

Broads Authority

29 November 2024

Agenda item number 8

Biodiversity emergency and Broads Nature Recovery Strategy

Report by Environment Policy Adviser

Purpose

Biodiversity is essential both to humans, through the provision of ecosystem services such as food, fuel, flood prevention and enjoyment, and in its own right as part of the natural world. Biodiversity is under severe threat. This report sets out the Broads Authority's draft response in the form of a draft Broads Nature Recovery Strategy (BNRS) and its delivery plan

Broads Plan context

Theme B - Improving landscapes for biodiversity and agriculture. Other themes in the Broads Plan will also benefit.

Recommended decisions

- i. To declare a Biodiversity Emergency, and to adopt the Statement in Appendix 1;
 - ii. To approve the Broads Nature Recovery Strategy (BNRS) and its delivery plan; and
 - iii. To note that the BNRS acts as the Broads Authority Biodiversity Duty Report.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Broads Plan is the long-term management plan for the Broads area that outlines a vision and actions to protect and enhance the area's special qualities. The current plan covers the period 2022–2027 and has six key themes including Theme B: Improving landscapes for biodiversity and agriculture.
- 1.2. The biodiversity of the Broads is significant, with a mosaic of wetland habitats including rivers and dykes, reedbeds, carr woodland, grazing marsh, and fen meadow, and more than 60 broads. Many nationally rare plants and invertebrates have their stronghold in the Broads, including Stoneworts, Water soldier, and rare pondweeds. Norfolk hawker dragonfly, Fen raft spider and the last stronghold for the Swallowtail are some of the iconic invertebrates with many more rare invertebrates. Nationally rare breeding birds include Crane, Bittern and Marsh Harrier. Many species of waterbirds overwinter in the Broads.
- 1.3. In 2011, the University of East Anglia prepared The Broads Biodiversity Audit. It recorded more than 11,000 (17%) of Britain's 65,000-70,000 species, making this the most biodiverse of any designated national park, despite also being the smallest, at 303 sq. km. It also showed that 26% of all UK Biodiversity Action Plan species are found in the Broads. Fen habitat in the Broads is a hotspot for 1,519 Species of Conservation Concern. There are no recent records for 423 (28%) of these, 67 of which are believed to be locally or nationally extinct. The Broads has been losing species at a rate of six per decade for half a century.
- 1.4. Many species are at risk from the impact of climate change, with warmer, wetter winters, and sea-level rise. Some species are intolerant of brackish conditions. These freshwater species will be at risk from tidal surge and overtopping events.
- 1.5. Some habitats, especially water and wetland related, are protected due to their internationally important bird life or rare and diverse wildlife, but do not meet European Habitats Directive standards because, amongst others, of excessive nutrients and sediment. Only 58% of the protected site network in the Broads is in favourable condition (2024).

2. Biodiversity Emergency

- 2.1. There is precedent amongst local authorities at declaring Biodiversity Emergency since 2018. In some cases, declarations were made both on climate and biodiversity. The Broads Authority declared a Climate Emergency in 2019.
- 2.2. The 16th UN Biodiversity Conference (COP16) concluded its work on 2 November 2024 in Colombia with notable achievements on strengthening the role of local communities in biodiversity efforts, approving a Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health, enabling action on invasive species, with a strategy for mobilising finance to follow. It is proposed that the Authority declare a biodiversity emergency, and endorse the Declaration in Appendix 1. The Authority's statement would raise public and political

awareness, emphasising the urgency for immediate action to protect and restore the environment.

- 2.3. The declaration could foster stronger partnerships with local stakeholders, encouraging collaboration on critical issues. Furthermore, it could mobilise the community, increasing volunteer engagement and public education.
- 2.4. The Broads Nature Recovery Strategy and its delivery plan would be a key mechanism to deliver and monitor change and is referenced in the declaration statement.
- 2.5. Of relevance, the Authority is a Supporting Authority working alongside both Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils as they publish the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, with the pre-consultation draft strategy coming to Broads Authority for comment at the meeting on 24 January 2025.

3. Broads Nature Recovery Strategy

- 3.1. The national legislative framework for nature recovery is set through the 25 Year Environment Plan 2018, The Environment Act 2021, and the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023. In addition, the Government has committed to protect 30% of the land and sea of the UK for nature's recovery, by 2030 (30by30).
- 3.2. The Broads Nature Recovery Strategy (BNRS) (2024-2029) replaces the Broads Biodiversity and Water Strategy (2019-2024). It includes a 5-year Delivery Plan which outlines priority actions, either led by the Broads Authority or in partnership with others, as well as projects managed by other organisations working in the Broads. The strategy will be monitored by the Broads Biodiversity Partnership (BBP), a network of organisations, businesses, and individuals working collaboratively to enhance habitats and species.
- 3.3. Members took part in the development of the BNRS during a workshop on 20 September. We thank members for their contributions which helped finalise the BNRS.
- 3.4. The BNRS includes a vision, guiding principles, and details on available resources and mechanisms, such as biodiversity net gain. It assesses the state of the Broads natural environment, including biodiversity gains and losses, drivers of change, pressures, risks, and opportunities. The headline of the vision is for Biodiversity to be thriving in the Broads, which remains a globally important wetland adapting to climate change.
- 3.5. The BNRS targets include seven of the targets for Protected Landscapes, and an additional target for species. Although the locally apportioned targets have been finalised, some of the nationally set targets have not been communicated yet by National England/Defra. The BNRS will be updated when the nationally apportioned targets are known. The Broads Authority acknowledge that it is unable to meet the targets on its own, and collaboration with partners will be essential to meet them. External factors will also impact on delivery.

- 3.6. The BNRS 5-year Delivery Plan will be implemented alongside other relevant plans such as the Broadland Rivers Catchment Plan, the Authority's strategies for managing waterways, tourism, education and integrated access, and site-based plans.
- 3.7. The delivery actions are organised under four foci:
 - i. Water quality and quantity
 - ii. Habitats (wet grassland, fen, fen meadow, reedbed, woodland)
 - iii. Species
 - iv. Monitoring and research (across all three focus above)
- 3.8. We will track the Broads contribution to the National Protected Landscapes Targets in collaboration with Natural England and the Protected Landscape Partnership. The BNRS Delivery Plan will be reviewed annually using a traffic light system to assess progress. Status reports will be presented to the BBP annually. If significant new projects emerge, the Delivery Plan may be updated and made available on the Broads Authority website.
- 3.9. To raise awareness of the BNRS, we have produced an [ArcGIS StoryMap](#) that brings the Broads' habitats and key biodiversity areas to life with detailed maps, and a BNRS Summary (in Appendix 3) that provides a concise, accessible overview, making the strategy easy to understand for a general audience.
- 3.10. Provisions introduced in the Environment Act include a strengthened Biodiversity Duty. The context and requirement for this provision was presented to Authority members on 26 January 2024. It was noted that the Authority is required to publish a biodiversity duty report. The publication of the Broads Nature Recovery Strategy (BNRS) will fulfil this requirement. It is recommended to note that the BNRS acts as the Broads Authority Biodiversity Duty Report.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1. There are no immediate financial implications apart from officer time related to the coordination of the Broads Biodiversity Partnership, reporting requirement on the Biodiversity Duty and monitoring of the Broads Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 4.2. The approach on the biodiversity duty report follows a pragmatic approach. The publication of the BNRS fulfils this requirement.
- 4.3. Any future proposals or commitments as part of fulfilling our Biodiversity Duty or delivering the Broads Nature Recovery Strategy will be managed through our existing business and financial procedures.
- 4.4. Funding for projects will continue to be derived from multiple sources and external funding, including Defra and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

5. Risk implications

- 5.1. Risk relates to timescale, content, and reputation.
- 5.2. Risk of declaring a biodiversity emergency may, as with the climate crisis, create a push back from stakeholders and alarm the public while raising expectations for rapid improvements. Without tangible follow-up actions, the declaration may be viewed as symbolic, increasing pressure on the Broads Authority to deliver measurable results despite limited resources. The content of the declaration details what the Authority resolves to act upon to mitigate that risk.
- 5.3. Risk of failure to complete Biodiversity Duty reporting by 12 weeks after 1 January 2026 is mitigated by the first biodiversity report being complete ahead of the deadline, and thereafter every 5 years. If the BNRS gets adopted in November 2024, the next publication of the biodiversity duty would be due by November 2029. The 2029 deadline will inform future workplans.

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Background papers: [The Authority's role in Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Duty Consideration](#)

[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: all strategic objectives in Theme B

Appendix 1 – Broads Authority statement on the biodiversity crisis

Appendix 2 – [Broads Nature Recovery Strategy \(2024-2029\)](#)

Appendix 3 – [Broads Nature Recovery Strategy 2024-29 Summary Document](#)

Appendix 4 - [ArcGIS StoryMap](#)

Appendix 1 – Biodiversity emergency statement - Broads Authority

Context

As part of the family of Protected Landscapes in England, we recognise that no single site or organisation can address the exacerbating impact of climate change on biodiversity loss.

The Broads Authority notes with concern reports from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) on global species and habitat loss, and also that the Broads has been losing species at a rate of six per decade for half a century. Iconic species in the Broads are further at risk from the impact of climate change, including warmer, wetter winters, and sea-level rise.

The Broads Biodiversity Audit demonstrates the importance of the Broads for UK rare species. The Audit showed that nearly a third of the conservation priority species once found in the Broads have not been recorded since 1988, with many confirmed to be no longer existing in the Broads.

Healthy ecosystems, supported by good ecological condition and sustainable management, deliver vital public goods such as food, recreation, tourism, water, abundant wildlife, and landscape character. The Broads Authority aims to protect the biodiversity that underpins these ecosystems, benefiting visitors, communities, and businesses in the Broads.

Protected Landscapes, like the Broads, hold unique cultural and personal significance, offering intimate spaces for connecting with nature. The Broads Authority plays an influential role in addressing the biodiversity crisis by inspiring land use choices and fostering a deeper connection between people and nature.

Therefore, the Broads Authority resolves to:

- Declare its recognition of the global biodiversity emergency and the local impact this could have on Broads communities;
- Engage with a diverse range of partners: local authorities, environmental NGOs, farmers, the private sector, and local communities, to drive collective action;
- Adopt the Broads Nature Recovery Strategy and seek to implement the 2024-2029 delivery plan towards biodiversity recovery in the Broads;
- Inspire behavioural change, through educational activities, by informing visitors and local communities to take active roles in conservation efforts;
- Support the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies in Norfolk and Suffolk; and
- Develop initiatives in partnership which achieve large-scale benefits, including:
 - Fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange;
 - Expanding networks to enable habitat restoration and connection;
 - Enhancing the Broads Authority estate to support native species;

- Supporting nature-based solutions; and
- Connecting with initiatives beyond the Broads to inspire conservation efforts elsewhere.

This approach highlights the Authority's commitment to reversing biodiversity loss while positioning the Broads as a leader in ecological resilience and nature recovery.