

SUMMARY OF INPUTS RECEIVED TO THE BAS/NOC MERGER CONSULTATION

Background

1. On 7 June 2012, it was announced that NERC Council had asked the Executive to consider merging the National Oceanography Centre and the British Antarctic Survey. As part of these considerations, a commitment was given that consultation with staff and stakeholders would take place.

Methodology

2. A consultation document was prepared and placed on the NERC website on 11 September 2012, with a closing date for responses of 10 October 2012. Key stakeholders in UK government, the academic community in the UK and abroad and national and international Committees were directly invited to input their views to the consultation process and a series of focus groups were organised for staff at BAS and NOC, with the consolidated group outcomes fed back into the consultation process.

3. Individuals and/or organisations could submit comments on this consultation document via a web-based portal, a “pro-forma” with comments on any or all of the sections in the consultation document or e-mail to the dedicated e-mail address used for the consultation.

4. The consultation document is attached at Annex A to the main Council paper.

Inputs received

5. A total of 364 inputs were received. These are broken down by the type of source of responses as per Table 1 below.

Table 1: Type of source of responses

Type of source of responses	Number of inputs
Individual member of staff at BAS	149
Individual member of staff at NOC	46
Individual member of staff in other parts of NERC	6
Private individual outside of NERC	87
As a member of or on behalf of an organisation	76

6. Responses were received from members of or on behalf of those organisations listed at Appendix A.

7. Responses were received from those private individuals listed at Appendix B.

Analysis

8. The BAS/NOC merger team agreed that it would be primarily responsible for the analysis of the inputs received. A member of the team from each of BAS and NOC analysed Sections 1-6 of the consultation document, with members of the team from Swindon Office analysing responses to the

more general questions and comments submitted. The inputs received were also shared, on a strictly confidential basis and for information purposes only, with the NERC Trade Unions.

9. This approach led to the identification of the key themes to emerge from the consultation which have been taken into account in the approach set out in the main Council paper.

10. In addition to this wholly team-based analysis, the NERC Chief Executive and Director NOC/interim Director BAS agreed that it would be helpful for this summary to be the subject of independent scrutiny in relation to the integrity of its development vis-a-vis the consultation inputs received.

11. Professor Robert Allison, Vice Chancellor at Loughborough University, agreed to provide this independent scrutiny. His views/comments are set out below.

Consultation themes

12. Key themes to emerge from the consultation were:

Theme: whether a merger needs to take place at all to achieve the stated aims.

13. Many respondents felt that:

- the current Centres achieve most of the vision and mission proposed for the merged Centre independently and are already world-leading – the merger will make little improvement on this
- the size and scope of the merged Centre may be viewed by UK HEIs as a threat to future collaboration and may become inward looking
- effective collaboration can be and is already achieved (between BAS and NOC scientists and between BAS/NOC scientists and other scientists outside BAS and NOC); a merger is not required to lever this
- scientific and operational synergies (eg fleet/logistics management) can be achieved without a merger
- the proposed scientific benefits of the merger can be realised through greater funding of integrated, collaborative, multi-disciplinary programmes

14. Other respondents' views were that:

- there are clear overlaps in the remits of the existing centres – the merger makes sense to improve scientific synergy and enhance collaboration and co-ordination in multi-partner programmes to the benefit of marine and Antarctic science on a UK and international scale
- operational synergies and savings (cf fleet management) can and should be achieved from this
- NERC, through this merged Centre, could play a much greater leadership role on the international stage in this area

NERC Council Response

In consideration of the merger, NERC, as is its usual practice, considered other ways of achieving its aims. This, together with its consideration of the responses to the consultation, led Council to the view that it will seek to achieve its aims using alternative means in due course.

Theme: the focus of research in the merged Centre.

15. Some respondents indicated that they were concerned by:
- an increase in emphasis on either marine or polar research at the expense of the other
 - an increase in emphasis on either marine and/or polar research at the expense of other research currently carried out in NOC and mainly BAS (eg Space Weather)
 - a merger of two Centres inhibiting the flexibility and diversity in research (particularly multi-disciplinary research) in Centres that was the very reason for the NERC Integration Programme stopping
16. Other respondents offered views that:
- the proposed merger offers an excellent opportunity to rebalance the ratio of Antarctic / Arctic science
 - the merged Centre would provide long-term scientific advantages in better coupling research effort in marine and polar regions
 - there could be greater multidisciplinary of the science programmes and the opportunity to investigate new areas of research
 - bringing together ice-ocean components is an important step in tackling Earth-system challenges

NERC Council Response

NERC Council remains of the view that, with the great scientific uncertainties facing, and strategic importance of, marine and polar science, and in the light of reducing resources, it should actively seek to integrate its strategic resources where this makes sense to do so. NERC will be considering next year ways of rebalancing its funding of strategic science to encourage this integrated approach to large scale problems of the environment.

Theme: the impact of the loss of the name/brand of BAS and NOC as discrete identities.

17. The vast majority of respondents provided reasons for maintaining the current arrangements such as:
- the BAS name/brand/reputation is a particularly strong one internationally, politically and is a generator of loyalty for BAS staff
 - re-branding of NOC may create an impasse with the University of Southampton on the “NOC, Southampton” brand
 - weakening the BAS name/brand would send unfortunate/dangerous messages about the UK’s commitment to the Antarctic/Falkland Islands
 - any “re-branding” will be costly in the current climate
18. A few respondents’ reasons for supporting a change to the current arrangements included:

- if a new merged Centre is to be created, then a new name/identity is necessary to provide the focus for staff to rally around and to develop its own culture and scientific opportunities
- the BAS name has too much baggage/history – a fresh start is needed
- the BAS name ties it to one geographical area when the focus of polar research is just that – polar.

19. If re-naming/re-branding is to be taken forward, arguments against all of the possible suggestions in the consultation document for a prefix for the new Centre were put forward:

- “National” or “British” was generally felt to be better than “NERC” as a prefix to the name. Associating the term NERC with the name of the Centre brought with it a lack of longevity and unknown brand
- “National” was preferable to “NERC” but many respondents commented upon the ambiguity of which nation this would be referring to
- “British” had a range of mixed views, being more descriptive than “National” but being “old school”, “Empire”, “parochial” and excluding Northern Ireland
- Naming the merged Centre after some inspirational former leader(s) in marine/polar research was felt to be a possible option for further consideration.

NERC Council Response

NERC Council recognises the strong connection to the existing names and, in light of the decision not to merge the Centres, sees no value in altering the names.

Theme: the leadership and management arrangements of the merged Centre and the location of its Headquarters.

20. Some respondents believed that the following needed to be taken into consideration:

- while announcing Southampton as the HQ might be the right decision for the merged Centre, it would have been helpful to have seen the evidence which led to this conclusion.
- there could be a risk to safety in Antarctica if procedures and/or personnel changed.
- ensuring that the new senior management structure for the Centre does not represent an increased overhead burden is important as multi-site management and leadership may be more costly and/or less effective, less agile, flexible, and responsive.
- site (science) leadership is important
- the practical day-to-day realities of managing corporate and operational/logistics facilities need a great deal further thinking through in any implementation phase
- a single Executive Director for the merged Centre may find it difficult to cope with the volume of work given the size of the merged Centre

21. Respondents also saw opportunities in the proposed changes, believing that:

- change always brings about opportunities for new ideas and for new leadership
- finding the right balance in the science structure across the merged Centre would be important – it could lever opportunities for greater collaboration and integration if old, site-based, ways of thinking could be overcome

NERC Council Response

A merged Centre would need integrated management and the management would need to have a single location. The points raised in the consultation illustrated some of the challenges that the merged management would face in effectively bringing together the two Centres. While Council took the view that these challenges could be overcome, this issue was a factor in Council reaching the decision that it would not seek to merge the Centres.

Theme: access to large research infrastructure.
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22. There were mixed views from respondents about the need to make changes to manage access to large research infrastructure in a different way, some believing that:

- the Antarctic Collaborative Gearing Scheme and Antarctic Funding Initiative have been particularly effective in widening access and allowing HEI researchers to participate in UK Antarctic research
- anyone who is eligible can already apply for a grant from NERC to use large research infrastructure, such as the research vessels or for logistic support for Antarctic research
- the qualification of Swindon Office to prioritise polar facilities access was also brought into question as it was felt to be too detached from the science and had no expertise in managing polar logistics
- if there is an issue, the issue is around funding models rather than access *per se*
- there is a lack of clarity on why it was now proposed to manage the combined fleet under single management arrangements when many previous ship (management) reviews have reached the opposing view
- separating the management of the polar ships from the rest of the polar logistics operations will introduce greater risk to their safe and effective operation

23. A few others were of the view that:

- this is an opportunity to improve the way in which NERC Swindon Office manages existing “transparent” scientific programming and collaboration
- consolidation of the major research infrastructure within one “behemoth” centre would give less access to the HEI community because the new centre would have all of the staff needed to run major projects in a way that neither BAS nor NOC currently can.
- integrating all ship management operations in one place makes sense

NERC Council Response

It is a key objective for NERC to ensure wide, open and transparent access by the UK science community to NERC large research infrastructure, both marine and polar. NERC Council accepted from the outset that this could be achieved without merging the two Centres.

Theme: this consultation process.
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24. Many respondents were disappointed by the consultation process, feeling that :

- there is insufficient information presented in the document, particularly around the scientific and economic case for the merger, to enable inputs to be made on the basis of evidence
- there is some confusion about the extent to which there is a genuine opportunity to shape or influence the consultation or whether parts of the merger were already decided upon
- there are no measures of success for the merger
- as those responsible for developing the consultation document and analysing the responses to it are one and the same, there should be some form of independent scrutiny of the analysis to ensure that respondents' views are taken into account

25. Other respondents were of the view that:

- the consultation was a fair representation of an important strategic decision and that the consultation document had posed appropriate questions where NERC was seeking objective feedback and advice.

NERC Council Response

NERC Council believe that it was the right course of action to seek views on the proposal that outlined a broad course of action prior to forming a detailed plan following Council's decision. To have conducted a feasibility study 'in camera' or to have hidden the fact that we were considering a merger as a serious option would rightly have been criticized.

Views from Professor Robert Allison.

See Appendix C

INPUTS TO THE CONSULTATION FROM MEMBERS OF OR ON BEHALF OF ORGANISATIONS

- National Institute of Polar Research, Japan
- Magnetosphere Ionosphere and Solar Terrestrial Council
- GC Rieber Shipping
- UK Polar Network
- Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research
- University of Sheffield
- Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Leicester
- The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Department of Chemistry, University of Cambridge
- Durham University
- MP for Cambridge
- Agulhas: Applied Knowledge
- Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University, New York
- Hertford College, University of Oxford
- Colorado State University
- Friends of the Earth
- Scott Polar Research Institute
- British Antarctic Survey Club
- Aberystwyth University
- Victoria University of Wellington
- University of York
- Alfred Wegener Institute for Marine and Polar Research
- Geophysical Institute, University of Alaska Fairbanks
- University of Manchester
- Department of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia
- Centre for Environmental and Marine Studies, University of Hull
- University of Bristol
- Orskov Yard, Fredrikshaven
- Centre for Marine Sciences, School of Ocean Sciences, University of Bangor
- Department of Zoology, University of Oxford
- University of Washington, Seattle
- Byrd Polar Research Centre, The Ohio State University,
- WWF-UK
- Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs
- National Science Foundation
- Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
- Australian Antarctic Division, Australian Government
- Antarctic Logistics and Expeditions
- Kingsbay
- Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

- Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna
- Universidad Autonoma de Madrid
- National Snow and Ice Data Center, University of Colorado
- Cambridge Cleantech
- Plymouth Marine Laboratory
- NERC Arctic Research Programme Consortium (The Environment of the Arctic –Climate, Ocean and Sea Ice)
- Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
- Institut fuer Phonetik und Sprachverarbeitung, Universitaet Muenchen
- South Georgia Heritage Trust
- Gilbert White and Oates Museum
- UK Antarctic Heritage Trust
- Pew Environment Group
- University of Pisa
- South Georgia Association
- South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands
- Australian National Committee for Antarctic Research, The Australian Academy of Science
- National Oceanography Centre Advisory Council
- Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics, University of Cambridge
- University of Southampton
- Challenger Society for Marine Science
- University of Liverpool
- National Research Council, Italy
- University of Cambridge
- Greenpeace
- NERC Trade Unions
- Royal Astronomical Society
- Scottish Association for Marine Science
- British Antarctic Monument Trust
- Blue Marine Foundation
- University of Leeds
- Centre for Polar Observation and Modelling
- Royal Geographical Society
- All Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions
- The Royal Society
- Marine Reserves Coalition
- Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly

INPUTS TO THE CONSULTATION FROM PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS

- Dr Peter Newman
- Professor Karen Heywood
- Mr RI Lewis-Smith
- Prof Richard Holdaway
- Dr John Dudeney
- Prof IN McCave
- Sir Martin Holdgate
- Prof T Jickells
- Prof DJ Drewry
- Prof RB Heywood
- Prof David Hopkins
- Prof Martin Siegert
- Profs John Shepherd, Chris Rapley & Harry Bryden (combined input)
- Mr John Splettstoesser
- Mr John Dunn
- Mr Robert Culshaw
- Mr Harald Hamley
- Mr Julian Taylor
- Captain CR Elliott
- Prof John Smellie
- Dr Mike Richardson
- Ms Anne Miller
- Mr Ian Collinge
- Prof Lionel Wilson
- Mr John Pye
- Dr David M Wilson
- Prof Chris Rapley
- Dr PD Clarkson
- Prof Andrew Clarke
- Mr Ian Dunn
- Mr Paul Buckley
- Mr Howard JS Pearce
- Mr Michael Thurston
- Mr Bryan Lintott
- Ms Denise Landau
- Dr Dougal Goodman
- Mr Bruce Tate
- Mr Philip Hughes
- Mr GA Howkins
- Prof Michael McIntyre

- Dr William Block
- Sir Crispin Tickell

A further 45 people identified themselves as private individuals when submitting a response via the on-line portal but did not provide their name.

PROFESSOR ROBERT ALLISON COMMENTS ON DOCUMENT: “SUMMARY OF INPUTS RECEIVED TO THE BAS/NOC MERGER CONSULTATION”

Background

1. As identified in this Annex to the Council paper, NERC asked me to carry out an independent scrutiny of the summary of responses submitted to NERC’s consultation on the proposal to merge BAS and NOC. The purpose of this was to provide an independent view on how fairly the views submitted by respondents to the consultation had been represented to NERC Council in their decision-making process.

Approach

2. I firstly received from NERC access to a secure website on which all the consultation responses were stored. I initially studied some of the responses in order to get an overview of the emerging issues. I subsequently received and read NERC’s draft summary of inputs received to the BAS/NOC merger consultation document. I then read the majority of responses. I have reviewed around 75% of submissions, making sure that they reflect the full range of respondents identified in Annex B.

3. In order to be consistent with the breakdown of type of source of response in Table 1 in the summary, I specifically studied a range of responses from:

- current and past members of staff at both BAS and NOC (including, but not limited to, former Directors and Deputy Directors of BAS)
- organisations (including, but not limited to, the Universities of Southampton and Cambridge)
- other stakeholders (including, but not limited to, those from the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Polar Regions, the Falklands Islands Legislative Assembly and the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands)

4. I finally discussed by teleconference with senior NERC officials¹ my view on the integrity of the summary document and agreed that structure and broad contents of this report.

Views

5. The responses sub-divide into four broad areas: i) science, ii) logistics, iii) political dimensions, iv) those who had misunderstood the issues. There were a number of respondents whose replies illustrated a misunderstanding of the issues (e.g. those who do not understand the current BAS/NOC/NERC relationship) and whose replies are therefore ill informed or based on incorrect assumptions.

6. My opinion on the balance of views submitted to the consultation is as follows:

¹ Professor Ed Hill, Director NOC/interim Director BAS; Mr Jonathan Bates, Director, People & Skills; Mr Nigel Sully, Head of Swindon Office and BAS/NOC Merger Project Manager

- those addressing science questions, in particular over-arching strategic questions (e.g. the majority of Universities) are broadly in favour of the merger. They see opportunities from the merger to address big science questions, interdisciplinary issues and themes that are at the forefront of the NERC science agenda
- respondents commenting principally on logistics issues are broadly against the merger, finding it hard to see how it will be beneficial to BAS / NOC operations and being particularly concerned about breaking up the integrated nature of polar logistics
- senior NERC staff, past and present, or those who were writing on behalf of an organisation, tend to be against the merger
- staff, particularly BAS staff, tend to be against the merger
- other stakeholder communities tend to be in favour of the merger although this is not a universal view
- environmental pressure groups tend to be against the merger

I particularly noted the following points from the consultation responses.

- many respondents do recognise that there are positive scientific opportunities from the merger to bring together BAS and NOC
- NOC works closely with the University of Southampton. BAS has a close relationship with organisations in Cambridge, principally at Cambridge University.
- some key Universities are in favour of the proposal
- a number of concerns have been raised about the impact on effective logistics and particularly health and safety in the Antarctic. These need to be addressed as part of the NERC/Council response due to statutory responsibilities
- the role of the Executive Director of a merged Centre will need to be considered in the context of any future Directorate group and the roles of direct reports to the Executive Director.

Integrity of the summary document

7. Based on my approach, I confirm that I am satisfied that the summary document that has been prepared for NERC Council is, in my view, a fair reflection of the main points submitted as part of the consultation process. If anything, the responses that I have read indicate that the positive opportunities for world-leading science arising from the merger were a little understated in the summary document although I recognise that this view is not common to all scientists or scientific groups submitting responses.

PROFESSOR ROBERT J ALLISON
Vice Chancellor and President, Loughborough University
31 October 2012