

Wetlands Biodiversity Delivery Group
Tuesday 28th April 2009
Oxford Island

Attendees

Bob Davidson	(NIEA – NH - Chair)
David Griffiths	(University of Ulster)
Caroline Marshall	(Lough Neagh Advisory Committee)
Mark Horton	(Ballinderry Fish Hatchery)
John Early	(NIEA - NH)
Eileen Mallon	(NIEA – WMU)
Garry O’Neill	(DCAL)
Judith Bankhead	(Rivers Agency)
Andrew McConville	(NI Water)
Marcus Malley	(NILGA)
Catherine McSorley	(NIEA – WMU)
Peter Archdale	(CNCC)
Steven McDowell	(NIEA – NH)
Alan Keys	(Ballinderry Fish Hatchery)
Derek Evans	(AFBI)
Paul Corbett	(NIEA – NH)
Maurice Turley	(NT)
Helen Paul	(NIEA – NH – Minute Taker)

1. Introduction

Bob welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Peter Archdale as a new member to the group. He also thanked Paul Corbett for agreeing to present on the results of the ASSI Condition Assessments.

2. Apologies

David Garret (Central Policy Group), Robert Rosell (AFBI), Robbie Marshall (Ulster Angling Federation), Godfrey McRoberts (Countryside Management Branch), James Robinson (RSPB), Seamus Bums (Biodiversity Officers Forum), Ciaran Mullen (UWT), Phil Davidson (Freshwater Taskforce), Mary Gallagher (NIEA – WMU), Paddy Boylan (Loughs Agency).

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

4. Matters arising

Bob advised the group that a draft version of PPS2 was circulating internally within the NIEA. He advised that NIEA would be happy to keep the group informed of the timetable but it would be up to individuals to respond to the consultation.

Action Point 1 : Bob to keep the group informed of the timetable for the PPS2 consultation.

Bob informed the group that he had looked into how the BARS and PAIRs system could be linked but advised that they were different things and it would not be possible to link them.

5. Reports from UK River, Pond and Lake HAP meetings.

John tabled a paper entitled 'Development of the Rivers Priority Habitat GIS toolkit.' The purpose of the toolkit is to bring together the supporting data for the criteria and use GIS functionality to assist in the identification of the priority river reaches. John explained that the use of layers would create a map that would focus on the most important sites. He advised that the layers for Near Natural Reaches and Brown Trout had been provided.

The question of how accessible these layers are was asked and John explained that there was a problem with ownership of the layers in some cases.

Peter suggested that eels be included and advised John to contact the Loughs Agency as they hold a lot of information. Derek advised the group that AFBI also held information on eels. John informed the group that eels had been included but would be grateful for any further information available.

John explained that within JNCC Andy Brewer was employed to work on the development of the River GIS tool kit. At present the process was being held up by issues over the ownership of the whole river network GIS layer in GB. John advised that NI had provided all the information requested.

Action Point 2: John to contact Paddy (Loughs Agency) to see what information they hold that would be useful for the layering.

Action Point 3: Derek to check if the information AFBI hold on eels is more up to date than info used.

Peter asked for clarification on how NIEA proposed to address River Basin Management Planning issues at a more local scale. Bob advised that he would find out and let him know.

Action Point 4: Bob to contact Alison or Gabriel of WMU and to inform Peter.

John gave a brief update on the Pond HAP steering group meeting that took place on Monday 27th April. He advised that the latest version of the UK Pond HAP was on the Pond Conservation website. He advised that the Pond HAP was at a much more advanced stage of development than the River HAP but the targets contained within it for NI were still to be agreed.

John explained that through the Natural Heritage Research Partnership (NHRP) with Quercus they are carrying out a project to identify Important Areas for Ponds in NI with Pond Conservation. He also informed the group that Pond Conservation are currently undertaking a Million Ponds Project. This however at present only covers England and Wales. It is anticipated that a phase 2 will cover NI and Scotland.

Bob advised that NIEA pay Pond Conservation an annual fee to provide a service to help implement the HAP.

There has not been a meeting of the UK Lake HAP steering group since the last update at the meeting in November 2008.

6. Wetlands Biodiversity Delivery Group work programme.

Bob pointed out that it is important to highlight the actions within the work programme that the group can collectively do as many actions will be ongoing within our own organisations through our organisations work remits. He advised that NIEA will be meeting with various units internally and they would hope to also meet with other members of the group to encourage networking and information exchange.

Peter commented that he would like to see some system in place to ensure all data which is collected is shared with CEDaR. A discussion took place and it was suggested that it could be made a stipulation of contract documents that any data is provided to CEDaR. He also showed concern for duplication of effort.

Derek pointed out that when he had requested information held on eels he had found the provision of data to be very straight forward.

Bob suggested that he run through the programme quickly due to time constraints. He advised if anyone wished to discuss any bigger issues this could be done either by requesting a meeting or via email. The group agreed.

1.2 – Peter pointed out that there were no SLNCs in the West.

Bob advised that a Wildlife sites database was being developed as a more flexible approach to identify important wildlife sites for planning purposes.

3.3 – Bob pointed out that there was various mechanisms already in place to monitor the condition of wetland habitats and species in the wider countryside eg. The NI Countryside Survey and Quercus projects.

3.4 – Peter suggested including the Loughs Agency as they routinely look at restoration. He also informed the group of a study that CNCC had commissioned on landscape conservation. He agreed to send it to NIEA once it was published.

Action Point 5: Peter to send the CNCC landscape study to NIEA once it is completed.

4.1 – Bob advised that it was only Natura 2000 sites included in the 1st round of the River Basin Management Plans at a UK level but that more local detail would be added in the 2nd round.

6.1.1 – Bob pointed out that this group could help co-ordinate the development of a wetland awareness programme with specific focus on activities for World Wetlands Day.

6.2.1 – Bob informed the group that a directory of best examples had been produced a couple of years ago and that it would be revised and updated and circulated to the group.

Action Point 6: John to update directory of best examples and circulate to the group.

Action Point 7: Anyone with examples of their projects to email details to John for inclusion.

Bob advised that membership of the group and the Terms of Reference would be discussed at the next meeting.

Action Point 8: Bob to add membership and TOR to the agenda for the next meeting.

Bob explained that a UK Wetland & Freshwater Habitat Group was being set up and there would be an NIEA representative and one other representative. He agreed to issue details of the meeting when they became available and anyone who wishes can volunteer to attend with the NIEA representative.

Action Point 9: Bob to circulate details of the UK Wetland & Freshwater Habitat group when available and offer the opportunity for a volunteer to sit as the second NI representative.

Maurice commented that the focus seems to be on restoration and suggested that something should be considered for the creation of new wetlands.

Peter pointed out that reference should be made to the Floods Directive.

Peter made the point that resources were a significant issue and that actions to secure resources should be included.

Action Point 10: John to update the work programme with comments from this meeting.

7. Establishing a Lowlands Wetlands Group

Bob explained that a sub-group to discuss lowland/wetland issues was to be set up shortly. The scope of this group would be members from other Biodiversity Delivery Groups and a few other NIEA staff both from Natural Heritage and Water Management Unit. The date or venue hasn't been decided yet.

Action Point 11: Bob to issue email with details of lowlands/wetlands group once available.

8. Invasive Alien Species update

John reported that the Invasive Species in Ireland forum was held at the start of April at QUB and was well attended. He informed the group that the Invasive Species in Ireland contract was due to end in May and that invitations to tender for a further 3 years would be issued shortly.

He gave a brief update on Invasive species and advised the group of a new species found, the Bloody Red Shrimp, which appeared in Lough Derg in April 08 and in Lough Ree much more recently.

Mark gave a brief update on the work of the RIPPLE project and how they were tackling Giant Hogweed along a tributary of the Ballinderry River.

Derek gave an update on the PhD on Zebra Mussels in Lough Neagh and informed the group of an eel swim bladder parasite. He advised the eel parasite had now been found in Lough Foyle.

Catherine informed the group that sampling of Lough Neagh had just finished and she would provide an update to Derek.

Peter enquired if there was any plans to restrict boat movements and introduce stronger controls on sales.

John explained that the 1st phase of the ISI contract introduced Codes of Practice which were aimed at marine and recreational water activities sector. He advised these Codes of Practices' were voluntary codes but it was hoped that clubs would implement them in their clubs local byelaws. He also advised the second contract phase would aim to encourage further uptake of the COPs.

Bob explained that the Wildlife Order Review would include a provision to introduce powers to ban for sale certain high risk species.

John also made the point that as the Loughs Agency were creating new legislation which he understood would cover Fish movements it was important to try and ensure these pieces of legislation complemented each other.

9. Freshwater Pearl Mussel and Planning and Floodplains workshop

John asked the group to put the 1st & 2nd of October 2009 in their calendar as a provisional date for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel workshop.

Action Point 12: John to confirm details of the Freshwater Pearl Mussel workshop and circulate to the group when available.

Mark tabled a paper on 'Outline of Wetlands & Planning Workshop'. Mark and Eileen gave a brief overview of how they envisaged the workshop to run and asked the group for comments. A discussion took place and it was agreed that a smaller meeting should be arranged with Planning Service Staff as this should be more effective in raising the issue with the people most closely involved in the decision making process. Judith suggested meeting with the original group of people who put together PPS15.

Action Point 13: Judith to email Mark the names of those involved in developing PPS15.

Action Point 14: Mark/Eileen/Caroline to discuss the new format.

10. ASSI Condition Assessment Results

Paul Corbett gave a presentation on the ASSI Condition Assessment Results to the group. He described the systematic approach used by NIEA which followed common standards for monitoring used across the UK. He highlighted the ASSI features that were in favourable & unfavourable condition. The Habitat feature most frequently in unfavourable condition was Fens, largely because of lack of grazing, scrub encroachment, invasive species and possibly water quality.

11. The White-clawed crayfish

John gave a brief update on the various white-clawed projects ongoing in NI. NIEA had recently facilitated a workshop with various local organisations that are carrying out white-clawed crayfish projects/research. He informed the group that it was proposed to set up a crayfish group later in the year to bring together the different projects and interested individuals. Anyone interested in being part of this should let John know.

Action Point 15: Anyone who would like to attend the crayfish group should contact John.

12. AOB

Bob asked for any agenda items. Derek suggested that he could give an update on the Eel Management Plan.

Action Point 16: Bob to add Eel Management Plan update to the next agenda.

13. Date of next meeting.

The next meeting is on **Tuesday 20th October 2009** and will be at Oxford Island.

Action Point 17: Helen to arrange date of meeting for next Spring.