



British Ecological Society

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill Briefing for Second Reading, House of Commons

Scientific Expertise in Natural England

June 2005

1. Background

The British Ecological Society, the learned society for the science of ecology, broadly welcomes the Government's proposals for establishing Natural England in the NERC Bill. The Society supports a Natural England that is independent and bases its actions and advice on best available scientific evidence. The Society believes that more can be done to ensure that Natural England has the scientific expertise to carry out its purpose.

2. Scientific Advisory Committee

The NERC Bill should be amended to include provisions for establishing an independent Scientific Advisory Committee to provide advice on scientific matters, review the quality of its research and contribute specialist knowledge on the wide range of issues that it will face. The BES believes such a Committee would help Natural England to conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment because the key issues facing the new agency, such as adapting to the impacts of climate change, will always involve the application of cutting edge science. Natural England therefore needs to have direct access to advice from leading scientists in a range of relevant disciplines.

3. Review and Research

The Society welcomes Clause 3 'Review and Research' in the NERC Bill. Natural England will need to be properly staffed with scientists and have a sufficient research budget to ensure that it is effective in undertaking and commissioning research relating to its general purpose.

4. Scientific Staff

It is crucial that Natural England has scientifically skilled staff to ensure both that its day-to-day work is underpinned by sound science and that it is sufficient in times of emergency. English Nature has a strong culture of supporting scientific specialists. As Natural England develops it is important that it builds upon this model in order to ensure that its activities, especially the delivery of agri-environment schemes, are based upon best scientific evidence.

5. Research Budget

The Government has stated that the budgets of the respective organisations will be incorporated into Natural England. However, it is unclear if the Rural Development Services will bring with it a proportion of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' research budget. The Society would like to have this clarified.

6. Further Information

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