

Minutes of the Farmland Biodiversity Delivery Group Meeting

Reception Room, Lindesay Hall, Loughry Campus

Friday 22nd October 2010

Present:

A Galbraith (Chair)	DARD CMU – Delivery Branch
G McRoberts	DARD CMU – Delivery Branch
A Quinn	DARD CMU – Development Branch
R Weyl	NIEA Biodiversity Unit
A Lawson	Ulster Farmers Union
H Sinclair	Ulster Farmers Union
S Fitzpatrick	NI Agricultural Producers Association
J Martin	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
P Casement	CNCC
M Harnett	NI Biodiversity Group
I Simpson	NI Biodiversity Group
R Wilson	NI Local Government Association + Biodiversity Forum

Apologies

Apologies were received from D Garrett (DARD), J McAdam (AFBI), M Meharg (NIEA), J Warnock (NIEA), C Barnett (RSPB) and S Convery (FWAG).

Welcome

A Galbraith welcomed all present to the meeting including Ian Simpson (NIBG) who was attending for the first time.

Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 6/5/2010 were read and agreed.

Items Arising

R Weyl agreed to contact a member of the Barn Owl BAP group to give a presentation for the next meeting.

Terms of Reference and Draft Action plan issued to members.

R Weyl to progress contact from DOE Planning Service.

J McAdam to provide an update on NICMS scheme monitoring for the next meeting.

RSPB agreed to give update on RSPB projects/actions for the next meeting.

DARD agri-environment scheme data issued to members.

Terms of Reference (TOR)

Draft TOR was issued to members in advance of the meeting for comment.

M Harnett asked for the broad biodiversity of all farmland to be included in the TOR and not just to concentrate on priority habitats found on farmland.

Following discussion the following action points were agreed.

Action: R Weyl to signpost relevant NIS species Action Plans to the Farmland BDG.

P Casement and R Weyl to provide text on the inclusion of the biodiversity duty and connectivity.

A Galbraith and R Weyl to amend TOR and circulate before next meeting.

Draft Action Plan

An amended Draft action plan (Oct 2010) was issued in advance of the meeting to members.

Alan Galbraith covered all sections in the DAP and comments were noted from members. A agreed to remove boxes from right hand side of the document. Agreed to defer comments on sections relating to planning until contact established with DOE Planning Service.

M Harnett requested that the definition of farmland is revised to include all farmland under DARD control. I Simpson requested that DARD and NIEA progress common definitions and classifications for priority and agri-environment scheme habitats. DARD and NIEA will assess any current differences and reasons.

Action: R Weyl to amend details relating to designated sites, SLNCI and MOSS agreements.

R Weyl and G McRoberts to amend Draft Action Plan and circulate.

Discuss potential research topics at next meeting.

Agri-Environment Update – Statistics

Agri-environment scheme statistics at 31/12/2009 were issued to members in advance of the meeting.

A Galbraith reported that approximately 4,800 applications have been received for NI Countryside Management Scheme at 31/3/10. £219 million is hoped to be spent by 2013/14.

No decision has been taken on the number of NICMS applications to be progressed and a decision is pending conformation of the DARD budget.

Selection criteria for NICMS has been finalised by the Environmental Sub-Group of the NI Rural Development Programme Monitoring Committee and will give priority to designated sites (Natura 2000 and ASSI).

Special Environmental Projects (SEP) are not currently available and availability depends on funding.

Single Farm Payment – eligibility and biodiversity impacts

R Weyl circulated paper for discussion to members on impacts of any planned changes to SFP eligibility on biodiversity.

A Galbraith outlined to members that the SFP disallowance is the top priority for DARD at present and gave details of the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) Improvement Project that has set up to amend DARD farm maps. DARD has established a SFP eligibility group chaired by Dr S Kennedy to assess eligibility of key features for SFP. Key issues for DARD are scrub, bracken, dense heather and dense rush and no decisions have been taken on SFP eligibility. A Galbraith thanked R Weyl for his paper.

Members raised concerns on the techniques, scale and timing of any actions to remove ineligible features such as scrub and rush and highlighted potential impacts on the NI landscape and biodiversity.

Action: Agreed for members to submit any comments on the SFP paper to either A Galbraith or G McRoberts by 5/11/10. Both the paper and comments would be relayed to the DARD SFP Eligibility group.

Undergrazing in Upland Areas

H Sinclair (UFU) highlighted the current problem of undergrazing in upland areas and impact of destocking, reduction in traditional livestock breeds and land abandonment. UFU members were also concerned at the impact on SFP and eligibility.

Future DARD agri-environment schemes should seek to permit controlled winter grazing to keep livestock on the hills and benefit biodiversity.

Cross Compliance – Hedge Cutting Dates

From the meeting on 6/5/10 RSPB re- submitted evidence to A Galbraith on hedge cutting dates. No other members submitted any data or evidence on hedge cutting dates.

UFU requested that exemption be given by DARD for farmers planting winter cereals and reseeded grassland in upland areas.

Agreed that bird nesting dates in Northern Ireland in relation to hedge cutting is a topic for targeted research for DARD to commission over the next 2-3 year period.

In light of the lack of scientific evidence provided A Galbraith stated current hedge cutting dates would remain in place.

Date of Next Meeting

Provisionally agreed for Thursday 17th February 2011.