



British Ecological Society

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David Slater
Committee Clerk
Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20 November 2015

Re: Assessment of EU/UK environmental policy inquiry

Dear Mr Slater,

The British Ecological Society (BES) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry on the extent to which EU environmental objectives and policies have succeeded in tackling environmental issues in the UK, in order to inform the debate ahead of the referendum on EU membership.

It is so far unclear what the Government proposes for environmental regulation and research funding should the UK leave the EU, so we are unable to provide comment on the benefits and challenges of an alternative system. This information will be critical for the electorate to make an informed decision come the referendum.

Ecological expertise and skills underpins both environmental policy development and its effective implementation, and will be an important consideration for this inquiry. The UK's membership of the EU has consequences not only for our environmental policy framework, but also the capacity of the UK ecological research community to deliver impactful research that addresses the most important environmental issues to the UK.

As such, we recommend that the committee looks to the current House of Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry on the Relationship between EU membership and UK science, to which the BES will submit a joint response with the Royal Society of Biology. In summary, UK ecological scientists currently benefit from access to EU science and innovation funding streams and mechanisms, and from the free movement of experts and samples that makes possible a significant proportion of the high performing research environment in the UK. For instance, between 2007 and 2013, over 500 projects relating to climate change, environmental challenges, ecology and agriculture were coordinated by UK institutions and received €670m under the Seventh Framework Programme.

Executive Director:
Dr Hazel J. Norman
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The framework of multinational legislation as set out by the EU can also aid the development of applied science solutions to environmental issues and help the UK to maintain our expertise at the international level. For instance, the Habitats and Birds Directives and the Natura 2000 network of conservation sites provide a framework to prioritise applied research in ecology and conservation biology. Likewise, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Water Framework Directive represent important bench marks around which UK scientists can design studies to inform policy making.

There are also challenges of working within the EU research environment; administrative burden being commonly cited, as well as the lack of a clear mechanism through which policymakers can be engaged by the ecological community. We hope that the EC Scientific Advice Mechanism and associated funding for European networks of academies and learned societies included in the 2016 work programme for Horizon 2020 will help to address these issues.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Caine, Policy Manager

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The British Ecological Society is the UK's academic learned society for ecological science and the oldest institution of its kind in the world, established in 1913. The BES has nearly 6,000 members, representing the full scope of ecological research and practice and breadth of ecological careers, from undergraduate students to established professionals.

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