

MINUTES OF THE BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY
PUBLIC AND POLICY COMMITTEE
14.00 – 17.00, Thursday 26 February 2009
Quaker Meeting House, London

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Present were: Peter Carey (Chair), Jeff Bale, Colin Hindmarch, Kathryn Monk, Dan Osborn, Andrew Pullin, Steve Sait, Jennifer Shay, Carly Stevens and Tim Rotheray. In attendance were: Ceri Margerison (Policy Officer), Hazel Norman (Executive Director) and Joanna Savage (BES Policy Intern).

Apologies were received from: Becky Allen (Press Officer), Lesley Batty and Kate Trumper.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 October 2008

The minutes were accepted as a correct record of the previous meeting.

-Follow-up from meeting in Wales

Members agreed that the meeting with the Minister for the Environment in Wales had been extremely positive. All agreed that it would be important to maintain the good relationship built up here, going forward. Members suggested that it would be sensible to stay in contact with the Minister's advisor, Dr Havard Prosser, regarding priorities for the Welsh Assembly Government. Periodically, every six months for example, key members of the BES could be selected to meet with the Minister, providing advice about key issues of importance to the Welsh Assembly.

The Severn Tidal Power scheme had been identified by Dr Prosser as a particular area in which the Minister's team might benefit from the independent expertise of the BES. The Conservation Ecology Special Interest Group had planned a meeting to discuss the ecological impacts of the development of a Severn Barrage, in 2008. Although this meeting had been cancelled, it would be useful to contact the organisers to find out if they would be willing to engage with the BES and with the Minister over this issue, possibly considering a meeting of select individuals with the Minister's team. **(Action: CM)**

Dr Rotheray stressed the importance of political astuteness amongst any small team of BES members engaging with the Minister in this way. It would be important to be pragmatic in our approach to offering advice and proposing solutions.

Kathryn Monk informed the Committee that part of her role was currently seconded to the Welsh Assembly Government, working directly with Dr Prosser, providing advice with respect to ecosystem services. The Committee thanked Kathryn and agreed that this would provide an excellent link into the WAG. Dr Monk would contact Dr Prosser to find out what information the Minister would find most helpful from the BES with respect to a Severn Tidal Power scheme. **(Action: KM)**

3. COMMITTEE MATTERS

- *2009 Business Plan and Budget*

This document was noted.

- *PPC five-year plan*

PPC 116th Meeting

This item was noted. The Chair encouraged members to contact him to suggest any amendments to the plan necessary: the document was a dynamic one and would be amended and updated as the Committee's plans evolved over the coming years.

- *PPC Management Accounts and Chair's commentary (papers to follow)*

End-of-year accounting meant that it was not possible to circulate the management accounts to the Committee in advance of the meeting. The accounts, and the Chair's commentary, would be sent to members as soon as they were available.

(Action: CM and PC)

- *Planning for October meeting with ACES and Scottish Government*

PPC agreed that liaison with ACES was a sensible suggestion, given the absence of a BES member from Scotland on the Committee. Other members of the BES who had previously played an active role in Council or in the work of the policy team, would be contacted to see whether they could also help to facilitate this meeting. (Action: CM).

A parliamentary reception for representatives of the Scottish Government, civil-servants, Scottish MEPs, representatives from NGOs, academia and members of the BES, would be organised. The President of the BES would be invited to deliver a brief speech at the start of the reception. The Policy Officer would liaise with the in-coming President regarding his diary commitments. (Action: CM)

Following the reception, members of PPC could meet the Scottish Environment Minister and other key figures for a private dinner. It would be useful to find out in advance, from the Minister's team, the topics which the Minister would like to cover. Key members of the BES, external to PPC, could then be invited to attend the dinner. **(Action: CM)**

The Policy Officer would liaise with ACES regarding the most suitable date to hold the reception and dinner, before liaising with PPC and inviting the Minister to take part. **(Action: CM)**

- *Staffing for the Policy Team*

Budgetary restrictions meant that recruitment to the proposed Policy and External Affairs Manager post would not now go forward. To support the Policy Officer, a Policy and Communications Assistant was to be appointed for nine-months, from Easter until Christmas 2009. The post was for three days per week: two to assist in the Society's public policy work, and one to assist the Communications Officer. The closing date was 16 March. Dr Norman urged members to circulate information about the post to contacts whom they considered may be interested in applying.

Members agreed that extra support for the policy team would be vital as the BES moved forwards, particularly in relation to developing an influence on European policy. Those members of the Committee with a position on Council agreed to make representations to this effect when the Council discussed the Society's budget. **(Action: PC, JB, TR, LB, SS)**.

The Chair agreed to send a note to Council stressing the importance and scope of the Society's policy work: vital to promote the science of ecology and get others to recognise its importance. **(Action: PC)**.

The Committee thanked the Policy Officer for her support over the past year, an uncertain time for the Committee and for policy work at the Society due to a stall in recruiting for the PEAM post. The Policy Officer thanked the current and previous policy interns and assistants for their help.

- *2020: What does the future hold for the environmental professions?*

Dr Norman had attended a meeting in October 2008, focusing on the future shape of the organisations representing the

environmental professions. One proposal to emerge from the meeting was the formation of a federation, to *represent* all organisations with an interest in the environment. A longer-term view, held by some, was the formation of a single organisation, *subsuming* the others.

Tensions had arisen between those organisations in favour of devolving functions to this larger body and those wishing to preserve their autonomy. PPC were concerned that many of the organisations represented at the October meeting seemed unlikely partners, which would lead to further tension. Concerns were expressed too regarding how 'science-led' the new organisation would be, and the potential for environmental education to be disregarded by the assembled grouping.

The Committee agreed that if invited to attend a future meeting, Dr Norman should do so but in the capacity of an observer.

- *To approve M. Press as BES representative on National Trust Board*

Professor John Lee had been a long-standing representative of the BES on the Board of the National Trust and was shortly to step down. The Committee agreed that Professor Malcolm Press should be nominated as his replacement. Dr Norman would draft a note to the National Trust to inform them that Professor Press' nomination had been approved. **(Action: HN)**

It was extremely important that the BES have a presence on the Board of the National Trust, particularly given the tension between improving access to the countryside for the public and the damage that this might cause to the environment. The Chair would contact Professor Press in advance of his first meeting on the Board to discuss key issues of concern. **(Action: PC)**

- *Developing an ethical policy for the BES: update*

Drs Rotheray and Batty had volunteered to develop this project further and would meet on 10 March to discuss. After discussion, the Committee agreed that the focus of the work should be on ethics in relation to the BES's own business practices; primarily with regarding the formation of partnerships between the BES and other organisations. Dr Rotheray agreed to draft brief guidance, in the form of a bullet-point list, which could govern how the BES dealt with approaches from other organisations seeking partnerships and how the BES approaches other organisations during forthcoming fundraising activities. The document would stress that the BES would adopt a 'best-practice' approach, reviewing our progress as we move forward and learning from our experiences. Members agreed that the BES could pair up with organisations in a spirit of helping them to improve their business practices and environmental impact, providing that this was a stated aim of the other body.

Dr Rotheray would present the document to the next meeting of PPC in May. **(Action: TR)**

Once this work was complete, Drs Rotheray and Batty could consider re-examining the Society's ethical investment policy. Dr Norman would send Dr Rotheray details of the current BES policy. **(Action: HN)**

Members of the Committee were keen that the Society lessened its environmental impact with respect to PPC meetings. Video-conferencing could be explored once the Society re-located to new offices in central London.

4. PRESS

- *To discuss support for BES activities at the British Science Festival 2009 and plans for the Centenary*

Members received a paper from Becky Allen, outlining how she might provide additional support for the BES's events at the

British Science Festival in September. The Committee agreed that Becky was best-placed to provide expert advice on the time commitment required to successfully run such high-profile events and accepted her recommendations.

Members agreed that a survey of BES members, seeking their views on the events and activities the BES should run in the centenary year, was an excellent idea and should be taken forward. Dr Norman would feed this back to the Centenary Working Group. **(Action: HN)**

Discussion around the idea of a time-capsule moved on to consider where this could be buried. Members considered that a 'BES garden' could be an excellent idea for the centenary and the possibility of delivering this in partnership with the RHS or the Royal Botanical Gardens Kew could be explored. A BES garden at the 2013 Chelsea Flower Show, also celebrating its centenary that year, could create a media splash. Dr Norman would feed back to Centenary Working Group. **(Action: HN)**

Dr Shay suggested that the 'Envirothon', run in Manitoba, Canada, could be an excellent activity for the centenary, and beyond. Schools from Manitoba submit teams of five students, who compete to improve their environmental skills and knowledge. After a short training period, the teams are taken on a two-day residential placement, where they must assess a site using ecological techniques and write a short report. Teams are judged on their interpretation. The competition has proven extremely popular and schools vie to take part. Dr Norman would pass this information on to the Education Officer, **(Action: HN)**

- *Update on progress against recommendations of October 2008 Annual Press Report*

This item was noted.

5. SCIENCE POLICY

- *Science Policy Report*

Members thanked Joanna Savage for putting together the policy report; an excellent and informative document.

Dr Rotheray suggested that the BES could consider engaging with a current consultation on zero-carbon homes. He would send a comment to the Policy Officer, who would submit a brief response from the BES. **(Action: TR and CM)**

- *Natural Capital Initiative Symposium*

The Natural Capital Initiative had reached its target to raise £100,000 in sponsorship and would run as proposed: a high-profile first day and three targeted workshops over two days. Sponsorship had been raised from the Institute of Biology, CEH, BES, Science Council, Biosciences Federation, Living with Environmental Change, Centrica, Lawes Trust, Natural England, RSPB and Foresight.

361 delegates had registered for the symposium as at 25 February. 136 of these had paid (raising £18,915 in revenue) and 225 were places allocated to the sponsor organisations.

6. PROJECTS

- *Potential workshop with Welsh Environment Research Hub*

The Committee was supportive of the proposal to run a workshop focused on coastal zone management in partnership with the Welsh Environment Research Hub. Integrated coastal zone management, and the management of waters around

estuaries and coasts, was a large and complex issue, where policy was vague.

The Welsh Environment Minister was concerned with the Spatial Planning Bill and the need to bring Councils together over planning with respect to estuaries and bays. Working with the Welsh Environment Research Hub in this area could be another opportunity to build links with the Welsh Assembly Government.

The end of October could be a suitable time to run the workshop. Dr Pullin would check that this did not clash with any plans at Bangor University. **(Action: AP)**.

Dr Monk and the Policy Officer would take the development of the workshop forward. **(Action: CM and KM)**

- *Parliamentary Reception with the IEEM*

The BES, the IEEM and Countdown 2010 would work in partnership to hold a parliamentary reception on 27 October. This would be supported by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. Lord Selborne had agreed to host the reception. Sebastian Winckler, Head of Countdown 2010 would speak and Pavan Sukhdev, leader of the TEEB review, had been invited. A letter of invitation to the Parliamentary-Under-Secretary of State was currently awaiting review by the IEEM.

The reception would be used as an opportunity to launch a statement by the BES and IEEM on potential steps forward to halt biodiversity loss post-2010. Although it was clear that the UK would miss the target to halt biodiversity loss by 2010. PPC stressed the importance of emphasising the positives which had arisen through the existence of the target. The position statement should present an objective, science-based view of why and how meeting the target had failed, along with suggestions for the future.

Members agreed to email the Policy Officer with suggestions of those members of the BES who should be invited to attend a small workshop in June, to draft the statement. **(Action: All)**

- *Activities for 2010 around biodiversity target*

There were several suggestions:

- Developing an event with the IEEM for the British Science Festival, raising the profile of biodiversity and efforts to halt its decline with the general public.
- A mini-symposium or thematic programme at the BES annual meeting in Leeds.
- A workshop with Defra. This would link to Phase II of the National Ecosystem Assessment, which would focus on scenario building. The National Ecosystem Assessment scenarios for ecosystem services delivery would have to be linked to the post-2010 target.
- Delivery of work through the Natural Capital Initiative. The Policy Officer would explore this following the April symposium **(Action: CM)**

Dr Osborn suggested that a well-developed programme of activities could attract funding from the Research Councils. This would be discussed further at the May meeting of PPC, in order to develop a coherent plan.

7. ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

- *Update on Wilding*

The Policy Officer would contact Dr Hodder to obtain the documentation which she had been able to produce so far. The

Committee would then review this before deciding how to proceed with publication. **(Action: CM)**

The Policy Officer would prepare a document for the next meeting of PPC, outlining how the Ecological Issues format could be altered to allow quicker publication, more responsive to 'hot topics'. This could include the publication of a 'POST-note'-type document or a briefing note. **(Action: CM)**

8. AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS

- Comment on vision for a new 'Royal Society of Biology'

A new organisation, 'Newco', had been formed and a meeting of the Institute of Biology was to take place in April to sign off the business plan for the new body. Chartered Biologist status would remain, delivered by the new organisation. Dr Norman would check how the BES's subscription would alter when 'Newco' became a legal entity. **(Action: HN)**

PPC were concerned by the potential for the independence of the new body to be compromised by the inclusion of commercial organisations, currently members of the BSF, in its governance. Their precise involvement should be transparent. Dr Hindmarch would contact Professor Press, a member of the 'Newco' Board, to alert him to this issue. **(Action: CH)**

- Update from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

The UKOTCF was to hold a large conference in Cayman in May. Dr Hindmarch informed the Committee that the Forum was progressing following a structural review and thanked the BES for its continued support of the Forum's activities.

9. AOB

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee and Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committees were horizon-scanning to find topics for future inquiries. The Policy Officer urged members of the Committee to send any suggestions to her via email by Friday 6 March. **(Action: All)**

Next meeting of PPC: Thursday 7 May, London

Number	Action	Responsible
1	To contact organisers of BES meeting on Severn Barrage to seek interest in a small meeting with the Welsh Environment Minister	CM
2	To contact Dr Prosser regarding the Welsh Environment Minister's key concerns with respect to Severn Tidal Power Scheme	KM
3	To send management accounts and Chair's commentary to members	CM, PC
4	Liaise with Scottish Environment Minister's team, when appropriate, over topics to cover at proposed dinner	CM
5	Liaise with ACES over date for event, liaise with PPC, invite Minister to attend	CM
6	To represent the importance of policy work, and a well-resourced policy team, to the BES Council during budgetary discussions	PC, JB, TR, LB, SS
7	To draft a note to Council stressing the importance and scope of the Society's policy work	PC
8	To contact the National Trust regarding approval for Professor Press' nomination to the Board	HN
9	To contact Professor Press in advance of first Board meeting to discuss issues of concern	PC
10	To present draft guidance on ethics at next PPC meeting	TR
11	To pass Dr Rotheray details of the Society's ethical investment policy	HN
12	To take the Committee's support for a survey of BES members' opinions, a time-capsule and BES garden, to the Centenary Working Group	HN
13	To inform the Education Officer about 'Envirothon'	HN
14	To email the Policy Officer with suggestions for BES members to invite to workshop in June, to draft a position statement on halting biodiversity loss post-2010	All
15	To discuss with the Steering Group the possible delivery of activities relating to biodiversity, in 2010, through the Natural Capital Initiative	CM
16	To contact Kathy Hodder to obtain materials produced so far for re-wilding project	CM
17	Committee to consider how to proceed with publication on receipt or re-wilding information	All
18	To draft a document for the next meeting of PPC, outlining proposals on how 'Ecological Issues' format could be altered	CM
19	To check how BES subscription would alter on the formation of 'Newco'	HN
20	Committee to suggest topics for inquiry by House of Lords and IUSS Select Committees – by 6 March	All