

'Making Brexit work for Ecology and the Environment': Workshop Report

Workshop held on 12 December at the BES Annual Meeting 2016



BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Introduction

Since the vote to leave the EU on 23 June, the BES has engaged with the Brexit process in a number of different ways.

- On 21 July, we organised the ['People, Politics and the Planet: Any Questions?'](#) event in conjunction with Royal Geographical Society and the Sibthorp Trust, offering the first opportunity for a public audience to question leading politicians on the future of UK environmental policy post-Brexit.
- In partnership with Zoological Society of London, Wildlife and Countryside Link, Royal Society of Biology and the Campaign for Science and Engineering, we organised the ['Making Brexit work for Ecology and Conservation'](#) event on 7 September, focusing on the need to protect the UK's world class scientific expertise during the debates surrounding Brexit.
- We are working collaboratively with a range of organisations, including Wildlife and Countryside Link, Campaign for Science and Engineering, Royal Society of Biology, the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management, the Institution of Environmental Sciences and the Landscape Institute.
- The Policy Team has represented BES at numerous workshops, roundtables and meetings, including [with Robin Walker MP, Minister for Exiting the European Union](#).
- We have developed briefings for Parliamentarians and submitted evidence to consultations and inquiry responses, including the [Environmental Audit Committee](#) and the [Science and Technology Select Committee](#).

It is important that BES continues to engage proactively and positively with the Brexit process to ensure that the voice of the ecological community is heard. On Monday 12 December 2016, the BES Policy Team organised a workshop around the theme of 'Making Brexit work for ecology and the environment' as part of the BES Annual Meeting. The workshop was attended by around 50 delegates, and aimed to identify priority policy topics relating to Brexit, focusing on the risks, opportunities and possibilities for action for each theme.

A Brexit Policy Working Group, comprised of BES members, is currently being established, and the results of the workshop, including this report, will help to inform the initial work of the group, including the development of position papers and briefings to communicate our key messages.

Workshop Discussions

Four topics were identified for discussion: agri-environment, invasive species, habitat and species protection, and marine and fisheries policy. This report summarises the key points from the discussion of each topic, then identifies overarching themes across the four topics. Evidence gaps were also identified for each topic; for the sake of brevity these are not included in the report but can be found in the linked annex. These notes summarise the discussions and viewpoints raised by delegates during the workshop, and do not necessarily reflect the organizational position of the BES.

AGRI-ENVIRONMENT

Risks

- **Funding:** Pillar 2 funding may be reduced for pro-environmental practices, and the drive for increased productivity may lead to disregard for the environment when setting priorities for agricultural support
- **Legislation and monitoring:** environmental legislation may be lost or watered down during CAP reform, including pesticide regulations, habitats and water directives. Monitoring and policing may be reduced and there may be an overemphasis on devolution, rather than UK-wide policy
- **Enforcement:** loss of ECJ may lead to lack of enforcement of legislation
- **Intensification and polarisation:** risk of a move towards large, intensively-managed systems and the perpetuation of polarised farming, with Eastern Britain focusing on arable land and Western Britain focusing on pastoral land
- **Broken, poorly-planned policy:** the Lawton vision cannot be achieved with a hands-off scheme; the impact of change as a result of Brexit has not been properly measured and each sector is likely to respond to it differently, leading to trade-offs that haven't been assessed. Brexit will break the momentum of previous schemes, leading to a dangerous policy gap
- **Conflict with food:** incentive-based mechanisms are likely to be ineffective if global food prices increase and may conflict with the food security agenda
- **Perception:** motivation of money may damage farmers' intrinsic desire to manage nature; loss of payments may remove farmers' incentives to engage in pro-environmental behavior

Opportunities

- **Reform of payment system:** can remove perverse subsidies and use payments to incentivise provision of ecosystem services and public goods; opportunity to link environmental and social benefits and supporting small farms
- **Locally-driven approach:** can develop locally-appropriate approach to environmental management and food systems, accounting for skills/experience of land managers and allocating payments for locally-desired public benefits, potentially increasing local ownership and monitoring
- **Evidence-based policy:** opportunity for new evidence gathering and incorporation into decision-making, including land management at appropriate spatial and temporal scales, such as a landscape

approach (especially where features like watersheds are concerned), and increased use of agroecology

- **Stronger regulations:** stronger regulatory policies (based on polluter pays principle) and non-monetary incentives for behavior change (such as social status enhancement)

What can BES do?

- **Engagement and workshops:** organize workshops to link members with politicians and farmers; engage more with farmers; participate in public debate and engage with government and the public to promote evidence-based decisions. Train academics to engage more effectively with policymakers
- **Evidence:** identify existing knowledge gaps and commission studies to fill these. Use the results to create more targeted policy briefings and reports and to provide recommendations to policymakers. Review evidence on 'radical' approaches to land management, including greener farming and rewilding
- **Framing:** develop aesthetic, non-scientific arguments for conservation, appealing to peoples' values and desires e.g. Victorian emphasis on landscape beauty. Increase focus on links between social and environmental outcomes

INVASIVE SPECIES

Risks

- **Loss of Invasive and Alien Species (IAS) regulation:** loss of legislation and reduction in cross-border collaboration and funding in tackling invasive and non-native species (INNS), including research, management and eradication. Risk that INNS will be de-prioritised, leading to less on-the-ground action and loss of resources for tackling newly-arrived INNS
- **Poor transposition of IAS regulation into domestic law:** risk of translating undefined terms from EU legislation into domestic legislation, need consensus around e.g. what constitutes 'naturalness' or 'negative impacts'; risk that taking current state of biota as the baseline and stopping movement of species prevents increases in biodiversity and species resilience in response to changing habitats

Opportunities

- **Increased focus:** UK can focus more closely on species that are a true priority, allowing more targeted use of funding and creation of policies to tackle INNS that are highly specific to the UK
- **Faster response:** UK may be able to respond faster to invasions from new/emerging species, not slowed down by EU process requiring species to be described before action is taken
- **Better biosecurity:** reduced bureaucracy and the natural advantage of being an island may provide opportunities for improved biosecurity
- **New evidence channels:** government needs advice and evidence, so there's an opportunity to take advantage of or create avenues for providing it, e.g. a policy reporting framework that provides evidence to UK government, as well as to the EU and internationally

- **Dynamic policy:** if IAS regulation isn't brought across, UK could embrace more dynamic biodiversity, taking a more relaxed attitude to, and even looking to increase, movement of species

What can BES do?

- **Engage with policymakers:** identify and target avenues for getting evidence to policymakers at UK, EU and international levels, ensuring their understanding of the evidence base and acting as a bridge between policymakers and scientists
- **Identify threats:** identify main issues and threats specific to the UK, including endemic species and critical habitats at risk from invasive species. Prioritise eradication efforts and point out when they're misguided
- **Build evidence base:** launch an Ecological Policy journal to drive work in this area, where evidence is lacking

SPECIES AND HABITATS

Risks

- **Weakened legislation:** Birds and Habitats Directives could be replaced by something weaker; pollution regulations could also be weakened, with an associated impact on species and habitats
- **Policy instability and gaps:** risk of policy instability due to UK political cycles and risk of lag period between end of EU policy and new UK policy
- **Political landscape pressures:** pressure to sell state-owned lands; over-reliance on markets to solve conservation issues; stagnating incomes mean public is less interested in environmental issues than in richer times
- **Loss of international perspective:** UK has reduced voice in international policy (e.g. CITES); loses EU regional perspectives (species and habitats are cross-boundary); fewer opportunities to collaborate and share best practice at international level
- **Reduced funding:** funding reductions at both practical (e.g. LIFE) and research levels

Opportunities

- **Better regulation:** the Directives could be replaced by something stronger, specific protection for species and habitats that are important for the UK can be created, increased protection of threatened species in UK from trade
- **Improved policy:** increased import control reduces risk of pests and diseases; Pillar 2 objectives no longer undermined by some Pillar 1-related payments; opportunity to develop outcome-based plan for species and habitats; possibility of more adaptive and dynamic approach to habitats; more emphasis on UK overseas territories; chance to implement rewilding
- **Funding and engagement:** opportunity to push for more research funding; chance to increase UK public engagement in species and habitat issues via increased sense of ownership

What can BES do?

- **Lobbying/advocating:** BES could decide to actively advocate approaches that are supported by strong evidence and increase member engagement with local MPs, work with smaller NGOs and bring environmental organisations together for a more united voice
- **Provide and collect evidence:** provide independent, centralised evidence base and evidence summaries
- **Strengthen policy engagement:** organise more policy-facing meetings, build stronger relationships with policymakers
- **Widen participation:** make ecology relevant to a wider audience in relation to policy issues, identify effective tools to 'market' ecology, increase and promote policy-relevant citizen science. Consult more frequently with BES members on their position

MARINE AND FISHERIES

Risks

- **Communication with government:** relevant departments are understaffed, overstretched and very busy; closed-door approach to policy development makes it hard to influence current government; departmental jurisdictions overlap so it's hard to know who to talk to; government isn't communicating what new policies will exist or how they'll work, making it hard to engage with the policy process
- **Lower standards:** risk that due to loss of valuable regulation and pressure from fishing industry, fish stocks will be less protected and over-exploited. Fishing quotas post-CFP may lack a sound scientific basis
- **Institutions and devolution:** UK government may not understand Scotland's economic and environmental issues particularly well; Irish-UK interface in Celtic Sea may be complicated; overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones between UK and EU mean it's unclear if CFP will still *de facto* apply; possibility of weaker data access between nations

Opportunities

- **More focused policies:** policies can be tailored to fit UK-specific environmental challenges; there's an opportunity to set new priorities for marine conservation and resource management; fish stocks can be better protected by reducing fishing pressure or increasing resource efficiency
- **Political landscape:** policymakers are desperate to hear the positive side of Brexit, so framing it as an opportunity to do things that couldn't be done in the EU can be effective; emphasise the cachet of UK being seen as a 'world leader' in marine policy and conservation of charismatic biodiversity; power of public opinion can be used to pressure policymakers to take action on the issues we advocate
- **New stakeholders:** BES aren't seen as partisan in this area so can talk to all stakeholders and build more positive relationship with fishing industry

What can BES do?

- **Build closer links:** BES can build links with marine organisations and learned societies and hold joint events; BES can help integrate marine and terrestrial approaches e.g. at coasts and estuaries; engage with other societies and groups through Aquatic SIG; work with inter-governmental bodies that UK is still signatory to (e.g. International Council for the Exploration of the Sea); engage at UK, devolved administration and European-wide levels to promote discussion and collaboration
- **Clear messaging and focus:** agree top-line messages with other organisations to ensure clarity when engaging policymakers; use message mapping to determine clear headline messages and themes; build a 'marine check' into all BES work, asking if the current project/document could engage with marine issues
- **Link to other policy areas:** tie marine policy to discussions of resource efficiency and natural capital-managing marine environment for just fishing is less efficient than a broader approach (e.g. rare earths found in marine sediments); use current research on blue spaces and wellbeing (e.g. University of Exeter) as way into public debate; develop evidence base around specific priority policy areas

OVERARCHING THEMES:

- **Opportunities for Improvement:** While Brexit poses a threat to parts of existing environmental policy and regulation, it also offers a number of opportunities. Policy can be tailored to address UK-specific issues, existing policy can be reformed to increase its effectiveness and new, stronger protections can be put in place. It is important to focus on developing better policies as well as retaining existing ones that could be lost post-Brexit.
- **The Importance of Engagement:** The ecological community must engage continually with policymakers and the public and work collaboratively with other stakeholders at devolved, nationwide and international levels. BES' role in providing links between the academic and policy communities is crucial for sustained and successful engagement
- **Need for Stability and Certainty:** Uncertainty around funding and policy are a cause for concern across several areas; the government needs to help rectify this by providing greater policy stability and certainty regarding funding
- **The Role of Values:** The huge political changes of 2016 demonstrated that facts alone do not win debates and determine policy. Clear, consistent messaging that speaks to people's values and emotions is essential to widen the audience that engages with ecological issues. This is not a call to abandon facts in an era of 'post-truth politics', but to frame discussions in a vivid and accessible way that engages new audiences and drives real change

'Making Brexit work for Ecology and the Environment': Annex (Evidence Gaps)

This annex summarises the evidence gaps discussed in each policy area. Evidence gaps include:

AGRI-ENVIRONMENT

- Evidence for economic sustainability of 'green' farming methods
- Relationship between agricultural practice and food quality
- Performance of different farm systems under climate change
- Impact of homogenisation of farming on system resilience under climate change
- Landscape-scale evidence
- Relationship between soil quality (biodiversity) and food quality
- Data collection on seed usage, particularly legumes and crop rotation
- Effectiveness of all agri-environment schemes
- Social science understanding (links between social and environmental outcomes)
- Legitimate model of change
- Usefulness of agri-environment schemes at different scales

INVASIVE SPECIES

- Which invasive species move with host species e.g. moving ash trees resulted in importation of an invasive fungus
- Knowledge of paleoecology among most ecologists
- Impact of invasive species upon delivery of ecosystem services
- UK-specific risk assessments – identify which native species are likely to be impacted by INNS and identify key traits signalling species whose introduction into the country should be avoided
- Effective communication of different impacts of invasive plants, invasive diseases and invasive insects
- Effectiveness of expenditure on INNS
- Relationship between species movement and species diversity
- Cost-effectiveness of preserving species population in one country when its global distribution is not threatened
- Role of global trade and climate change in species distribution and whether people are happy to trade off biodiversity with prosperity
- Effectiveness of early warning systems
- Definition of 'naturalism' and 'negative impacts of INNS'

SPECIES AND HABITATS

- How to implement the Lawton Review
- Long-term landscape scale data to inform policy
- Cost-effectiveness of investment in natural capital
- Science and policy knowledge related to marine systems
- Ways of measuring soil condition
- Ensuring coherence across devolved administrations
- Level of dependence of economy on environment
- Adaptability of species to environmental change
- Role of habitats and species in delivery of ecosystem services
- Role of technology in cost-effective monitoring of habitats and species (e.g. remote sensing)
- Trade-offs for land use post-Brexit and their impact on species and habitats
- How to mobilise interest in the environment; how do people value species and habitats?
- Which are the right species and habitats to protect (e.g. common species/functional species)?

MARINE AND FISHERIES

- Policy-relevant areas likely to be affected by Brexit, such as land management for biodiversity and water quality in local contexts
- Whether Marine and Coastal Access Act allows change without new primary legislation
- Land-sea links and local context