

Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)

Meeting papers

GECC Sub-Committee Minutes

24 June 2005

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**GECC SUB-COMMITTEE ON GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY ISSUES
MINUTES: 24TH June 2005**

Attendees:

Richard Berridge, Defra Science Directorate
Ian Bainbridge, Scottish Executive
Geoff Boxshall, Royal Society & NHM
Karen Dickenson, Defra
Saikat Dutta, FCO (on behalf of Rob Bowman)
Richard Ferris (Secretariat), JNCC
Claudine Gibson (Secretariat), JNCC
Pamela Kempton, NERC
Tony Miller, RBGE (on behalf of Mary Gibby)
Eimear Nic Lughadha, RBG Kew (on behalf of Peter Crane)
Miles Parker (Chair), Defra Science Directorate
Glenys Parry, Defra Environment and Sustainable Development International
Clare Rushowski, BBSRC
Andy Stott, Defra Natural Resources and Rural Affairs
Mike Waldock, CEFAS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced Richard Berridge.

Agenda Item 1: Introductions and apologies

Apologies were received from Rob Bowman (FCO), Peter Crane (RBG Kew), Joanna Elliott (DFID), Mary Gibby (RBGE), Gary Grubb (ESRC), Wyn Jones (JNCC), and Paul Leonard (Defra). JNCC informed the meeting that either Malcom Vincent or Marcus Yeo would attend future meetings.

Agenda Item 2: The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (GECC GBSC (05)04)

Prior to the main discussion, an update was provided on where the MA stands in a UK policy context. The group were reminded that the MA is being published in stages. Publications so far include an overall synthesis report, Biodiversity synthesis report and most recently, the Land Degradation and Desertification synthesis report. There are more reports and assessments to follow, over the next 18 months. Altogether the MA will be over 2000 pages long, so there is a vast amount of information to take on board.

There is a link to the French government initiative, which is a consultative process to consider the need for an international mechanism to provide an assessment of scientific information and policy options (i.e. an Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity modelled on the IPCC). There will be a series of meetings to discuss how this is taken forward (Andrew Stott will be attending the first of these, in Paris, during the w/c 27/06/05).

DISCUSSION

The Chair explained that the purpose of the discussion was to consider the science gaps revealed by the MA and the priorities for filling them. GECC GBSC (05)04 was an attempt to identify science gaps by extracting relevant sections from the MA.

The *MA biodiversity synthesis report* and GBSC (05)04 identified a whole string of really challenging issues, however it was felt that the structure of GBSC (05)04 could be improved and simplified. It was considered reasonably easy to pull out a number of science gaps, and several disparate themes were identified from the two papers. It was recognised however, that the level of detail varied between themes.

Summary of discussion points on the science gaps:

A need was identified for more of an emphasis to be placed on monitoring to improve trend information, and to strengthen local, regional and global data sets, allowing a global synthesis to be produced. We need to consider how to fund long-term monitoring, as unfortunately, existing monitoring projects are not considered as 'original research' which is a requirement of many funding bodies.

The data gaps are bigger than data availability.

The science is now quite dated particularly on ecosystem services,

Identifying and filling key data gaps, especially from developing countries was considered important.

The value of making the link between ecosystem goods and services and biodiversity was discussed. Some GBSC members considered this to detract from the inherent value of biodiversity. There was some disagreement over the view that ecosystem services can serve as a lever for biodiversity conservation, as this could be regarded as down playing their essential role in long-term well-being. Ecosystem services are considered among the most important concepts to come out of the last decade.

Modelling, if it could be done for biodiversity was considered potentially very powerful in communicating the pressures on biodiversity and in supporting decision making. In view of the vast number of variables, but limited data available, the need to start with a crude model (addressing the complexity of biodiversity, if only for specific ecosystems or scales) was recognised. It was noted that we need to improve our understanding of systems and feedback if we are to take forward modelling work. If modelling is feasible, we should place it high on the priority list for action.

There is a need to address the gap between academic issues raised in *The MA biodiversity synthesis report* (systems-based) and decision-making in the CBD.

It was considered that themes should be clustered at a high level, as focus for research funding. It was agreed that the Secretariat would produce a first draft list of research needs, synthesised from GBSC (05)04. Such work could be taken forward as a sub-group exercise, to include identifying priorities and appropriate funders.

During the discussion of science gaps, a number of shortcomings of the MA were identified:

- It has a marked terrestrial bias, and appears to neglect marine issues. There are other generic marine issues in addition to indicators.
- The science used is now quite out of date – the MA has taken a long time to produce, and the science has since come on a long way, particularly in respect of ecosystem services. Consequently, this could affect the choice of emerging priorities for science.
- There is some un-certainty on the reliability of the MA Scenarios, as they are not wholly based on models.
- In any future work a more explicit link between the MA and the CBD work programmes should be made. This would include reference to global goals, targets and indicators adopted by COP7, subsequent to the inception of the MA. Some attempt has been made to 'retro-fit' MA findings to the CBD work programmes and indicators in the Scenarios report, and this exercise highlights gaps in the availability of data and models.

ACTION 2/1: Secretariat to produce an initial draft of research needs, based on *The MA biodiversity synthesis report* and GBSC (05)04.

ACTION 2/2: Secretariat to draw up a Terms of Reference for a sub-group. The sub-group would aim to develop the research needs and identify UK research priorities and gaps. The group should also investigate current work, since it was thought that a lot of the required work is already underway.

Sub-group to involve Richard Ferris/Claudine Gibson (JNCC), Geoff Boxshall (Royal Society), Eimear Nic Lughadha (RBG Kew), Andrew Stott (Defra), plus a social scientist and a marine specialist (see below).

ACTION 2/3: Secretariat to invite Kerry Turner (social scientist, UEA) to join the sub-group.

ACTION 2/4: All to identify a marine specialist to be invited to join the sub-group.

Timetable

In order to satisfy the timetable for the UK research agenda, it is necessary to ensure that submissions for Spending Review 2006 are made by February 2006. The GBSC would need to conclude its work this autumn.

It was also noted that this exercise should, if possible, aim to inform the Office of Science and Technology (OST) in relation to setting priorities for EU Framework Programme 7 (FP7). European funding has a particular importance in this area, although it was considered important that a balance should be struck between FP7 funding global issues and those with a European focus.

Due to current disagreement over EC budgets, the size and content of FP7 is uncertain. Draft proposals are expected to be issued for consultation over the summer. The timing is such that a fully considered response from GBSC may be difficult; a precise timetable would be needed.

ACTION 2/5: Richard Berridge to contact Mike Collins (Defra) to establish a precise timetable for feeding specific comments to OST in order to influence the development of FP7, and inform the Secretariat.

In considering what the UK can contribute to meeting scientific research needs, and recognising that this was a huge agenda, the GBSC group identified the need to decide how to engage in, and define its role in addressing the MA.

The idea of holding a UK workshop to bring science and policy together was discussed. This would assist the UK government in responding to the MA, focusing particularly on how the science priorities should be taken forward. The focus of the workshop would be on the MA from the perspective of what the UK can contribute to the science on global biodiversity, since the international response is the subject of global assessment at the forthcoming DIVERSITAS conference in Mexico, November 2005.

The workshop needs to engage people with time and expertise to assess specific components of the MA. For this reason, it was suggested that attendance at the conference should be by invitation, and involve GBSC members, reviewers and key players.

ACTION 2/6: MP and GB to approach the Royal Society to request assistance in mobilising relevant people for a discussion on the MA to include reviews of key elements, with the aim of having a meeting in November to inform the UK response.

ACTION 2/7: ENL to brief Peter Crane on this discussion and request his involvement in the proposed conference.

Agenda Item 3: Minutes of the last meeting (GECC GBSC M(05)05)

These were taken as a true and accurate record of the last meeting.

Agenda Item 4: Actions and matters arising (GECC GBSC MA(05)07)

Documents prepared by CR were circulated, providing information on the three Research Councils' priority setting process (ESRC, NERC, BBSRC) in response to outstanding Action 3/3 (Feb 05).

ACTION 4/1: CR to confirm whether these documents can be put on GECC website.

The Secretariat circulated information provided by Trevor Guymer on the work of IACMST to begin to establish links and clarify interface between IACMST and GECC GBSC.

ACTION 4/2: Secretariat to invite Trevor Guymer to a future GBSC meeting (consider attendance at the November meeting).

The following outstanding actions will be carried forward:

ACTION 4/3: MP to write to DfID (Gordon Conway) regarding attendance at future GBSC meetings.

ACTION 4/4: Secretariat to invite Martin Parry (Tyndall Centre) to attend the February 2006 meeting, for a discussion on climate change and biodiversity.

ACTION 4/5: Secretariat to circulate the link to the main GECC website when it becomes live.

Agenda Item 5: Programme of Work (GECC GBSC (05)08)

The new tabular format for the GBSC Work Programme was adopted, but it was agreed that it was missing a set of performance measures / success criteria, with agreed dates for deliverables. The Secretariat noted that the next main GECC meeting is scheduled for 12/09/05, and the GBSC would be expected to report on its progress.

It was agreed that ToR item 3 – *identify and review emerging scientific questions* - should be a standing item on the Agenda, with acknowledgement that there will not always be new discussion on this item.

It was requested that the Work Programme should define how the proposed actions should be undertaken. It was decided that ToR item 4 – *review effectiveness of national capacity, capability and performance* - should be on the Agenda in the New Year and that ToR item 5 – *recommend a lead Department or Agency in areas of science and technology* - should be raised at longer intervals.

Some ToR should be identified as standing items to be re-visited on a formal basis. It was decided that projects should have specified durations, with clear outcomes identified.

ACTION 5/1: Secretariat to identify and develop performance indicators for 2/1, 2/2, 3/2.

ACTION 5/2: All GBSC members to consider how each work programme should be addressed, appropriate timescales, and anticipated outcomes; and submit ideas to The Secretariat

ACTION 5/3: Secretariat to keep ToR item 3 - *identify and review emerging scientific questions* - as a standing item on future meeting Agendas; and all GBSC members to provide feedback on any Horizon Scanning activities within their organisations..

Agenda Item 6: Environmental Research Funders' Forum (GECC GBSC (05)09)

The Secretariat has already established links with ERFF, through UK BRAG, and would seek a similar advisory role for the GBSC.

It was agreed that the outputs from the proposed sub-group synthesising the MA (see Action 2), would serve as the first output to inform ERFF on the emerging science needs.

ACTION 6/1: RF to contact the ERFF Secretariat, to clarify his role in representing both UK BRAG and GBSC; and establish an appropriate arrangement to submit information generated by GBSC.

Agenda Item 7: BiodivERsA

A presentation on BiodivERsA was made by Defra/JNCC and NERC, the two UK partners in this ERA-Net project. It was acknowledged that the most relevant components of the BiodivERsA workplan to the work of GBSC, are WP2 (*Identification of best practices and barriers to implementation*) and WP4 (*Information gathering and linkage of ERA-Net members' programmes with developing countries*).

It was questioned whether WCMC had been consulted on the use of existing databases as a source of the information required for WP4. It was felt that Gerry Lawson (NERC), leading this Work Package, would be aware of these, but that it would be helpful to remind him of this resource.

ACTION 7/1: Secretariat to provide GBSC members with an electronic copy of the presentation and the web address for the BiodivERsA project.

ACTION 7/2: PK to discuss with Gerry Lawson the value of WCMC databases as a source of information for BiodivERsA WP4.

ACTION 7/3: RF / PK to inform GBSC how issues develop.

Agenda item 8: Conventions and initiatives paper (GECC GBSC (05)10)

The paper was circulated to the group, who were informed that it had been reformatted due to the amount of text. However, it was noted that the format still needs improving, in order to make the information easier to read. A request was made for all GBSC members to continue assisting the Secretariat in updating the paper. It was suggested that the paper should be forwarded to the UK focal point / lead of each convention / initiative for assistance/clarification.

ACTION 8/1: Secretariat to improve the format of the paper.

ACTION 8/2: All GBSC members to update / add information to the paper, submitting any changes or additions to the Secretariat.

ACTION 8/3: Secretariat to forward the paper to UK leads, requesting information/clarification on the content of the paper.

ACTION 8/4: Secretariat to investigate making the table available on the main GECC website (discuss with Alan Whitelaw, ESYS).

Agenda Item 9: Diary / meeting dates

The 23rd August was agreed as the date for the next GECC GBSC meeting, with UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, as a provisional location.

The 17th November was agreed provisionally for the MA conference, with the Royal Society as a possible location (see Actions 5 and 6). This would possibly double as a GBSC meeting.

ACTION 9/1: Secretariat to confirm with UNEP-WCMC for meeting venue

Agenda Item 10: AOB

The evening discussion meeting to discuss the role of BBSRC in biodiversity research (Glasgow, 13/07/05) was brought to the attention of GBSC members. The Secretariat asked all GBSC members to consider submitting responses to the BBSRC consultation paper – *The Role of BBSRC in Biodiversity Research* – with a deadline of the 31st July.

ACTION 10/1: Secretariat to circulate the BBSRC document to all GBSC members. **All** to consider submitting views.