Suggestions included closer working with DLUHC; identifying possible solutions with Defra; having clarity with stakeholders on where NE bring most value to partnership working (for example in monitoring, measuring and certifying).
- 9.5 David Hill acknowledged that there wasn't a binary decision between statutory work and place-based working. Rather if NE could evidence that place-based working was the best way to delivery statutory outcomes then Defra would be open to creative discussions. David Renwick responded that Area Teams would welcome flexible resource to be able to have more constructive conversations with partners.
- 9.6 The Board asked for the team to further develop proposals for the evaluation of the impact of place-based working, including their contribution to EIP targets, with a view to these informing spatial prioritisation and funding bids. **(Alan Law / Matt Heard / David Renwick)**
- 9.7 The Board asked to revisit this again, noting the pivotal importance of this work and that, if possible, a green finance discussion should be included at the Board Strategy Session in April. **(Governance team to liaise with Alan Law - immediate)**

Item 10 Forward Look, Sub-committees and AOB

Forward Look

- 10.1 Sean Cornall talked through the planned Board timetable for the coming year, including the stakeholder events. Board members' attention was drawn to the need to prioritise their commitments as set out in the paper, to make best use of their available time.
- 10.2 The Board asked the Governance Team to:
- Avoid conflicts with multiple webinars or meetings in a day; and ideally reduce to just one in each of the non-board meeting months.

- Arrange webinar briefing and site visit for Penwith (tentatively August 24).
- Hold a webinar briefing when the general election is announced.
- Provide a glossary of acronyms with future Board packs

(Governance Team - immediate)

Board sub-committee updates

- 10.3 Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC): Catherine Dugmore outlined the Extraordinary ARAC Meeting which had been held on 7 February to discuss BNG readiness and preparation for the Annual Report and Accounts. She explained that ARAC had also been kept abreast of the budget pressures.
- 10.4 Remuneration Committee (REMCOM): Peter Unwin outlined that at the last meeting on 11 December 2023 the committee had recognised the work done to secure the pay award; and referenced the work in hand for, and action plan to address, the six main causes of workplace stress.
- 10.5 Natural England Landscapes Advisory Panel (NELAP): Rosamund Blomfield-Smith provided an update from the meeting 9 and 10 January. She outlined that the NELAP members considered the principles that should underpin a new National Park designation. Rosamund confirmed that as her term with the NE Board was ending, Dame Caroline Spelman would take over as interim NELAP co-chair until a permanent replacement was appointed.
- 10.6 Natural England Science Advisory Committee (NESAC): Clare Fitzsimmons and Lynn Dicks outlined that at the last meeting on 29 November 2023, the committee discussed that current members would be offered the opportunity to remain on the committee for another term or to step down. New independent members would be recruited. Clare and Lynn also highlighted that the committee discussed the use of big data to understand people's enjoyment of the outdoors and the risks from avian influenza to wild birds associated with the release of captive-reared mallards. Actions:
- NESAC membership – to confirm mechanism for membership changes (eg whether approval is needed from Board). **(Navroza Ladha / Sean Cornall)**
 - Provide list of potential nominations and approach used in Gideon Henderson's recent review of Defra memberships. **(David Hill)**
- 10.7 Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC): Mel Austen provided an update from the meeting on 21 and 22 November 2023, which had discussed the situation re membership and no permanent chair. Mel explained that Charlie Banner is currently acting chair. Mel continues to chair the Marine sub-group of the Committee and because of the current shortage of Committee Members has rejoined JNCC's ARAC.
- 10.8 NNR Steering Group: Kim Shillinglaw outlined the work undertaken by the committee regarding membership of the group to ensure a better representation of NNR Approved Bodies and owners of land with whom NE work. This included a National Park Authority, The Crown Estate, a County Council and Private

Landowners NNR Steering Group. Kim also explained that due to resource constraints 'NNR Week 2024' may not proceed as planned.

Closing remarks

- 10.9 The Board expressed their gratitude to Ian Fugler and Caroline Cotterell for their contributions to Natural England over many years. Both directors were both due to retire imminently.
10. The Board also formally expressed their gratitude and recognition to Rosamund Blomfield-Smith and Kerry ten Kate for their service on their Board since June 2020. Their tenures were due to end on 29th February.