

Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)

Discussion paper

**Discussion paper for GBSC on JNCC
MEA event**

June 2009

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Global biodiversity mechanisms: a thematic review of recent developments and future evidence needs

In support of the process of implementation of UK obligations under the major multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs), the JNCC held a one-day event that aimed to review and reflect on recent MEA outcomes. The event was held on 20th May 2009 at the Strand Hotel in London. It attracted 85 participants from a range of organisations. The event comprised of presentations on a number of cross-cutting themes, followed by a series of parallel workshops which provided an opportunity for detailed discussion of outcomes, implications for the UK and areas where the UK may wish to further contribute to relevant international processes. The presentations and reports from the working groups will be posted onto the JNCC website shortly¹.

Emerging issues and key evidence and research needs by thematic area

1. Biofuels

There is a need for international sustainability standards which ensure safeguards for biodiversity and ecosystems. Current safeguards lack teeth, and there is also a need to look at how to ensure that protective regulations will genuinely be implemented internationally.

There is a pressing need for an improved/increased evidence base on the impacts of biofuels on biological diversity.

Emerging issues

- A whole systems approach should be taken
- There is a need to fully understand the impacts of subsidies and targets on land use at international and national levels
- Biofuel production is increasing and there is a need to catch up quickly on developing sustainability of production
- Are we funding the right research? More/better horizon scanning – science policy interface
- Implementation of EU REDD (Reduced Emission from Deforestation and Degredation)

Evidence and research needs

- Collate existing evidence – then do a gap analysis before undertaking further research
- Systematic review
- Consider research needs and how to take them forward e.g. government programmes, FP7 (focus on biodiversity impacts of biofuels)

¹ <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/>

- Cross Whitehall biofuels research programme
- Understanding of what is blocking policy response to research.

2. Climate change

There is a need to look at systems globally, not just nationally/locally. Research is needed to monitor changes in order to assess the impact of climate change. The need is for multidisciplinary work groups to assess the impact of climate change. The challenges for MEAs are as follows:

- to develop a common understanding of the science through research, monitoring and modelling;
- to take coordinated action;
- and to ensure that implementation at an International/National level translates to action on the ground.

Emerging issues

- How to engage effectively with UNFCCC
- How to keep research summaries fresh
- Effective communication with for eg. TEEB
- Developing a common line from the biodiversity MEAs.

Evidence and research needs

- Evidence is needed of the co-benefits between biodiversity and other ecosystem services
- More complex models are needed. i.e. beyond simple climate envelopes
- Connectivity – research into the risks and benefits
- Impacts of mitigation measures
- Ocean acidification
- Appropriate research – an example was made of the Phenology Network. Simple and inexpensive, but with a wealth of information coming out of it. Long-term large scale, research can be expensive – some questions can be answered with small scale simple research
- Clear messages are needed from good science (the UKBRAG was cited as an example)

3. Invasive Alien Species and wildlife diseases

The need is for holistic and integrated policies which are designed to be responsive, backed by research to underpin risk assessments (e.g. is control feasible? How to do it?). It was noted that biosecurity is dull, as it is about making sure things don't happen, so is difficult to sell. Although awareness is increasing, effectiveness is lacking and information exchange is the key to improving this.

Invasive alien species are a top priority for OTs/CDs with a need for immediate action, but identifying funding is a challenge! Implementation will depend on developing public and political understanding of the long term costs of not considering environmental issues.

Emerging issues

- Climate change and interactions

- New invasives/non-natives/natives and associated diseases
- Contingency planning
- Globalisation – managing consequences
- Effects of economic change

Evidence and research needs

- Better links with academic and research funding bodies – better engagement of scientists leads to better results and clearer communication
- Should be prepared to have imperfect research – policy development without perfect science, risk based approach
- Biocontrol information – more about mechanisms, risks etc.
- Transferability to developing countries – evidence and research
- Improving surveillance as component of risk assessment – methods, and mechanisms. Assess what is coming in before it becomes a problem

4. Ecosystem Approach and Ecosystem Services

Language/terminology can be a block to understanding. Different conventions and even different areas within the biodiversity sector have different terminology. It would be useful to have more integration across key sectors and to have more publicising of success stories. An emerging issue is the need to link in to climate change negotiations.

Evidence and research needs

- Gaps in the evidence base
- Better evidence of added value of EA on the ground
- Valuation in different systems
- More information about benefits transfer
- Case studies/lessons learnt – winners and losers of EA case studies
- Payment for ecosystem services approach – who are the losers of change, do they need compensation?
- Better knowledge and recognition of carbon storage of all ecosystems
- What incentives drive behaviour?
- Future importance for genetic resources
- What services and how much of each do we need now, what will we need in a changing world and what happens if we can't get them?

5. OTs/CDs Island Issues

Communication and continuity are critically important. It was noted that where there is expertise and good practise from other countries, e.g. New Zealand, it should be shared and used. It would be useful to have a gap analysis to ascertain who has expertise and where, who can help so this can more readily be shared. Facilitation of island to island support would be helpful. The need for basic survey and inventory of endemics was highlighted where again it would be useful to benefit from expertise from other countries due to lack of capacity on islands.

Emerging issues

- Making protected areas real – planning procedures
- Management and conservation of marine areas
- Fisheries and biodiversity – investment budgets for fisheries protection
- Economic benefits from biodiversity – linked to ecosystem services
- Communication issues of how changes in the environment affect people; how changes perceived both in CDs / OTs and Metropolitan UK

Evidence and research needs

- Knowledge of capacity and opportunities to share experience / expertise
- Research needs exercise was undertaken in 2007 by JNCC – implementing the research is a necessary next step
- Invasive aliens – evidence and research on impacts and risk assessment
- What endemics exist (e.g. in marine environment) – basic survey and inventory
- Link OT / CD implementation with Metropolitan UK. Currently OT issues are dealt with separately by Whitehall – need to join up better
- Islands are a good scale to demonstrate Ecosystem Approach

General comments and conclusions

An observation was made that the event did not have anyone attending from the Research Councils, and few from academia. There is a need for the biodiversity community to expand horizons and talk to more economists and social scientists, and to encourage greater and clearer communication between science and policy makers. There is a tendency for organisations to operate in silos both internally and externally with other organisations. The biodiversity community needs to find effective ways to allow knowledge to move between these silos. In order to do that it needs to be creative and inventive.

The need for consistency of practice and decision making across Governments, within government departments, within the UK and as a wider community was stressed as a priority. It was noted that bottom up engagement hasn't been very apparent in the MEA process and questions were asked about how to better engage constituencies, communities and the public on biodiversity. The role of the NGOs was noted as being of particular value in helping improve communication and engagement from the bottom up and ultimately helping governments implement conventions.

A UK agenda for MEAs was proposed which summarises agreed priorities and positions over a 2-3 year period. Communication with other countries would be useful and the aim would be to seek to improve implementation of the MEAs.

There is a need to keep up international work on the science policy interface. Greater clarity of information and clearer articulation of the science policy dialogue would be helpful in this task. It was noted that this is also required at the national level and that the JNCC could provide a science policy interface and could start the process of a UK agenda for MEAs with Defra refining the UK policy position. It was noted that the biodiversity community tends to work in a reactive mode and it could learn lessons about how to be more proactive from the climate change community

There was a call for another MEA workshop to be held in advance of the next round of the major meetings of the MEAs, It could be linked to the post 2010 targets process and could consider whether the UK can make a difference in that process.

The general themes across the day were around boundaries (both physical and within and between organisations and countries), language (including clarity and understanding of terminology) and communication. The UK can take a lead in the process of rationalising MEAs and can look ahead at what's coming up on agendas, identify priorities and put together evidence.

Tina Yates and Elizabeth Moore
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