



Minutes

Extraordinary meeting of the Board

Wednesday 10 December 2025

MS Teams

Members

Malcolm Beatty OBE	Board Member
Professor Liz Fisher	Board Member
Richard Greenhous	Chief of Staff
Julie Hill MBE	Board Member
Professor Dan Laffoley	Board Member
Dr Paul Leinster CBE	Board Member
Caroline May	Board Member
Natalie Prosser	Chief Executive
Dame Glenys Stacey	Chair

OEP Attendees

Peter Ashford	General Counsel
Donnacha Doody	Head of Analysis (item 25.80)
Neil Emmott	Head of Monitoring Environmental Law (item 25.80)
Mike Fox	Head of Communications and Strategic Relations
REDACTED	Principal Communications and Engagement Manager (item 25.82)
Angel Lai	Head of Finance and Corporate Services
Andy Lester	Head of Business Strategy and Planning
Professor Cathy Maguire	Head of Assessments (item 25.81)
Professor Robbie McDonald	Chief Insights Officer
REDACTED	Human Resources Manager (item 25.82)
REDACTED	Board Secretary and Private Office Manager
Helen Venn	Chief Regulatory Officer

Observers

David Lambert	Boardroom Apprentice
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25.78 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Malcolm Beatty attended from item 25.81.

The Board noted the conflict of interest of all employed Members and OEP attendees in respect of item 25.83

25.79 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes from the 11 November meeting were agreed.

There were no matters arising to note.

25.80 Environmental Law Report – Nutrient Action Programme Regulations 2019

The Board noted the substantial progress on the development of an environmental law report examining the Nutrient Action Programme Regulations 2019. An executive summary and proposed recommendations were presented for the Board to consider.

The Board endorsed the direction of the report. It emphasised the importance of prioritising the draft recommendations, particularly those related to the 170 kg/hectare standard, and suggested further development of the pathway to compliance section. This should recognise that current measures are unlikely to achieve legally binding targets.

The Board discussed the political context, and how this should inform how matters should be communicated.

This section has been redacted as it contains information available elsewhere.

The Board was informed of early consideration of the communications approach. This will include emphasising our independence and evidence-led role and highlighting the real-world impacts. It was noted that a comprehensive communications plan will be developed prior to publication, considering the potential for significant media attention.

This section has been redacted as it contains information available elsewhere.

The Board highlighted the need for conflicts of interest to be carefully considered, especially those with connections to farms. ACTION Chief of Staff to ensure conflict of interest declarations are up to date.

25.81 England EIP progress report – for sign off

The Board was presented with the final England EIP report.

It was noted that preparations are being finalised for the upcoming EIP event in January, that the Minister is likely to attend as may the Select Committee Chair. Members agreed that it is important to carefully manage this engagement to protect our independent voice in this key publication.

The Board considered the focus of targets within the EIP, observing that they are primarily directed at protected sites rather than areas of nature depletion. Members highlighted the need to reflect on the implications of this approach in the executive summary.

It was noted that the report does not include recommendations on water, despite this being a government priority. This should be considered when finalising the executive summary.

The Board was made aware that work is being undertaken to assess the new EIP 25, recently published. This assessment is expected to be complete in order to feature at the January event.

Members discussed the shift in messaging, which emphasises the importance of achieving 2030 targets and positions environmental action as essential, rather than an optional concern, particularly considering the introduction of the new EIP.

The Board agreed the report in substantially the form at Annex A and to delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair, ensuring that the final report has satisfactorily incorporated such amendments necessary to reflect the Board's discussion and any other non-material amendments.

25.82 People strategy project update

The Board was updated on the progress of the people strategy project.

The Board welcomed the union's comments, noting the commitment to equality, inclusion, and diversity, acknowledging their interest in the ongoing process and their request for increased transparency.

Members discussed whether our values are sufficiently embedded in daily operations. It was noted that further work would be done to refine and clarify these values with staff as part of the implementation plan.

It was emphasised that the availability of HR resources is a matter of choice, not risk, and that the wording of this within the strategy document should be considered for transparency. The Board considered the tone of internal communications, particularly regarding the use of the phrase "our people". The Board also suggested that categorising key themes within the documentation would help make communication more accessible.

The Board considered the effectiveness of the current measures of success. Members stressed the importance of clear communication to staff, ensuring the strategy leads to tangible improvements rather than remaining theoretical. The speed at which changes could be implemented was discussed, with agreement that this should be communicated clearly.

The Board reaffirmed its role in providing assurance that appropriate actions are taken and in challenging as necessary. It was agreed that this assurance role should be revisited following the results of the people survey or after significant events.

The Board agreed with the recommendation of the paper to endorse the final draft People strategy and implementation plan.

25.83 24/25 Pay Remit Issue

The Board discussed issues raised by the National Audit Office in respect of the pay remit awarded for 2024/2025. The Board was reminded that it decided to award an increase of 5.44% compared with the Cabinet Office guidance of 5%. This 0.44% above 5% equates to £14,000, and had been decided in order to retain parity with the Defra Group pay scales, where Defra's award had been above the Cabinet Office guidance. The Board were reminded that the risks of this pay remit were considered when making this decision at the Board meeting on the 16 October 2024. The NAO is concerned that the 0.44% award is irregular expenditure as outside the pay remit guidance. We disagree, given the provisions set out in the Environment Act.

The Board were therefore presented with a number of options to address this concern and allow for the completion of the 24/25 accounts so that the Annual Report and Accounts

could be published. With the presented options, the Board were made aware of the potential risks of each. *This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

The pension scheme implications were discussed including how the risk of the OEP being removed from the Civil Service Pension Scheme could materialise. The Board judged the likelihood of this to be low.

When considering the recommended option, the Board agreed that a document should be drafted for the Cabinet Office outlining the reasons behind the pay remit decision taken in October 2024, and our understanding of the legislative provisions.

The Board agreed with the recommendation to endorse option C including all its mitigations, and noted that is recommended by the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer.

25.84 Any other business

The Board were reminded that the applications for the Chair position close on the 18 December and the Chair encouraged Board members to consider applying or encouraging any contacts to apply.