

Minutes of the board meeting held on Wednesday 7 May 2025 at the Marine Biological Association, Plymouth and via MS Teams

Present

Alan Lovell
Stewart Davies
Ines Faden Da Silva
Brittany Harris
Maya Leibman
Lilli Matson
Sarah Mukherjee
Mark Suthern
Jon Watts (Items 1 to 5)

Chair
Board Member
Board Member
Board Member
Board Member
Board Member
Board Member
Board Member

In attendance

Philip Duffy
Tamara Bruck

Chief Executive
Executive Director, Strategy,
Transformation and Assurance
Director, Finance
Defra, Director, Floods and Water

Anna Caffyn
Sebastian Catovsky (Items 1 to 4, 7 to 9)
(virtual)
Sarah Chare
Matt Cornford
Chris Davis
Caroline Douglass

Executive Director, Local Operations
Director, Strategy
Deputy Director, Communications
Executive Director, Flood and
Coastal Risk Management
Executive Director, Environment and
Business

Laura Milton
Verity Zurita

Director, Legal and Audit Services
Deputy Director, Governance and
Engagement

Corry McDiarmid
Alex Hole
Beth Lamb

Board Governance Manager
Board Governance Senior Advisor
Board Governance Advisor

Item 2

Sir Jon Cunliffe

Chair, Independent Water
Commission

Anne Dacey (virtual)
Katherine Newell

Deputy Director, Water Futures
Co-Head, Independent Water
Commission Secretariat

Victoria Williams

Water Strategy Manager

Items 5

Susan Codling (virtual)

KPMG Auditor

Item 6

Sarah Cook (virtual)

Director, People and Assurance

Harry Leeder (virtual)

Strategy Manager

Alice Mayne (virtual)

Deputy Director, Strategy

Item 7

Jennie Donovan (virtual)

Director, Nature and Place

Claire Porter (virtual)

Deputy Director, Planning and Place

Item 8

Rachel Ashburner (virtual)

Sustainable Funding Manager

Andy Wilkinson (virtual)

Deputy Director, Future Funding

Item 1: Apologies and declarations of interest**Apologies**

1.1 The board noted apologies from David Hill.

Declarations of Interest

1.2 No new declarations were raised.

Item 2: Water Review: session with Sir Jon Cunliffe

- 2.1 The board welcomed Sir Jon Cunliffe, Katherine Newell, Anne Dacey and Victoria Williams to the meeting. Sir Jon provided background information on the Water Review commissioned by the Government, including the context, timelines and current progress.
- 2.2 The board noted the context provided as well as Sir Jon's initial reflections, key proposals and likely direction of travel.
- 2.3 The board discussed management of water at a catchment level, strategic oversight and the mechanisms for regional control. The board also raised questions to Sir Jon regarding financing of proposed changes.
- 2.4 The board encouraged Sir Jon to also consider emerging risks around water resources and the other sectors that impact water quality.
- 2.5 The board acknowledged the work done so far by the Environment Agency to improve performance on water regulation.

Item 3: Meeting administration: minutes and matters arising

- 3.1 The Chair welcomed Jon Watts to his first Environment Agency Board meeting.

Approval of minutes from 18 March and 31 March 2025 meetings

3.2 **The board approved** the 18 March 2025 meeting minutes subject to minor amendments to paragraphs 13.4 and 13.5.

3.3 **The board approved** the 31 March 2025 meeting minutes.

Matters arising

3.4 The board noted the progress of all actions.

3.5 The board requested that the due date for action reference BOARD2025-020 be brought forward to the June meeting.

Item 4: Finance update

4.1 The Director of Finance provided an update on the emerging 2024 to 2025 financial and performance outturn.

4.2 The board acknowledged the work of the Director of Finance and her team to achieve this positive outcome on the year-end spend.

4.3 The board noted that continued close focus on budgets would need to remain for 2025 to 2026.

4.4 The board noted the emerging Q4 performance figures, which would be reviewed at the June meeting.

4.5 The board noted the likely timeline for the laying of the Environment Agency's and Environment Agency Pension Fund's (EAPF) 2024 to 2025 annual report and accounts. It was noted that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) would be working with the National Audit Office (NAO) over the coming months to determine a pathway to pre-recess laying in future years.

4.6 **Decision: The board approved** the approvals process for the laying of the Environment Agency's and the Environment Agency Pension Fund's 2024 to 2025 Annual Report and Accounts as per section 4 of the paper.

The Defra Director of Floods and Water left the meeting at this point.

Item 5: External board review feedback

5.1 The board welcomed Susan Codling to the meeting. Susan introduced the item and drew out the main recommendations included in the KPMG report.

5.2 The board discussed the recommendation relating to clarifying the remits of the board sub-committees. They noted that the three new

committee Chairs, Jon Watts (ARAC), Mark Suthern (Flood and Coastal Risk Management) and Stewart Davies (Environment and Business) had met to discuss future meeting agendas and ways of working ensure there is full coverage of all relevant topics but without duplication or overlap across these 3 committees.

- 5.3 The board discussed the recommendation to formalise the board's approach to stakeholder engagement.
- 5.4 **Action:** The Board requested a future discussion on how the Board can better use its stakeholder relationships to support the Environment Agency.
- 5.5 The board noted the recommendation for board members to receive refresher training on the role of the Accounting Officer and the requirements set out within Managing Public Money.
- 5.6 **Action:** Chief Executive and Director of Finance to organise a teach-in with the board to help them understand the CEO's Accounting Officer responsibilities
- 5.7 The board discussed issues relating to the speed at which the board is able to recruit new board members.

Jon Watts left the meeting at this point.

Item 6: EA2030

- 6.1 The board welcomed Harry Leeder, Alice Mayne and Sarah Cook to the meeting. The Director of Strategy introduced the item and gave an overview of progress made since the last meeting, including incorporating a clearer 'change story' and more emphasis on health and safety. The board noted the plans for the launch of the new strategy.
- 6.2 The board advised the team to further develop the tangibility of the strategy and clarify how progress will be tracked, particularly on elements linked to health and safety.
- 6.3 The board raised concerns around how the 'people' section of the strategy would land with staff if the 'what we do' story was too rigid. The board queried who would support the innovation and technology aims outlined in the strategy.
- 6.4 The board advised the team to be cautious on including goals that are not within the Environment Agency's control. The board discussed deliverability of the goals and felt there should be more emphasis on addressing staff underperformance.

- 6.5 The board discussed the communications approach needed.
- 6.6 The board discussed and provided steer on the proposed names for the strategy and the proposals for its launch. The board showed strong support for a strategy launch of 8 or 9 July 2025.
- 6.7 **Decision: The board approved** the following:
- The updated executive summary and message house
 - The latest people and culture pillar and suggested approach to cultural change work
 - The proposed name and proposals for launch

Item 7: Growth and planning

The Defra Director of Floods and Water rejoined the meeting at this point.

- 7.1 The board welcomed Jennie Donovan and Claire Porter to the meeting. The Director of Strategy provided an overview of the key points in the paper including the work done so far, the changes already implemented and the priority themes the Environment Agency is working with Defra colleagues towards the government's growth ambitions.
- 7.2 The board noted potential challenges for the Environment Agency in balancing protection of the environment when asked to make decisions which may enable growth. The board noted that a Growth Director was currently being recruited to help oversee improvements to permitting and monitoring with the aim of supporting sustainable growth.
- 7.3 The board discussed the Environment Agency's role in the deliverability of some of the government's nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) with regard to issues such as water resources. The board emphasised the importance of remaining part of government discussions and consultations on these projects.
- 7.4 The board noted that work was already underway with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to help them understand scale and deliverability from the Environment Agency's perspective.
- 7.5 The board noted the significance of the ongoing IT transformation work in allowing the Environment Agency to continue supporting the government's aims for growth.
- 7.6 **Action:** Executive Director E&B to set out the areas of greatest challenge for the EA in enabling growth.

Item 8: Commercialising the Environment Agency

The board noted Brittany Harris' declaration of interest regarding her company, Qualisflow.

- 8.1 The board welcomed Andy Wilkinson and Rachel Ashburner to the meeting. The Executive Director of STA introduced the item and set out the opportunities for commercial income, as well as the associated risks and challenges.
- 8.2 The board noted the scope of the Environment Agency's statutory powers to carry out certain activities.
- 8.3 The board discussed potential to generate profit through the commercial application of Environment Agency databases.
- 8.4 The board discussed the scope to recover costs and generate profit through navigational assets, as well as the communications plans in place and reputational risks that could be associated with pursuing profit-making activities.
- 8.5 The board noted that more resource would be needed in legal, communications and area teams to support a more ambitious commercial reform agenda.
- 8.6 The board noted their support for the ambition to drive up existing commercial income from 2025 to 2026 and pursue proportionate opportunities through commercial reform. The board asked that the team take this forward, costing up where the risks will justify the efforts needed for legislative changes.
- 8.7 **Action:** The Board asked that the elements identified in the discussion are considered in full in terms of the risks, opportunities and costs, and brought back to the Board for consideration in 6-9 months

Item 9: Any other business, date of next meeting, review of meeting and summary of evening and next day arrangements

Any other business

- 9.1 No other business was raised.

Date of next meeting

- 9.2 The board noted that the next meeting would take place on 11 June 2025 in London.

Review of meeting

- 9.3 The board reviewed the meeting.

- 9.4 The board acknowledged the value of holding a strategy-focussed meeting rather than trying to have strategic discussions during the quarterly performance meetings.

Summary of evening and next day arrangements

- 9.5 The Chair summarised the evening arrangements and timings for the following day's visit.

The meeting closed at 5pm.