

Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)

Meeting papers

Approved Minutes

13 July 2009

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**GECC SUB-COMMITTEE ON GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY ISSUES
MINUTES: 13 July 2009**

Attendees:

Miles Parker, Defra
Andy Swash, Defra
Chris Baker, NERC
Elizabeth Moore, JNCC (Secretariat)
Vin Fleming, JNCC
Mary Gibby, RBGE
Chris Lyal, NHM.
Helen Baker, JNCC (Secretariat)
Andy Chalmers, DECC
Eimear Nic Lughadha, RBGK

Plus guests:

Lawrence Way, JNCC

Agenda Item 1: Introductions and Apologies

Apologies were received from; Simon Jennings, Cefas, Rachel Garthwaite, Royal Society, Amanda Read, BBSRC, Ken Norris, NERC Biodiversity Theme Leader, Sharon McAuslan, Defra, Steph Godliman, Defra, Heather Christie, FCO, Joanna Drewitt, SG.

Agenda Item 2: GECC Review and Global Environmental Research Coordination Subgroup (GER) research priorities review (GECC GBSC (09)13 and GECC GBSC (09)18)

GECC Review

Miles Parker provided some background on the GECC by way of introducing this item. The GECC was set up as an inter-agency group in 2001 to advise the GCSA on gaps in the global environmental research agenda and to coordinate UK involvement in it. GECC's role was to review the scope and identify lead organisations to fill the gaps. Responsibility for the GECC transferred to Chief Scientific Adviser, then to Defra who was pulling together issues around global environmental change. Currently the lead is DECC, however Defra maintains the lead on biodiversity issues.

The GECC review set out to establish whether GECC should continue, and if so in what form and looked at its role in comparison with a number of initiatives such as LWEC¹. At the last GECC meeting it was agreed that there is still a need for the functions the GECC provides and the action was for Miles Parker and David Warrilow (DECC) to discuss the issue with ERFF, the Royal Society Global Environmental Research Committee, DfID and the CSAs and to develop proposals for a special GECC meeting in the Autumn. GECC's subgroups were also asked to comment on the review's recommendations.

During the discussion GBSC members agreed that the biodiversity sub-group was a useful mechanism for finding out what disparate bodies are doing and thinking. The GBSC provides an important interface between science, research and policy. It was noted that GBSC differs from ERFF in that it consists of research players and has a valuable relationship with the

¹ Living with environmental change <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/ccprog/lwec.htm>

Royal Society whereas ERFF consists of research funders. Members felt it was important to engage with discussions on the international biodiversity agenda and without GBSC this would be hard to do.

However the group has costs associated in the form of the running of the Secretariat and it was noted that information sharing is happening outside of the group, for example the Sutherland papers^{2,3} and the JNCC MEA workshop⁴. It is hard to ascertain how the products produced by the GBSC are used in terms of influencing science and the group needs to think about what influence it could have in the future. Andy Swash noted that there was a lack of clarity about the policy customer of the forum.

ACTION 2/1: Andy Swash to check whether GBSC is delivering value within Defra. **Andy Chalmers** to check how useful GBSC is for DECC policy needs. Both to provide feedback to Miles Parker by 15 September in order to develop position on policy demand to take to Autumn GECC meeting.

GER research priorities review

It was noted that the GBSC has already commented on the lack of biodiversity component in the document and a number of caveats were included in the latest draft version on the limitations of the biodiversity component. At the last GECC meeting the GBSC was tasked with the action of reviewing the GER report and considering whether to produce an equivalent report on the ecosystem services and biodiversity issues not addressed by it.

It was noted that the GER review was intended to be a summary of priorities for GECC members to take to their own organisations to prompt funding decisions. It will be on the GECC website as a living document. There was general agreement for the suggestion to edit the exiting document to include the GBSC outputs and make it a more complete review rather than produce a separate document.

ACTION 2/2: Secretariat to produce a revised draft GER report, incorporating conclusions on key biodiversity issues addressed at GBSC meetings in order to ensure the review adequately covers biodiversity and ecosystem services research priorities. Revised draft to be circulated to GBSC members by 24 August. GBSC members to provide comments to Secretariat by 4 September. Secretariat to collate comments and prepare final version for submission to Chair by 16 September.

ACTION 2/3: Miles Parker to send a letter to David Warrilow, DECC (cc. Bob Watson, Defra and Peter Liss, Royal Society) noting the action the GBSC is undertaking regarding the GER review and the timescale for submitting a revised draft.

Agenda Item 3: Taxonomy

Mary Gibby attended the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS) meeting concerning world biodiversity and European taxonomy held in Czech Republic in May 2009. Prior to the meeting there was an e-conference which provided global input to the

² *Future novel threats and opportunities facing UK biodiversity identified by horizon scanning*, Journal of Applied Ecology 2008, 45, 821-833

³ *One hundred questions of importance to the conservation of global biological diversity*, Conservation Biology 2009

⁴ <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4663>

meeting. The main outcome was recognition of the importance of diversity in biodiversity. It was agreed that diversity (i.e. taxonomy) can get lost in initiatives such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, ecosystem services and climate change issues, and the challenge is to ensure better engagement with these initiatives.

UK BRAG had a substantive discussion on this issue at their meeting on 9 July. They concluded that this was a relevant work area and more work needs to be done on some of the detail. It was agreed that the EPBRS statement lists a number of useful recommendations however these are unprioritised and not placed within the broader context of the role of biodiversity in the ecosystem approach. It also fails to sum up the conclusion that diversity is going off the agenda of a number of big causes. There are opportunities to prompt interest in diversity in the climate change agenda, for example the UN-REDD programme⁵.

Chris Baker noted that NERC is undertaking a UK systematics and taxonomy review. They are currently inviting tenders for provision of consultancy services to support the review and the closing date for applications is 3 August⁶.

(Vin Fleming took over chairing the meeting at this point.)

Agenda Item 4: Sutherland papers (GECC GBSC (09)11 and GECC GBSC (09)12)^{2,3}

Vin suggested the group consider the issues identified in the two papers and discuss how GBSC may want to take them forward. As GBSC has already discussed a number of the big issues such as ocean acidification and invasive species it could consider what other issues remain and how to prioritise them.

Chris Baker suggested that the issues could be cross-checked against NERC's thematic action plans. Andy Swash noted that Defra has already started to use the papers for example in their review of biodiversity research needs. The next step would be to find out which issues are not being followed up. Andy Chalmers agreed that he could check within DECC which issues are being addressed in relation to policy requirements and where there are gaps. It was noted that the ERFF research database should provide an assessment of work already being undertaken on these issues.

ACTION 4/1: Andy Swash to cross check activity within Defra against issues identified in Sutherland papers. Prepare report highlighting any gaps. Submit to Secretariat by 18 September.

ACTION 4/2: Andy Chalmers to cross check activity and needs within DECC against issues identified in Sutherland papers. Prepare report highlighting any gaps. Submit to Secretariat by 18 September.

ACTION 4/3: Chris Baker to cross check NERC thematic action plans against issues identified in Sutherland papers. Prepare report highlighting any gaps. Submit to Secretariat by 18 September.

⁵ <http://www.undp.org/mdtf/UN-REDD/overview.shtml>

⁶ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/themes/biodiversity/events/itt-taxonomy.asp>

ACTION 4/4: Secretariat to cross check activity against issues in Sutherland papers reported on ERFF research database. Also compare Sutherland papers against research priorities identified in the MEA paper (GECC GBSC (09)10). Collate all the information from actions 4/1, 4/2, 4/3 and 4/4 into a report for November 2009 meeting of GBSC.

Eimear Nic Lughadha noted that it would be pertinent to use the rationale for UK involvement as outlined in the GER review (p2).

Agenda Item 5: Minutes and actions from 3 March 2009 (GECC GBSC M(09)07) and GECC GBSC MA(09)08)

The minutes were taken as a true and accurate record of the meeting. The majority of actions had been completed; the following four will be carried forward:

ACTION 5/1: Secretariat, Royal Society and Defra to convene a seminar on ground level ozone at which David Fowler and Rachel Garthwaite present information to a number of key representatives from different policy groups (including those responsible for food security, Peter Costigan, DECC and DfID).

ACTION 5/2: Vin Fleming to organise a workshop to consider priority Arctic biodiversity research issues from a UK perspective. Workshop group to include David Stroud, JNCC, Tavis Potts, SAMS, Richard Mills, FCO, Stephen Dye, Cefas plus a modeller from the Hadley Centre and a representative from NERC.

Workshop 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. VF to report back to GBSC in November 2009.

ACTION 5/3: Royal Society to provide a summary of the RS report on geo-engineering following its launch 1 September, with reference to any gaps and issues for the GBSC to progress.

ACTION 5/4: Royal Society to identify representative to present the issues concerning synthetic biology in relation to global biodiversity to the GBSC at a future meeting. Liaise with Secretariat to decide whether to provide briefing paper to next GBSC meeting and who to lead on this issue.

Agenda item 6: Nanotechnology (GECC GBSC (09)14)

Helen Baker introduced her information paper on this issue. She noted that there is lots of work being undertaken in the UK and less so in Europe with very little happening at the global level. The research tends to focus on human health issues and technological advancement with only a small proportion on biodiversity issues. The key question for GBSC is whether it has a role helping UK government understand the global impacts and benefits of nanotechnology.

It was noted that this issue is one of the 100 questions identified in Sutherland's paper³. Andy Swash noted that he had recently attended the launch of the Food and Environment Research Agency (fera) and that there was a presentation on nanotechnology⁷, considering the

⁷ <http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/events/launchEvent.cfm#presentations> See presentation number 3, Food safety, nanotechnology, and science in support of food and environment policy

environmental benefits and impacts. It was agreed that it might be worth considering inviting an expert from fera to present to a future GBSC meeting. As this issue is still in its infancy it was agreed that it is too early to tell if there is a gap for the GBSC to consider, however the group should keep this issue in mind as a horizon scanning item for a future agenda item when more information is available (reconsider in 24 months).

Agenda Item 7: Feedback from members on related actions within their organisations
UK BRAG report

Helen Baker noted that UK BRAG had only just met on 9 July, hence a verbal update. They discussed ground level ozone and Helen will circulate the BRAG briefing to the GBSC for information.

The joint UK BRAG/BES event at the annual BES conference will be held in September 2009 at the University of Hertfordshire. The event will be on valuing biodiversity and the national ecosystem assessment. There will be a number of introductory presentations followed by breakout groups dealing with issues of delivering the national ecosystem assessment. All GBSC members are welcome to attend⁸

Helen noted that there were a number of ongoing initiatives within the EPBRS. The Network of Knowledge concept is being finalised and has been shared with the European Commission; it is intended to contribute to development of an EU platform on biodiversity and the IPBES (see below). EPBRS is also reviewing its research strategy – a meeting will take place in August. The next EPBRS meeting will be held in the autumn under Swedish Presidency and focus on beyond the 2010 targets. There will be an e-conference leading up to this and UK BRAG will contribute to it; the Secretariat will inform members when this e-conference goes live.

UK BRAG set out some future priorities; in particular, reviewing approaches to the science-policy interface to progress the way research influences science and vice versa. GBSC would like to be kept informed of progress and may wish to participate to ensure the international perspective is taken into account as well as domestic issues.

Tony Weighell (JNCC) presented to the UK BRAG on biodiversity issues for small islands, with particular relevance to the Crown Dependencies. UK BRAG decided that thematic work was required around islands and the issues that affect them.

ACTION 7/1: Secretariat to circulate UK BRAG briefing on ground level ozone to GBSC.

ACTION 7/2: Secretariat to provide an update on the UK BRAG science policy interface review to a future GBSC meeting.

OT Research priorities (GECC GBSC (09)04)

Further to the paper, Vin Fleming provided an update on recent issues relating to the OTs. At a recent reception held at the FCO it was announced that the Defra Minister will take the lead for biodiversity issues within the OTs. More funding will be made available for OTs under the Darwin Initiative, some specifically earmarked for their use, some for fellowships and up to £25,000 challenge funds for scoping studies. OTs will be able to apply for funds in

⁸ For more details on the event go to: <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3900>

their own right without having to have a UK partner. Hopefully this will lead to more Darwin projects being undertaken in the OTs.

Andy Swash added that whilst Defra have recognised OTs are a priority area for research the research needs to be policy relevant to the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

IPBES (GECC GBSC (09)16)

Helen Baker introduced the update paper on the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). This is a concept for an international network to improve the way work is done in the biodiversity and ecosystem services sector. The European Commission is trying to establish an EU position within the IPBES community and is linking with the EPBRS Network of Knowledge concept. The Commission has funding to develop the concept of what an EU platform could look like.

Chris Lyal noted that he had recently circulated information on the e-biosphere meeting to the GBSC. Following the e-conference a small group developed a road map of biodiversity informatics initiatives. It was agreed that this information should be circulated to the group.

ACTION 7/3: Chris Lyal to circulate information on biodiversity informatics initiatives to GBSC members.

Agenda Item 8: MEAs (GECC GBSC (09)10)

Vin Fleming introduced this item. The JNCC hosted a one-day event with the aim of looking at cross-cutting themes across a number of the key biodiversity conventions. The outcomes were the evidence and research needs for each thematic area that will help inform the UK at future MEA meetings. It was a successful event with 85 delegates from government agencies, departments and NGOs. However there was not much engagement from the academic community and the research councils. As such, the outcomes tend to be biased towards policy evidence needs. It was none-the-less a useful event which enabled open free debate between policy makers and it was felt that more of these events should be held in the future. All the briefings papers, presentations, reports from the working groups and outcomes will be posted onto the JNCC website⁹.

Agenda item 9: Earth Observations Initiatives

Lawrence Way, JNCC, gave a presentation on earth observation initiatives (EO) - copy of presentation circulated with minutes. Using an example of a wetland in Sri Lanka, he demonstrated the applied benefits of using EO land cover to show changes over time from lagoon to land. This evidence was used to drive the need for land use policy and discharge management in the area.

(Miles Parker resumed chairing the meeting at this point)

EO, which includes satellite data, can provide a huge resource of high resolution time series data. Radar and optical sensors can measure elevation, structure, biomass, carbon, and differentiation of vegetation across many sectors. Images can be compared from different seasons and changes can be detected, for example large scale change in land cover.

⁹ <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4663>

Many areas of the world are undergoing large scale changes in land cover. Some countries have the money and have developed the skills to use EO, for example Mexico. There is added value in initiatives that work above the country level, for example the Globwetland projects¹⁰ which are locally-led projects distributed across regions with limited existing experience. The local land managers are the real users of EO and having stakeholder involvement means that data is linked to solutions. Having organisations such as the European Space Agency involved means that the skill is available to process the satellite data.

One of the EO initiatives most significant for the GBSC is the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) EU initiative. This is seeking to create large funded programmes mostly for land within the EU. Some EO initiatives have an initial drive from the space agency background which means they are not necessarily the land managers. In general there is little global coordination of all the initiatives from a biodiversity perspective. There are few organisations placed to exploit the opportunities and get practical knowledge transfer or capacity building initiatives.

During the discussion it was noted that there is clearly a gap between the drivers of EO initiatives and the users of the data derived from the initiatives. The gap was defined as a skills gap for local community users. Further barriers to uptake include cost and support issues, along with a lack of awareness of the benefits within the biodiversity community.

Andy Chalmers suggested he could find out what extent EO is being applied to areas such as deforestation and reforestation within DECC. Andy Swash noted that a lot of thought has been given within Defra on how to use EO science to better fit with the gap filling process and providing evidence needs.

Miles Parker suggested that information about the benefits of EO technologies could be made available to Darwin applicants to broaden awareness and use. However there are many global issues that could benefit and the GBSC is not necessarily the right place to proceed with this debate. It was agreed that this issue should be raised with the main GECC for further consideration.

ACTION 9/1: Miles Parker to raise the issue of EO initiatives with the main GECC and to suggest the option of a special meeting to be convened including Ian Davidson (Defra), Lawrence Way (JNCC), Bill Eason (NERC) and others to take this issue forward.

Agenda Item 10: Gaps and emerging science issues

Reporting back on issues identified at the last GBSC meeting under this agenda item, the Secretariat noted that they could consider a paper on carbon markets and biodiversity to be circulated at the next GBSC meeting.

Bonn Climate Change talks (GECC GBSC (09)17)

Miles Parker noted that the IUCN were making a concerted effort to raise biodiversity issues, largely in the context of REDD¹¹. The group agreed this could be a potential future agenda

¹⁰ <http://www.globwetland.org/>

¹¹ UN Collaborative Programme on Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in Developing Countries <http://www.undp.org/mdtf/un-redd/overview.shtml>

item, and Neville Ash (IUCN) could be invited to discuss the biodiversity and ecosystem services side of the climate change agenda.

Agenda Item 11: Diary/meeting dates and AOB

The next GBSC meeting will be held 3 November in London. Members will be sent details as soon as possible.