Office for Environmental Protection

Minutes

Meeting of the Board
Wednesday 27 August 2025
MS Teams

Members

Malcolm Beatty OBE	Board Member
Professor Liz Fisher	Board Member
Richard Greenhous	Chief of Staff (items 25.39 to 25.45)
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

Tim Adey	Head of Science and Evidence (item 25.42)
Peter Ashford	General Counsel (items 25.39 to 25.45)
REDACTED	Senior Investigations Officer (item 25.42)
Mike Fox	Head of Communications and Strategic Relations (items 25.39 to 25.45)
Joe Hayden	Head of Complaints, Investigation and Enforcement (item 25.42)
Angel Lai	Head of Finance and Corporate Services (items 25.39 to 25.45)
Andy Lester	Head of Business Strategy and Planning (acting as Board Secretary)
Professor Robbie McDonald	Chief Insights Officer (items 25.39 to 25.45)
REDACTED	Principal Lawyer (item 25.42)
REDACTED	Human Resources Manager (item 25.46)
Kate Tandy	Head of Litigation and Casework (item 25.42)
Dr Kate Trumper	Head of Regulatory Programmes (items 25.39 to 25.45)

Observers

David Lambert	Boardroom Apprentice

25.39 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Professor Liz Fisher.

Natalie Prosser and Richard Greenhous declared their interest in relation to item 25.46. Richard Greenhous was recused from this item.

25.40 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting of 15 May were agreed and the matters arising were noted.

25.41 Chief Executive Report

Defra has published its annual progress report for 2024-25, which is not aligned with our recommendations for an effective APR. The Board expressed concern in an apparent lack of interest and senior sponsorship within Defra, in relation to the report and potentially the EIP. **ACTION** Chief Insights Officer to consider how we formalise our concerns in relation to this report.

It is understood that EIP25 may be delayed. We are actively considering how we mitigate late publication of the EIP, if it cannot be taken into account in our January report. We may, for example, publish a supplementary analysis of EIP25.

The Board discussed the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, and the reception to our latest letter. It noted suggestions in the media of further planning reform, and noted the approach being taken to permitting the proposed new Universal Studios theme park via a Special Development Order might become a precedent for other infrastructure projects. **ACTION**: Head of Intelligence to consider how to monitor MHCLG's approach to considering environmental issues in determining this application.

The Board was updated on our analysis and discussions held with officials subsequent to the publication of the Cunliffe Review. We are engaging to understand the likely timing of policy development, and Defra's view of the risks we have identified, so that we can identify if and how we most effectively contribute to any future reform. The Board noted the particular intricacy and complexity of the water regulatory system, given its integration with other regulation. The Board encouraged analysis of the risks and opportunities of different regulatory models. Given the likely timeline of any potential reform, it also encouraged a focus on effective implementation of existing law, whilst reform is considered.

The Board noted the judgment in *Rights Community Action v Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government* and that the claimant has applied for leave to appeal.

The Board discussed the context of the Corry Review, how this is informing thinking about future regulation and discussions held in relation to some of the sandbox arrangements being proposed by Natural England.

The Board suggested that the OEPs' Intelligence Management System might be showcased to the Board and other UK oversight bodies in the Board's September meeting. **ACTION** Head of Intelligence

The Board considered Defra's proposed amendments to the draft framework document. It steered the Executive to seek to maintain the agreed provisions, reflecting those commitments made to Parliament by the previous administration.

25.42 Marine Good Environmental Status Investigation – Next Steps

This section has been redacted as it relates to information recorded for the purposes of OEP's functions relating to investigations and enforcement.

25.43 Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Audit and Risk Committee Chair introduced his report, and noted the cooperation received from officials and staff and the action taken as a result of the Committee's decisions. The Board welcomed the report, and the work and support of the Committee during the year.

25.44 Annual Report and Accounts

The financial statements were introduced, including in comparison to the prior years. The key changes year on year were explained to the Board. The Board sought further information in relation to the breakdown of consultancy, and research and evidence.

The Audit and Risk Committee Chair reported on the scrutiny undertaken by the Committee, and how this had been incorporated into the papers presented to the Board.

The Board discussed whether and where we set out the cost of individual investigations, in which others may have an interest. It noted the inherent variability between investigations and the difficulty in creating an average assessment.

The Board agreed that the report provides a fair, balanced and accurate description of the OEP's performance and agreed the sufficiency statement. It noted the annual report and accounts will be presented again for agreement after audit.

25.45 Q1 Finance Report

The financial position at the end of June 2025 was reported, which is a small underspend against the forecast position. It was confirmed that the trajectory reported has persisted at the end of July reporting. The Board noted and welcomed the degree of control demonstrated by the information now routinely presented.

25.46 SCS end of year reviews

The proposals were presented, and the assurance that had been undertaken explained. The Board queried whether there should be increasing expectation for those that have an exceeding rating in successive years, and it was confirmed that is not our current practice.

The Board encouraged fewer measures in objectives that more clearly articulate what really matters in the year ahead. The Chief Executive is to consider how this can be made clearer in future. A clearer articulation of the differentiation between performance ratings may benefit the Board's discussion in future years, and the Board sought and received assurance on how the moderation had been undertaken this year.

The Board agreed the ratings set out and the bonus payments proposed.

25.47 Any other business

There was no other business.