

COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

115th MEETING TO BE HELD ON THE 9th MAY 2008 AT LISBURN CIVIC CENTRE, LISBURN

Present:

Mr P Casement, Chairman
Mr B Murphy, Deputy Chairman
Dr B Brown
Mr M Campbell
Mr P Cregg
Mr J Furphy
Mr A Gibson
Mr D Hughes
Mr J Jackson
Mr H McBride
Dr A McGarel
Mr J Simpson

In Attendance:

Mr G Seymour, EHS
Dr M Meharg, EHS
Mr P Cush, EHS
Mr A Reddick, Rivers Agency
Mr G Earls, DETI
Ms R Quinn, DARD
Mr D Abernethy, DARD

Mr C Francey, Secretariat

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr B Black, Mr M Hill, Mr A Lonergan, Mr R Northridge, Mr J Anderson, Mr J Campbell, Mr P Warner and Mr P Scott, DARD.

2. MINUTES OF THE 114TH MEETING HELD ON THE 29TH FEBRUARY 2008.

The minutes of the meeting of the 29th February were agreed.

3. PRESENTATION ON TELLUS PROJECT

Mr G Earls, Director of the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) gave a brief introduction to the role of the GSNI and its contribution to geoscience and the environment. He outlined the mission statement and mentioned some of the areas covered by the geological mapping such as geology and landscape, energy and minerals, environment and hazards. Mr Earls commented that in the context of geodiversity, Northern Ireland was the most diverse area on the globe and provided good laboratory conditions for geoscience.

Mr Earls informed members of the TELLUS Project, a £6M initiative funded on an all island of Ireland basis. He highlighted the goals and a range of the mapping surveys, geochemistry and mineral exploration. Some of the work involved the mapping of risk assessments in ASSIs for EHS and assessing suitable sites for the storage of natural gas in salt sea beds. GSNI was also involved in outreach and education and future projects included development of geovisionary 3-D systems. He concluded that the TELLUS Project was a substantial resource in supporting the decision making process.

In discussion, members sought clarification on a number of points as follows:

- Council asked about the potential of TELLUS for linking up with the EHS NI Countryside Survey and the provision of biodiversity data. Mr Earls in recognising the potential for this, believed that there was not enough joined up science within government and suggested it may be beneficial to appoint a Chief Scientist to oversee and coordinate all scientific information.
- Members recognised that the system was an appropriate predictive tool for habitats and monitoring. The use of TELLUS meant that there was no need to repeat sampling because data sets were kept in storage.
- TELLUS can identify appropriate sites for windfarms on hill tops by assessing the stability of the site, particularly where it is peat based. This mapping function is used in the planning process.
- Council noted that this service is used by EHS in the provision of data sets for work associated with implementing the WFD.
- The GSNI has been involved in establishing the boundaries of the Geopark in county Fermanagh and more recently in its expansion to include a cross-border dimension. The system has a holistic approach and can be used to identify conservation problems as well as harmonisation of management regimes.
- GSNI is considering an application to identify carbon storage but funding was needed for research. There was potential for sequestration of CO₂ in sedimentary basins but there was need for debate between stakeholders to understand the process.

The Chairman thanked Mr Earls for an interesting presentation and commented that the TELLUS project had the potential to be used in providing even more geological data associated with the natural environment.

4. PRESENTATION ON EC FLOODS DIRECTIVE

Mr A Reddick, Rivers Agency gave a presentation on flood risk management and the EC Floods Directive. He outlined the organizational structures within the Rivers Agency and some of the type of work and services it provides. Mr Reddick highlighted the rationale behind its flood risk management policy and its links with planning policies relating to housing and avoidance of building on flood plains. He mentioned the four main areas of its work in relation to flooding i.e avoidance, alleviation, awareness and assistance. Mr Reddick informed members that currently the Rivers Agency was undertaking a flood management policy review; this was important in the context of identifying its future role and covered such aspects as environmental, social and economic elements, sustainable solutions, climate change, the Marine Bill and Land Use Planning.

In the case of the EC Floods Directive, Mr Reddick explained the reasons behind this and outlined some of its key elements which involved a proactive catchment approach, drawing up of hazard maps for planning

and flood risk assessments. The Directive has still to be transposed into Northern Ireland legislation and will have substantial implications for NI.

In discussion, a number of points emerged as follows:

- Members were concerned that PPS 15 may not be effective in prohibiting housing on flood plains given the number of buildings it has already allowed. Mr Reddick explained that part of the problem in the past was that there had been a policy of infilling and developers could then build on a raised foundation. Rivers Agency no longer permit this.
- A question was raised about the cost to the public of alleviating works and if this would continue. Mr Reddick pointed out that developers are now required to provide sewerage infrastructure. It was noted that 2 recent proposals from developers were approved and completed by the Rivers Agency. Mr Reddick explained that the developer had gone bankrupt and given the major legal costs that could be involved in enforcement action, Rivers Agency undertook the work.
- Members noted that Rivers Agency advise Planning Service of flood plains so that these can be flagged up in Area Plans. The Agency applies the 100 year rule to flood plains and in that way it is confident there should be no development in these areas.
- Members were concerned about the recent practice of garden development in urban areas and the impact this has on drainage. Mr Reddick informed members that in the case of brownfield sites PS would allow development on the existing footprint but if it is beside Greenfield sites approval is not granted.
- Council suggested that it might be worth introducing a bond if the developer proceeds on a flood plain so that the cost of flood damage can be negated. Mr Reddick pointed out that this raised questions of insurance cover.
- Members asked about the use of Headwater Retention Schemes and their upstream catchment approach. Mr Reddick explained there had been problems with this type of approach because of objections being raised by the agricultural community.

The Chairman thanked Mr Reddick for his informative presentation. He mentioned that he and the Deputy Chairman would be able to explore some of the issues further when they meet Mr McCrudden, Rivers Agency.

5. PRESENTATION ON BADGERS

Mr D Abernethy, DARD gave a presentation on Bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland and explained that this was a significant problem with NI probably having the highest incidence of the disease in the world. He

outlined the descriptive epidemiology, the key risk factors, cattle v. badgers in TB, the proposed prevalence survey and conclusions. Mr. Abernethy highlighted a number of the issues and two main studies, one of which involved a 6-year study in Ireland and the other a GB Randomised badger culling trial. He pointed out that in the case of Northern Ireland there was no regional association in the incidence of TB. DARD is to undertake a prevalence survey which is to be quality assured and overseen by a panel of international experts. This will allow DARD to provide essential information in trying to establish the cause of the disease.

In discussion, a number of points emerged as follows:

- It was noted that the veterinary test carried out on cattle lacks accuracy and the sensitivity of the test is only 75%. DARD would prefer to test both badgers and cattle. However, this was the only available tool DARD had for testing.
- Members commended DARD on the decrease of reactors within herds in Northern Ireland since 2006. It was noticeable that in the RoI which had culled 25,000 badgers, the disease in cattle was on the increase.
- The disease in NI followed more closely the trend in the UK and there was a challenge to reduce the disease even more but this was dependant on the availability of adequate resources. There was a view that the high rise in TB was initially attributable to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease a number of years ago. Movement restrictions had increased stocking densities of cattle and this may have contributed to the cow to cow transmission of the disease. This posed the question if stocking densities were reduced would the TB decrease?
- Members suggested that it might be useful if the prevalence survey included a comparison of suburban/semi-suburban areas against urban regions.
- A licence to carry out the prevalence survey has been applied for by DARD. This will be submitted to the Environment Minister for approval. From an EHS perspective the decision is based on science and it would be considering the prevalence survey in the context of its responsibilities for the protection of the badger under the Wildlife Order.
- Members were concerned that it appeared DARD was no longer making the effort to establish if the disease was being transferred from badgers to cattle. Mr Abernethy informed members that very little research has been done on this.

assessment. He informed members that representatives of the NGOs would be invited to participate in this workshop. Council urged EHS to extend their invitation to other relevant government departments.

7. REPORT ON FINDINGS OF SURVEY OF ‘ IT’S IN OUR NATURE CAMPAIGN’

Mr Cush, EHS gave a report on the survey carried out on ‘It’s In Our Nature Campaign’ by IAS SMARTS, consultants commissioned by EHS. He outlined the objectives of the campaign which were set following agreement on the budget for this project. He highlighted the programme of PR activity used to raise the awareness of the public on biodiversity issues. This had the overall effect of raising the awareness from 24% in 2006 to 29% in 2008. Of the 29%, the survey showed that 58 % felt that biodiversity was fairly important. The survey also included engagement with stakeholders. Mr Cush gave a brief resumé of the findings/observations which focused on the challenges, integration, advertising, PR, use of the website and other communications which heightened the problem of finding good spokespersons with the appropriate communication skills for promoting the message at media level.

Members expressed the view that it was encouraging to note the upward trend and recognition of the biodiversity message but it was vital that this should not slip back and therefore it was important for EHS to consider how it can maintain and further the aims of biodiversity. Mr Cush pointed out the difficulty of adequate resources for moving this forward given that EHS no longer had access to consultants. EHS was currently using the local council biodiversity officers forum to plug the gap. Advertising was now controlled by the OFMDFM and EHS now has to use a call off contract. Dr Brown suggested that if EHS was having any difficulty with this new regime, the NIBG could approach the Minister to highlight the problems. It was noted that many local councils were without biodiversity officers and concern was expressed that this could have repercussions for the new local government arrangements. However, EHS advised members that it was working on having Biodiversity Action Plans completed before the new council arrangements are implemented.

The Chairman thanked Mr Cush for his presentation.

8. REPORT ON OUTCOME OF EHS GRANT-AID PROGRAMME

Mr Seymour introduced the paper on the Outcomes of EHS Grant-aid Report. Members noted the report and commended EHS in achieving the allocation of grant-aid to such a wide range of applicants. They were also encouraged by the use of funds by councils to employ countryside officers.

The use of EHS grant-aid to provide core funding to some organisations was quizzed. Mr Seymour explained the reasons behind this, pointing out that core funding supported those parts of an NGO that were unlikely to attract funds from other sources.

9. UPDATE ON PROPOSAL FOR MOURNES NATIONAL PARK

Mr Seymour updated members on the proposal for the Mourne National Park. The MNPWP’s recommendations had been submitted to the Minister and referred to the Assembly’s Environment Committee, Agricultural and Rural Development

Committee and Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee and CNCC. The 3 Assembly Committees have still to respond to the proposals. The Minister recently met a delegation from the Ulster Farmer's Union who are opposed to the NP and a number of other stakeholders with varying views including the Tourist Board, Mourne Trustees, the three district councils CAAN and other local bodies. The Minister is expected to make a formal announcement on a NP at the end of May 2008.

10. PROGRAMME OF FIELD VISITS

Members agreed a framework for a programme of field visits as follows:

- 23rd July Gobbins, geological ASSI
 Sea Lough Management

- 26th August Strangford Lough (Prof J Orford – Sea Level Change)
 Castle Espie mudflats

- 4/5th September Fermanagh area Marl Lakes
 Geopark – Extension to Forest Land in Fermanagh &
 Cross Border to part of Cavan
 RSPB Project – Slieve Beagh Cross Border area

- 30th September Red Kite in the Mournes

Consideration had been given to a two-day visit to the Isle of Islay but it was decided to defer this to next year.

11. REPORT FROM WORKING GROUPS

Members noted the minutes of the various Working Groups and a verbal report from Dr Brown as follows:

11.1 Biodiversity/Geodiversity Sub-Group

Dr Brown reported that this Sub-Group had considered the Report of Faber Maunsell on Biodiversity/Geodiversity Relationships in NI. The Group concluded that the Report stood up to good scrutiny and agreed that when amendments to the Report have been made it will be a substantial briefing document for Council's use. It also agreed that it would be useful to produce a non-technical document which can be easily understood by the public. A leaflet highlighting the geodiversity of NI should also be published. It might also be useful to have a more detailed promotion with local councils and NGOs. The local Earth Science body might be used to take this forward. The Group concluded that recommendations 2,3, and 4 of the Report should be used when the opportunity arises.

12. REPORT ON EEAC WORKING GROUPS

The Deputy Chairman reminded members of Council's membership of the European Environmental Advisory Council (EEAC). He had attended a workshop organised by the EEAC about agri-fuels and its main focus was on the target of 10% agri-fuels by the year 2020. There was opposition to agri-fuels and it was not clear if the target would be met.

Dr Brown highlighted the Working Group he attended on biodiversity. He felt there was a need for the EEAC to develop advice on biodiversity and that it hoped to engage with all the players including the UK. He also suggested that there was a need for integration of other diversities across Europe, including the marine aspects.

Members highlighted the anomaly of the difference between UK targets and NI targets for halting biodiversity loss. The UK had set a date of 2010 whereas the NI date was 2016. It was important to address this anomaly and it should be drawn to the attention of the EEAC.

13. MEMBERS REPORTS

Members noted the various reports. Verbal reports were also given as follows:

13.1 Biodiversity Conservation in a Changing Climate

Dr Brown reported that he attended this conference held on the 11th March. The conference covered top level issues on biodiversity and climate change and highlighted the shift in distribution of a number of species. It was noted that 25% of priority species were at risk due to climate change and 29 of the BAP species have been identified as vulnerable. Dr Brown felt that a key point in ensuring the protection of species was a need to obtain data and understand the impacts of climate change. He suggested that projects should be developed to prepare for future change and specifically mentioned the work of Prof. J Alford on Strangford Lough.

13.2 Meeting with P Scott and other DARD Staff

The Deputy Chairman and Dr McGarel met Mr P Scott and 3 other DARD staff to discuss issues around the revised Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS).

In the case of the NICMS, the Special Environmental Project option could be an interesting development, encouraging work on a landscape level by involving groups of farmers rather than just individuals. Projects will be identified by farming or community groups or through NGOs. Funding will be limited and a selection process is to be involved and therefore a sub-group is to be set up to establish criteria and priorities for suitable projects. The revised scheme is to be launched on the 4th June.

13.3 Meeting with Mr D Small, Chief Executive, Forest Service

The Chairman reported that he, Mr Hill, Dr Brown and Mr Cregg met Mr Small, Chief Executive of the FS on the 28th April. It was encouraging to note that FS want to embrace the broader environmental aspects associated with forestry. Mr Small had informed them that FS was carrying out a review of the Forestry Act and CNCC would be included in the consultation process. One very welcome inclusion in the revised Act

will be the introduction of Felling Licences for privately owned woodland. The meeting addressed some other issues such as access to forests, biodiversity, liability and maintenance.

13.4 JNCC

The Chairman highlighted some of the issues discussed at the last meeting of JNCC held in March 2008. This included (a) findings of the condition assessment of designated areas in GB, which completed its first 6 year monitoring programme in 2005. A number of variables within each jurisdiction was taken into account (b) a paper on energy and conservation (c) Corporate Plan issues, particularly on the funding and role of JNCC (d) a UK wide monitoring system for biodiversity.

13.5 Modiolus Restoration

Dr Brown updated members on the Modiolus Restoration Plan. The structures for the Plan have been set up and an appropriate team identified to carry the programme forward. An interdepartmental Group will co-ordinate the work of this team. There will be an overall scrutiny group to oversee and monitor the work and this will include himself and Prof R Seeds as independent biological experts. The interdepartmental Group has still to meet and Mr Seymour undertook to contact Mr Breen, EHS to move this forward.

ACTION: **Contact Mr Breen** **Mr Seymour**

13.6 Climate Change

Mr Campbell reported that he attended a UK Climate Impacts Partnership Workshop on the 8th May 2008. Issues focused on information available on a NI scale and the 2008 Report due to be launched in November 2008.

14. MATTERS ARISING REPORT FROM THE 114TH MEETING

14.1 Sperrins AONB

Mr Seymour reported that the site known as Legavannon Pot is an Area of Mineral Constraint in the Area Plan and has therefore some protection. EHS does not propose to include this area within the Sperrin AONB.

14.2 Coarse Fish

It was agreed that the Chairman should write to the Loughs Agency about the illegal netting of coarse fishing.

ACTION: **Write to Loughs Agency** **Chairman**

14.3 Ruddy Duck

Mr Seymour informed members that a draft management plan has been prepared for the Ruddy Duck. It was agreed that this should be dealt with by the Ecosystems Group.

ACTION: Arrange meeting of Eco-Systems Group Secretariat

15. GENERAL INFORMATION

Members noted the events and publication lists No. 103

The Chairman reported that he also attended -

- Launch of the WWF/UWT Marine Protected Areas Report 'Marine Reserves in Northern Ireland: The Way Forward' on the 1st May
- Invitational dinner with Peter Robinson, Minister of Finance on 1st May.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

16.1 River Faughan ASSI

Mr Seymour informed members that the River Faughan was declared an ASSI on the 9th May 2008 and it was now on course for designation as a cSAC.

Members congratulated EHS on its speedy delivery of this designation.

16.2 EHS State of the Environment Report

Members noted that some of the EHS targets were missed.

Members were made aware that the Environmental Research Note No 2 of May 2008 showed that half the 'green' targets set by the UK Government were missed. Mr Cregg undertook to send the Secretariat a copy of this note for distribution to members.

ACTION: Send research note to Secretariat Mr Cregg
Circulate note Secretariat

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 17TH JUNE 2008.