

Peatlands and Upland Biodiversity Delivery Group Peatlands Country Park 20th March 2006

Attendees

Mike Meharg (EHS - Chair)
Richard Weyl (EHS)
Bob Davidson (EHS)
Colin Somerville (EHS – Minute Taker)
Stuart Morwood (Forest Service)
John Gamble (DARD Central Policy Group)
Keith Johnston (DARD Service Delivery Group)
Jim McAdam (AFBI)
Roy Anderson (AFBI)
Dermot Hughes (CNCC/Peat Consortium)
Gillian Stewart (Invest NI)
Matthew McCrisken (DRD Mineral Unit)
Jim Ryan (NPWS)
Ken Bradley (DOE Environmental Policy Group)
Ronnie Tosh (DOE Environmental Policy Group)

1. Apologies

James Robinson (NIBG), Nicki Whitehouse (QUB), Ulster Farmers Union, NIAPA

2. Introduction and Welcome

Mike thanked everyone for attending and outlined how he hoped that this group could help in the delivery of Habitat Action Plans (HAP's).

He advised that EHS owned only a small percentage of land in Northern Ireland, and that it was important to engage other stakeholders.

Mike explained how the NI Native Woodland Group had been set up to look at multiple HAP's relating to Woodland. This group had been a success, and a similar approach was being proposed for Peatlands and Upland.

3. Background

Bob explained that as well as this group and the NI Native Woodland Group, Freshwater and Wetlands and Marine and Coastal Groups were being set up. DARD Environmental Policy Group are also considering setting up a Farmland group.

Bob advised that the collective work of the 5 groups would contribute to all 37 HAPS, and where possible, Species Action Plans would also be included.

4. Terms of Reference

Purpose

“**within Northern Ireland**” to be added to the end of the first sentence.

Scope

“**Relevant action for species as agreed by the group**” should be added to the scope.

It was noted that the minutes of the Peatlands and Upland Group and reporting back on common issues should be made available to other groups to avoid duplication of work.

Objectives

3.1 Add “**and relevant policies**” to the end of the sentence.

3.2 Change Bullet Point 3 to read “**Providing guidance for landowners**”.

Change Bullet Point 4 to read “**Liaison with peatland and upland interests in Republic of Ireland and UK**”.

Remove Bullet Point 5 “**Reporting**”

After a debate on developing policy being included as a main objective in section 3.2, it was agreed that it was adequate to refer to relevant policy in section 3.1.

3.3 Agreed

3.4 Amend to “**Establish, deliver and review the Peatlands and Upland Biodiversity work Programme**”.

3.5 Amend to “**The provision of Peatlands and Upland biodiversity advice to government**”.

Representation

It was agreed that Nicki Whitehouse should represent Queens School of Paleobotany rather than the Peat Consortium.

Action: Dermot to provide a further name from Peat Consortium

It was agreed that the following groups should be considered for the Peatland and Upland Group:

Irish Peatland Conservation Council

Forestry & Timber Association

Representatives from Peat Extractors/Horticultural Retailers

FWAG

Representatives from District Councils/LBAP Officers

Action: Bob to see that these other organisations are invited to join the group.

Gillian agreed to check if there was a representative body for Peat Retailers.

Action: Gillian

Organisation

Agreed

Review

Agreed

5. Update on Habitat Action Plans

Richard gave a presentation on the Habitat Action Plans

It was agreed that EHS should produce a disk with Richard's presentation, the full set of Habitat Action Plans and the Peatlands Review.

Action: Richard/Bob

6. Proposals for developing a work programme

Bob circulated the Peatlands Policy Review Document and a Draft Implementation Plan.

He explained that the HAP's had been Government focused, but that the Draft

Implementation Plan was suitable for Government, NGO's and others.

A three year work programme period was proposed and agreed, and EHS will take the lead on producing this. This document will be signed off at the next meeting.

It was agreed that the following amendments should be made to the Draft Implementation plan:

A column for Other Partners should be added. N.B. to be agreed with other partners.

A column for Progress should be added.

A column to cross reference the objectives to the relevant HAP's should be included.

It was agreed that progress with actions should be reviewed annually.

Action: All to advise Richard of any comments on the objectives and layout.

Action: All to cross check the HAP's with the Draft Implementation Plan to ensure that there are no omissions.

Action: Bob to e-mail the Draft Implementation Plan to the group.

Action: EHS to inform the Inter Departmental Biodiversity Group about the establishment and terms of reference of the group.

7. Priorities for next meeting

Agree a work programme.

Look at progress to date – 2003 to present.

DEFRA are due to publish a report on Peat alternatives, and it was agreed that the group should see this report and consider it.

Action: Bob

It was agreed that peat producers should be invited to discuss what they are doing re alternatives, at a future meeting.

Action: Bob

Jim McAdam pointed out that DARD are also carrying out a research project on Peat Alternatives.

Action: Jim McAdam to update the group on progress or arrange talk

Jim McAdam to ascertain what checks are carried out on imported peat from Plant Imports Section.

Action: Jim McAdam

Jim Ryan to ascertain what checks Bord Na Mona carry out on imports.

Action: Jim Ryan

8. AOB

Richard agreed to try to find documentation on best practice, from UK sources, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Richard Watson (Fermanagh District Council) and Keith Stanfield.

Action: Richard

Jim Ryan informed the group that he could provide copies of Conservation and Restoration of Raised Bogs, if requested.

Jim Ryan summarised an EPA Inter reg project called "Boglands" which is researching sustainable peatland issues, and agreed to give an update at the next meeting

Action: Jim Ryan

Richard agreed to create an inventory of publications on Peatlands e.g. PHD's, Pamela Todd's thesis etc

Action: Richard

9. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 15th June 9:30am at Oxford Island.