

UK PROGRAMME BOARD FOR NON-NATIVE SPECIES

SIXTH MEETING

VIRTUAL

23 OCTOBER 2023, 14:00 – 15:30

APPROVED MINUTES

1. Attendance / apologies

Present:

- Richard Gray (DAERA – NI) – *Chair*
- Niall Moore (NNSS) - Secretary
- Alison Seton (Scottish Government)
- Berni Moloughney (Scottish Government)
- Bill MacDonald (Welsh Government)
- Finn Eaton (Defra)
- Gavin Measures (NE)
- Iain Henderson (APHA) [Items 1 – 4 only]
- James Phillips (NE)
- Jenny Stewart (APHA)
- Jo Long (SEPA)
- Leasa Fielding (Welsh Government)
- Lisa McCann (Scottish Government)
- Mark Preston (DAERA – NI)
- Neil Parker (NRW)
- Nicola Spence (Defra, Plant Health)
- Olaf Booy (NNSS)
- Rebecca Isted (FC)
- Richard Pullen (Defra)
- Sarah Errington (MMO)
- Sharon Boyle (Defra)
- Stan Whitaker (NatureScot)
- Theresa Kudelska (NRW)
- Trevor Renals (Environment Agency)

Apologies:

- Chris Graham (MMO)
- Colin Edwards (Scottish Forestry)
- Dave Rowlands (MMO)
- Dave Stone (JNCC)
- Des Thompson (NatureScot) – replaced by Stan Whitaker
- Nicholas Greenwood (MMO)
- Peter Pollard (SEPA – replaced by Jo Long)
- Sarah Wood (NRW)

- Toni Scarr (replaced by Trevor Renals)

2. Minutes of meeting on 24 April 2023

Paper circulated (PB Oct 23-02)

The minutes were signed off. Action 1 from the previous meeting (Oct 2022), copied below, had not been picked up in the actions to take forward.

ACTION 1 (carried over). Non-native Species Inspectorate (NNSI) to continue to meet with government agencies individually after which it will arrange a workshop with multiple agencies to discuss its work – before the next Board meeting.

3. Actions / matters arising

Paper circulated (PB Oct 23-03)

All actions were discharged.

4. Inspectorate update

Paper circulated (PB Apr 23-04)

Niall introduced this paper outlining highlights, including that approximately 60% of target inspections have been undertaken, with approximately 10% non-compliance detected. The NNSI continue to carry out systematic inspections, monitor online sales, deliver intelligence led inspections, undertake data collection and awareness raising activities. They have also been involved in rapid responses (e.g. to *Baccharis*, *Tapinoma* ants and greater white-toothed shrew, as well as providing emergency support for the Asian hornet response) which amounts to about 6% of NNSI time. In addition, they have helped to investigate new pathways, such as the escape of non-native plants from ornamental collections.

Niall highlighted that there were still some issues for the NNSI, most notably a lack of access to the Border to deliver important inspections of anglers, boaters and containers. Jenny flagged that improving biosecurity at the border is integral to the UK Biological Security Strategy. This is an issue that Sarah Webster (previous Defra policy lead) was leading on resolving with Border Force, but little progress has been made since she left post. Defra requested that the NNSI provide a short note setting out why we need to carry out inspections at the border so that they can follow it up with Border Force.

Neil noted that it would be useful to see more connections made in the NNSI report with the delivery of the GB Strategy. There was also discussion about how new species that arrive in GB are prioritised for a response from the NNSI, citing the greater white-toothed shrew (GWTS) as an example. The NNSI explained that

established contingency plans are followed in these cases, which include listed priority species and a process for responding to new / unexpected species that arrive, such as the GWTS. In this case, the Response Group for England (comprising Defra, NE, NNS and APHA) determined that the potential distribution of this species should be investigated. More broadly, prioritisation of species is a key part of the GB Strategy, with actions set out in Chapter 6. The Board was invited to send any comments to the NNS.

ACTION 2. NNSI to provide Defra with a short note setting out why we need to carry out inspections at the border so that they can follow it up with Border Force.

ACTION 3. Defra to engage with **Border Force** to attempt to facilitate access of the **NNSI** to the Border.

5. GB Strategy implementation

Paper circulated (PB Apr 23-05)

Finn led on this item, outlining the paper provided by Defra. This included various tools to support the strategy implementation, including the action tracker, plan on a page and theory of change documents – on which the Board made no comments. It also included suggested changes to the governance of non-native species work in GB, with three different options that the Board was asked to decide between. Defra recommended option B, which includes the establishment of 9 additional groups to act as a leads for each chapter of the GB strategy and an additional INNS steering group to drive policy and implementation decisions, which would be accountable to the UK Non-native Species Programme Board and the Environmental Improvement Plan Board in England. Defra explained that this was necessary because of overlap in workloads (with everything being done all at once), the infrequency of Board meetings and because of the need for further reporting.

There was extensive discussion on the issue of governance amongst the Board, with differing views on the options and information presented. Defra and Welsh Government were broadly in favour of option B, while Scottish Government, FC and APHA were either not in favour or required more information.

Bill and Leasa (Welsh Government) were concerned that the GB Strategy and implementation plan were very high level and that they needed a more detailed understanding and to be clearer what was being delivered. They highlighted a gap in making sure delivery is taken forward. They commented that it would be useful for people to report more and for there to be a mechanism to progress timely action. For these reasons they commended option B. They understood concerns about resources but noted that Defra had offered to lead the additional groups on behalf of GB.

Lisa (Scottish Government) thanked Defra for their work but was concerned about the additional bureaucracy that option B would create, and the amount of resource required from their small team – particularly given that there are already structures in place (such as the Non-native Species Programme Board and 4 countries biodiversity group). Scottish Government was concerned that this was being driven, at least in part, by specific requirements for Defra to report internally by the EIP. They also noted that they have other strategies and structures being set up for biodiversity at the moment and could not consider changes to INNS governance until those were in place.

Jenny (APHA) was concerned that the paper did not clearly explain what the problem was that it was trying to address. Before deciding on significant governance changes, it was first necessary to clearly set out the issue or gap, which would allow for a range of options to be considered to best address them. She was not convinced that the proposed changes to governance were needed to address the issues of overlap and reporting that had been mentioned. Instead, other options should be considered – such as a more detailed delivery plan with streamlined reporting without extra layers of governance. She noted that the plan-on-a-page indicated that delivery objectives are not so closely spaced that they require more frequent meetings and reporting.

Rebecca (Forestry Commission) commented that there was a gap in reporting and that more oversight or more frequent opportunities to contribute would be useful. However, she was concerned that option B would create a massive amount of work and noted that there were already a lot of groups delivering the GB Strategy. She commented that if new groups were required, they should be Task and Finish groups established to deliver a specific objective over a set time. A more detailed version of the action tracker with more detailed tasks could be a useful way of resolving some of the issues around reporting. She commented that a clear articulation of the problem to be solved would be very helpful and noted it seemed to be about tracking delivery and highlighting where delivery is not happening.

Stan (NatureScot) commented that it would be useful to have a paper on metrics which could be used to ensure priority action is being taken, for example to ensure the prevention of new introductions / establishments, eradications and management. Jo (SEPA) noted that having an implementation plan in place, with clarity on metrics, would provide a better line of sight from the working groups to the objectives they are tasked with delivering - this would enable the working groups to report better on progress/flag issues needing Board input quickly without the need for additional layers of administration.

For their part, Niall and Olaf (NNS) raised serious concerns about the suggested governance changes. They flagged that a review of governance had not been requested by the Board and stressed that option B would create significant additional bureaucracy which would burden already over-stretched teams. They highlighted that previously the issue of reporting had been addressed by developing an implementation plan, which had detailed tasks, against which progress was reviewed at each Board meeting with issues flagged and addressed. This had been done by Defra since the original strategy was published in 2008 but stopped in 2018 when Craig Lee left. They also noted that there are already extensive catch-up and

reporting meetings that take place every week – for example the NNSS calculated that they had attended approximately 57 such meetings since the last Board meeting, which excludes 10 meetings held specifically to develop the implementation plan. In addition, it was highlighted that work is underway to develop metrics for the Board that would measure the main outcomes of the strategy relating to preventing introductions and establishments, eradicating species and undertaking other forms of longer-term management. These outcome-focussed metrics could be a better way of helping the Board monitor real-world progress and drive forward delivery action.

Richard G (as Chair of the Board) concluded that it did appear there was an issue or gap that required further exploration but acknowledged differing opinions among the Board. He suggested that a paper is required for the Board that more clearly sets out the gaps / issues in question, which could then form the basis of a discussion about how to address them. He noted that it would be useful to have the implementation plan drafted and queried whether discussions around governance should be deferred until it was in place. It was agreed that the implementation plan should be produced as well as a paper on the issues or gaps that require further consideration. It is not necessary to wait until the next Board meeting in 6 months for these to be considered – they could be considered either by correspondence or by an exceptional meeting of the Board.

ACTION 4. Defra, working with **Welsh Government, Scottish Government** and the **GBNNSS**, to finalise the implementation plan for the GB Strategy. This can be sent to the Board between meetings for consideration by correspondence or considered at an extraordinary meeting if necessary.

ACTION 5. Defra, working with **Welsh Government, Scottish Government** and the **GBNNSS**, to produce a paper for the Board that provides a clear articulation of the issues and / or gaps that the original paper on governance was seeking to address. This can be sent to the Board between meetings for consideration by correspondence or considered at an extraordinary meeting if necessary.

6. International

Niall provided a brief update on the IPBES IAS assessment published in September. Finn provided updates on plans for work with the G7 to encourage international cooperation of invasive species work.

7. Pathway Action Plan update

There continue to be delays with the PAP consultation, which is with Defra's Secretary of State at the moment. Defra hope to be able to carry out the consultation in the new year.

8. Rapid Responses

There were no exceptions related to ongoing rapid responses to report. Updates from some agencies are at Annex 1.

9. Secretariat Report

Paper circulated PB Oct 23-09

Niall led on this paper – highlighting key points.

10. AOB

There were no AOB.

11. Date of next meeting

NNSS will seek dates in April unless it is agreed that an earlier (possibly extraordinary) meeting is needed to discuss governance. Defra will be in the chair.

ANNEX 1 – RAPID RESPONSE UPDATES FROM AGENCIES

SEPA

Chinese mitten crab – report (unverified) from Loch Assynt, West Sutherland. An unlikely location but reasonably plausible report. Discussions are underway about next steps for eDNA analysis as trapping has been unsuccessful. Collaborative effort with SEPA, NatureScot, West Sutherland Fisheries Trust, Marine Directorate (SG) and Environment & Forestry Directorate (SG)

Pink Salmon – collaborative work this summer with SEPA, Marine Directorate, NatureScot and Fisheries Management Scotland undertook eDNA surveillance of 30 rivers. Results not yet available but overall very low numbers (46 visual sightings compared with 171 in 2021 and 131 in 2019).

Apple snail – report from Buglife of snail eggs at a pond at Beecraigs Country Park in West Lothian. No adult snails have been found so far. Further investigations and containment measures will be carried out by Rangers, with advice from SEPA.

Crassula helmsii – appears to be far more widespread in 2023, with new records in a number of waterbodies including Loch Lomond and Loch Ken. Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority have been in touch with NatureScot and SEPA to seek advice on potential monitoring & management options and SEPA is currently advising on this matter. SEPA is discussing options for Loch Ken with the local Landscape Partnership.

Parrots feather – successfully eradicated from garden pond in Assynt as a result of liaison between NatureScot and local contacts. No extant sites in the wild in Scotland

NatureScot

Purple pitcher plant – monitored in September 2023. Three seedlings removed at one location none found at other site.

Ring-necked parakeet – roost site has moved to grounds of Glasgow Vet School. Plan to monitor in November 2023.

NRW

Topmouth gudgeon - eradication is funded by Welsh Government in Wales and is being undertaken by NRW in partnership with Carmarthenshire County Council. The eradication is also supported by the Environment Agency who are involved in applying the piscicide. Eradication work is planned at Sandy Water Park this financial year (provisionally planned for February). Work has been undertaken to design a series of measures to prevent water escaping from the site that will not affect flood risk. Currently a final date for the eradication is being agreed. Contracts have been

let or are in the process of being let to enable work to be undertaken to support the eradication. Alongside this, applications for permissions are being updated ready for submission and comms are also being updated.