

**THE BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY
PUBLIC AND POLICY COMMITTEE**
10.30 – 13.30, Thursday 29th April 2010
Charles Darwin House, London

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Present: Peter Carey (Chair), Lesley Batty, Rob Brooker, Colin Hindmarch, Tim Rotheray. In attendance: Becky Allen, Press Officer; Ceri Margerison, Policy Officer; Hazel Norman, Executive Director; Jenny Oates, Policy Assistant.

Apologies were received from: Jeff Bale, Rosie Hails, Kathryn Monk, Dan Osborn, Andrew Pullin, Jennifer Shay and Carly Stevens.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 May 2009

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record, subject to the correction of a minor typographical error. Ceri Margerison would amend this and send the minutes to the Chair to sign and return (**Action: CM, PC**).

3. COMMITTEE MATTERS

- *PPC Management Accounts*

The Committee had not seen the Management Accounts for the 2008/09 year as these had not been ready at the end of the financial year. The Chair had seen these Accounts at a recent meeting of Finance Board, and these showed that the Committee's expenditure was on budget in 2009. The Management Accounts presented to the Committee at this meeting were for October 2009 – April 2010; again, they were as would be expected at this stage in the BES's accounting year.

A meeting of the BES Finance Board had been held on Monday 19th April. The financial outlook for the BES appeared more positive than at the same point in 2009, due to a rise in the stock market between April 2009 and April 2010.

- *Update on BES – NERC Science Policy Interactions Workshop*

Ceri Margerison informed the Committee that the BES and NERC were once more collaborating to deliver a science policy training workshop for early-career researchers, with no more than 12 years post-PhD experience. Thirty researchers had been allocated places to attend the event, which would take place at the Defra Innovation Centre, a Defra training facility in Reading, on 18 – 19 May. The programme was a mix of networking sessions, role play, conversations with 'mentors' and written and oral communications training.

The Chair suggested that it would be useful for participants to consider how best to communicate via email, given the criticism of researchers' approach to e-mail communication at the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit. Ceri Margerison would pass this feedback to Kate Trumper, leading the written communications session (**Action: CM**).

- *Update on BES – UKBRAG workshop at Annual Meeting*

Plans for the session were progressing well and only one speaking slot was still to be filled, concerning 'what the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act means for nature conservation'. The Chair suggested that it might be useful to contact Val Kapos, Cambridge Conservation Forum (CCF), for suggestions as the CCF had a marine conservation section (**Action: CM**).

Members were supportive of the proposal to broadcast the session via the internet but suggested that this facility should not be widely advertised in advance, to avoid compromising attendance at the event.

An informal networking session, either lunch or a drinks reception depending on the time, would be important to attract delegates to attend, particularly as the marine community was not generally well-represented at the BES annual meetings. Members recognised such networking opportunities as a strength of previous BES – UK BRAG collaborative events. Ceri Margerison would raise this with Tina Yates, UK BRAG **(Action: CM)**.

Catering for the event would be investigated to make sure that any fish or seafood used would be sustainably sourced **(Action: CM)**.

- *Planning for Autumn 2010 meeting in Peterborough*

Ceri Margerison had spoken to Paul Rose, JNCC, immediately before the PPC meeting and had been informed that JNCC remained supportive of the proposal to run a joint event in the autumn. The event would focus on the outcome of the COP-10 negotiations, taking place in October in Nagoya, Japan, and their implications for conservation and research in the UK's Overseas Territories (OTs). The JNCC wished the event to contribute to capacity building in the OTs, and to meet the needs of the OTs, rather than these needs be imposed on OT representatives by the JNCC and BES. OT representatives should be encouraged to attend the event and a meeting of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum could be organised to coincide with this workshop, to better facilitate this.

Colin Hindmarch suggested that Gerard Gray, Montserrat, be invited to take part, whilst representatives from Birdlife International could also be approached. Professor Ken Norris, University of Reading, had an interest in biodiversity conservation in the OTs and could be invited to engage with the workshop. Kew Gardens was also actively involved with the OTs and could provide a source of interested individuals. Ceri Margerison would investigate these suggestions with Juliet Vickery, standing for election as Chair of PPC, and UKOTCF colleagues **(Action: CM)**.

Ceri Margerison would take forward discussions with Helen Baker, JNCC, and the UKOTCF **(Action: CM)**.

The Chair suggested that the session could run in the morning, with a PPC meeting in the afternoon, followed by a networking dinner between the Committee and JNCC representatives. The precise structure of the day would depend on who was to attend the dinner, to avoid attendees wasting time between the session and evening meal.

- *Partnership with Natural England – Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation*

At the request of the Committee, Mike Morecroft, Natural England, had submitted a revised proposal for a joint meeting between Natural England the BES on 'Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation'. Dr Morecroft sought the support of the BES through the provision of the Policy Officer's time and complimentary use of the Charles Darwin House conference facilities.

The Committee agreed to support the proposal from Dr Morecroft.

Ceri Margerison would clarify arrangements for complimentary hire of the conference centre with Dr Norman: members queried whether joint ownership of the facilities with the Biochemical Society and Society of Experimental Biology might necessitate a compensatory cost payable to these two organisations **(Action: CM)**.

Ceri Margerison would also ensure that the BES Meetings Committee was aware of the planned conference **(Action: CM)**. Dr Brooker volunteered to sit on the large consulting group proposed by Dr Morecroft and offered to identify colleagues at Scottish Natural Heritage working on climate change adaptation projects. Ceri Margerison would send this information to Dr

Morecroft (**Action: CM, RB**).

- *Possible support as an 'affiliate' for the Defra UK Landscape Award*

The Committee received a document from the Landscape Institute, outlining how the BES could become involved with the 'UK Landscape Award' as an 'affiliate'.

Colin Hindmarch informed members that the Landscape Institute consisted of three major groups of professionals: landscape architects, landscape managers and landscape scientists (who may be conservationists and ecologists). The aims of the Landscape Institute were therefore not so far divorced from those of members of the BES; the Chair also informed the Committee that the Institute was exploring becoming a tenant at Charles Darwin House.

Dr Rotheray suggested that as an affiliate the BES might have the opportunity to input into the judging criteria for the award, meaning that the ecological value of the landscape might be better considered.

In light of this information, the Committee was happy to become an affiliate of this award, provided that this would be cost-neutral for the Society. Ceri Margerison would contact Stephen Russell at the Institute to seek further information (**Action: CM**).

The proposal that the BES support the award would need to be sent to Council (**Action: CM**).

- *Chairmanship of PPC*

Juliet Vickery, Head of International Research at the RSPB, was to stand for election as Chair of PPC at the BES Annual General Meeting in September. Dr Carey would remain as a member of PPC once he stepped down as Chair.

Members thanked Dr Carey for the fantastic work he had undertaken as interim Chair, taking over the role when Dr Dan Osborn was no longer able to continue due to other commitments. The support and assistance which Dr Carey had offered to the Policy Officer was greatly appreciated.

- *Policy Assistant position and policy internships*

Kirsty Wilmot would join the BES as Policy Assistant on 13th May and would work for the Society on a Thursday and Friday until 23rd December. Kirsty had previously been employed in the House of Commons Library and as a member of staff supporting the Associate Parliamentary Renewable and Sustainable Energy Group.

Members thanked Jenny Oates for her work as Policy Intern. Jenny was to leave the BES on Friday 30th April and would join the marine team of the JNCC in June. Rob Calvert would join the BES as Policy Intern on 11th May, working for the Society for two days each week for three months.

4. PRESS

- *April 2010 Press Report*

The Committee received an update on press activity from Becky Allen. Oxford University Press had published a book examining the history of Wytham Woods and the BES Forest Ecology Special Interest Group had organised a meeting at which this was being launched (29th April); Becky was therefore busy dealing with press inquiries relating to this. Coverage would appear in the NERC 'Planet Earth' magazine and in Defra's in-house publication, plus via the BBC and other outlets.

The most recent journal papers selected for press-release had attracted a great deal of press coverage. Highlighting journal

papers to institutional press officers also continued to work well.

- *British Science Festival event: 14th September, Birmingham*

Plans for the BES panel event at the British Science Festival, focused on 'Landscapes of the Future' continued to develop. Dr Brooker raised a number of questions, from Dr David Miller at the Macaulay Institute, who was considering whether to attend to exhibit the 'Virtual Landscape Theatre' (VLT) as part of the BES event. Ceri Margerison and Becky Allen emphasised the enthusiasm of the BES for displaying the VLT and the help which the BES could provide with promoting the VLT in advance of the event.

Ceri Margerison requested costs from Dr Miller regarding the use of the VLT at the event. The BES only had limited funds available to run the event at the Festival.

Dr Brooker would feed these comments back to Dr Miller (**Action: RB**).

- *Tansley Trail and BES Centenary*

Ceri Margerison and Becky Allen were aware of the actions which needed to be undertaken to develop the Tansley Trail and would begin to move forwards with these in coming months.

Ceri Margerison would send Dr Brooker a copy of the paper outlining plans for the Tansley Trail, presented to the 25 February 2010 meeting of PPC (**Action: CM**).

The need for a clear communications plan, strategy and budget had been communicated to the Centenary Working Group, which had met earlier in April: the outcome of the meeting was not yet widely known.

Members felt strongly that the Centenary Working Group, charged with developing plans for the BES Centenary celebrations in 2013, should be asked to report back to the next meeting of Council in June, and subsequent meetings. This would ensure that all Council members and BES Committees remained in touch with discussions and could coordinate their efforts with those of the Working Group. The Chair would raise this with Dr Norman (**Action: PC**).

5. SCIENCE POLICY

- *Science Policy Report*

The Committee received the Science Policy Report, which would be made available to interested individuals across the wider BES membership following the meeting, as the thrice yearly 'Policy Digest'.

- *UK General Election: update and post-election activities*
 - *Parties' manifesto commitments*

The document comparing the manifestos of the three major political parties in the UK General Election would prove useful in allowing comparison between manifesto commitments and eventual policy developed.

- *Letter to Prospective Parliamentary Candidates*

There was a reluctance and nervousness amongst a number of senior figures within the BES to engage in what was perceived to be direct political action. Members of the Committee recognised that sending a letter to prospective parliamentary candidates could be seen as politically sensitive but did not agree that this perception was accurate and suggested that sending such a letter was a legitimate action to communicate the value of impartial ecological science to

policy-makers. The Committee was therefore were firmly in favour of sending a letter to new MPs, with a background or interest in science, post-election.

In the event of a hung parliament, the importance of sending a letter would be further accentuated as the BES would need to engage with a number of politicians from across a number of parties, all with different policy interests: a hung parliament would also mean that policy debates and decisions would need to be considered in greater depth, in which case information from the BES would be even more valuable for MPs.

Dr Rotheray emphasised that the letter should highlight the value of ecology to key policy decisions, such as the development of a Severn tidal barrage. The text should emphasise the important role of the BES as a conduit of information, facilitating connections between academic experts and policy-makers. The letter could explicitly state that the BES does not campaign on specific policy issues; an approach which might be welcomed by MPs.

Dr Rotheray would revise the letter (**Action: TR**).

Ceri Margerison would draft a note for the BES President, to accompany the revised letter, emphasizing the importance which PPC attached to this piece of work and that the letter had been re-written to take account of concerns expressed by the President and others. The Chair would review the note and send this to the President (**Action: CM, PC**).

The letter would then need to be circulated to new MPs no more than twenty-days post-election, to take advantage of the limited window of opportunity to grab MPs' attention (**Action: CM**).

The BES President would be invited to attend the autumn meeting of PPC, allowing members to discuss the Society's policy work, and the aims and objectives of this, with him (**Action: PC**).

- *Post-election activities*

Ceri Margerison responded to a query from Dr Norman regarding engagement with Select Committees. Select Committees would be constituted in the autumn: at this point the BES should send Committee members a letter and offer to meet with them. The successor to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee would be an important focus for this work, as would the EFRA Committee (in whatever guise).

A parliamentary reception with the Society of Biology or Natural Capital Initiative could be pursued: May 2011 could mark a good time for this, depending on any potential follow-up election, in the event of a hung parliament in May 2010.

- *Development of a BES 'Pilot Reviews' programme*

Dr Brooker raised concerns that a 'Pilot Reviews' scheme would not deliver desired outputs for the BES: as outlined this seemed to be a means of generating a question, which could then be further scrutinised via an in-depth systematic review; a particular question was not itself answered.

Members acknowledged the comments made by Prof. Pullin in an earlier meeting, that the small amount of funding the BES made available under the 'Ecology into Policy Grant' (EIPG) was not enough to conduct a quality systematic review and that other funders were now fulfilling this role: the BES should better concentrate its resources on another scheme.

Dr Brooker suggested that it would be more useful to fund the production of a policy brief, in a style similar to a 'POSTnote'.

The call for applications under the EIPG would be reviewed at the next meeting of PPC to make sure that the Committee

received high-quality applications to produce an evidence-based policy brief, of use to the Society's policy work (**Action: AII**).

- *Update from the Natural Capital Initiative*

Dr Norman had sent a copy of the draft Natural Capital Initiative constitution, proposing that the NCI become a 'Special Interest Group' of the Society of Biology to the Chair. The Chair had a number of concerns about the content of the document, which he would send to Dr Norman, to be fed back to Dr Bruce Howard, NCI Science Policy Liaison (**Action: PC, HN**).

If the NCI agreed to make the changes suggested by the Chair and Dr Norman, the BES would be happy to sign the document. Status as a 'Special Interest Group' was due to insecurities surrounding the future financial viability of the NCI; if the NCI grew in strength over time however it should be re-constituted as an entity in its own right, no longer part of the Society of Biology.

- *Update on BES POST Fellowship 2010*

Eleanor Kean, completing a PhD at Cardiff University on modelling and monitoring Eurasian otter populations, had been awarded the next BES POST Fellowship. Eleanor would begin her Fellowship in January 2011, researching and writing a POSTnote on 'Landscapes of the Future'.

The 2009 POST Fellow, Rebecca Ross, had recently secured a job as Committee Specialist to the EFRA Select Committee. This achievement emphasised the valuable opportunity provided by the POST Fellowship and highlighted why BES support for the scheme should continue.

6. ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

- *Update on Wilding*

The Chair provided a brief outline of the genesis of the 'Wilding' project. Members agreed that as the outputs which had been produced did not meet the content and format required of a BES 'Ecological Issues' publication, being more suitable for 'British Wildlife', this project would not be further pursued. The Chair would inform Dr Hodder (**Action: PC**).

7. AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS

- *Update from UKOTCF*

Dr Hindmarch reported that the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum continued to build strong relationships with the JNCC. The Forum was applying to Defra for funding for 'NetBiome', with a meeting in Paris in May. The next in the series of UKOTCF biannual meetings would be held in 2012, and it was probable that this would take place in London.

- *Society of Biology*

Ceri Margerison had attended a dinner meeting with staff from the Society of Biology and other Member Organisations (MOs) on 26th April, aimed at fostering more productive means of working between the Society and MOs. MOs were hopeful that this meeting would lead to the greater ability for them to input into decision-making and identification of means by which the Society could add value to their own work.

Dr Norman informed members that the BES, Biochemical Society and Society for Experimental Biology had agreed to

refurbish the first and second floors of Charles Darwin House over the summer. The Society of Biology was extremely interested in moving into the building, and becoming a partner with a share in CDH, and this could happen as soon as September or October 2010.

Dr Mark Downs, CEO of the Society of Biology, would attend the June meeting of BES Council and would meet with Dr Norman informally in advance of this.

8. Matters arising from the meeting of 25 February meeting not covered elsewhere on the agenda

Ceri Margerison informed members that all actions bar one from the 25 February PPC meeting had been completed: to investigate the availability of matched funding from DFID for applicants to BES grants from Nepal. This remained an important issue, particularly for Grants Committee which received very many such applications. Ceri Margerison would follow this up once more via Dr Dan Osborn and then identify another route if this were not successful (**Action: CM**).

9. AOB

- *International Year of Biodiversity event in Wales, 20 May*

Ceri Margerison informed the Committee that the BES and IEEM would together attend an event, aimed at policy-makers, to launch the International Year of Biodiversity in Wales on 20 May. The IEEM had organised the translation of the joint position statement on 'halting UK biodiversity loss' into Welsh and this document would be available at the event.

- *Scope of BES Policy Work*

Dr Hindmarch raised an important issue for the Committee and the BES to consider: how far could the BES suggest policy options to policy-makers and what level of engagement with policy was appropriate for the Society? This could be covered at the BES Council's 'strategy day' in June, with PPC following this up with the BES President at the Committee's next meeting in the autumn. Dr Norman would raise this with the BES President (**Action: HN**).

Next meeting of PPC: October 2010, date to be confirmed.

Action	Responsible
Amend typographical error in the minutes of 25 February meeting: send the minutes to the Chair to sign and return	CM and PC
Feedback to Kate Trumper the need to consider transparent e-mail communication with delegates at BES – NERC workshop	CM
Contact Val Kapos, Cambridge Conservation Forum (CCF), for suggestions of speaker at BES – BRAG marine session	CM
Raise the importance of an informal networking session at BES –BRAG session with Tina Yates, UK BRAG	CM
Check with caterers at Leeds University to make sure any fish or seafood used for catering for BES – BRAG session is sustainably sourced	CM
Investigate suggestions for speakers/ delegates at BES – JNCC autumn workshop with Juliet Vickery and UKOTCF colleagues	CM
Take forward discussions on BES – JNCC session with Helen Baker, JNCC, and the UKOTCF	CM
Clarify arrangements for complimentary hire of the conference centre, for BES- Natural England conference, with Dr Norman	CM
Ensure that the BES Meetings Committee is aware of the planned conference with Natural England	CM
Send feedback to Dr Morecroft regarding Dr Brooker's willingness to be involved with Natural England conference	CM, RB
Seek further information on 'affiliates' scheme from the Landscape Institute	CM
Send proposal that the BES support the UK Landscape Award as an 'affiliate' to Council	CM
Feed comments on BES engagement with the Macaulay 'Virtual Landscape Theatre' back to Dr Miller	RB
Send Dr Brooker a copy of the paper outlining plans for the Tansley Trail, presented to the 25 February 2010 meeting of PPC	CM
Raise need for the Centenary Working Group to report back to Council and Committees with Dr Norman	PC
Revise the letter to new MPs	TR
Draft a note for the BES President, to accompany the revised (draft) letter	CM, PC
Circulate the letter to new MPs, with an interest or background in science, within 20 days of General Election	CM
Invite the President to attend the autumn meeting of PPC	PC
Review the call for applications under the EIPG to make sure that the Committee receives high-quality applications to produce an evidence-based policy brief	All
Send comments on NCI draft constitution to Dr Norman, for feedback to Dr Bruce Howard	PC, HN
Inform Dr Hodder that the BES will not continue with the 'Ecological Issues' project on 'Wilding'	PC
Follow-up outstanding action to investigate whether Nepalese applicants to BES grants could receive matched funding from DFID	CM
Raise with the BES President the possibility of discussing the scope of the BES's policy work at the Council's strategy day	HN