



BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

A summary report from the Brexit Policy Social event, held on 18 December 2018 at the BES Annual Meeting in Birmingham.

Introduction

Although the outcome is far from certain, leaving the EU will likely mean dramatic changes to our current policies and legislation. Accordingly, the BES Policy Team held its Annual Meeting social with a focus on Brexit, during which members were asked to identify environmental policy priorities in post-Brexit Britain, while sharing a drink with other members interested in policy!

The evening was split into four policy topics: 1) the Common Agricultural Policy, 2) the 25-Year Environment Plan, 3) the Environment Bill and 4) the future of environmental policy in devolved nations. Delegates were asked to write their views on post-it notes and place them on the relevant flipchart. The responses highlighted a wide-range of views, often conflicting, illustrating the immense challenge of delivering effective policies for such complex issues. This is a summary of the member feedback from the session, which the Policy Team will use to inform Brexit-related work in the future.

NB: The following are the views of attendees and do not necessarily represent the views of the British Ecological Society.

1) The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

A central question emerged from members exploring post-CAP policies for rural land subsidies: *What should agricultural subsidies be spent on?*

Attendees appeared to largely approve of a new system focused on a “public money for public goods” approach. There were varying perspectives on what the definition of public goods should be, what elements of biodiversity would be subsidised, and which ecosystem services

would be prioritised. Some delegates suggested prioritising carbon storage, while others called for more funding for natural flood management. One of the issues raised during discussions was the balance between food production and environmental protection, with one member asking: “Are we going to continue to support food production in UK?”

What should we pay for?

- “What ecosystem services are going to be prioritised and paid for?”
- “Payment for public goods, look to Ireland re how they do it”
- “Payment for results a combination of outcome and interventions-based payments?”
- Carbon storage:
 - “Concentrate on biodiversity, forestry better for carbon benefits”
 - “Carbon capture”
 - “Improving soil carbon sequestration”
- Flood management:
 - “Include funding for natural flood management”
- Food production:
 - “Are we going to continue to support food production in UK?”
 - “Sustainable intensification of farmland. Advice, financial support, regulation. We must (at least) maintain self-sufficiency.”
 - “Supporting the production of protein-rich crops and reducing livestock production”

Landscape-Scale Approach and Monitoring

Many participants argued for new schemes to include effective monitoring and a landscape-scale option, with broad support for a more joined-up approach to agricultural and environmental policy.

- Landscape-Scale:
 - “More incentives for landscape scale management rather than farm scale”
 - “Aiming for regional catchment scale results as well as farm-scale results.”
- Monitoring:
 - “More scientists involved in design of new AES so we can properly assess the benefits”
 - “We need better monitoring and more monitoring, reverse decline in funding”
 - “Good monitoring needed to measure impact of any new CAP scheme”
 - “Need to be assessed over e.g. 5 years to counteract the “bad” and “good” years – keep food prices stable”

- “More monitoring of effectiveness of new funding. The monitoring of existing schemes has been too limited and sampling not suitable for analysis”
- “Huge opportunity to test effectiveness and provide evidence on best practice. But we need to plan monitoring and experiments carefully”
- “Will the EU move beyond CAP? We can be the testing ground for how to do this.”
- Integrated policies:
 - “Integrate environmental and agricultural policy”
 - “Integrated policies across farming/forestry/uplands/lowlands, a joined-up approach”

The social side of CAP

There were divergent views on the role farmers should play post-CAP, with some members saying farmers must be land stewards, while others were calling for a simple, less bureaucratic system for farmers. There was a general consensus that support should be given to farmers to deliver environmental goods. Advisory services were suggested as a way of supporting land owners in delivering public goods.

- Changes in land management practices:
 - “Any changes to the predominant land management will require changes to the predominant national psyche: the green and pleasant land”
 - “Beyond CAP = beyond farming. Farmers as land stewards please”
- Public money for delivering public goods:
 - “Farmers need to be supported to provide ecosystem services”
 - “Farmers to become land managers where they’re supported to provide public goods”
 - “Support the push for any landowner who receives payments to register their land. Understanding who owns land and who makes land-use decisions would aid future policy implementation”
- Making schemes more, less bureaucratic, more accessible for farmers:
 - “Work more closely with farmers and fishermen to make feasible, pragmatic way forward”
 - “Engagement with farm advisor services/consultants and land management advisors to provide better support to implement changes”
 - “Simplified, streamlined, less bureaucratic system so farmers have less paperwork and confusion”
 - “Stakeholder/land manager engagement/consideration.”
- Evidence of payment support beneficiaries:
 - “Attempt to provide evidence on the social justice impacts of whether farm payments support agricultural workers or more wealthy landowners”

2) The 25-Year Environment Plan

The discussions around the 25-Year Environment Plan (25-YEP) focused on environmental management, with members offering ideas specifically around how species, habitats, ecosystem services, and landscapes should be managed.

Management suggestions

- Species management:
 - “Continued protection of EU protected species. No loss of protection status.”
 - “Increase biosecurity. Biosecurity is poor within the EU, quite a significant opportunity to improve with benefits for tree/plant/wildlife health. There is already some traction among industry and ministers, so this is the perfect opportunity”
 - “UK non-native species needs funded leadership for selected early invader species including funding training of UK teams”
 - “Management of NNS overseas, using UK funding/expertise”
- Habitat management:
 - “Need to focus on doing more than maintain, let’s really push the restore aim”
 - “Focus on quality as well as quantity of habitat created”
 - “Habitat-focused protection (holistic) specialising on the key habitats within the UK specifically, e.g. heathland habitat (preserve ecosystems as opposed to singular species)”
 - “Threats to NP environments should be resisted, e.g. tourism development in woodlands and wetlands.”
- Ecosystem service management:
 - “More support/funding for sustainable solutions, rather than the ever-increasing evidence of the harm being caused. Conservation optimism”
 - “Some land management practices/interventions meet multiple goals but risk being overlooked, as they are not the best at achieving any single goal. Agroforestry = clean air, clean water, carbon storage, higher biodiversity”
 - “They say nothing about aiming for multiple ecosystem services from any given land use/area. We should be encouraging this to be included”
 - “BES could advise on tree planting objectives, using ecological knowledge to choose the right area/tree”
- Landscape management:
 - “Need to focus on well managed landscapes and seascapes, not just patches”
 - “Landscape focus, we need well-managed whole, not excellent remnant parts”

- “Focus on creating connected reserves, focussing on corridors and reintroducing species. Appreciation of rewilding – more natural areas with natural processes”
- Marine Management:
 - “Marine section of 25YEP is inadequate, especially compared to the actually quite ambitious other chapters”

Monitoring, Indicators, and Legislation

Following the comments on environmental management, participants agreed on the need for there to be robust monitoring of the ambitions in the 25-YEP, and achievable science-based targets to deliver them. There was broad consensus that legislation was needed to underpin the 25-YEP, as well as consensus over concerns that it may lead to weaker environmental protections post-Brexit.

- Monitoring:
 - “Monitoring needs to be implemented”
 - “We monitor lots of things. Monitoring needs to be more strategic, focus and effective. Monitor to inform change, not just record it.”
 - “Government should provide funding towards set targets, so timely/periodic collation and analysis becomes available”
- Indicators:
 - “Clear baselines and indicators that can be monitored at regular intervals. Funding!”
 - “Credible, robust and standardised indicators to measure progress towards targets”
 - “Achievable science-based targets that are based on global policies such as SDGs and Aichi targets”
 - “No near-term targets and the long-term ones will come too late”
- Legislation and accountability:
 - “Needs to be legislated”
 - “The 25YEP looks as though it is a weakening of the environmental protections provided by the EU. We should be strengthening, not weakening.”
 - “Accountability that it is implemented and on what time scale”
 - “More teeth please!”
 - “Legislation that it is robustly and scientifically supported with input from the people. Communication is key”
 - “Balancing conservation with economy but keeping conservation goal high”
 - “People need to be in the heart of everything. We need to combine restoration with reconnection”

3) The Environment Bill

Discussions and comments on the Environmental Bill largely focused around the new environmental watchdog and what future UK environmental laws and regulations might look like. Many participants expressed concerns around the Watchdog and future regulations being too weak. Others expressed their hope that future regulations would be stronger and more robust.

Environmental Watchdog:

- Independence of the watchdog:
 - “Who will oversee the UK government in place of the EU”
 - “Watchdog as the country conservation agencies are now too close to government. Watchdog needs to be properly funded”
 - “Watchdog = supreme court”
- Accountability:
 - “There needs to be accountability and monitoring and some sort of penalty/repercussions if we’re not meeting our own targets”

Laws and regulation:

- Principles:
 - “Duty of ministers to follow principles”
 - “Precautionary principle”
 - “Principles underpinning 25 YEP”
- SDGs and Aichi Targets
 - “Aichi targets incorporated”
 - “SDGs”
 - “Clear, near-term targets on environment please”
 - “Should incorporate global policy such as SDG and Aichi targets”
- Future UK Law compared to EU Law:
 - “Be even stronger than Europe? We should lead on this and not reluctantly follow”
 - “Go beyond EU law – if we want to show EU how “great” Britain is, let’s show them how great we can be at protecting the environment”

Protected Areas and habitats framework directive

- Protected Areas (PAs):
 - “Make improvements to existing legislation. For example, PAs currently managed for “conservation features” and cannot explicitly consider wider ecosystem/an ecosystem approach”
 - “PAs managed to maintain, we need to be able to restore and improve”
- Habitats framework directive:

- “EU regulations e.g. habitat listed under EU directive. Keep or make better”
- “Make sure we don’t forget less charismatic species/habitats”

Other areas

There were several comments from members raising less prominent issues such as biosecurity, waste, human right, and research strategy.

- Other areas:
 - “Improve biosecurity!”
 - “What is up with waste? A lot transported through the EU proliferation of illegal waste sites post-Brexit”
 - “Human rights – these matter too and we could lose them, but they are totally connected to environmental protection. Should we be considering these too?”
 - “Research strategy”

4) The future of environmental policy in devolved nations

On the future of environmental policy in devolved nations flipchart, delegates shared what they think the BES policy team could focus its attention on. This included more activities and opportunities in the devolved areas, such as Policy Fellowships taking place in devolved Government departments. There were different views on what powers should be devolved, with some members calling for a common framework for the environment while others recommended an environmental strategy for each country.

- Devolved policy opportunities for BES
 - “More effort to get a functioning WPG (I wouldn’t mind being involved, but not organising)”
 - “Don’t forget Northern Ireland!” + “Seconded”
 - “Need policy fellowship in Scotland, Wales and NI”
 - “Suggest work with CIEEM Wales Group and Wales LINK, as probably not room for all three”
- United or devolved?
 - “Ahupua’a in a British context”
 - “Environmental strategy for each country”
 - “Retained responsibilities”
 - “Common framework”
 - “Devolving powers back to devolved countries and therefore different policies in different countries”
- Environmental research:
 - “Research strategy for each country”
 - “Ecological/international research after Brexit – Horizon 2020”

- “Post Brexit funding for science hinges on promoting economic growth – which ecology doesn’t promote. Is ecology going to be funded post-Brexit?”
- “Plant diseases – biosecurity and impacts or potential impacts on biodiversity, ecosystem services and natural capital”
- Land use and land ownership:
 - “Land is treated as a private asset, when it should be a public good.”
 - “More transparent property ownership legislation and land taxation”
 - “Involving Scottish upland sporting estates”
 - “A coherent policy for managing the Scottish uplands, including buy-in from estates”
 - “Uplands/land-use strategy in Scotland, in particular coming up the agenda after the grouse review”
 - “How do we stop raptor persecution? Can we improve the incentives for landowners/land-users to protect them?”
 - “Rewilding old sheep farms?”