NERC Council Meeting
Summary of discussions, 7 June 2018

Members present:
Prof. Duncan Wingham (Executive Chair), Mr N Folland, Prof. L Heathwaite, Prof. K Lochte, Mr G MacGregor, Prof. G Henderson, Mr I Khan, Prof. Dame J Slingo, Prof. IL Boyd, Lord Willis.

NERC Executive: Prof. T Wheeler (Director, Research & Innovation), Ms A Robinson (Director, Corporate Affairs), Mr PJ Fox (Chief Operating Officer), Dr P Heads (Items 3, 4 and 5), Dr AJ Turner (Secretary).

Key issues discussed
The NERC Executive Chair, Professor Duncan Wingham, welcomed members to the first meeting of the NERC Council within UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). Professor Wingham also provided background context to assist with discussions of specific agenda items.

NERC Governance under UKRI: NERC Council formally adopted the proposed Terms of Reference for NERC Council as drafted in conjunction with UKRI. Council welcomed Council meetings chaired by Professor Wingham, while noting the role of the Senior Independent Member, Mr Folland. Council agreed it remained open to ask Mr Folland to chair meetings or specific items if this would be advantageous to promote effective discussion and would keep this option under periodic review.

A new strategy for NERC in UKRI: Council welcomed a paper and presentation setting out the process, timing, stakeholder engagement approach and potential themes to include in a new NERC Strategic Delivery Plan. Council had a wide-ranging discussion including consideration of the opportunities of new UKRI funds such as the Industrial Strategy Challenges Fund and the Strategic Priorities Fund. Key points included the need to demonstrate the value NERC added to UK environmental sciences and to state NERC’s role and purpose in the new UKRI landscape. Council agreed the proposed thematic approach and requested a first full draft for consideration at its September meeting.

NERC funding processes and governance: Council received an overview of the implications of the changed role of NERC Council and the follow on considerations for NERC funding processes and governance. Council considered options and discussed the need for balance and agility within the structures that provide expert advice to NERC to address the new requirements of the UKRI context, including significant opportunity presented by the new central funding. Council agreed the need to adapt its funding governance in the light of the new role of NERC within UKRI and requested detailed options be brought for consideration at its next meeting.

NERC Budget Planning 2018/19 – 2020/21 and Review of NERC top risks at May 2018: Council noted the NERC budget and financial context and agreed the proposed programme resource budget for the period to 2020/21. It noted the importance of clear budget information for future planning and welcomed the paper and format of reporting, including sharing information on risk and forecast variances, as both impact on Council’s ability to make effective decisions.
Rolling programme of business: Council noted the process of developing a programme of business and the dates of future meetings: 27 September and 13 December 2018.