

NERC Science Board Meeting

Summary of Discussion

12 & 13 July, British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge

Members Present: Professor Angela Hatton (Chair), Professor Mike Begon, Dr Jennifer Collier, Professor Lora Fleming, Professor Rosemary Hails, Professor Tamsin Mather, Professor Ian Poll, Professor Andrew Shepherd, Professor Rowan Sutton, Professor David Thomas, Professor David Vaughan, Professor Susan Waldron, Professor Mathew Williams.

Ex Officio: Professor Duncan Wingham, Professor Tim Wheeler

Apologies: Professor Peter Cox, Professor John Brodholt, Professor Tim Wheeler (day 1 only).

Other Attendees: Dr Ned Garnett, Dr Caroline Culshaw (whole meeting); Dr Liz Fellman, Dr Nicki Badcock (item 3 & 4); Professor Ed Hill, Professor John Remedios, Professor Peter Jan van Leeuwen, Professor Harmut Boesch, Professor Stephen Mobbs, Professor Alastair Lewis, Professor Mark Bailey, Professor Alan Jenkins, Professor Richard Sanders, Professor Icarus Allen (item 3); Professor Phil Heads (item 7); Professor Steve Banwart, Professor Graham Underwood, Dr Simon Kerley, Professor Bridgett Emmett, Professor Alison Hester, Professor Lisa Belyea, (item 9).

Secretary: Lyndsey Jones

Key issues discussed

NC Commissioning Single Centre Science

Centre leadership teams presented detailed outline proposals for underpinning and programme elements of National Capability Science and discussed strategic direction, strengths and weaknesses of the outlines with Science Board. The Board provided feedback for Centres to consider when developing the full proposals for submission in September.

CE Update

The Board heard about current progress in the formation of UKRI and the implications for advisory structures in NERC. They discussed the ongoing work to plan and define the role of the new Council once NERC ceases to be a legal entity.

Feedback from Council

Professor Wheeler outlined plans agreed with Council to imminently communicate changes to NERC's portfolio of services and facilities following an evaluation and consideration of strategic need.

Science Board also heard about plans to develop a suite of research and innovation priorities to guide NERC investment. The Board discussed the desire for a data-driven approach informed by foresight to enable more dynamic portfolio management. Board members volunteered to help progress the work and agreed to discuss further at the November 2017 meeting.

NERC's unique role in UKRI

Dr Phil Heads joined the meeting to share some emerging thinking on this topic, building on the discussion at the Council retreat, to which members contributed. The Board heard about the articulation of the importance of environmental science and the unique skills and expertise that NERC can bring to UKRI, and agreed to provide advice about opportunities for scientific advances that could make a real societal and economic impact.

Strategic Programme Areas

Members of the scoping groups for the two SPAs (Peatland Resilience: Innovative Science for Transforming Management and Designing Future Landscapes for Multiple Benefits from Natural Resources) joined Science Board to present the cases. Science Board discussed the cases and considered them using the agreed assessment criteria, but did not recommend either for funding. It was felt that a strong strategic case was made, but the potential for research excellence was not sufficiently high.

Science Board noted the strong strategic case for tools to support multivariate decisions about the environment at different scales and agreed with the Executive to consider if, in the longer term, an activity in this area could be taken forward through another route, building on what the scoping group has achieved so far

Standing items

The Board confirmed the minutes and noted the information papers: the finance report, forward agenda, Peer Review College Chairs' report, Joint Strategic Response update and the portfolio analysis.