

## **Wales Environmental Information Steering Group: Update on WEIF Data Flow and Data Charter Actions**

### ***Background***

In November WBP agreed that WEISG should concentrate on the 2 actions agreed as priorities at the Forum in March. The actions are:

- To develop a data sharing charter for partners in Wales
- To agree data flow roles and responsibilities

WBP also asked that the steering group report back on progress at the February meeting and to be in a position to present the draft charter for WBP's consideration.

Two task and finish 'focus' groups have been formed to take these actions forward and to present plans and outcomes to WEISG/WBP for approval. This paper presents the draft charter and provides an update on progress with the 2 actions.

### ***Progress since November Paper***

#### WEIF 2009 Action 1: Data Sharing Charter

The data charter has been developed as a high level charter that lists overarching principles. As reported in November, this action emerged from the WEIF forum. Although the remit of the forum and steering group is environmental data, the focus of the data charter is initially biodiversity data. It is proposed that the charter is broadened over time to cover other environmental data that supports the biodiversity remit.

The data charter focus group met in December to prepare the draft charter. The focus group includes WEISG volunteers and representatives from key groups (e.g. NBN Trust and MEDIN). The full Steering Group met on 29/01 to consider and approve the charter.

- Presumption to share
- Timely submission of new data & update of published datasets
- Submit data once to single appropriate custodian
- Adopt agreed model for data flow
- Acknowledge the source
- Users able to access all data through agreed routes

These initial principles were based on the NBN's recently published data flow principles. See appendix 1 for the full charter and points that have been recorded for inclusion in the supporting agreement or WEISG guidance.

At the moment we have 2 suggestions for the format of the charter:

a) a high level charter (that can e.g. be posted on a wall) with a supporting contractual agreement/commitment (possibly MoU) that details additional points highlighted at the focus meeting as being important for the agreement but are not strategic enough for the principles. The points in the agreement/commitment could then be supplemented with specific detailed guidance.

b) a single charter document where the contractual elements are wrapped around the charter and that the extended charter be supplemented with specific WEISG guidance

The Focus group had decided upon (a) as the best format but discussions at the steering group veered towards (b). We would like WBP's views on this before we embark on formatting and releasing documentation for appropriate audiences.

Points that have been highlighted for inclusion in the supporting agreement or guidance are listed as an appendix to the charter.

## 2. WEIF 2009 Action 2: Data Flow Roles and Responsibilities

The aim of this action is to define and agree the roles and responsibilities for all partners involved in the flow of data for specific taxonomic groups. As reported in November, this action also emerged from the WEIF forum and the focus is again on biodiversity data as a first step. The data flow focus group met in January to identify which taxa to focus on; to identify relevant individuals for each taxa; to identify an individual person to take the lead for each taxa and to develop an outline plan. The focus group includes relevant representatives from WEISG and a representative of the academic community.

It was decided that this group should build on the work already being done in Wales on data exchange with particular taxa and organisations, rather than embark on new work. Opportunities were identified where the group could align the data flow projects in Wales with NBN projects that are agreeing data flow models for the same taxa with national schemes and societies at a UK level.

The groups settled on 6 taxa and 2 sectors to focus on.

- Mammals
- Reptiles and Amphibians
- Higher Plants
- Dragonflies
- Lichens
- Butterfly Conservation
- Academic sector
- Private sector

Most of these tend to focus on terrestrial and freshwater habitats. The group considered marine data but there is no marine representation on the focus group. It was noted, however, that the NBN are facilitating a project under their Defra contracted to document data flow for marine data at a UK level. WEISG may be able to benefit from the results of this project in the future.

2 representatives of the focus group were agreed as lead and support for developing an action plan for each target group.

It is important to note that partners involved in the collection and dissemination of data for each of the chosen groups are at different stages of development and implementation of data flow models. For some groups data flow models have been agreed at a local level but not at a national level or vice versa. For others the issue is yet to be addressed. It has been agreed that actions will focus on work that is already taking place, therefore, progress will reflect this context and will vary.

### Progress with additional WEISG Workstreams

These are detailed in the WEISG meeting notes from 29/01 and are/will be published on WBP web site.

## ***Plan/Proposals***

### WEIF 2009 Action 1: Data Charter

Once approved by WBP, three processes need to begin:

#### *Format the charter as a consultation document*

The draft principles will be updated following feedback from WBP and then formatted into a polished consultation document ready for wider consultation and the first steps of

implementation. Please note that if it is agreed that the document is to be amended to include elements of the contractual agreement the re-formatting will take longer.

#### *Consultation and gaining agreement in principle to the high level charter*

It is recognised that organisation may find it difficult to sign up to the high level principles without the detail of some or all of the supporting agreement or WEISG guidance. To facilitate progress and consultation, it is therefore suggested that organisations agree to the charter in principle and that the agreement is subject to the detail of any supporting agreement or WEISG guidance.

It has been recommended that the Government and Government sponsored bodies in Wales are seen to lead by example and adopt the charter first with a view to extending this to Local Authorities and then the private and voluntary sector through consultation. It is therefore suggested that WAG, CCW, EAW and FCW consult internally on implementing the charter and report back to WEISG/WBP when agreement in principle is approved for implementation or to highlight any constraints they will need to overcome.

Some private and voluntary sector representatives have expressed an interest in trying to implement the charter from the outset and it is suggested that these opportunities are taken up and implemented in parallel.

#### *Drafting the supporting agreement and/or publishing WEISG guidance*

The Charter has been drafted as a set of high level principles that the signatories will adhere to however, for the process to effectively free up data in the way that WEIF intended, there will need to be a more detailed document setting out a clear framework of behaviors and practices that underpins the higher level documents. As outlined above, two options have been proposed, one is to supplement the charter with a contractual/committal agreement and detailed guidance; the second is to expand the charter and embed the contractual obligations within the charter and supply supporting detailed guidance. The data charter focus group need to agree the format for the charter and then work on the detail of any supporting agreement or relevant WEISG guidance.

#### WEIF 2009 Action 2: Data Flow Roles and Responsibilities

Once the list of target groups is approved, the focus group lead and support for each target taxon or sector will develop an action plan based on existing action and progress to data flow for the target group and known individuals involved in the flow of data for that group.

### **Issues**

It is acknowledged that a significant effort will be required to progress this work but we think that the benefits of co-ordinating effort through WEISG outweigh the constraints.

WBP members may be interested to hear that partners in Scotland are investigating options for a similar forum and steering group.

### **Decision Points**

1. To provide suggestions for the introductory paragraph to the data charter
2. To endorse or amend the Data Charter as a consultation document and the ideas behind the principles.
3. To agree a consultation period for the data charter and provide approval for WEISG to sign off the final version
4. To endorse the proposal for implementing the data charter
5. To endorse the groups identified for initial action for agreeing data flow in Wales