

Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)

Meeting papers

Approved Minutes

September 2008

For other documents from
Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)
Visit: <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4628>



**GECC SUB-COMMITTEE ON GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY ISSUES
MINUTES: 1 September 2008**

Attendees:

Miles Parker, Defra
Andy Stott, Defra
Chris Baker, NERC
Simon Jennings, Cefas
Elizabeth Moore, JNCC (Secretariat)
Dilys Roe, DfID
Vin Fleming, JNCC
Mary Gibby, RBGE
Chris Lyal, NHM.
Sharon McAuslan, Defra
Eimear Nic Lughadha, RBG Kew
Rachel Garthwaite, Royal Society
Helen Baker, JNCC (Secretariat)

Plus guests:

Lloyd Peck, NERC
Richard Mills, FCO
Tavis Potts, SAMS
David Stroud, JNCC

Agenda Item 1: Introductions and Apologies

Miles Parker welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted it was good to have Dilys Roe re-join the group as the DfID member. Apologies were received from; Ian Bainbridge, SG; Amanda Read, BBSRC; Shaun Earl, FCO; Eric Blencowe, Defra; Sarah Nelson, Defra; and Paul Rouse, ESRC.

Agenda Item 2: Arctic Biodiversity Research issues

At the April GBSC meeting Vin Fleming raised the issue of Arctic biodiversity research as a new and emerging issue. The report from the workshop in Oban¹ on this topic was circulated (GECC GBSC (08)06). Dr Tavis Potts, Centre for Coastal and Ocean Governance at the Scottish Association for Marine Sciences (SAMS) and Richard Mills, Arctic and Antarctic Policy Adviser, Polar Regions Unit, FCO were invited to provide presentations. These will be circulated with the minutes.

Tavis Potts, who is a political scientist within SAMS, noted that the Arctic is changing, especially with regard to the politics of the region and human economic development and also as a result of climate change. These changes have ramifications for biodiversity. Reference was made to the ACIA report² which outlines the impacts of climate change on the region and its people. Examples of the bio-physical impacts include changes in species distribution and abundance. Some of the economic impacts include increased shipping and fisheries activities.

¹ UK-Arctic Stakeholders Conference held at the Scottish Association for Marine Sciences, Oban, 10-12 March 2008

² Arctic Climate Impact Assessment reports available at: <http://www.acia.uaf.edu/>

There are a number of priority issues in terms of what UK research can do e.g. studies to predict how migratory species respond to Arctic warming and understanding climate change effects on ecosystem structure and functioning.

Tavis noted that there are no Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Arctic which could potentially provide some level of conservation in the region. He questioned the role of international biodiversity mechanisms in terms of protecting the Arctic region, and the activity of domestic states to protect Arctic biodiversity. Tavis concluded by emphasising the general lack of funding and coordination of activity across all areas of Arctic research.

Richard Mills noted that he has responsibility for representing the UK at Arctic Council as an observer, and therefore can assert the UK's views and opinions at a political level. He explained that although there is strong scientist to scientist involvement and co-operation within the field of Arctic biodiversity research, improvement is needed at the UK science to policy level and by co-ordination of research.

The Arctic Council was established under declaration in 1996 and it is the only pan-Arctic body. The Council is growing in global interest, as seen by the number of observers recently joined and planning to join including China and Italy. The Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) is a working group of the Council of particular relevance to the GBSC. There are two specific pieces of work coming out of CAFF which are potential routes for collaboration between CAFF and GBSC:

- Arctic biodiversity assessment summary report, due to be published 2010
- Circum-polar biodiversity monitoring programme (<http://arcticportal.org/en/caff/cbmp>)

One of the reasons Arctic biodiversity is important is because there are shared populations which means shared responsibilities. FCO is able to provide GBSC with access to the Arctic Council working groups, Arctic networks and international contacts which in turn can enable GBSC greater involvement in CAFF and potentially evaluate the biodiversity science issues and identify the gaps.

During discussion the quality of modelling being used was queried. Tavis noted that it is likely the estimates of how quickly ice is retreating are too conservative. The last 5 years have shown the most severe extent of retreat. There are lots of additional factors which need to be brought into the models, for example permafrost melt and increasing levels of sedimentation and there is a drive for improved science. David Stroud asked to what extent the models are being developed internationally. Tavis noted that the UK is the world leader with the Hadley Centre being at the forefront. However there is a rush for expertise and information from other countries. Russia have lots of relevant data, unfortunately it is very hard to acquire the information. One way to improve the situation is to focus effort on bi-lateral relationships and use the UK's expertise to lead this.

Vin Fleming noted JNCC's involvement in CAFF, especially through the seabird working group and also noted the information they were able to share on seabirds. He made the point that there are probably more things the UK could do with its data, especially on those populations which are shared with the Arctic, however it would need to prioritise what is most relevant and how to resource it. Shared populations of species are a key link and greater engagement with CAFF to establish how best to work together.

Richard Mills explained that the Oban workshop aimed to bring together the key people in UK Arctic biodiversity research and start a dialogue. However the workshop was organised on a very low budget and it is not clear how to take forward the outcomes. Andy Stott noted that since some of the issues raised go beyond biodiversity this could be of relevance for the main GECC. Miles Parker agreed that the issues should be highlighted to the main GECC, however it would be good to start work and make some progress on the biodiversity concerns and then look to raise the issues with the main GECC.

Chris Lyal mentioned that since climate change is increasingly bringing about reductions in sea ice and increased permafrost melt it is likely that the balance and mix of terrestrial migratory species will change. This could have an impact on the UK's protected areas since species could more easily migrate out or in. Potentially this could be a discussion paper for CBD SBSTTA. Sharon McAuslan noted that the next SBSTTA will be in June 2010, however there is an opportunity to flag this to the CBD as an emerging issue in November 2008. David Stroud mentioned the possibility of inserting some text on Arctic research in the climate change Resolution at the Ramsar CoP being held in November 2008. This draft Resolution seeks a range of co-ordinated activities on climate change.

Miles Parker noted that there are clearly a huge number of risks which have been identified and yet what is lacking is a sense of how to rank them and which ones the UK should focus on. The next steps should involve risk ranking and GBSC should also raise the issue of the gaps in modelling and the physical components to the main GECC.

ACTION 2/1: Vin Fleming to lead a working group to consider priority Arctic biodiversity research issues from a UK perspective. Working group to include David Stroud, JNCC, Tavis Potts, SAMS, Richard Mills, FCO, Stephen Dye Cefas, a modeller from the Hadley Centre, and a representative from NERC.

Working group to consider what the risks to Arctic (and shared) biodiversity are, how to rank them, to identify what is important to the UK, how to collate what is currently being done and to identify any serious gaps and how we might achieve better cohesion or synergy with UK research. Working group to report back to GBSC in March 2009.

Agenda Item 3: NERC's Biodiversity Thematic Action Plan

Lloyd Peck, Biodiversity theme leader at NERC was invited to provide a presentation on NERC's Biodiversity Thematic Action Plan (TAP), following his presentation to the UK BRAG meeting in June 2008. A copy of the presentation will be circulated with the minutes.

NERC launched their new strategy in 2007³. This is based around a thematic approach. Seven themes have been identified, including biodiversity. All themes are currently supported at equal levels, however this is likely to change in the future. The first action plans were written last year, were reviewed by NERC's Science and Innovation Board (SISB) and went to NERC's Council who agreed the actions in July 2008. The theme leader's role is to build the action plans and the challenges for each theme were developed by a consultation process.

The primary challenge in the biodiversity TAP is to improve understanding of biodiversity's role in ecosystems. The underlying theme is adopting a whole ecosystem approach and there are 4 underlying actions to this:

³ Next Generation Science for Planet Earth 2007-2012, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/strategy/ngscience.asp>

- Developing new tools and technologies
- Improving approaches to measuring abundance and distribution
- Enabling society to predict and mitigate effects of biodiversity change
- Developing tools for assessing benefits of technology.

Within the biodiversity TAP there are 4 major research actions, one of which is on biodiversity in poorly described areas which include Polar Regions. There are also 3 essential facilitation and capacity building activities including one on new tools for rapid taxonomic evaluation and traditional taxonomy. In addition to the TAPs NERC are supporting current biodiversity initiatives including BiodivERsA and ESPA.

Issues for future biodiversity action plans have been identified for further development. These include agriculture and biodiversity, marine bioresources, environmental heterogeneity and biodiversity patchiness etc. The status of the current actions is variable. Some activities are proceeding directly, for example ocean acidification, others need further scoping and a prioritisation phase for example valuation. Taxonomy is being looked at by NERC skills review. The theme leaders are now in the process of building dialogue with stakeholders and the community and represent NERC on a range of groups including the Living With Environmental Change (LWEC) Programme Design Group.

Lloyd was asked to explain the links between LWEC and the TAPs. LWEC has identified a range of strategic objectives, some of which are more relevant to NERC than others. Biodiversity is embedded in a number of the objectives. The action being taken forward as a result of the TAPs is being done within the umbrella of LWEC, recognising which objectives are most appropriate. For example, the ESPA programme understanding what is happening to ecosystems is an LWEC initiative.

During the discussion Miles Parker noted that lots of the issues identified in the biodiversity TAP have also been highlighted by the GBSC, for example ocean acidification, climate change, invasive species and ecosystem goods and services. Lloyd pointed out that the TAP aims to get the measures to understand these processes. Andy Stott asked where the proportion of resources will go when taking the issues forward, i.e. how much UK versus global. Lloyd noted that there was no decision on this, but the focus is likely to be regional, but global in context. It would depend on the UK community and would be a decision for the theme leader who would need to consider the most relevant ways to address issues. If the question can be addressed at a local or regional scale this would most likely be the best way to proceed since the UK is more likely to have the long-term capacity and expertise. The aim is therefore to be global with a local focus. However some areas of research pose problems for example deep sea and the Arctic. In the latter UK has to consider whether it is a player, what the gaps are and what it can most usefully do.

Dilys Roe queried how NERC delineates between themes, for instance what is included in the natural resources theme as compared with the biodiversity theme. Lloyd noted the definitions of the themes are in the theme reports, and that the Sustainable Use and Natural Resources (SUNR) theme has a strong emphasis on energy, however there are areas of common interest for example ecosystems. SUNR includes up to soils and the biodiversity theme goes from soils upwards but there is some overlap. Fisheries span both themes and the theme leaders are deciding who will take the prime lead on this area.

There was some discussion about taxonomy. Lloyd clarified that NERC hasn't funded traditional taxonomy for taxonomists, however they do fund taxonomy and systematics to answer questions that are relevant to NERC. Clearly taxonomy is an area of decline and there is a long term requirement for taxonomy and systematics to meet the requirements of biodiversity and to be able to predict future trends. NERC are aware of the problem however they do not have the funds to address this.

Miles thanked Lloyd for his presentation and invited Lloyd to stay for the rest of the meeting and to maintain contact with the GBSC.

During the lunch period Diana Mortimer, JNCC Sustainability Advice Manager provided a short talk on the work of her team which covers the ecosystem approach, environmental economics, climate change, energy, air pollution and land use in regard to agriculture (see note circulated with the minutes). Diana referred to a number of reference materials the team had produced including an environmental economics toolkit and a video on climate change in the Overseas Territories. More information can be found at: <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-158> or by contacting Diana (Diana.Mortimer@jncc.gov.uk).

Agenda Item 4: Minutes and actions from 1 April 2008

The minutes were taken as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Action points from 1 April 2008.

ACTION 4/1 (old Action 2/1 carried forward): **Sarah Nelson** to lead a sub group considering the role of the UK as a data provider to GBIF and to consider where the GBIF is a data provider for the UK in specific project areas, e.g. biodiversity information needs in the OTs. **GBSC members** to volunteer to work with this group. Sub-group members to report back to March 2009 GBSC meeting.

(It was noted that Eimear Nic Lughadha expressed an interest in joining this group and will contact Sarah directly.)

ACTION 4/2 (old Action 3/1 carried forward): **Sarah Nelson** to lead a sub group including Miles Parker, Andy Stott, and Ian Bainbridge to take forward the discussion concerning earth observations and extend an invitation to Lawrence Way (JNCC) to join this group. Discussions should include the potential to extend the work of the Defra research priorities study to consider EO, the potential for a NERC placement and an analysis of the gaps and how they may be filled. Engagement should be made with Arwyn Davies and Andy Shaw. Provide a report back to a future GBSC meeting.

ACTION 4/3 (old Action 4/2 carried forward): **Andy Stott** to work up a proposal for a futures workshop to include budget considerations and report back to a future GBSC meeting. (It was noted that the outputs from Bill Sutherland's work on the 25 threats to UK biodiversity relate to this and there are also links to UK BRAG.)

Miles Parker commented on previous Action 6/1 regarding the GECC Global Environmental Research (GER) review of science priorities. Miles had asked the GECC Secretariat to review the paper to better reflect interactions between biodiversity and other environmental issues. His comments were circulated to the GBSC on 11 August. Rachel Garthwaite noted that she had spoken with Peter Liss, Chair of the GER, about this issue. Peter had said he is open to receiving comments on the strategy, however he requires them fairly soon in order to incorporate them into the review before the main GECC meeting.

ACTION 4/4: ALL MEMBERS to forward comments on GER review of science priorities to GBSC Secretariat by 15 October. Secretariat to collate comments and send suggestions to Peter Liss, Royal Society by 31 October.

Vin Fleming commented on previous Action 9/2 regarding the Overseas Territories (OTs) research priorities. Tara Pelembe, JNCC's OTs officer provided a presentation and paper (GECC GBSC (07)14) to the November 2007 GBSC meeting. Since then she has prepared a paper for the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity (IDMGB) similar to the one circulated to the group in November, however is unable to circulate this before Ministers have seen and discussed it. There is no date currently set for the next IDMGB meeting (though this will focus on OTs) and the paper has not changed substantially from the previous one. Furthermore, since the paper was prepared there have been a number of reports from Parliamentary Committees with recommendations relating to the conservation of the environment in OTs. Vin suggested the next step would be to await the outcome of the IDMGB and of any responses to the various Parliamentary committee reports and bring back any feedback to the GBSC at an appropriate time, especially noting any key gaps, developments or issues that were raised.

Agenda Item 5: Informing MEAs

The Secretariat introduced the paper (GECC GBSC (08)07) on the key themes and issues of the biodiversity Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). This was prepared following discussion at the April GBSC meeting where it was agreed that there was a need to consider scientific questions emerging from a range of biodiversity MEAs in order to explore how GBSC can influence them. It was noted that it would be very difficult to feed into each of the MEAs prior to their main meeting due to the constraints of having sufficient lead-in time on the key agenda items and adequate time and resources within GBSC to consider the issues. A simpler approach would be to consider key biodiversity issues coming out of the MEAs and prioritise these with a view to feeding back at the subsequent MEA meeting. In order to do this it would be important to establish a relationship the Head of Delegation, or Defra lead, to ensure they provide adequate and timely feedback following the MEA meeting, and ideally an insight into the likely future priorities for the MEA.

The group agreed that this was a good approach. Vin Fleming noted that wildlife diseases is starting to emerge as a common issue among a number of MEAs. The group should be aiming to provide more policy relevant research to help the UK delegation form a position and respond to questions at the MEA gatherings. Miles Parker mentioned that GBSC could consider inviting a speaker on one of the other MEA's such as Ramsar or the IUCN since these have not yet been explored.

ACTION 5/1: Secretariat to start establishing a relationship with the Head of Delegation or Defra lead on the forthcoming MEA meetings in order to raise awareness about the GBSC and request feedback from the meeting. Once feedback is provided Secretariat to circulate a short note and highlight issues for consideration at a subsequent GBSC meeting.

Agenda Item 6: GBSC input to post CBD CoP9 issues

Sharon McAuslan introduced the paper (GECC GBSC (08)08) on the CBD CoP9 outcomes, implementation and intersessional work. 36 decisions were adopted at CoP in May 2008 and the paper highlights the significant ones of relevance to the GBSC. These include the 2010 target and biodiversity and climate change, where it was noted that there will be an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group, the first meeting of which will be chaired by Bob Watson (CSA

Defra) in London, 17-21 November. There was no agenda set for SBSTTA and there will only be 1 intersessional meeting of this group in June 2010. However there is a significant amount of work to do in the period leading up to the next CBD COP. In the meantime Defra are requesting views from the GBSC on the notifications they receive from the CBD Secretariat in response to many of the CoP9 decisions.

ACTION 6/1: Sharon McAuslan to circulate the CBD template on the process for SBSTTA to deal with new and emerging issues along with other relevant notifications. Sharon to check with CBD deadline for submitting notification on new and emerging issues (given that SBSTTA is not due to meet until 2010) and whether it would be possible to put forward suggestions for new and emerging issues in a broad context.

ACTION 6/2: Secretariat to prepare a brief list of new and emerging issues already identified by GBSC and circulate to GBSC members. **ALL MEMBERS** to provide comments on list by 30 October. Paper to be submitted to CBD Secretariat by 30 November.

Agenda item 7: Gaps and emerging science issues

Rachel Garthwaite noted the Royal Society report on ground level ozone and its impacts on ecology as being of relevance under this item. The report has evidence to show the impacts on species around the world and it will be launched on 6 October 2008.

ACTION 7/1: Rachel Garthwaite to identify a representative to provide a presentation about ground level ozone and its impact on global biodiversity for the next GBSC meeting.

Miles Parker referred to launch of a Royal Society report on geo-engineering. Working group members are being identified and there will be an open call for evidence which will be circulated when available. There is also a Defra paper due out shortly which this area, although the focus is geophysical rather than the biological impacts. Miles Parker and Rachel Garthwaite agreed to discuss offline more details about how to ensure biodiversity and ecological impacts are adequately considered in the project.

Andy Stott provided an update on Defra's review of international biodiversity evidence needs. Tenders have been invited and Defra are about to decide whom to award the contract to. The aim of the review is to take a strategic look at the issue in a policy context. The evidence gaps and science needs will be reviewed including outputs from GBSC and its workshops. This will be set in the context of Defra's policy and the contractor will need to draw up priorities and specific proposals for where and how Defra should allocate funds. The work is expected to be complete prior to Christmas 2008. This is being run in parallel with Bill Sutherland's initiative following identification of top ecological issues. A workshop is being held in early September to identify the 100 most important global issues for biodiversity.

Agenda Item 8: Feedback from members on related actions within their organisations

UK BRAG report (GECC GBSC (08)09)

The Secretariat provided a brief update following the last UK BRAG meeting which was held in June 2008. Miles Parker expressed an interest in the paper on knowledge exchange and the sub-group reports.

ACTION 8/1: Secretariat to circulate the UK BRAG paper on knowledge exchange and the sub-group reports once approved by UK BRAG.

Concept note on an Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (GECC GBSC (08)10)

Andy Stott referred to the concept note (GECC GBSC (08)10) circulated last week, which makes proposals to bring together two initiatives following the IPCC model: global follow-up work to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and the Intergovernmental Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB). An initial paper was circulated to the CBD CoP9 and this received welcome support. It was suggested that UNEP call for support to bring together international action. The deadline for feedback is very short, owing to a miscommunication of the original concept note in June, however Andy Stott welcomed comments from members immediately following the meeting and he will be preparing a Defra response in early September. There will be an intergovernmental meeting on 17 November to take forward the discussion.

GBSC were broadly supportive of the proposal for an international voice for biodiversity and ecosystem services and saw this as a significant step forward and a chance for priorities to be put forward at an international level. However, the paper needs greater clarity since it doesn't clearly explain the priorities, costs, decision making process or links and interactions between this platform and other mechanisms such as the CBD.

Update on progress with the OT research priorities project

The Secretariat noted that a considerable amount of work is being done by the JNCC OT Officer, Tara Pelembe, on progressing research priorities within the OTs, as identified by the grass-roots survey of the territories which was run at the suggestion of the GBSC in 2007. One specific project is being progressed with partners at Cambridge University and Anguilla, undertaking base-line marine survey over a period of 3 years to establish an inventory. Another project is being run with Reading University who have presented JNCC with a holistic and sustainable proposal for providing training and research and data sharing for the OTs, Reading have recently applied to NERC for a Knowledge Exchange grant to undertake some of their project. Discussions are also taking place between JNCC, Reading University and DfID and FCO to find out about funding opportunities for the training and research skill development part of the project.

Information about this and other issues of relevance to the OTs is available in a JNCC newsletter which can be found at <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4079>.

Feedback from the HoL Systematics and Taxonomy inquiry

Miles Parker noted that the report from the House of Lords inquiry clarifies the lead on this issue as being the Department for Innovation, University and Skills (DIUS). However there is also some work for Defra and the research community. DIUS will lead on the process of providing a response to the report and it was suggested that the GBSC pick this up again following the report response, recognising the role of UK BRAG in the process.

GECC annual meeting and Sub-Committee report

Secretariat noted that the annual meeting for the main GECC has been postponed until February 2009. This is due to the review of the main GECC which is being currently being undertaken. The GECC are keen to establish the outcome of the review prior to meeting. Consequently the Sub-Committee reports will not need to be submitted until January, although it would make sense to have them ready prior to Christmas.

Miles Parker noted that Bob Watson, Chair of main GECC is considering the future need for the main GECC, given initiatives such as LWEC. Miles noted that it would be useful if members could consider how useful they and their organisations find the GBSC and feed back to him prior to the main GECC meeting in February.

ACTION 8/2: ALL MEMBERS to consider value of GBSC to their work and their organisations. Members to provide note to Secretariat by 19 December, who will compile a summary document for Miles Parker for consideration at the main GECC meeting.

ACTION 8/3: Secretariat to prepare a draft report to main GECC for circulation to the GBSC by 31 October. **Members** to provide comments and report to be signed off by 19 December.

Agenda Item 9: Diary/meeting dates and AOB

Chris Lyal noted the electronic conference "European contribution to GEO BON" which will run from the 1st - 5th September 2008. The results of this electronic conference will be presented at the Biostrat workshop in Cegléd, Hungary, on the 25th - 27th September 2008. The main objectives of the workshop are to:

- discuss a strategy to support the implementation of the conceptual approach for GEO BON at the European scale
- to propose research priorities to support the involvement of the EU research community into the implementation of GEO BON

The Secretariat noted that the meeting schedule had been previously set for 3 meetings per year in the following months: January, April and September. This was designed to fit with the CBD SBSTTA timing of meetings. However, arranging a meeting in January requires a substantial amount of forward planning and the dates do not evenly span the calendar year. GBSC agreed to the proposal that the meetings be held in the following months: March, July and November.

ACTION 9/1: Secretariat to trawl for dates for March 2009 and to establish venue. Circulate details to members as soon as information available.