

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

**Strand Palace Hotel, London 20<sup>th</sup> May 2009**

**Invasive Alien Species and Wildlife Diseases Working Group  
Report**

May 2009

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Working Group Report**

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**1. Key implementation requirements**

It was noted that the GB Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy applies only to GB, not to Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (OTs/CDs). Given the level of threat to island ecosystems, and levels of endemic biodiversity in the OTs, it was felt that immediate action was required to deal with the greatest threats, coupled with a longer term strategic approach.

World and regional trade systems, and the economic benefits of trade versus their environmental costs, were discussed. Globalisation was considered to be a problem in this respect. Very often trade restrictions apply to imports that could threaten or have an impact upon agricultural or horticultural products or where direct human impacts are recognised, but not to imports that could threaten wildlife. The costs of the long term impacts on biodiversity of invasive alien species (IAS) and wildlife diseases (WD) are seldom considered as opposed to the benefits of allowing certain types of trade (imports for zoos were considered an exception and an example of best practice). Risks to biodiversity should be adequately incorporated in legislation and policy in terms of the loss of wildlife value. It was felt that development of an EU strategy and possibly legislation to deal with some of these problems at EU level was very timely.

The perceived costs and difficulty of dealing with IAS were seen as barriers to achieving successful control. It was noted that very few studies have compared the costs of good prevention mechanisms with the costs of not acting to prevent IAS arriving and their subsequent long-term effects on biodiversity and ecosystem services, which might help to change the perception. It was also a good approach to work on small projects that could be completed successfully and where the success could be publicised as an example of good practice, rather than attempting large scale, expensive projects where outcomes were uncertain.

Ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities were seen as essential for achieving action. Very often MEA texts contain long lists of Actions and Resolutions, but unless those responsible for carrying out the activity are identified, there is a high likelihood of inaction. Obtaining sufficient funding to tackle problems, building capacity and knowledge in areas of greatest need and understanding the

economic drivers of change were all seen as resource limitations to achieving effective actions on IAS.

The group considered effective communication a really important issue. This could involve developing public and political understanding and support for strategic approaches and actions and having wider engagement at different levels, across all sectors. Sharing best practice, prioritising action and having effective science and policy maker dialogue were also considered essential for dealing with IAS and WD effectively. Getting stakeholder input to policy and developing stakeholder interfaces were also important.

## **2. Key emerging issues**

Climate Change was considered one of the big issues and raised several questions. For example, how should decisions be made on the status of species that have arrived in the UK as a result of climate change, in terms of consideration of native / non-native / invasive non-native status, and how should assessments be made on which species to manage? In relation to WD, what should be done about serious disease threats associated with climate change? The increasing movement of humans and other species as a result of climate change and other factors could result in suddenly emerging diseases, both completely new and in new locations. There may be low levels of immunity in areas where these diseases are not endemic, which could make the effects much more severe. Surveillance of wildlife diseases lacks the information necessary to produce models to assess the impacts. Good contingency planning was considered to be one way of dealing with these problems, coupled with preparation for the unexpected, and having a good risk assessment process in place.

It was also noted that emerging policies to combat climate change could increase the problems of IAS. For example, the need for reducing global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions has resulted in biofuels, often crops with IAS characteristics, being increasingly grown in countries in which they do not originate.

The effects of the economic crisis were likely to have both positive and negative impacts over the next few years. Reduced trade could have positive effects, but reduced funds for biodiversity conservation could have negative impacts.

## **3. Evidence and Research needs**

Engagement with academia was considered a major issue. There was an urgent need to develop better links between academia, research funding bodies and policy makers.

The increasing threat of IAS meant that new and effective methods of control and eradication would be required. Biological control was one mechanism that could be effective, but research was required into costs and benefits, effective use and the potential dangers of using bio-control agents. There was also a need for research on identification methods, particularly for plants because of the issues of erroneous nomenclature in legislative lists.

Global transfer of information was considered important. This could be achieved through capacity building in developing countries, training surveyors and developing different methods for identification. Linking the puzzles of databases together at a global level was also important, as was keeping databases up-to-date so that global movements of species could be tracked. Bringing good practice from other sectors to adapt for use in the biodiversity sector could also be useful. Surveillance for early detection and as a component of risk assessment should be improved.

## **4. The interface between science and policy**

It was very important that scientists understand the relevance of international conventions and policy developments and tailor their research to address policy questions. Results should be fit for purpose and translate easily and understandably into policy. This was not happening effectively; some problems were identified as likely causal factors.

Scientists and policy makers operate on different timescales. Policy development was often short term, but scientific research often required longer timeframes and there was a need to improve understanding and dialogue on both sides of the implications of the differences in approach. Scientists also wanted to provide 'perfect science' whereas policy makers often required quick answers to complex questions.

To overcome these issues scientists should be engaged as early as possible in the policy making process. This would help to ensure that policy makers understood the complexity of issues, but also ensure that scientists got clear messages on the research required. Conversely, sometimes the policy making process could operate without engaging scientists, but could make sure that they were engaged at relevant stages. A risk based approach could be used to assess the implications of using the minimum level of knowledge required to make informed decisions.

Often scientists and policy makers didn't speak the same language and there was a need for a translation process involving those with an understanding of both processes. This includes taxonomy issues. Simplifying messages and language used and ensuring that science messages were appropriately delivered would help in this process. Sometimes policy makers were unwilling to engage with the scientific evidence for political reasons, developing the negotiation skills of scientists was an important consideration.

## **5. Priorities from global, European and UK perspectives**

Global priorities included IAS work in the Overseas Territories (OTs). Accessing funding and getting immediate action were considered to be of high importance. However, the conflicts in funding priorities between metropolitan UK and the OTs had to be recognised. Global sharing of information, best practice and capacity building were all priorities, involving development of effective communication streams. This should include providing guidance on interpreting MEAs, which can be difficult to understand. Strategies and action plans should be implemented as a matter of urgency and it was recognised that immediate action is very important. Creative thinking was considered an important attribute to achieve delivery of these priorities, including accessing novel funding opportunities for the OTs and looking across Conventions to provide policy links - e.g. for countries to use stricter measures under the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to deliver some trade restrictions.

Policy influencing was a priority in Europe and in the UK, including the development of an EU strategy on IAS and integrating IAS considerations into other policy sectors e.g. agriculture, transport, trade and fisheries. Understanding the economic drivers of change including socio-economic factors was also really important to combat IAS impacts.

Biosecurity should be improved, including raising awareness of travel implications among the general public.