



British Ecological Society

Response to NERC's plans for the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

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January 2006

The British Ecological Society is the learned society for ecology in the UK.¹ As such, the Society feels it appropriate to comment on the Natural Environment Research Council's (NERC) proposal to cut 200 staff and four research facilities at the Centre for Hydrology and Ecology (CEH).²

CEH is the largest research institute carrying out fundamental and applied ecological research in the UK. The BES is concerned that the ecological research capacity of the UK could be seriously diminished by these proposals. The BES urgently seeks reassurance from NERC that the actions taken do not represent an intention to reduce the priority given to the funding of ecological research, a discipline for which NERC is the principal funding agent.

At present, it is unclear what science will be lost in the proposed plans. The BES urges NERC to declare as soon as is possible what science will be cut from CEH. Scientists at CEH have been particularly prominent in providing advice for government policy on major environmental issues including GM crops, agri-environment schemes, air pollution, water resources, climate change and conserving biodiversity. The BES feels that significant loss of key expertise in these areas would impact on the pool of scientific knowledge available to understand the pressing ecological issues currently faced by the UK and other countries, as well as compromising the ability of UK science to solve them.

Making progress in tackling issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss requires long-term large-scale strategic science that CEH is particularly well placed to carry out. Whilst recognising that financial constraints on NERC have led to the proposal to close some CEH sites, the BES urges NERC to declare the measures it will take to maintain the long-term ecological research conducted by CEH at key sites throughout the UK.

The BES is also concerned that possible site closures and staff redundancies could threaten the curation and maintenance of CEH's invaluable long-term data sets on the distribution and abundance of the UK's flora and fauna, and of key environmental parameters. The BES seeks reassurance from NERC that these data sets will continue to be actively maintained.

In conclusion, CEH is an extremely important research institution for ecology due to its scientific expertise, research facilities and data holdings. The BES urges NERC to maintain CEH's strength in those areas of science that are difficult to replace and are vital to the scientific community's ability to address current environmental issues.

¹ The BES has 4,000 members, some of whom are employees of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

² NERC Council Statement of Intent - Centre for Ecology and Hydrology: www.nerc.ac.uk