

THE BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY
PUBLIC AND POLICY COMMITTEE
13.00 – 16.00, Thursday 10th February 2011
Charles Darwin House, London

WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Present were: Juliet Vickery (Chair), Rob Brooker, Peter Carey, Emma Goldberg, Colin Hindmarch, Kathryn Monk, Dan Osborn, Jennifer Shay and Carly Stevens. In attendance were: Becky Allen, Press Officer; Ceri Margerison, Policy Officer; Hazel Norman, Executive Director.

Apologies were received from: Jeff Bale, Rosie Hails, Andrew Pullin and Tim Rotheray.

1. PRESENTATION BY GILLIAN BLACK, MELTWATER MEDIA MONITORING

The Committee was joined by members of staff from the Biochemical Society and Society for Experimental Biology for this item, a remote demonstration of the Meltwater media monitoring platform. A subscription to Meltwater would enable the BES and other learned societies based within Charles Darwin House to identify journalists writing on particular topics of interest, beyond the science journalists with whom the organisation traditionally engaged. Links to regional journalists could be facilitated, as could connections into social media networks, assessing which ecological or other science topics were attracting attention and comment.

Press releases could be sent through Meltwater, to lists of journalists created by the BES. The system could provide information regarding which journalists had accessed the press releases and which had not. The platform did not currently log coverage generated by an organisation's press release: a different arm of the Meltwater business provided this function.

Meltwater was predominantly focused on media within the UK, where it had been running for 10 months, but was also fully integrated into the German and Nordic markets. The company had access to the United States' market and was planning to expand into Australia. In response to questions, Gillian Black suggested that Meltwater's retention of clients once subscribed was good, in part due to the service of a dedicated client manager per subscriber.

Gillian Black would assess the effectiveness of coverage by raising this with an existing client and would provide this information to the BES's Press Officer (**Action: GB, BA**).

The cost of the subscription to the BES would be £3,000 (including a charity discount). If other organisations within CDH wished to join Meltwater, there would be additional costs to them for the extra platforms which would be needed. Meltwater did not offer a trial period.

The Committee thanked Gillian Black for the demonstration before discussing next steps. Members agreed that the opportunity to link into local media would be useful, particularly for the BES's centenary. Finding out about journalists' and others discussions through social media was also attractive. The Committee however considered that it would be best for the BES and others to subscribe once Meltwater's reach into other international markets was improved. Becky Allen would discuss the demonstration with the marketing team at the Biochemical Society, exploring the possible use of Meltwater by organisations within CDH (**Action: BA**).

Before committing to Meltwater, it would be essential to assess how a subscription would increase coverage for the BES. Becky Allen would seek views on this through the STEMPPRA science communication network (**Action: BA**).

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 OCTOBER 2010

The minutes were approved as a correct record of the meeting on 21st October 2010.

With regard to the actions of the October meeting, Colin Hindmarch stated that he was seeking to work with the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) on spatial strategies with respect to the UK's Overseas Territories. In response to a comment regarding the differences in planning systems in Wales, Scotland and England, Dr Hindmarch commented that the RTPI was UK-wide in scope.

The Chair was yet to contact Professor James Bullock regarding the British Ecological Society's relationship with the European Ecological Federation and would do so in advance of the Committee's next meeting (**Action: JV**).

3. COMMITTEE MATTERS

- Evaluation of proposals for the Public Engagement Grant

Following discussion of the scores assigned to the proposals by several members of PPC, the Committee decided to award £1,886.00 to proposal 1927 – 4121 (Savita Custead, 'Bee Ecological'), the full amount requested. The remainder of the Public Engagement Grant (£1,114) would be split equally between proposal 3310-4090 (Forestry Commission) and 3336-4118 (Wildlife Habitat Protection Trust).

Members spent some time discussing the criteria for the grant, including whether the BES should support events which reach a great many people, or events targeted at smaller numbers who may then become catalysts for wider change. Winning proposals should also focus on the science of ecology, rather than conservation. The number of applications received for the grant suggested that the criteria should be tightened. Rob Brooker would begin to look at this, with help from Kathryn Monk and input from both Jennifer Shay and Emma Goldberg (**Action: RB, KM, JS, EG**).

In an email to the Policy Officer in advance of the meeting, Kathryn Monk had suggested that the increasing incorporation of art and social applications within the proposals could warrant an artist being involved in assessing these. An 'artist in residence' could also be considered. Ceri Margerison had sent these suggestions, along with the Public Engagement Grant proposals, to the BES's Festival of Ecology Manager, Julie Hodgkinson.

- Final PPC Business Plan and Budget (*to note*)

The BES Council had decided that all Committee budgets would be frozen in 2011. The Chair urged members to consider novel ideas which PPC could develop as activities in the future (**Action: All**). Council was keen to see good suggestions emerge from the committees and would revisit a 20% budget increase as a potential scenario in the future. Dr Norman informed the Committee that Council would be reviewing its strategic plan at its next meeting in June.

- PPC Management Accounts and Chair's commentary

The Management Accounts were prepared at the end of each financial year and would therefore be available at the Committee's next meeting in April.

- Review of the BES Risk Register

PPC was asked to review the Risk Register each year, considering those actions within its remit; the balance of risk and probability; actions to ameliorate these risks and whether any new risks had arisen.

With respect to the following risks the Committee decided:

- *'Substantial changes in science/ environmental policy'* – to retain the probability as '5' as in 2010, reflecting changes being made across policy areas by the Coalition Government.
- *'Current economic difficulties result in a decline in the public's interest in environmental issues'* – the probability would be increased to a '5' from '4'. The 'need to keep a watching brief on this matter, acting on issues which arise' would be added as a means for the BES to manage this risk.

Two further risks were added:

- *'Missed policy opportunities in the devolved administrations'*

Kathryn Monk suggested that the BES should be much more actively involved in the development of the Natural Environment Framework in Wales, and that not being fully aware of policy developments in Wales and Scotland was a risk to the Society.

Important in ameliorating this risk would be empowering BES members locally and regionally to engage with policy-makers in their country or area. Building links with expert groups outside the BES (e.g. the RTPi) would also be important.

- 'Public mistrust of science'

This risk could be managed by providing information, and making sure that this information was heard; the Society should 'take opportunities' and 'alleviate ignorance'.

Engaging with the Science Media Centre (SMC) would be an important part of this approach. The Science Media Centre would be interested in working with the BES on an environment briefing, possibly around the launch of the Defra Natural Environment White Paper.

Dan Osborn said that the BES had to be robust in briefing the media, but within the realm of the Society's expertise. The National Ecosystem Assessment could provide an opportunity for a BES briefing. Many members of the BES had played an active role in assisting officials in formulating Defra's 'ecosystem approach', which could be highlighted to the SMC (**Action: BA**).

Dr Norman would update the risk register (**Action: HN**).

- BES Assessment Exercise

Dr Norman distributed copies of the BES Assessment Exercise, which members completed. The aim was to understand whether the BES was effective as a Society, through the governance structures in place. Dr Dave Hodgson, BES Honorary Secretary and Chair of the Personnel Committee had worked with Dr Norman to update the exercise, first completed by Council in 2009. Dr Hodgson would compile the responses and produce a report for Council and the BES committees.

- Minutes of BES Council

The Chair encouraged members to consider suitable names for a new award to recognise the contribution of volunteer naturalists to the science of ecology. Members were also asked to consider nominees (**Action: all**).

Members noted Council's decision to present the 2010 Ecological Engagement Award to Professor Jonathan Silvertown,

Open University, in recognition of his work with iSpot. The minutes of the Council meeting did not make clear whether a formal nomination form had been submitted for Professor Silvertown. Council would therefore be asked to comment at their June meeting on the process followed to select the EEA recipient (**Action: JV**).

- Joining Wildlife and Countryside Link

The BES had submitted an application to join Wildlife and Countryside Link and expected to receive notification of the outcome in early March. If the BES's application was successful, there would be an opportunity for the BES Policy Officer, members of PPC and other members of the BES to engage with the work of the organisation through working groups and taskforces.

If the BES's application was successful, the Policy Officer would prepare a list of Link working-groups for the next meeting of PPC, so that members could consider whether they wished to represent the BES on these (**Action: CM**).

- Proposal for a Climate Change and Media Workshop

The organisers of a workshop at the University of York, focusing on communicating climate change science to the media, had approached the BES to seek a small amount of funding for the activity. Preparations for the meeting were going well, with a number of high profile speakers secured for the event, including the BBC Environment Correspondent and the Defra Chief Scientist. Based on the strength of the proposal, PPC agreed to provide £100 to support the workshop. This contribution would be matched by the BES Meetings Committee, so £200 would be provided to the organisers in total. There would be an opportunity for the BES to promote its own activities at the event and to nominate a member to attend. Dr Norman would notify the organisers of the Society's decision (**Action: HN**).

- Workshop proposals for the BES Annual Meeting

The UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG) was once again keen to cooperate with the Policy Team to organise an event at the BES Annual Meeting. Of the two proposals presented, PPC was supportive of both but suggested that an update on the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) could be timely. Dr Brooker commented that a session focused on the NEA would provide opportunities to involve the UK's devolved nations. It would be important to ensure that those presenting on the development of the NEA could provide perspectives from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Dr Monk urged the Policy Team and BRAG to provide as much notice to those working in policy as possible, in order to ensure that they could attend the session.

The Chair suggested that a presentation on the development of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) would be useful for the Committee. The Policy Officer would try and secure a speaker from the RSPB, Birdlife or elsewhere to discuss this at the April meeting of PPC (**Action: CM**).

A proposal to run a workshop on 'impact' at the Annual Meeting had been supported by the Meetings Committee, but only if this was merged with a similar session planned by the Publications team. Dr Norman would approach the BES Journals Committee regarding how the sessions could be merged (**Action: HN**).

- Report of the Ecoflora Project

The Committee thanked Dr Alastair Fitter for his report on the Ecoflora project. Two members of PPC who made use of the Ecoflora database regularly commented that it was an excellent resource.

- Update: Policy Assistant for 2011

A large volume of applications had been received for the part-time, temporary position of Policy Assistant, and interviews had been held on Wednesday 9th February. A decision on the appointment would be made shortly. In future, more stringent criteria would be put in place for applicants, possibly including a set question to be addressed by covering letter, to reduce the burden to the Policy Officer of assessing so many applications.

Dr Norman informed the Committee that it would not be possible to offer the Policy Assistant position as anything other than a fixed-term, part-time contract. However the Committee could consider extending the length of the contract to 11-months, or offering a greater time commitment per week should the budget allow in 2012.

4. SCIENCE POLICY

- Science Policy Report

The Committee noted the report, and thanked the Policy Officer for producing this document.

- Policy Priorities and use of the 'Ecology into Policy' grant (EIPG)

Dr Stevens had prepared a draft proposal for the Committee, which the Policy Officer had adapted. Dr Steven suggested that the EIPG could be used to disseminate work from research projects; scientists do not often take the opportunity to communicate the results of their work to policy-makers or to the public, and if they wish to do so may not be able to find funds to support this. Government restrictions on 'marketing' had prevented Dr Stevens from disseminating the results of a recent JNCC-funded project.

Dr Brooker commented that although the general principle of the revised EIPG was suitable, bids to NERC, for example, needed to include a budget proposal for communication activities. Other Committee members commented that researchers who were funded by a grant acquired some time ago may not have built in funds for communication of their research results, and that other researchers not funded by the Research Councils may also lack these resources. In applying for the EIPG, applicants would need to make clear why they had not secured funds through other means to aid dissemination.

The audience for the outputs of the Grant needed to be clarified as outputs would need to differ according to audience (public, policy-makers and others). POST-style briefing notes would be useful for policy-makers, who appreciated brevity.

Dr Carey suggested that the EIPG could be used to publicise the results of systematic reviews. It could be useful to discuss the EIPG proposal with Prof. Sutherland, Vice-President of the BES. Prof. Sutherland enjoyed good contacts with policy-makers as many had sat on panels to contribute to his review papers.

The scope of the Grant could also cover linking scientists with those who could facilitate the dissemination of their key messages.

The quality of the outputs produced through EIPG funding would have to be assessed carefully, to avoid any risk to the reputation of the BES.

Dr Stevens would re-draft the proposal in light of discussion. Dr Monk and Emma Goldberg would review Dr Stevens' proposal (**Action: CS, KM, EG**).

The proposal and criteria for assessment would be finalised at the next meeting of PPC. The EIPG would then be launched in October, following publicity for the Grant at the BES Annual Meeting in September.

- Report of Natural England – climate change adaptation conference

The joint Natural England – BES conference on 'Adapting Conservation to a Changing Climate' (11-12 January) had been a great success, with much positive feedback from delegates and from partners at Natural England.

The meeting had represented a great use of Charles Darwin House. Dr Norman encouraged members of PPC to consider how CDH could be used as a space for future meetings the Committee might wish to run (**Action: All**).

- Parliamentary activities in 2011, including devolved administrations

Members agreed that engaging with Northern Ireland through PPC's October 2011 meeting would be useful and timely. The Committee could hold a meeting in Northern Ireland, depending on the budget, or a representative of the N.I Executive could be invited to attend a meeting in London.

Dr Osborn suggested that the BES could run a parliamentary event in Westminster focused on forestry, given Defra's plans to sell off 15% of the Forestry Commission estate and consultation on how to manage the remaining 85%. The BES would focus on the management of the forests, not details of land ownership.

Dr Monk stated that the Water White Paper, expected later in 2011, would have consequences for all countries of the UK. Scientific input would be necessary to inform solutions to the cross-boundary issues and other problems the countries would need to tackle.

The Policy Officer was clear that the BES should not organise a parliamentary reception for its own sake; any reception should be timely, relevant and add value. A reception or event focused on the Defra Natural Environment White Paper, or the UK National Ecosystem Assessment could be valuable, but the BES could be entering a crowded space with these proposals. Membership of Wildlife and Countryside Link could assist the BES in assessing what other organisations were planning with respect to these developments.

This agenda item would be revisited at the Committee's April meeting. Members would send additional suggestions for activities to the Policy Officer in advance (**Action: All**).

- Update from the Natural Capital Initiative

The update from the NCI was noted.

5. PRESS

- Press Report and Forward Plan

Becky Allen had been able to highlight a greater number of papers from the BES journals, achieving higher coverage, through working in partnership with institutional press officers.

Becky noted that press work in partnership with Natural England for the joint Natural England – BES climate change conference in January had been managed well, with a number of inquiries from the media as a result.

Becky suggested that the forthcoming Defra Natural Environment White Paper and the launch of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment might present opportunities for the BES to brief journalists on ecological issues. The Committee agreed that Becky should approach the Science Media Centre, suggesting that the BES could provide members willing to comment on the NEA and White Paper (**Action: BA**). The Committee would suggest members who could be approached to

put themselves forward (**Action: CM, All**).

- Nominations for British Science Association Award Lectures

The scientific specialties and experience of past winners of the British Science Award Lectures were varied and it was not easy to spot commonalities between them. The Press Officer would contact the British Science Association to seek greater clarity on the criteria for selection (**Action: BA**). The Policy Officer would then circulate this to PPC, seeking nominations (**Action: CM**).

- Festival of Ecology 2013

Dr Norman introduced Julie Hodgkinson, Festival of Ecology Manager, who joined the Committee for this item. Julie informed the Committee that she was investigating ideas for Centenary activities before presenting these to the next meeting of the Centenary Working Group in March. Comments and ideas would be sought, with a final Business Plan then presented to Council in June.

Members suggested that it would be useful for Julie to attend future meetings of PPC; the Policy Officer would circulate meeting dates to Julie (**Action: CM**). Julie could also consider co-opting a member of PPC onto the Centenary Working Group (**Action: JH**).

6. AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS

- Update from UKOTCF – *to discuss BES representation on the Forum*

The Committee thanked Dr Hindmarch for the fantastic job he had done acting as a link between the Forum and the BES. Dr Hindmarch had accepted an invitation from the Chair of PPC to remain as the BES representative on the UKOTCF. Other members of the Committee were happy for this arrangement to continue. Dr Hindmarch would step down from PPC at the April meeting of the Committee, but would continue to provide updates on the Forum's activities via the Policy Officer.

Dr Hindmarch informed members that the UKOTCF was a formal partner in the NET-BIOME ERA-NET project. A research call (€3.5 million) had been launched by NET-BIOME recently, attracting 70 expressions of interest. NET-BIOME had met with the European Commission, building links with the Environment Directorate regarding another initiative, named 'BEST': applications to NET-BIOME which could not be funded could be cascaded to BEST.

Dr Hindmarch commented that several members of the Council of the UKOTCF would be keen to see the RSPB return to the Forum.

- Society of Biology

The Society of Biology was to buy a share in Charles Darwin House, becoming a partner in the ownership of the building. The Society was moving into CDH on Friday 18th February. Co-location should open up greater opportunities for collaboration on policy, and other matters.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF 21 OCTOBER MEETING NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

There were no matters arising.

8. AOB

- a. Dr Brooker commented on the fullness of the agenda and suggested that future meetings of the PPC could begin earlier, possibly with a working lunch. The Chair and Policy Officer would consider and discuss **(Action: JV, CM)**.
- b. The BES needed to find a means of engaging with policy issues in the devolved nations. Dr Brooker and the Policy Officer would work together to produce a paper for the next PPC meeting, outlining how engagement could be taken forward constructively, given the limited resources available within the Policy Team **(Action: RB, CM)**.
- c. Engagement with the National Trust could be nurtured further. Prof. Malcolm Press, immediate past President of the BES, was the Society's representative on the Trust's Board, whilst Dr Osborn was running an event for the Living with Environmental Change initiative at a National Trust site. Dr Norman stated that the BES needed to put greater thought into its relationship with the Trust **(Action: HN)**.

Action	Responsible
Gillian Black to assess the effectiveness of coverage by raising this with an existing client and to provide this information to the BES's Press Officer.	GB, BA
Discuss the Meltwater demonstration with the marketing team at the Biochemical Society, exploring the possible use of Meltwater by organisations within CDH.	BA
Seek views through the STEMPRA science communication network on how Meltwater may increase press coverage.	BA
Contact Professor James Bullock regarding the British Ecological Society's relationship with the European Ecological Federation.	JV
Review the criteria for the Public Engagement Grant.	RB, KM, JS, EG
Consider novel ideas which PPC can develop as activities in the future.	All
Highlight to the Science Media Centre the active role of BES members in informing Defra's 'ecosystems approach' .	BA
Update the risk register.	HN
Consider suitable names for a new award to recognise the contribution of volunteer naturalists to the science of ecology and consider nominees.	All
Ask Council to comment at their June meeting on the process followed to select the EEA recipient.	JV
Prepare a list of Link working-groups for the next meeting of PPC.	CM
Notify the organisers of the 'climate change and the media' workshop of the Society's decision.	HN
Secure a speaker from the RSPB, Birdlife or elsewhere to discuss the IPBES at the April meeting of PPC.	CM
Approach the BES Journals Committee regarding how proposed sessions on 'impact' can be merged.	HN
Re-draft the EIPG proposal in light of discussion.	CS, KM, EG
Consider how CDH can be used as a space for future meetings the Committee might wish to run.	All
Send additional suggestions for parliamentary activities to the Policy Officer in advance of PPC's April meeting.	All
Approach the Science Media Centre, suggesting that the BES could provide members willing to comment on the NEA and White Paper.	BA
Suggest members who could be approached to put themselves forward for a media briefing.	CM, All
Contact the British Science Association to seek greater clarity on the criteria for selection.	BA
Circulate the criteria for selection for the BSA Award Lectures to PPC, seeking nominations.	CM
Circulate dates of future PPC meetings to Julie Hodgkinson.	CM
Consider co-opting a member of PPC onto the	JH

Centenary Working Group.	
Consider beginning PPC meetings earlier in the day.	JV, CM
produce a paper for the next PPC meeting, outlining how engagement with the devolved nations can be taken forward.	RB, CM
Consider the BES's relationship with the National Trust.	HN