

**THE BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY
PUBLIC AND POLICY COMMITTEE**
8 October 2009, 13.00 – 16.00
Macdonald Holyrood Hotel, Edinburgh, Scotland

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Present: Peter Carey (Chair), Lesley Batty, Rosie Hails, Dan Osborn, Andrew Pullin, Tim Rotheray, Jennifer Shay, Carly Stevens. In attendance: Becky Allen, Press Officer, Jonathan Hall, Policy and Communications Assistant, Ceri Margerison, Policy Officer and Hazel Norman, Executive Director.

Apologies were received from: Jeff Bale, Colin Hindmarch, Kathryn Monk.

The Chair welcomed Prof. Rosie Hails, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, to her first meeting of the Committee.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 May 2009

The minutes were accepted as a correct record of the meeting on 7 May 2009, with one minor change: Dr Bridget Emmett was based at CEH Bangor, not Bangor University.

The majority of actions from the May meeting had been completed. Dr Monk had suggested that the BES might wish to respond to a consultation from the Welsh Assembly Government on 'Protecting Welsh Seas'. This would be considered by the Chair and Policy Officer (**Action: CM, PC**). An ethical policy had been drafted and would be sent to Council in December. A policy newsletter for members of the BES would be prepared following the meeting, based on the Science Policy Report (**Action: JH**).

One action remained outstanding: to consult contacts in DFID to investigate matched funding for candidates from Nepal applying for BES grants. Dan Osborn could supply a contact to take this forward (**Action: DO, CM**).

3. COMMITTEE MATTERS

- **2010 Business Plan and Budget**

Members had received a copy of the management accounts for PPC, prepared up to 31 August, as a late paper. The Committee's expenditure was in line with expectations for this point in the year, indicating that an accurate budget had been prepared for 2008 – 09.

- **PPC Management Accounts and Chair's commentary**

All Committees had been asked to find 10% savings on 2008-09 budgets by the Management and Finance Boards. The Chair had secured an agreement that this would be a cut based on the Committee's existing activities and not on those given to PPC by the Society in 2009: Ecoflora and the Natural Capital Initiative. The Committee's budget in 2008-09, excluding these activities, was £73,005, therefore, with a 10% cut, the budget for 2009 – 10 should be £65, 704.

The Chair thanked the Policy Officer for preparing a workable budget. An additional £2,485 of savings had to be found in addition to those proposed in the draft budget.

In addition, the Committee had been asked to find £500 to support the further development of the BES website, improving the ecological content and attractiveness to an external audience.

The following was agreed:

- The 2010 October meeting of PPC would be held in Peterborough. This would avoid costs associated with an overnight stay for the majority of members. Saving: £1000
- Support for the IEEM's 'In Practice' would be cut to £500. A letter would be sent to the IEEM stating that 2010 would be the last year in which the BES would provide financial support to 'In Practice'. Saving: £1000
- Policy Lunchbox: Policy Officer to revisit costs to ascertain if meeting room hire included (this would be free at Charles Darwin House) with the aim of cutting by £300. Saving: £300
- The Policy Advisory Groups would retain support of £1500 but this would be contingent on the funding being used. Financial support allocated to the groups had not been used over the past two years. Convening and disbanding groups to act as temporary taskforces, examining particular issues, could be considered.
- £500 support for members' media training should be retained but this would be discussed further at the PPC February 2010 meeting: means had to be found to better encourage members to take advantage of this resource.
- Public Engagement Grant: if money remained in the PPC budget at the end of 2009, the PEG proposals received in 2009 would be reviewed, with the aim of supporting those excellent applications which had missed out on funding.
- CaSE: Dr Norman would discuss the proposal that CaSE does not increase its membership fee, in return for free meeting space at Charles Darwin House, with Nick Dusic, Chief Executive of CaSE (**Action: HN**)
- The allowance to attend meetings of UKBRAG would be depersonalised.

The BES budget would be amended accordingly (**Action: CM**).

The PPC budget contained no funds to support the appointment of a Policy Assistant in 2010. If PPC wished an Assistant to be appointed, the business case for this would need to go before Council. The Policy Officer stressed how useful the position of Policy and Communications Assistant had proven, and the necessity of this post to allow the BES to deliver the range of high-profile policy activities it wished to. Committee members agreed, stressing the importance of support in the run-up to the 2010 general election: there would be much lobbying activity to be done around this time. Dan Osborn suggested that a future Policy Assistant could be assigned the task to develop a narrative about the impact of ecological science on human well-being. If this were the case, NERC might be able to provide co-funding for this position, perhaps as part of the NERC Policy Placements scheme. It would be useful for the Policy Officer to discuss this with Faith Culshaw, Head of Knowledge Exchange at the NERC (**Action: CM**).

One proposal was that a Policy Assistant be shared with the Biochemical Society. This could be offered as a paid policy internship for six months, at a cost to the BES of approximately £3,800 for a four-day per week position (19,000 pro-rata: £7600 for 6 months at 0.8FTE, divided between the two organisations).

Jonathan Hall stressed the importance of ensuring that this role were attractive to an ambitious graduate: three days per week would be more desirable than four, allowing the appointee to take other paid or unpaid employment.

Dr Norman would discuss the possibility of a shared policy resource with Dr Chris Kirk, Chief Executive of the Biochemical Society (**Action: HN**).

The Committee agreed that, depending on the outcome of discussions with the Biochemical Society, it might be best to develop a business case for Council based on a two-day per week position solely at the BES. If the Biochemical Society wished to then join with this they could do. A document, with costs and including comments from Dr Kirk if applicable, should be sent to Dr Norman for 10 November (**Action: CM, PC**)

Jonathan Hall would leave the BES at the end of December, when his contract expired. The Committee thanked Jonathan for his hard work over the past few months, and high standard of the briefings and reports he had prepared.

- Ecology into Policy Grant

The Committee decided not to fund the application submitted for an Ecology into Policy Grant as the candidate had declared that this research was to be conducted as part of their PhD. The BES had a policy, consistent across all of the

Society's grants, not to fund work which contributed to an applicant's PhD research. The candidate would be sent feedback indicating why the application had not been successful (**Action: PC**).

Funds set aside for the EIPG could be used to fund excellent applications for the PEG which had not been successful earlier in 2009, if applicable. The Policy Officer would investigate to see whether any of the best PEG applications could still benefit from an award (**Action: CM**).

- **Benchmarking the BES policy activities against other Learned Societies**

The benchmarking activity, conducted through Policy Lunchbox, had revealed that the BES delivered just as much, if not more, than similar organisations, and runs a number of innovative schemes (Policy Training, Shadowing Scheme). The BES did not commission, or produce in-house, original research reports: these may be expensive to develop. Briefing papers would be a useful addition to the Society's work but PPC needed to think carefully about how best to produce these so that they are authoritative, particularly given constraints in the BES office surrounding access to Web of Science.

4. PRESS

- **2009 Press Report**

The Committee received Becky Allen's press report and thanked her for a fantastic job in securing a high volume of high quality press coverage for the BES over the course of the year. The BES journals had formed the focus of press work during 2009 and a number of fantastic papers had arisen from these, particularly from Functional Ecology, achieving a great deal of press coverage in Australia.

Becky had publicised a number of grants and one in particular, awarded to a young researcher in Dudley, had attracted much local media interest; a great opportunity for an early-career researcher to enhance their media skills and profile.

The Managing Editors of the BES journals had discussed with Becky how best to distribute a wider range of papers from the journals to freelance journalists working on Nature, Science and New Scientist. As a result, a password-protected area of the BES website had been established and Becky had generated a list of media contacts to whom access details could be circulated. The efficacy of this would be monitored over the next six to 12 months.

The Committee agreed with Becky's comment that there was more that the BES could do with regard to media relations with policy-makers. However, the Committee would need to give Becky a clear steer about where she should direct her time, something the Society had not done well in the past.

Dr Osborn suggested that the BES could do more to make use of its picture library, generated through the BES Photographic Competition. The pictures could be used as the basis for stories which could be pitched to national newspapers. Dr Osborn suggested that Becky speak to Ruth Walters, leading communications for Living With Environmental Change, about potential press work in relation to policy (**Action: DO, BA**).

Becky would carry out a benchmarking exercise to evaluate how the coverage generated for the BES in the media, given the resources available, compared to that of other, similar organisations (**Action: BA**).

- **BES at the BA Festival of Science: feedback and future involvement in Science Festivals**

The BES's involvement in the British Science Festival had been a success and had resulted in significant press coverage for ecology on the first day of the event. Dr Ken Thompson, University of Sheffield, and Dr Nikki Gamman, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, had both been extremely positive about the opportunity they had been given to engage with the media. The British Science Association had also thanked the BES for working hard to generate coverage and deal with media

inquiries.

The Committee agreed that the BES should organise an event for the 2010 Festival, targeted at the media.

- **Tansley Trail**

Dr Norman indicated that the BES Centenary Working Group would be very supportive of PPC continuing to develop a Tansley walking route. Work on developing the Tansley Trail would now begin in earnest (**Action: CM, JH, BA**).

5. SCIENCE POLICY

Dr Rotheray asked whether the BES was planning any activities around the time of the General Election, expected in May 2010. Ceri Margerison informed the Committee that the BES had organised a meeting with Nick Dusic, CaSE, through the Policy Lunchbox group, with the aim of co-ordinating pre-election activities and aiming to influence manifesto development. CaSE had since formed a network to focus on this, of which the BES was part. The election would disrupt the next round of the BES Shadowing Scheme at the UK Government, hence the focus for the scheme in 2010 would be the devolved nations and Brussels.

Dr Osborn urged the BES to time its intervention in policy well in 2010: the Society should aim to influence the next Comprehensive Spending Review, which would happen immediately after the election and for which preparation was already taking place. The recession would mean large cuts in spending and the Society should be seen to be protecting the science of ecology in relation to this. Although the BES worked effectively with partners, on this matter it would be useful for the Society to be seen to be 'stepping out'. The Committee acknowledged that the IEEM could form a natural partner.

A narrative about why ecology is important and the impact of ecology on human well-being should be developed. Dr Osborn suggested that the Presidential Addresses may be useful for this purpose.

The Committee was asked to consider the 'top three' issues to put to politicians – the key messages the Society could put across in meetings with key people. Dr Rotheray would lead a small group looking at this and other members were encouraged to put themselves forward (**Action: TR, all**).

The Committee agreed that it would be timely to revisit PPC's strategic priorities. Sustainable food production, water and soil were three suggestions.

The Society could also make greater use of its senior, well-connected, members and its links to high profile members of the Society of Biology. The Policy Officer would co-ordinate the strategic review (**Action: CM**).

- **Preparation for parliamentary reception and dinner**

The Committee congratulated Jonathan on preparing an excellent, informative and useful summary of the structure of the Scottish Government and environmental policy priorities.

Members noted that a drinks reception at Dynamic Earth, hosted by the BES, would immediately follow the PPC meeting and that Committee members and delegates would be joined by Roseanna Cunningham, Minister for the Environment at the Scottish Government. The Minister had expressed an interest in meeting BES members with expertise in Scottish habitats: two members of the BES, experts in this area, Robin Pakeman and Michael Usher, would be introduced to the Minister.

Those attending the BES dinner with Prof. Anne Glover, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Scottish Government, and Prof. Maggie Gill, Head of the Rural Environment Research and Analysis Directorate, were asked to return to the hotel for

7.30pm.

- **Plans for BES – IEEM reception on ‘Halting Biodiversity Loss’: 27 October**

Plans for the joint BES – IEEM parliamentary reception were progressing well and interest in the event had been high: the registration list was now full.

The position statement on ‘halting UK biodiversity loss’ was yet to be finalised as Prof. Charles Godfray, President of the BES, had expressed some concern about its content and accessibility. Professor Godfray had re-drafted the statement, which was to be sent to Professor Steve Ormerod, President of the IEEM, for comment, before circulation to members of the working group who had helped to draft the original. The timescale was extremely tight as the statement was to be launched at the 27 October reception.

The Committee expressed concern that the statement might not reflect the views of the members of the BES who had given their time to a workshop to help develop the statement, and to working on a draft. Members were also concerned that Council should approve any statement released on behalf of the Society.

Once a copy of the re-drafted statement had been received this could be compared with the original. Any concerns could then be raised with the President by Dr Carey, as Chair of the Committee (**Action: PC**). A copy of the statement would be circulated to Council for approval (**Action: CM**).

The Policy Officer would draft a protocol outlining how position statements should be produced in the future. The President of the BES should be involved in the development of the statement from the start. Whilst members should be involved in a workshop to develop an initial draft of a statement, this could then be sent to a higher level expert group who could refine this for publication (**Action: CM**).

- **Science Policy Report**

Members noted the Science Policy Report and congratulated Jonathan Hall on a comprehensive review.

- **Future of the Natural Capital Initiative**

Dr Hails, as Chair of the Natural Capital Initiative, informed the Committee that the NCI would focus on ecosystem services and health and the economics of the natural environment. The NCI had sought a relatively small amount of funding from a number of organisations, including the BES which had agreed to commit £10,000 each year for three years. The NCI also hoped to secure funding from a charitable trust or foundation. In order to qualify for this support, the NCI had to be incorporated as a separate entity with a low turnover; one possibility was to establish the NCI in a similar way to a ‘branch’ of the Society of Biology.

It was possible that the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology would appoint a part-time, or almost full-time, member of staff for a limited period, to complete applications to funding bodies for financial support to establish a secretariat. PPC could be involved in assessing the applications, which Prof. Hails could circulate through the Committee.

Dr Hails anticipated that the NCI could be an additional resource for the delivery of the BES’s policy objectives. The BES could influence the development of NCI activities through Prof. Hails and Ceri Margerison, who sat on the NCI Steering Group. The NCI would remain as a standing item on the agenda for PPC meetings (**Action: CM**).

Dr Osborn asked Prof. Hails whether the NCI had thought to expand its remit to cover physical capital, particularly minerals – an overlooked policy area. Prof. Hails would consider this and feed this comment back to the Steering Group (**Action: RH**).

- **Feedback from May 2009 Policy Training Workshop**

This item was noted. Dr Osborn informed the Committee that feedback from the event, which he had attended, had been extremely positive. The workshop had been very well attended and was an insightful meeting. The BES's innovative activities, such as this, had been noticed by the Research Councils and Government.

- **Feedback from policy session with UK BRAG at BES annual conference**

This item was noted.

6. ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

- **Update on Wilding**

Dr Carey had received an email from Dr Kathy Hodder, requesting information on progress in reviewing the Ecological Issues booklet on 'Re-wilding'. Dr Carey was waiting for comments from a second reviewer and would then feed these back to Dr Hodder, with a view to moving the project on quickly. It was unfortunate that the document had not been available to use as a response to a September policy announcement from the UK Secretary of State for the Environment on re-wilding the UK countryside.

7. AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS

- **Update from UKOTCF: to receive paper from Dr Colin Hindmarch**

This item was noted. Members were asked to return any comments to the Policy Officer as soon as possible so that these could be raised with Dr Hindmarch at the UKOTCF AGM on 23 October (**Action: all**).

8. AOB

1. In response to a request from Bill Bewes, BES Membership Officer, PPC agreed that information on external media training should be included in the e-Bulletin when such opportunities arose. The Policy Officer would feed this back (**Action: CM**).
2. Professor Pullin suggested that it might be useful to explore how the Ecology into Policy Grant, funding for the Ecological Issues series and the production of briefing papers could be harmonised, to make best use of the Society's resources. This could form part of a wider review of PPC's activities, re-visiting the Committee's strategic priorities and actions.

The Policy Officer would set up a 'Wiki' to allow members of the Committee to contribute information and views on the Committee's future work, including strategic priorities, potential topics for briefing statements and the 'top three' points to communicate to policy-makers in the run-up to the general election. Details of how to access the Wiki would be circulated as soon as possible. Those members who chose to contribute could form a small steering group examining the Committee's work (**Action; CM, all**).

Actions

Number	Action	Responsible
1	Consider responding to consultation on 'Protecting Welsh Seas'	PC, CM
2	Provide contact at DFID for details of matched funding for Nepalese applicants for BES grants: to contact	DO, CM
3	Use Science Policy Report as basis of first Science Policy Newsletter for BES members	JH
4	Contact Nick Dusic, CaSE, regarding meeting space at Charles Darwin House	HN
4	Amend PPC budget	CM
	Discuss potential funding for a Policy Assistant, through the NERC Policy Placement Scheme, with Faith Culshaw, NERC	CM
	Discuss potential shared policy resource with Dr Chris Kirk, CEO, Biochemical Society	HN
5	Prepare business case for Policy Assistant, possibly with Biochemical Society input	CM, PC
6	Feedback to applicant for Ecology into Policy Grant	PC
7	Assess 2009 PEG applications to see if any could still benefit from funding	CM
8	Contact Ruth Walters, LWEC Communications, regarding media relations work with policy-makers	BA
9	Benchmark BES media impact against other, similar organisations	BA
10	Begin work on Tansley Trail	CM, JH, BA
11	Lead group to develop top issues to communicate to policy-makers in advance of a general election	TR, All
12	Co-ordinate review of PPC strategy and activities	CM
13	Raise any concerns over re-drafted position statement with the BES President	PC
14	Circulate the re-drafted position statement to Council	CM
15	Draft a protocol for development of future position statements	CM
16	Keep NCI as a standing item on PPC agenda	CM
17	To consider broadening remit of NCI to cover physical capital, and report comment to Steering Group	RH
18	Send comments on UKOTCF paper to Policy Officer, to report back to Dr Hindmarch	All
19	Feed back to the BES Membership Officer the need to advertise external media training opportunities in the e-Bulletin.	CM
20	Establish a 'Wiki' and invite PPC members to attend, allowing members to contribute to a review of PPC's activities; particularly how best to produce briefing notes, the Committee's strategic priorities and top issues to take to politicians in advance of the General Election.	CM