

# Biodiversity Expert Committee: terms of reference

Date: March 2024

## 1 Aim

The Biodiversity Expert Committee (BEC) is a sub-committee of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) Science Advisory Council (SAC).

The BEC will provide independent expert advice, challenge and scientific support to Defra specialists and policy makers in matters related to biodiversity.

## 2 Remit and role

Members of the BEC will provide independent technical and scientific advice in matters related to biodiversity. This includes, but is not limited to:

- advising and supporting Defra in developing and implementing an effective and efficient strategy for obtaining and using evidence and scientific advice relating to biodiversity
- advising on and providing assurance on the process for biodiversity evidence gathering, modelling, and monitoring and evaluation
- providing timely targeted advice and expert judgement where necessary, – this includes the option for Defra to commission BEC members to produce short advice papers at pace, or to carry out analysis, quality assurance, evidence gathering exercises and reviews
- providing constructive challenge on Defra's biodiversity evidence, including reviewing evidence and analytical products produced by Defra teams, as well as research work commissioned by Defra or its arm's length bodies
- providing clear guidance on latest trends and hot topics within fields of study
- identifying sources of additional expert external advice to input to Defra evidence
- providing expert advice to senior Defra biodiversity policy boards, when needed

The group's scope will cover biodiversity policy in terrestrial, freshwater and marine areas across England, the UK, UK overseas territories and internationally.

The BEC will be a forum for providing expert advice and not a forum for lobbying or critiquing policy development.

Expertise within the group is broad across areas relating to biodiversity, including but not limited to: data analysis; climate change; modelling; agriculture; international; marine;

freshwater; terrestrial; social science; and economics. Specific expertise of members are outlined in the member biographies.

If an agenda item will benefit from expertise outside of the BEC, the chair can co-opt members of the SAC or its subgroups to attend a meeting. For example, the chair could co-opt members of the Social Science Expert Group.

### **3 Background of committee**

The new Biodiversity Expert Committee is being set up by the Central Science Division within the Science and Analysis Group. It will report to Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser. The BEC will have a dispersed secretariat, with support from the Science and Analysis Group and staff from policy teams across Defra that work on biodiversity. The primary secretariat responsibility will be held by the Science and Analysis Group.

## **4. Membership and operating procedures**

### **4.1 Members**

Members will be recruited as individuals based on their expertise and knowledge of issues relevant to the focus of the Biodiversity Expert Committee. The range of expertise required may change or evolve over time. This means the BEC will regularly review the balance of skills, expertise and experience of members in light of current and anticipated future work programmes. If necessary, additional experts may be co-opted for a limited period of time to provide specific input.

Members and the chair are appointed for an initial fixed term of 3 years, and may be reappointed for a second term.

### **4.2 Secretariat**

The secretariat are responsible for:

- promoting the committee and communicating its role within the department
- making sure the committee delivers value for money in line with any independent review
- preparing and circulating agendas and papers for meetings
- supporting the committee by assembling and analysing information and recording conclusions of the meetings

The secretariat are the main contact point for members:

[biodiversity.expert.committee@defra.gov.uk](mailto:biodiversity.expert.committee@defra.gov.uk).

### **4.3 Meeting time and format**

The BEC will be a long running advisory group that is reviewed every 5 years by the Science and Analysis Group.

The BEC will hold 2 in person meetings every 6 months, with 2 teleconference meetings in-between these. As well as these regular meetings, shorter meetings may be requested on an ad hoc basis to discuss specific issues raised by policy teams. These may involve a subset of members or individuals with specific expertise. If an ad hoc meeting is required, these are expected to take less than 6 hours a month.

Additional pieces of work will be commissioned on an ad hoc basis subject to BEC member agreement. For example, this could include pieces of analysis, advice papers, evidence gathering exercises or reviews.

Preparation time for meetings is expected to be half the meeting length. On average, the time commitment for BEC members is expected to be less than 16 hours a month. This will be lower on months without a quarterly meeting.

Members will be provided with a copy of the official's paper, presentation or questions. They are expected to have read these documents before the meeting and come with advice prepared. These documents are typically confidential and classified as [official-sensitive](#) and should not to be circulated outside of the meeting attendees.

The secretariat will endeavour to give as much notice as possible with regards to meetings dates. The agenda items for discussion and supporting papers will be emailed to the members before the meeting. The aim is to send papers to members at least 4 days before the meeting where possible.

#### **4.4 Remuneration and expenses**

It is optional for members to claim remuneration and travel expenses for Biodiversity Expert Committee related work.

The current remuneration for attendance of committee meetings is £39 per an hour for committee members. This includes preparation time of half the meeting length. Preparation could include peer-reviewing papers for the meeting, reading and assessing pre-meeting papers and any preparatory work.

Some meetings that are in-person may require members to travel far and stay overnight, especially if the meeting is over 3 hours long. Accommodation can be booked by the secretariat or reimbursed if members provide a receipt. To claim travel and subsistence expenses, members will be provided with a claim form accompanied by guidance notes. Any queries regarding claims should be referred to the secretariat.

The department has due regard to diversity. Expenses may include reimbursing reasonable additional childcare or other carer costs and reasonable additional expenses of disabled people that occur due to BEC commitments.

#### **4.5 Conflict of interest**

If members have any real or perceived conflict of interest that might affect their ability to undertake this role, they should share details with the secretariat. Members should disclose information on any relevant business interest, public appointment or position of authority, including any other connection with commercial, public or voluntary bodies.

#### **4.6 Member standards and behaviour**

Members of the committee will be required to comply with standards and behaviour as set out in [the seven principles of public life](#).

#### **4.7 Changes to these terms**

These terms of reference may be amended at any time.