



**Note of first telephone conference between UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group members.**

**Held 2nd December 2010**

Weather conditions meant that a high proportion of UK BRAG members were not able to travel, so the scheduled meeting at the Welsh Environment Centre Wales was replaced by a phone conference.

**Connected:**

Helen Baker, JNCC  
Tim Blackstock, CCW  
Peter Costigan, Defra (Chair)  
Mary Gibby, NHM Edinburgh  
Mike Kaiser, University of Bangor  
Scot Mathieson, SEPA  
Davy McCracken, SAC  
Andrew Pullin, University of Bangor and BES.  
Shaun Russell, Welsh Environment Centre Wales  
David Townshend, NE  
Tina Yates, JNCC (Secretariat)

Apologies: Sallie Bailey, FC; Ian Bainbridge, SNH; Joanna Drewitt, Scottish Government; Andrew Impey, NERC; Mike Fay, Kew; David McDonald, Oxford; Ken Norris, NERC Biodiversity Programme Leader; Amanda Read, BBSRC; Mark Spencer, NHM; Mark Stevenson, Defra; Allan Watt, CEH; Kevin Watts, Forest Research; Mark Wright, DoENI;

**Start time 10:00**

**TC1.1 CBD CoP10 & the developing EU biodiversity strategy Ref.Paper: BRAG 16.1 EU Emerging research**

This item was deferred

**TC1.2. Outcome of spending review and implications for biodiversity research**

England: The final allocations within Defra are not yet agreed, but the expectation is that R&D allocations will be influenced by the priorities within the Defra's Evidence Investment Strategy – in which Biodiversity fared well. Allocations should be known by January.

Scotland: There are to be significant cuts to RBGE, RERAD and SEPA funding, although in some cases a smaller cut than expected. SAC have been told to expect 11% Budget cuts next year, but how the cuts will be distributed, and the effects on research, are not yet known.

Wales: The environment part of WAG is seeing a 3% cut in revenue spend and a 28% cut in capital spend, over the next 3 years. The Welsh Minister is trying to protect natural environment framework and biodiversity work as much as possible.

**TC1.3. NEA Update (PC)**

See also <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=UIQr0mgTWWU%3d&tabid=82>

**TC1.4. Sub groups – report back;**

Agriculture and Aquaculture sub group; The intention is to move forward to a draft report in the Spring. There was some discussion about the objectives of the work, and it was agreed that a significant output will be a list of the current research gaps.

Forestry; Not discussed as the group members were unavailable.

Reviews; **Ref Paper: BRAG 16.2 Review Planning**. The paper was at an advanced draft stage and had been circulated. It was intended as guidance and sets standards for reporting. It also sets principles behind reviews. The early draft has had input from several people, and now sets out clarity of objectives and a clear distinction between different approaches and expectations for different types of review, such as a review that is literature based, and one that uses mainly expert opinion.

There was comment that it would be helpful if the paper incorporated guidance as to when different review approaches were appropriate. An additional comment was that it will be a useful paper for the other sub groups. The Chair thanked Andrew Pullin and Tina Yates for their work in drafting the paper.

**ACTION: Any further comments to be sent to Andrew Pullin and Tina Yates by Christmas, so that the paper can be finalised early in the New Year.**

Taxonomy and Systematics: Mary Gibby had very recently received an advance copy of the NERC review on Taxonomy and Systematics (chaired by Prof. Charles Godfray, see <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/programmes/taxonomy/events/documents/syntax-consultation.pdf> ) Activity is now focused on getting documentary evidence of needs for identification guides. A recent new bryophyte guide was initiated as a web site, which, after input from those viewing the web site, was published in book format. This may well be the way forward in future, although it does rely on good networks and communications amongst specialists. However the bryophyte guide has been very successful, is now running to a second print run, and is showing a profit to the funders. There is also an iPhone app which provides a moth identification guide.

DNA barcoding across the country is taking off, with BBSRC investigating the possibility of funding further development.

Mary Gibby reported that she is planning to get in touch with the NHM about OPAL (the Open Air Laboratory project), which is also a fast developing area (see <http://www.opalexplornature.org/NHM> ).

The intention is to have a draft write up for this sub group ready for a spring meeting of UK BRAG. TY suggested that Charles David of the Guernsey Biological Records Centre could be contacted at this stage, as he is an expert taxonomist and could provide helpful comments on a draft, although he would have difficulty finding the time and money for meetings on the GB mainland.

**TC1.5. Shaun Russell, Director Welsh Environment Hub;**  
***Implications of the Welsh Environment Framework and the NEA to Wales***  
***Biodiversity Research***

NB: slides from the presentation were circulated prior to the phone conference, and will be available separately.

The deadline for NEA chapters to be finalised is the end of February 2011. Most chapters are now drafted, and some are in the revision phase. Of the regional chapters Scotland has submitted, Wales was about to be submitted, and the England and Northern Ireland chapters are to be submitted by Christmas. Publication of the NEA is then scheduled for the end of March/ beginning of April 2011.

The biodiversity chapter of the NEA has flagged up the research needs for less charismatic groups and for a better understanding of biodiversity interactions and of ecosystem services. The NEA premise is that biodiversity underpins all ecosystem services, but conclusions seem to be that better knowledge of the detail of how systems function is needed. In Wales there is an appreciation of this principle at Ministerial level.

The Natural Environment Framework (NEF) in Wales is paralleling the England White paper (due spring 2011 along with the revised England Biodiversity Strategy), and is looking at taking ecosystem services and biodiversity into mainstream Government thinking. There is not much money available though to develop work streams for the NEF. A progress report is due to the Minister in 2011, and UK BRAG members who would like more information are invited to contact Shaun Russell directly. One of the NEF work streams is a GIS "layers" portal that allows users to examine spatial relationships between environmental data. Further information is available on the Welsh Assembly Government web site. See <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/environmentandcountryside/eshlivingwalescons/?lang=en>

The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) is carrying out a pilot programme of ecosystem services mapping in Wales, with the assistance of the Aberystwyth-based consultancy - Environmental Systems. Dr Isabelle Durance of Cardiff University has also been working on the mapping of "layers" of natural capital for Wales, as part of the NEA programme. This type of work is in its infancy but is likely to be used more in the future

**TC1.6. Other UK country biodiversity/evidence strategy development activities:**  
**England; Natural Environment White Paper & England Biodiversity Strategy;**

Implications of the Lawton Review Ref. Paper: BRAG 16.3 Lawton Review Exec. Summary;  
The England Natural Environment White paper is expected in spring 2011, as are the revised England Biodiversity Strategy and the response to the Lawton Review.

Defra Evidence Plan: Each policy program is developing an evidence plan. Peer review and revision is happening during December and a summary will be available once plans are finalised.

Scotland activities. There were no reps. from SNH or Scottish Government able to link in because of disruptions due to extreme snow conditions. However the Scot Mathieson reported that SEPA were looking at streaming services more effectively, along the lines of the Wales GIS portal and layers work.

#### **TC1.7. UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee (PC):**

UK BAP governance structures;

**Ref. Papers: BRAG 16.4 UK BAP Governance, BRAG 16.5 UKSC10-10 Conference (Stirling), BRAG 16.6 UKBP Conference**

Thinking on how UK activities are evolving to complement country activities is evolving, and more ideas are being drafted as plans develop as to what complementarity is needed. LWEC has merged the ERFF and GECC functions; UK BRAG needs to think how it fits into a developing framework. This needs taking forward at a full UK BRAG meeting in the spring. The policy link that is a feature of how UK BRAG was formed is important in the way that UK BRAG operates and should stay firmly in place, while noting that UK BRAG is, and should remain, an evidence body. There will be a need in future to be more focused. There was some discussion on how to engage NGOs more. Because BRAG was born out of the Biodiversity Partnership the NGOs seemed to have an expectation that BRAG would service the HAP and BAP, and were not interested in engagement with BRAG when it became obvious that their expectations were wrong. It was agreed that engagement with the NGOs would need following up separately and that if the way BRAG operates was to be re-examined it would be a good opportunity to bring the NGOs back to engaging with the group.

**ACTION: Tina Yates make the development of BRAG an agenda item for spring BRAG meeting.  
Peter Costigan talk to Andrew Watkinson about relationship of UK BRAG and LWEC.**

#### **TC1.8. European activities;**

The disruptions due to snow meant that there was no one to report on SPIRAL and EPBRS.

KNEU: Developing a Knowledge Network for EUropean expertise on biodiversity and ecosystem services (KNEU) is funded under the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), developing a European scientific biodiversity Network to inform policymaking and economic sectors. It started on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2010, so there is not a lot as yet to report. There are 18 European partners, with the UK input coming from CEH Bangor and Bangor University. It will link in to how IPBES is structured at an EU level, with some of the work of KNEU being to link institutions more effectively.

#### **TC1.9. Information papers;**

IPBES Ref Paper: BRAG 16.7 Dr A Stott presentation on IPBES

A final decision on IPBES was taken to be taken at the forthcoming UN General Assembly on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2010. This will be the last approval needed for the formal formation of IPBES. Further updates can be found at <http://www.ipbes.net/>.

**ACTION: Tina Yates and Peter Costigan to circulate any updates on progress with IPBES as they become available.**

GBSC Ref. Paper: BRAG 16.8 GBSC Update

It was noted that there is a need to discuss where the Overseas Territories fit in after the GECC changes, given that the current UK BRAG remit only covers the UK.

BES-BRAG event Ref. Paper: BRAG 16.9 MCAA BES BRAG report The annual topic-specific workshop is a very effective forum for engagement with the BES and a wider circle of researchers. The 2010 event was notable for the very high standard of presentations and debate, although it was shame that there were some problems with the location of the venue. The Public and Policy Group of the BES is keen to maintain the relationship and to focus on the outcomes of the NEA at the

September 12-14 meeting in Sheffield in 2011. There was a suggestion that development of the NEA work on indicators and monitoring could be a good topic, looking at surveillance of ecosystem services.

**ACTION: Tina Yates and Andrew Pullin to discuss with the BES, and to organise a meeting with Public and Policy Group and UK BRAG Chairs early in 2011.**

Crown Dependencies meeting report back **Ref. Paper: BRAG 16.10 Note of CD meeting**

The constraints of time and travel costs make it difficult for the CDs to engage directly with UK BRAG, but there is a lot of interest in the group. It might be useful to engage the CDs in specific pieces of work, perhaps linking with telephone conferencing.

BiodivERsA 2 **Ref. Paper: BRAG 16.11 BiodivERsA2 Information Paper**

**TC1.10. Minutes of last meeting**

These were accepted.

**TC1.11. Any other business; date, time place of next meeting.**

There was no other business. It was agreed that the next formal meeting should be in Spring 2011, avoiding April due to the plethora of Bank Holidays. Date and venue to be advised, noting that the group will be very welcome at the Welsh Environment Centre.

**Summary of Actions:**

Action no.	Reference in minutes	Description	Action	Progress
1	TC1.4	Any further comments on paper: BRAG 16.2 Review Planning, to be sent to Andrew Pullin and Tina Yates by Christmas, so that the paper can be finalised early in the New Year.	All present	
2	TC1.7	The development of BRAG to be an agenda item for spring BRAG meeting. Chair to talk to Andrew Watkinson about relationship of UK BRAG and LWEC.	Tina Yates/ Peter Costigan	
3	TC1.9	Updates on progress with IPBES to be circulated as they become available.	Tina Yates/ Peter Costigan	
4	TC1.9	Discuss future BES-BRAG workshops with the BES, and organise a meeting with Public and Policy Group and UK BRAG Chairs early in 2011.	Tina Yates, Andrew Pullin and Peter Costigan.	