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Climate Change Adaption, Air Quality, Landscape & Rural Affairs Directorate
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FAO Jeff Coast

17 February 2011

RGH/JP/HB

Dear Jeff

Consultation on the Governance Arrangements for the National Park Authorities and the Broads

I refer to the above consultation document issued by Defra in November 2010 and am pleased to submit the Broads Authority's formal response.

This response has been drawn up following a special meeting of the Authority which was held on 15 February. To assist members in arriving at their conclusions, they were provided with copies of the 28 responses which had been submitted which specifically related to the Broads, a summary of these responses broken down by the six questions in the consultation document, and the summary of 'national' responses received by email up to midnight on 31 January (as provided by Defra).

Members also had regard to the views submitted at a special workshop held on 14 January to undertake a preliminary consideration of the six questions. This was attended by around 40 people, including members of the Broads Authority, Navigation Committee, Broads Forum, Broads Local Access Forum, Standards Committee and Sustainable Development Fund Panel, together with representatives of key partner organisations (including the Norfolk Association of Local Councils)..

Perhaps not surprisingly in view of the nature of organisations and individuals who responded to the consultation, a wide variety of views and opinions have been expressed, and there is no overall consensus on many of the issues. In particular there appeared to be little support for any radical changes to the size of the Authority, although there were differing views about its composition, limited support only for parish council appointments and no strong support for direct elections.

The Authority's response to each of the six questions is set out below.

Question A. Whether the membership of the Broads Authority, both the size and composition, should be changed.

Both at the workshop and amongst the written responses there was a feeling that the current membership is about right. It was noted that a significantly reduced membership would pose an

increased workload for individual members and that would reduce the range of people willing to commit the necessary time. The Authority therefore supports the retention of the current membership of 21.

With regard to parish representation there was limited support only for this amongst the responses received. Members noted that parish representation would be difficult because of the small resident population with no parish being wholly in the Broads area, and could therefore see no reason at this stage to recommend any changes to the composition of the Authority. It was noted however that parish council members are able to put themselves forward for consideration as Secretary of State appointees, and are able to gain membership of the Authority through this route.

Question B. Whether the selection process for all categories of members of the Broads Authority can be improved.

It was considered that the existing processes for appointing Secretary of State and Navigation Committee members are rigorous and inclusive, and the Authority does not therefore recommend any changes to these processes.

With regard to local authority appointees, members agreed that it would be helpful to develop a person specification which would provide guidance and assist local authorities in making their appointments to the Authority. Arrangements will be put in place to develop this as soon as possible.

Question C. Whether there should be a limit on the length of time which local authority and parish members can serve, and a reduction in the maximum term for the Secretary of state 'national' members (currently 10 years).

The Authority recommends no change to the existing 10 year maximum term for Secretary of State appointees and those appointed from the Navigation Committee, subject to flexibility to allow a 'special extension' in exceptional circumstances, for example if it is in the wider interests of the Authority to retain or appoint a Chair.

With regard to local authority appointees, the Authority does not support a maximum term (which would need some form of Governmental regulation as the Authority cannot determine which members are appointed by local authorities), but will instead include a proviso in the person specification that members ought not to be appointed for more than two or three four-year terms.

Question D. Whether the current membership and structure of consultative committees, groups and forums can be strengthened so as to better achieve 'Big Society' benefits.

The Authority felt that it did not have sufficient time – within the constraints imposed by the very tight timetable – to consider the membership and structure of the current consultative committees, groups and forums in the detail which would be necessary to do justice to this exercise, especially having regard to the differing views submitted through the various responses. It was agreed therefore that a review would be carried out of the role, composition and support provided to all the Authority's consultative bodies, including the Navigation Committee, Broads Forum and Broads Local Access Forum.

Question E. What additional measures the Broads Authority can take to strengthen the links and engagement with their local communities on a variety of issues including planning.

The Authority is already engaging with local communities through initiatives such as Parish Pop-Ins and the Parish Councils Forum, and there will be opportunities for strengthening this engagement further through the Mosaic Project Community Champions, forthcoming appointment of a full-time Education Officer and Volunteer Coordinator, and proposed bid to the Heritage

Lottery Fund for a Landscape Partnership Project. The Authority will also consider, as part of the review of its consultative bodies referred to in the previous question, whether this can provide opportunities for strengthening the links and engagement with local communities.

Question F. Whether there are any other ways in which the Broads Authority can improve its effectiveness and accountability.

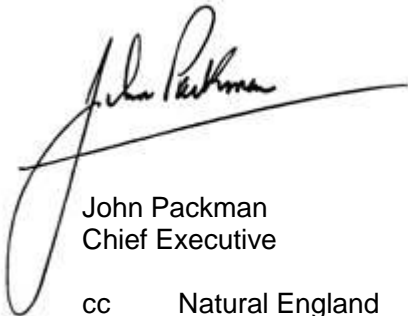
The review of the Authority's consultative bodies will have regard to how these can be managed and administered more effectively, as well as the extent to which they can strengthen local engagement.

With regard to accountability the Authority will look closely at the 28 Broads specific responses, and especially those which raise issues around accountability and engaging with communities and the public, to identify any issues which can be taken forward.

Finally members expressed disappointment that the extremely short timetable did not allow the Authority to consider the responses and explore some of these important issues in the detail they deserve.

I hope these comments are helpful. We look forward to receiving Defra's own response to the consultation exercise in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Packman', written over a horizontal line that extends to the right.

John Packman
Chief Executive

cc Natural England
FAO Andrew Wood