

**PROGRAMME BOARD ON NON-NATIVE SPECIES
FIFTEENTH MEETING**

MINUTES

ROOM 307, DEFRA NOBEL HOUSE, LONDON

Monday 14 June 2010, 11.00

1. Attendance / apologies

Present:

Francis Marlow (Defra, Chair)
Niall Moore (NNSS, Secretary)
Sallie Bailey (FC)
Jessa Battersby (JNCC)
Olaf Booy (NNSS)
Ian Carter (NE)
Susan Davies (SNH, by telecon)
Mark Diamond (EA)
Barbara Franceschinis (Defra) – replacing Nigel Gooding
Eleanor Hart (Defra, for presentation only)
Verity Hunter (NNSS, Minute taker)
Ant Maddock (JNCC)
Pete Robertson (Fera)
Angela Robinson (Scottish Govt)
Huw Thomas (Defra)
Mark Tollitt (Defra, for presentation only)
Gabe Wyn (CCW)

Apologies received from:

Nigel Gooding (Defra)
Diana Reynolds (WAG)

FM welcomed colleagues from the three Country Agencies to the Programme Board and said this reflected the current strategic focus on implementation.

2. Minutes of 14th meeting on 2 February 2010

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-02

HT referred to Action 5 (under Item 6) involving the PB discussion on whether the MMO should be included in the Rapid Response process and decision making flowchart. He said that comments from the MMO acknowledged it would have a role but suggested that it did not want to be part of the Core Group. GW pointed out that it may be necessary for contingency planning as the MMO has responsibility for oil spills etc. HT said that Defra will pursue this further. [Post-meeting note, MMO has now confirmed it will join the Core Group. HT]

There were no other comments and the Minutes of the 14th meeting were agreed.

3. Actions / matters arising

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-03

Action 3 – NM reported that work on the Country working group prioritisation exercises is ongoing – carry over.

Action 5 – see Item 2 above – carry over.

Action 8 – NM said that a Lessons Learned exercise from the Rapid Response process so far would be useful but it was still too early to carry this out – carry over.

Actions 10 and 11 – HT reported that work on inviting the relevant organisations in England, Scotland and Wales to sign up to the Rapid Response process is ongoing. He will keep members informed of developments between PB meetings – carry over.

All the other actions had been discharged.

There were no matters arising.

ACTION 1 – (Action 3) NNSS to report back the results of the Country working group prioritisation exercises to the Programme Board.

ACTION 2 – (Action 5) HT to add MMO to the ‘coordinating body’ diagram. Chair to invite the MMO to be part of the RR Core Group.

ACTION 3 – (Action 8) NNSS to review the process in light of the *Didemnum* work.

ACTION 4 – (Action 10) Chair to invite relevant organisations to sign up in England, Scotland and Wales respectively.

ACTION 5 – (Action 11) NNSS to keep Programme Board informed about developments outside of Programme Board meetings.

4. GB Strategy

- **Implementation plan (forward / reverse look)**

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-04

NM introduced Paper 04, beginning with the Reverse Look and speaking only about the Actions on Amber:

Action 7.9 – NM reported that progress on the establishment of a training working group is behind schedule.

Action 8.7 – NM said that Diane Owen has prepared a paper on the projects database to go to Local Action Groups and Country Working Groups.

NM then introduced the Forward Look where Actions 11.2 and 11.3 needed a decision from the Programme Board. These had been incorporated into the current Agenda under Item 8. FM said that good progress is being made on research issues.

MD queried whether Action 9.2 should still be Low priority, given the current emphasis on utilising the Third Sector where possible. FM said there had not yet been any in-depth discussion on doing this for non-natives. Meetings with Ministers had confirmed biodiversity as an area to be supported, with the production of a new England biodiversity strategy and a possible environment White Paper. There will be severe restrictions on publicity and marketing campaigns in future but the budget for biodiversity seems steady for this year. HT said it was important to finalise the economics report so we have reliable figures to back up our work. FM said the Third Sector, volunteers and Local Action Groups are all important. The PB agreed the need to maintain momentum and make our case for Be Plant Wise, and to be able to demonstrate impact using existing materials where possible.

5. Secretariat Report

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-05

NM summarised this paper and highlighted several issues (outlined below) for the Board.

Be Plant Wise awareness raising campaign

This had absorbed a great deal of the Secretariat's time especially in the run-up to the launch and its immediate aftermath.

Local Action Group toolkit and workshop

The resources are now on the Local Action Groups website pages.

Risk analysis mechanism

Ten more risk assessments have been completed (but are still due for public comment) since the last Board meeting. A two-day workshop and meeting in Oban had clarified much ambiguity, including how to incorporate climate change within the assessments. SB thought the climate change question is important for long-lived species such as eucalypts. MD thought there should be a systematic review and commented that it would be useful to develop a story with the general public about the potential impact of climate change on invasive species (e.g. Carp).

HT commented that there will come a time when we need to think about re-visiting RAs.

Website

The NNSS website was re-launched in February and some very good feedback has been received from users. Visitor figures seem to have reached a plateau but OB said there was a question over the way these are recorded which may distort the numbers.

EU IAS Group

HT reiterated that his and Niall's involvement with the consultants supporting the Commission on the EU strategy was an informal advisory role – and no outputs had been seen as yet.

Future Work Programme

NM said it had been decided to combine the proposed marine workshop (aimed at developing a code of practice) with discussions on making progress on the Pacific oyster issue as this would help ensure industry involvement in the workshop. The workshop would probably take place in late September. Defra policy colleagues would be involved.

Pathway Action Plan and risk management are being taken forward by the NNSS.

The Secretariat will shortly be embarking (with BRC) on a campaign to encourage GB agencies to supply data to NNSIP, beginning with a meeting with Fera on 29 June.

6. Rapid Response

- **Monk Parakeets**

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-06A

HT introduced this paper summarising the results of the research carried out by Fera since February 2008 when the Board decided that Monk Parakeets were a high priority for rapid response. The Board was invited to consider three options for management: do nothing, suppress population growth or eradicate. The research had shown that trapping was completely ineffective but that shooting, combined with nest removal, was the most effective method of removal.

IC commented that the difficulties of undertaking control would grow over time (as populations increase and access problems worsen). He pointed out that the birds have multiple clutches and one or two more breeding seasons will make effective action much more difficult. He noted that we are probably at the point of needing to take urgent action. AR asked if there had been dialogue with utilities companies as they will be seriously affected by nests and it might be best to find out their views. PR thought utilities companies could be useful for future monitoring of the birds. AM and others said that a good communications plan and a clear message are both essential to explain to the public the reasons for carrying out eradication, and this could be used to educate people more widely on non-natives. PR thought there needs to be a line on wounding and perhaps a comparison with rates in general

hunting situations. FM asked what is the policy on Ring-necked Parakeets (RNPs) as we need consistency of approach and NM suggested that the policy for RNPs could be to prevent new populations establishing.

The Board agreed that Option 3 (eradication) was the only sensible option while it is still feasible to do so. However there needs to be a plan to deal with areas where access may be difficult. The Board also agreed that key stakeholders need to be informed and consulted as this goes forward and that communications issues need to be given a high priority.

ACTION 6 – HT to prepare a recommendation to Ministers on Monk Parakeet management following consultation with key stakeholders.

ACTION 7 - NM and HT to draft lines for public awareness and communications on the Monk Parakeet eradication in consultation with the Defra and NE Press Offices.

- ***Didemnum* update**

GW reported that video work is being done on the seabed near Largs in Scotland, although it is not expected that *Didemnum* will be found. In England a feasibility study is being carried out by CEFAS and this should be finalised soon. The eradication work is finished at Holyhead marina in Wales and the area is being re-surveyed. However, another infestation has recently been found in the commercial dock area of Holyhead harbour. It is thought to have spread from the marina between the original survey of the area and the start of the eradication project. The cost of eradicating the new population is likely to be high – around £0.5m. A meeting with WAG is planned to discuss the way forward.

OB said that the GB *Didemnum* WG has concluded that pathway management is likely to be particularly important for *Didemnum vexillum* management (because complete eradication is unlikely to be feasible). The group are working on a paper for the Programme Board setting out potential methods for reducing the risk of spread of this species. The paper will provide a brief assessment of each pathway and attempt to set out positive actions that could be taken to reduce the risk of transmission along each.

GW added that there could be some quick wins, such as ensuring the cleaning of boats but that a mixture of options will be needed.

- **Individual species actions**
Paper circulated – PB Jun10-06B

American Bullfrog

NM reported that the Rapid Response alert process has been initiated with an appeal for help and that some very fast and helpful responses had been received. SB asked if a grid reference could be supplied so that FC researchers could look out for the animals.

Topmouth Gudgeon

MD reported that work is continuing on the key site of Turkey Brook, a tributary of the R. Lee which is a river leading to the Grand Union Canal. The EA is diverting the watercourse away from the lake and then dosing the lake with biocide. The lake will then be restored and put back into use.

African Clawed Toad

NM reported that in Wales control is likely to progress within the next 6 weeks. IC asked for the costs of the control work in Wales.

ACTION 8 – NM to send grid reference of Sussex Bullfrog location to SB.

ACTION 9 – GW to supply costs of African Clawed Toad control work in Wales.

7. Talk – Be Plant Wise campaign

EH presented this talk, supported by MT. The outcomes of the campaign were excellent, especially given the financial and time constraints, and members agreed that the success should be built on and the message reinforced. MT stressed that there is now an almost complete stop on any new marketing and publicity campaign spending. Everything must be cleared by the Cabinet Office and the criteria are extremely tough. If we are to be allowed to proceed with Phase 2 of the campaign he thought we must influence decision makers with statistics on economic impact and the campaign must be linked to legislative changes, public health and EU/WFD matters.

8. Research

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-08

HT introduced this item. It is felt that it would be useful to distil the key areas of research/evidence needed in relation to non-native species. At the moment many of the research proposals are highly academic and a greater emphasis on applied research is needed. Nick Turner of Defra is currently looking at this area. Potential funders need guidance on where research is most needed but we must beware of making the focus either too nebulous or too narrow. FM pointed out that the Defra Biodiversity group, with the Devolved administrations, already has some mechanisms in place and SB pointed out that Peter Costigan of Defra has just set up a biodiversity-focused research group, mainly covering England but also including the rest of GB. She said we must ensure that any terms of reference for a group are tight to avoid a conflict of interest. HT thought we should start by looking at other existing research co-ordination mechanisms but still it would be useful to give a better steer on our evidence needs to support implementation of the Strategy. GW questioned where marine research might fit in as the current Marine Research Strategy for GB has no mention of non-natives.

The Board agreed that this issue should be taken forward as proposed while ensuring that existing mechanisms are included.

ACTION 10 - GW to circulate the link to the Marine Research Strategy for GB and circulate the CCW marine policy leaflet.

ACTION 11 – Defra and NNSS to take forward the proposals for assessing research/evidence priorities but ensuring that existing mechanisms are not ignored.

9. Biosecurity guidance

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-09

NM introduced this item and said that WAG are particularly keen that contractors as well as surveyors should sign up to the guidance. GW thought it very important that biosecurity is included in planning policy statements (including in the marine environment). AR said that Scottish plant workers in particular need biosecurity advice. Currently many staff are not even doing basic cleaning of tools between sites. HT thought the information needed more structure, perhaps being divided into categories such as vehicles/movement/equipment etc. PR thought such a huge topic needs some high level simple messages such as those in the Be Plant Wise campaign. Overall the Board questioned the cost and practicality of issuing guidance and thought we need to identify the key risk areas and raise awareness of those. GW and SB thought the onus should then be on contractors etc. to add biosecurity to their own RAs and guidance, perhaps just with a question such as 'Have you considered?'

The Board agreed that the best way forward would be to raise awareness of the issue to help facilitate surveyors, contractors and others in posing the right questions on biosecurity. It advised making better use of existing advice (via links) rather than writing novel advice.

ACTION 12 – NNSS to reduce the scope of the existing bio-security advice on the website, replacing most of it with links to existing advice.

10. Stakeholder Forum

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-10

NM introduced this item and said that we had received feedback from 30 out of 91 delegates at the Forum. This had been overwhelmingly positive regarding the work of the Secretariat, the new website, the GB mechanism and the Forum itself. The next Forum is due to be held in Scotland and NM reported that many delegates would prefer two days, and suggested having an invited speaker on the first evening. The Board approved of this idea but FM emphasised that cost needs to be carefully considered. HT stated that we need to get more feedback on the direction of the GB mechanism rather than the specific components within it. FM congratulated the Secretariat on the success of the Forum.

11. Local Action Groups (LAGs)

Paper circulated – PB Jun10-11

NM introduced the paper, which had been drafted by Trevor Renals of EA who had presented a talk on Local Action Groups at the Stakeholder Forum. The number of LAGs is growing and their structures are varied, many of them being based with Wildlife Trusts or local authorities. They are proving increasingly important for delivering control of common species, often using volunteers, but funding is an issue. Better use of European bids or partnership working might be helpful. MD suggested that their engagement with bigger players (like the Highways Agency) is not always optimal and this does not help coordination and efficiency. OB said that many LAGs have asked for local contacts with the larger organisations such as the Highway's Agency, British Waterways and Network Rail. There is now a resource pack on the Secretariat's website and a workshop was held in January, both paid for with WFD money.

12. Legislation

AR reported that the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill was introduced into the Scottish Parliament in the previous week.

There has also been a meeting in York (attended by Defra, NNS and the Scottish Government with WAG inputting subsequently) to look at Ban on Sale proposals in the light of the risk assessment conclusions. The agreed list was fairly consistent between the three governments with ten species in Scotland and nine in England/Wales proposed for a sales ban. Submissions will go to Ministers in the coming months. HT said that a list of species in the revised Schedule 9 is now on the Defra website together with revised guidance on Section 14.

ACTION 13 – AR to circulate a link to the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill.

13. AOB

Economics report

AR said that this is currently being peer-reviewed and should be completed this summer. The next question is how to take it forward with the media. There is a need for careful briefing to avoid mis-interpretation or mis-representation of the figures.

Japanese Knotweed

HT reported that the psyllid was released on 21 April and the trial release is being monitored as required by Fera. The psyllids have laid eggs and these have hatched into nymphs. The Project Board will meet on 18 June with a Phase 2 trial release at further sites probable in July. MD said there is also some other Defra-funded research on biocontrols, some of which is quite advanced.

Planning

GW asked how we can better feed into planning policy statements. This has already begun on marine sites in Wales but it needs to be adopted more widely and there are many areas to cover. HT said that the Defra Biodiversity group has had some input into national planning statements. He noted that it may not be possible to alter planning statements and OB noted that guidance which goes with the statements might be a better place to include information about non-native species. It was discussed that a key issue was to identify the appropriate mechanisms for influencing planning guidance.

Eagle Owl

HT reminded members that the last Board meeting had decided to take action in the next breeding season and the position is still to be finalised with the new Minister. He reminded the meeting that there had been an attack by an Eagle Owl on a Hen Harrier's nest in Bowland recently. IC suggested that Eagle Owls should be added to the priority species list for rapid response. The Board agreed that the priority species list should be reviewed.

ACTION 14 – GW to circulate Welsh document on planning policy for comment.

ACTION 15 – HT to advise what the possible appropriate mechanisms could be to engage with planning colleagues.

ACTION 16 – Secretariat to put prioritisation of rapid response species on the agenda of the next PB meeting.

14. Date and location of future meetings

The meeting decided the next PB should be held in Scotland in October.

ACTION 17 – VH to explore venues and circulate dates for the next meeting in Edinburgh in October.

FM pointed out that today's Board would probably be the last one attended by Jessa Battersby whose place would be taken by Ant Maddock. The meeting thanked her for her contribution and wished her well.