

THE BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY
PUBLIC AND POLICY COMMITTEE

21 October 2010

12.30 – 17.00

Charles Darwin House, London

1. ATTENDEES AND APOLOGIES

Present: Juliet Vickery (Chair), Jeff Bale, Emma Goldberg, Colin Hindmarch, Dan Osborn, Jennifer Shay, Carly Stevens. In attendance: Becky Allen, Press Officer; Ceri Margerison, Policy Officer; Hazel Norman, Executive Director; Kirsty Wilmot, Policy Assistant.

Apologies were received from: Rob Brooker, Peter Carey, Rosie Hails, Kathryn Monk, Andrew Pullin and Tim Rotheray.

2. DISCUSSION WITH NATURAL ENGLAND COLLEAGUES

Andrew Wood, Executive Director of Science and Evidence at Natural England, joined the Public and Policy Committee for a discussion focusing on recent announcements by the Coalition Government, including the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR, 20 October) and the implications of a 32% budget reduction for Defra and Natural England. The Lawton Review of England's protected areas and ecological network, released at the end of September, was also discussed, as was the Defra Natural Environment White Paper, to which the BES would prepare a consultation response. The sale of England's forestry estate by the Forestry Commission was raised, as was the potential sale of National Nature Reserves.

Discussion continued for an hour, after which the Committee thanked Andrew Wood for giving up his time to join the meeting.

3. REFLECTION ON DISCUSSION. TO INCLUDE:

- BES response to the Comprehensive Spending Review

The Research Councils' budget faced a cut of approximately 10% in real terms. The budget for the Medical Research Council would increase, meaning that the remaining six Councils would receive proportionately less. All Councils needed to make major efficiency savings. Some of these savings were already planned, for example the Research Councils' Shared Resource Centre.

In responding to the CSR, the BES would work through the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) but would also need to make a clear statement about the importance of ecology, rather than science in general. CaSE would not provide a route for the BES to respond to budget cuts at Natural England and Defra.

It would be vital to ensure that the evidence base in Defra did not suffer because of budget cuts in the Department. The BES President could be asked to write to the Secretary of State and Defra Permanent Secretary, to make this point (**Action: CM**). There could be a request to other organisations sharing CDH to respond likewise, stressing that funding for science research within Departments should not be cut (**Action: CM**).

Professor Bale commented that funding from Defra was often seen as less respectable or impressive at university level than funding from the Research Councils. Academics had pushed hard for Defra funding, for applied research, to be recognised in the Research Excellence Framework and it was disappointing that this funding could now be cut.

The science budget came with a condition that the economic and social impact of research should be a core consideration, which might place pressure on resources. The BES needed to make a statement that blue-skies research and opportunities should be prioritised: reiterating this point would be valuable.

The Committee noted that Defra did not mention the UKOTs in its spending review statement, released on 20 October.

The Browne Review of university funding had implications for ecology. Although ecology and environmental science were in HEFCE price group B, meaning that they would receive teaching funding on top of student contributions under the Browne model, ecology was often taught as part of geography. There may be implications to this which would be examined by Ceri Margerison and the BES Education Officer (**Action: CM**).

- BES DRAFT response to the Defra Natural Environment White Paper

Additional points would be added to the BES response to the White Paper (**Action: CM**):

- A debate is needed regarding the spread of non-native species to the UK. The UK may need to be more flexible with respect to those species colonising the UK due to climate change.
- Real tensions exist between conserving biodiversity and devolving planning decisions locally. A danger with the localism agenda, and loss of local Natural England staff, would be ensuring that information reached those locally responsible for making decisions about the natural environment and use of resources.
- The BES response would draw attention to the conclusions of the National Ecosystem Assessment: although some in Defra would be aware of the NEA, it was important to reiterate the value which external organisations placed on the NEA, to reach higher officials.
- Government would be encouraged to consider how to find alternative sources of finance to fund conservation, in a time of cuts. The Committee agreed that incentives would be preferable to taxes.
- The BES should stress to Government that the points raised in the response to the Natural Environment White Paper should also be considered in relation to the Water White Paper, currently undergoing consultation.
- Biodiversity conservation in the UK Overseas Territories should be highlighted as a priority action for Government.

Ceri Margerison would seek a meeting with the Royal Town Planning Institute, to better gauge how planning legislation was to change, and the implications of this for conservation (**Action: CM**).

4. FORMAL WELCOME TO NEW PPC MEMBERS

The Committee welcomed Juliet Vickery, new Chair of PPC, and Emma Goldberg, elected to BES Council in September 2010, to their first meeting of PPC. Both Juliet and Emma introduced themselves. Emma worked as National Specialist on Forestry and Woodland at Natural England and would be pleased to act as a conduit of information between Natural England and the Committee.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 April 2010

The minutes of the Committee's April 2010 meeting were accepted as a correct record. Ceri Margerison reported that all outstanding actions, bar one (to investigate whether matched funding was available to candidates for the PEG from Nepal) had been completed. Ceri would be happy to update members on individual actions where necessary.

6. COMMITTEE MATTERS

- PPC Management Accounts and commentary

Members noted the Management Accounts and commentary, showing spending from the PPC budget as of 31 August 2010.

- 2011 Business Plan and Budget.

In September, the BES Finance Board had decided to ask each BES Committee to generate three budget scenarios for 2011: a 0% increase, a 20% increase and a 20% decrease on 2010 figures. A 20% cut had been proposed as a means to make Committees think creatively about their activities, and as a way for Council to assess what good ideas may exist within the Society not yet exploited. Following the CSR announcement it was clear that the UK faced difficult times until at least 2014. Therefore the BES should consider ways to better support the ecological community over this timeframe. The BES Council would also examine the impact on the Society of withdrawing some current activities.

- o *Budget scenarios*

Ceri Margerison would write a narrative to accompany the budget scenarios, detailing the impact of increasing or decreasing the PPC budget on the policy work the Society was able to deliver (**Action: CM**).

Ceri Margerison drew the Committee's attention to areas of significant difference between the three budget scenarios, summarised as follows:

- Under a 20% increase, a Policy Assistant could be employed on a temporary contract, at two days per week for a year, to assist the Policy Officer. An Assistant could join the Society for two days each week for eight months under a 0% scenario. No assistance would be possible with a 20% decrease.
- The Shadowing Scheme would be scaled back with a 20% decrease.
- A Select Committee Shadowing Scheme could be implemented only with a 20% increase.
- Scoping a parliamentary reception/ meeting with policy-makers in Northern Ireland would be possible only with a 20% or 0% increase.
- Two taskforces could be convened to take forward consultation responses or produce position statements under a 20% increase, compared to one with a 0% or 20% decrease.
- Regional Advisory Groups could be convened only under a 20% increase.
- A joint workshop with a Government partner would not be possible under a 20% decrease scenario, because of the limited time available in the Policy Team without an assistant.
- The Ecology into Policy Grant would be cancelled under a 20% decrease.
- An event at the British Science Festival could be organised only under the 20% increase scenario because of the staff time needed to manage this.
- The PEG would be doubled, to £6,000, under a 20% increase, and reduced to £2,000 with a 20% decrease.
- The Ecological Engagement Award would be suspended with a 20% decrease.
- The BES would withdraw from both the European Ecological Federation (EEF) and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) under the 20% decrease scenario.

- o *PPC subscriptions to other organisations*

Dr Hindmarch highlighted the importance of the BES remaining engaged with the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF). The Forum relied almost completely on volunteers, with two paid officers supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Its financial resources were limited and the Forum relied on the support of its network to succeed in its aim of influencing UK and EU policy. The Forum particularly relied on independent and impartial organisations, such as the

BES. Its relationship with the BES was important to the Forum, which gained from BES connections into networks and support with policy activities.

The BES also received benefits from membership of the Forum, with the UKOTCF acting as a conduit into a far richer biodiversity resource than in the mainland of the UK. The UKOTCF provided a means for the BES to link into development issues and to the European Commission. The Forum had developed particular links with Europe, through a regional ERA-net and EU Commission funded work on the Turks and Caicos Islands. The Forum was in the process of drafting three concept notes to link to key European initiatives.

The majority of the UK's Overseas Territories were engaged in the Forum, which was also working hard to re-build relationships with the RSPB, which had suffered during recent years. Further evidence that the UKOTCF was improving its relationship with other organisations was to be seen in plans for the UKOTCF and the UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) hold a joint reception in Foyles Bookshop, London, early in 2011.

The Forum would suffer not simply through a withdrawal of funding by the BES but from a withdrawal of support. Dr Osborn had provided valuable help and advice to the Forum in the past for example.

Dr Stevens suggested that if the BES needed to withdraw funding from the UKOTCF, the Society could still provide support in kind.

- *BES support for the European Ecological Federation (EEF)*

The Committee received a paper from Prof. James Bullock, General Secretary to the EEF. The BES had been providing administrative support to the EEF for some time, with the aim of building the influence of ecology in relation to European policy-making. As acknowledged by Prof. Bullock however, policy engagement had proceeded slowly; despite the best intentions by EEF members resources for this were limited.

Members questioned how long the BES could continue to support the EEF. The Chair suggested that the BES consider discussing with Prof. Bullock the establishment of performance targets, upon which the BES would wish to see action in two to three years. If no action was seen, the BES could gradually withdraw from the Federation (**Action: JV, CM**).

Dr Batty stressed the disadvantages to the BES of withdrawing support from the UKOTCF and from the EEF. The Society risked becoming isolated and inward-looking, losing connections to policy-making in Europe, and concentrating only on policy affecting the mainland UK. If these links were to be removed the Council of the BES would need to find other ways to develop connections to EU and overseas issues.

The BES had advocated, and would continue to advocate, the importance of supporting the UK's Overseas Territories. Cutting support to the UKOTCF would send a message to the Government that the Overseas Territories were not in fact important.

- *Natural Capital Initiative funding request*

Members expressed concern about the £21,000 pro rata cost of employing Bruce Howard, NCI Science Policy Liaison. Via email Dr Howard had confirmed that the high cost was due to Centre of Ecology and Hydrology overheads of 131%.

The Committee agreed with Dr Osborn that by being based in a larger organisation like CEH, Dr Howard would bring additional advantages to the BES. The Committee supported the £7,000 request for funding from the BES but Dr Howard would be asked to explore the cost of being employed by CEH but seconded to sit in Charles Darwin House, avoiding the overhead charges and having the advantage of the post being based with two of the three contributing organisations

(Action: CM).

o *Stand for Photographic Competition: request from Grants Committee*

The Committee agreed to fund the cost of replacing the stand, displaying winning pictures from the BES Photographic Competition. The cost would be found from the 2010 budget. Ceri Margerison would report this to the BES Grants Officer **(Action: CM).**

o *Decision on Ecology into Policy grant*

Government Departments and arms-length bodies were no longer able to print publications, due to a freeze on marketing. Dr Stevens suggested that the BES could assist primarily Government-funded projects in the dissemination of information, printing policy briefs, reports and glossy publications.

Several projects could compete for the chance to print their publications, receiving funds under the EIPG. The award could also include the cost of a launch event, such as a parliamentary reception (if the scope was of broad enough interest). An alternative could be a launch event at the BES Annual Meeting, with funding provided for a number of key policy-makers, identified by the grant holder, to attend.

A policy-maker from Defra, another Government Department or arms-length body could be invited to sit on the assessment panel for the grant.

A condition of applying for the grant should be that the project team should have the full backing of their funders to do so. The projects should map to the policy priorities of the BES.

Dr Stevens would prepare a couple of paragraphs on how the proposed grant could be assessed. Dr Stevens would outline how long an example printed report could be, and the numbers to whom it would be distributed. Ceri Margerison would then seek quotes for the cost of printing, using these figures to assess the total amount of EIPG funding which could be available **(Action: CS,CM).**

Dr Batty suggested that CLARE produced a four-page briefing on their design projects, which was a model that the BES could consider adopting for the printed policy briefs.

o *General discussion*

Dr Norman informed the Committee that income streams for the BES were projected to remain similar in 2011 to those in 2010. The BES was therefore not under pressure to slash budgets: the purpose of the scenario building exercise was to stimulate good ideas from committees with the 20% increase designed to help committees 'think outside the box'.

In the longer term it was likely that pressures on finances in the UK would impact on commercial library subscriptions to the BES journals, although strengths in international markets might temper a drop in income. Wiley-Blackwell had become more conservative in their financial projections for the BES journals.

Members agreed that a strong case could be made for supporting the Society's policy work, given the change and development in environmental, education and science policy expected in the coming months and the extremely successful track record of the committee's work in recent years.

There was a strong case for replacing the Policy Assistant position in January 2011 since without this the activity of the Committee would be severely restricted regardless of the level of income. Dr Norman suggested that Council would look

more favourably on a temporary than a permanent member of staff. Members of PPC would contribute to the business case for the need for this position (**Action: CM, All**).

- Nominations for Ecological Engagement Award 2011

Dr Osborn proposed Linda Davies, Imperial College, as a nominee for the EEA, for her work with OPAL. Dr Davies had successfully attracted funding from the National Lottery for work to engage the public. Dr Davies was the only applicant ever to successfully attract follow-on funding from the Lottery. Ceri Margerison would pass Dr Davies' nomination to the Grants Officer (**Action: CM**).

PPC members would suggest further nominees via email (**Action: all**).

7. PRESS

- 2010 Press Report

The Committee thanked Becky Allen for achieving fantastic press coverage for the BES during 2010.

Coverage of BES media stories continued to increase each year. The metrics for analysing press coverage were fairly inaccurate and it was likely that the amount of coverage detailed in the Press Report was an underestimate of that actually achieved by the BES. Figures for broadcast and online media were also not included as these were harder to audit than those for print media.

The BES had developed excellent contacts at the BBC during 2010, particularly with the planning desk at Radio 4 and with the Today Programme. Successful relationship management and the supply of useful information to journalists had been fundamental to this.

Mark Kinver, BBC Science and Nature Reporter, had attended the BES Annual Meeting in Leeds for two days. As a result the BES Annual Meeting had received excellent media coverage.

All the authors with whom Becky had worked had been delighted to achieve such a high profile in the media for their work. One of the most important factors behind this positive feedback was Becky's support of the authors, spending time reassuring and guiding them before media interviews.

PPC considered the recommendations outlined in the Press Report. Becky drew members' attention to the first and last:

- o *Institutional press officers*

Becky had been working with Lindsay Haddon, BES Publications Manager, to develop a service for press officers at the institution of the lead author of papers published in a BES journal. Institutional press officers were alerted to the publication of the paper, therefore leveraging the resource of the university press office to the coverage of ecology. Work on this system had stalled because of the BES Annual Meeting but Becky would pick this up once again.

- o *Sharing expertise at Charles Darwin House*

Cohabiting with other Learned Societies at Charles Darwin House could offer opportunities to share information and expertise in press engagement. Dr Norman would explore these opportunities, possibly considering an in-house seminar or meeting, with the other organisations in CDH once the new CEO of the Society of Experimental Biology was announced and

in post (**Action: HN**).

- Meltwater

Meltwater was a web-based platform facilitating the distribution of press releases to online media lists. It would be particularly useful to the BES in facilitating links to international and local media, the area in which the BES was weakest in its coverage. Meltwater also included the means to monitor press coverage.

Another useful feature would allow the BES to link into commentary and analysis of particular issues online, for example through blogs. This would be a means of BES members engaging with and commenting on local debates regarding areas of interest, particularly important given the Government agenda of devolving decision-making to the local level. This could be a feature which the Society could use in the future.

The Biochemical Society subscribed to Meltwater but had mixed feelings about its usefulness. It would be useful to explore why as it could be sensible to eventually share a Meltwater subscription across CDH organisations.

Becky could facilitate a demonstration by the Meltwater sales team at one of the PPC meetings in 2011. Relevant individuals from the other organisations within CDH could also attend (**Action: BA and HN**).

Dr Osborn noted that the Research Councils were withdrawing from the Local Authority Research Council Initiative. There might be an opportunity for the BES to step in somehow locally, with a linkage provided by the IEEM as an organisation with a large number of members already working in Local Authorities.

- BES at the BA Festival of Science: feedback

The BES had organised an event at the British Science Festival in September 2010, focusing on 'Landscapes of the Future'. The Society had also facilitated the appearance of the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute's Virtual Landscape Theatre (VLT).

The Landscapes of the Future event had gone well, with over 60 members of the public in the audience. The VLT had also seen a number of engaged school groups pass through and the team from Macaulay viewed their attendance as worthwhile. Press coverage for both events had been limited, with no coverage for the Landscapes event, although public engagement in the audience exceeded the events run by the BES at the 2009 Festival.

The Committee thanked Becky Allen, Ceri Margerison and Kirsty Wilmot for their work organising the Festival events.

- Tansley Trail and Centenary update

Becky Allen and Ceri Margerison would begin work on the Tansley Trail in November 2010.

The Committee had received the minutes of the September 2010 meeting of the Centenary Working Group. The main point to note was the recruitment of a Festival of Ecology Manager. Interviews for the post would take place in November. Within their first six months in post the Festival of Ecology Manager would need to prepare a costed business plan which would include liaison with Becky Allen over the centenary communications plan. This plan might also include costing for an additional amount of Becky's time during the centenary year.

8. SCIENCE POLICY

- Science Policy Report

PPC thanked Kirsty Wilmot an excellent job in pulling together the latest science policy report. Kirsty would edit this to form the Policy Digest, circulated to interested members of the BES. Information on the UK Overseas Territories would be added to the Report and Digest in future **(Action: KW)**.

- Topics for 2010 and 2011 Briefing Notes

Kirsty Wilmot had prepared a list of briefing note topics for consideration by PPC. An important consideration was how to distinguish these from POSTnotes and briefing notes prepared by the House of Commons library. Kirsty urged the Committee to think carefully about the target audience for the briefings: MPs, or Defra officials for example. Dr Osborn suggested that the Policy Team could contact the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee (PSC) to seek guidance on the briefing or article that the PSC would find useful.

The impact of the article/ briefing could be gauged by whether the text or topic was picked up by a parliamentary question; via informal feedback; whether POST picked this up as a topic for an inquiry; or MPs could be asked whether they would consider asking a question on the subject.

The briefing could be published as a 'concept note', or a concept note could be an additional output of the briefing production process. The concept note format, one A4 page, was popular with civil servants, who were hungry for ideas.

The list of topics could be trailed with someone, for example from POST or the PSC, who was aware of topics rising up the political agenda and who could comment on their timeliness.

The production of briefing notes was a new activity for the BES and would be highlighted to Council as an activity justifying the retention of existing staff resources in the Policy Team.

Kirsty Wilmot and Ceri Margerison would take the Committee's suggestions forward **(Action: KW and CM)**.

The Committee thanked Kirsty for her hard work in preparing the list of briefing topics.

- Update on the Natural Capital Initiative

Dr Osborn had suggested to Prof. Hails, Chair of NCI, that the NCI could collate the responses to the National Ecosystem Assessment from other groups. Dr Osborn would send information about this to Ceri Margerison **(Action: DO)**.

There could be an opportunity to link NCI to efforts taking place in the United States around "coupled natural and human systems". Funds could be forthcoming from the NERC and the U.S. to support international networking for the NCI. Members noted that the Ecological Society of America (ESA) was an early leader in the field of the valuation of natural capital. It could be interesting to build links between the ESA and NCI, possibly affiliating the NCI to the ESA in some way. The valuation of natural capital could provide the scope for a joint BES – ESA session at the INTECOL meeting in 2013.

Dr Norman and Dr Osborn would discuss further the links between the BES and ESA in this regard. Dr Norman would also contact Katherine McCarter, Executive Director of the ESA. Ceri Margerison would discuss Dr Osborn's suggestion with Dr Howard, NCI, and Prof. Hails **(Action, HN, DO, CM)**.

- Feedback from policy session with UK BRAG at BES annual conference and topics for future meetings

Turn out at the BES – BRAG session had been low; a reflection of the topic of the meeting (the UK Marine and Coastal

Access Act) and the location of the meeting venue. Ceri Margerison had discussed issues around venue, signage and scheduling with other members of BES staff and was confident that these factors would be addressed at the 2011 Annual Meeting in Sheffield. Despite the low turn-out, the quality of discussion had been high and BRAG had been pleased with the meeting.

The Committee agreed that the topic for the joint meeting in 2011 should be the National Ecosystem Assessment, as a follow up to the session on the same topic in 2009.

9. AOB

Many Scientific Advisory Committees in Defra were to be converted to 'committees of experts.' This might mean that a route for Committees to communicate with Ministers could disappear, as Committees could previously communicate via their Chair. Legislation could be needed to disband Science Advisory Committees.

Dr Osborn enquired whether the BES would respond to the Government Office for Science consultation on the 'Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees'. Ceri Margerison informed members that the BES would prepare a response in partnership with the Biochemical Society. Dr Osborn encouraged the BES to share the draft response with the Research Councils, which would be pursued (**Action: CM**).

Next meeting of PPC: 10 February 2011.

Action	Responsible
The ask the BES President to write to the Secretary of State and Defra Permanent Secretary, highlighting the importance of Defra funding for applied research.	CM
Request that other organisations sharing CDH Write to Government Departments, stressing that science research within Departments should not be cut.	CM
Examine the implications of the Browne Review and HEFCE price bands for ecology tuition.	CM
Add additional points to the BES response to the White Paper.	CM
Seek a meeting with the Royal Town Planning Institute, to better gauge how planning legislation is to change, and the implications of this for conservation	CM
Write a narrative to accompany the budget scenarios, detailing the impact of increasing or decreasing the PPC budget on the policy work the Society is able to deliver.	CM
Discuss with Prof. Bullock the establishment of performance targets for the EEF.	CM, JV
Ask Dr Howard to explore the cost of being employed by CEH but seconded to sit in Charles Darwin House.	CM
Report to BES Grants Officer that PPC will fund photographic competition stand.	CM
To prepare a couple of paragraphs on how the EIPG can be assessed. To seek quotes for the cost of printing, using these figures to assess the total amount of EIPG funding which could be made available.	CS, CM
Contribute to the business case for the need for a Policy Assistant position.	All, CM
Report Dr Linda Davies nomination for the EEA to the BES Grants Officer.	CM
Suggest further nominees for the EEA via email.	All
To explore opportunities to share press experience, possibly considering an in-house seminar or meeting, with the other organisations in CDH once the new CEO of the Society of Experimental Biology is announced and in post.	HN
To facilitate a demonstration by the Meltwater sales team at one of the PPC meetings in 2011. Relevant individuals from the other organisations within CDH could be invited to attend.	BA, HN

To edit the Science Policy Brief to form the Policy Digest. To add information on the UK Overseas Territories to the Report and Digest in future.	KW
To take forward the Committee's suggestions regarding briefing notes.	CM, KW
To send to the Policy Officer suggestions regarding NCI collating feedback to the NEA.	DO
To discuss further the links between the BES and ESA with respect to natural capital. To contact Katherine McCarter, Executive Director of the ESA. To feedback to Dr Howard, NCI, and Prof. Hails.	HN, DO, CM
To share the draft BES response to the CoPSAC consultation with the Research Councils.	CM