

ALTER-Net Management Board Meeting, Edinburgh, 15-16th April 2015

Centre for Ecology and Hydrology Edinburgh – Bush Estate EH26 0QB, Scotland, UK

Draft Minutes

Present:

Allan Watt, CEH, MB chair

Andy Sier, CEH, internal communication

Ben Delbaere, ECNC, external communication (by Visimeet)

Carsten Neßhöver, UFZ, science-policy (by Visimeet)

Jiska van Dijk, NINA, vice-chair and strategic advisor

Katie Bates, CEH

Lawrence Jones-Walters, Alterra, high impact action (by Visimeet)

Maurice Hoffmann, INBO, Council chair

Michael Mirtl, EAA, infrastructure (by Visimeet)

Apologies:

Frauke Ecke, SLU, research projects

Petteri Vihervaara, SYKE, research calls

Tessa Van Santen, INBO, secretariat

Timo Assmuth, SKYE, ALTER-Net conference

Philip Roche, IRSTEA, training activities

1. Welcome

Allan welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Minutes of Management Board meeting, Brussels May 2014, & Actions

Item 2. Action will be taken on the matrix/table of ALTER-Net partners in ongoing EU-projects: passed to Petteri by Jiska. See below.

Item 3. Network extension strategy: Ben has drafted the strategy. Allan and Maurice to comment and (all three) will agree next steps. **ACTION 1**

Item 3. CSIC: Maurice and Carsten have had discussions to check for further interest and these efforts will continue (Maurice sending information on his contacts to Carsten). **ACTION 2**

Item 4. Conference: planning well-advanced.

Item 5. Carsten wrote a case for funding to support the development of the Network of Knowledge, which was agreed by Council and carried out with modifications (see below).

Item 6. Joint training activities proposal still pending. **ACTION 3**

Item 7. Proposals on H2020 (and other calls) in development by Petteri with input from Jiska and Allan (see below and paper to Council).

Jiska, Petteri and Allan to hold Skype after this meeting. **ACTION 4**

Item 8. Multi-site experiment guidelines (for future calls) pending.

Allan thanked Tessa on behalf of the Board for the minutes as an agreed record of the Management Board meeting.

3. Council Decisions and feedback

Council requested that the Management Board establish a Horizon-Scanning Task Force. Jiska and Allan to organise the Task Force (Alison, Eeva, Kinga, Ulf, Terry and Stefan suggested as members).

ACTION 5

Other Council actions may require Management Board action e.g. "ALTER-Net will promote IPBES participation through its website... A questionnaire will be sent around by the secretariat to council members to list up who is actually already involved in these IPBES for a..." Maurice and Allan will discuss with the Secretariat and propose appropriate actions for the Management Board. **ACTION 6**

4. ALTER-Net annual event – Nature-Based Solutions conference 2015

Organisation of the Nature-Based Solutions conference May 2015 was discussed. Timo Assmuth has produced a full programme with 25 sessions with up to six presentations in each and "mini-courses". There are (at the time of the MB meeting) 85 people registered, 33 from ALTER-Net, similar to the numbers registered for the previous conference at this stage. A clash with an EEA meeting was noted with concern (e.g. Lawrence and Ben will have to go to the EEA meeting). The conference topic – Nature-Based Solutions – is one that interests the EC greatly and although this means that they have provided considerable support it has also resulted in additional effort, including meetings / phone calls between Maurice (and, to a lesser extent, Allan) and EC RTD.

The Management Board expressed their appreciation of the work done by, in particular, Timo in organising the conference who has done a huge job. The importance of conferences for ALTER-Net was stressed and although links with the EC (and in this case the involvement of the Latvian Presidency) are advantageous, future conferences should ensure that the best possible participation of delegates from ALTER-Net organisations.

An evaluation (lessons-learned) session was proposed for the next Management Board meeting, and this should include Timo. **ACTION 7**

There is a time-slot in the programme (Monday, before the conference "proper" starts) for discussing e.g. a) opportunities in H2020 and b) nature-based solutions. Maurice to ask Petteri to organise a session on the former and Carsten to consider (with Timo and Dagmar) including a session on the latter. **ACTION 8**

Topics for the next conference will be discussed under AOB.

5. Science-policy interface

Carsten summarised progress on the Nature-Based Solutions working group, including a workshop in Berlin. A discussion paper will be prepared for the Ghent conference and further outputs are planned.

Development of a business model for a Network of Knowledge was outlined by Carsten, including a (separate) workshop in Berlin. Carsten also summarised the work done on a H2020 proposal to implement this Network of Knowledge and referred to another (competing) proposal. Both involve ALTER-Net partners. Thus there are separate, connected issues: the development of the ALTER-Net science-policy interface and ALTER-Net policy on forming consortia for H2020 (and other sources of funding). Those involved with Carsten in the H2020 proposal based it on work done in the KNEU and SPIRAL EC RTD projects, including the aim of incorporating KNEU's Network of Knowledge concept in it. Although this project would have a small core team managing the project, it would give ALTER-Net and all its partners the opportunity to participate in the project, if funded. It would also give other networks opportunities too. Some of these networks and ALTER-Net participated in the Berlin workshop, where the concept was presented. An alternative approach, where all ALTER-Net partners formed a consortium for this project was discussed as a possible "lost opportunity".

The general idea of an active knowledge hub was discussed: how can we really make a difference with the knowledge that researchers have? It was agreed that this would have to be addressed no matter what happens on the relevant H2020 call. Options for a database or similar of researchers, skills, expertise and/or thematic issues were discussed. Some concerns about databases were expressed because they quickly become out-of-date. Other ways of tapping into the network of knowledge need to be developed, acknowledging the ever-growing body of scientific knowledge and the complicated science-policy-society landscape. Concerns about the real cost of engaging in the science-policy were also expressed.

It was agreed that the Management Board (or a relevant sub-set of the Board) would discuss ALTER-Net's science-policy interface as soon the results of the call are known. **ACTION 9**

It was further agreed that the Management Board will communicate to the network the way that ALTER-Net would engage in any subsequent project that offers that opportunity. **ACTION 10**

This item was closed after the work done by Carsten in taking the network of knowledge concept forward was gratefully acknowledged.

6. Joint training activities and summer school

Joint training activities

An emailed report from Philip was presented. It was agreed that Philip would develop a joint training activities plan with help from Jiska, Frauke and Allan. **ACTION 11**

Marie-Curie

A proposal (BIOTRAIN) coordinated by Frauke was submitted in 2014 but was unsuccessful. No proposal was submitted to the subsequent call.

Summer School 2014

The Management Board thanked Sanna-Riikka Saarela for the work done over the last two years in organizing the summer schools. She has decided not to continue as organizer because of other commitments. Allan and Sanna-Riikka proposed that Marie Vandewalle as the new organizer and she (and her employer) agreed.

The support of Peyresq Foyer d'Humanisme was gratefully acknowledged.

An Advisory Board with input from the Openness and Operas projects was set up for the first time. With the help of the Advisory Board, a revised programme has been prepared. The conveners proposed that the programme would begin to change more from year to year. This year more emphasis is being placed on natural capital and ecosystem services. The conveners suggest that more emphasis next year is placed on biodiversity conservation and on natural capital and ecosystem services again the following year, marking the final year of Openness and Operas.

Because of the relative timing of the Management Board meetings and necessary planning for the summer schools, the Board is asked to discuss the specific content of summer schools proposed for one year in advance and their general strategy (rather than this year's school). The Board expressed support for the summer schools, their general approach and the involvement of the new Advisory Board. Andy suggests that the programme could be linked to the horizon-scanning activity. The Board discussed ways of promoting the summer school and what categories of students should be targeted. The importance of involving student participants from ALTER-Net partners was emphasised and the policy of involving not also PhD students but also more experienced persons from within and outside the network was emphasised e.g. post-docs. It would, however, appear that this policy is not widely appreciated.

The Board agreed the current funding strategy (including student fees and no more than five grants to students unable to pay the fees) with a contribution of approximately €35,000 from the ALTER-Net budget and agreed in principle to support the 2016 Summer School to allow continuity of planning.

It was also agreed that the LinkedIn alumni network should be maintained and updated (although Facebook pages also exist for individual schools and a successful blog was initiated last year) and that the alumni should be asked to help in promoting the summer school. **ACTION 12**

7. Strategy

The involvement of ALTER-Net in IPBES, EPBRS and Future Earth was discussed, particularly its involvement in IPBES. ALTER-Net is now an official observer and Maurice represented ALTER-Net formally at the last plenary. Others, including Carsten and Allan, were present, as were many former summer school students, and the opportunity was taken to publicize their attendance. Furthermore, two MEP members, György Pataki and Paul Leadley are from ALTER-Net partners.

Some partners are directly involved in working groups and this is likely to increase. Further participation should be encouraged. IPBES was suggested as a possible topic for the next conference, perhaps as a reflection on the Europe and Central Europe Regional Assessment (“what does it mean for Europe”), although the timing of the next conference may be too early. This could, perhaps, be done in partnership. Carsten will discuss options with colleagues and contacts in IPBES and report back to the Management Board with proposal. **ACTION**

8. Promotion of cooperation, including trans-disciplinary activities

ALTER-Net High Impact Action

Lawrence reported that the last Council meeting supported the Management Board recommendations that proposals led by Györgyi Bela of ESSRG and Philip Roche of Irstea should go ahead, provided that they contact ALTER-Net partners through their Council representatives on possible participation of ALTER-Net researchers to the projects. Council decided, however, that a lower budget than recommended should be allocated. This prevented the latter proposal from going ahead.

Maurice reported on the project led by Györgyi Bela on citizen science. They made very good progress, have produced a manuscript for Conservation Biology, and will give two presentations at conferences this year. Györgyi summarized the lessons learnt during the project so far in a short report and offered to do so (in person) at the next Council meeting. Because money is left in their budget they propose to use it on producing a short film. Management Board supported this suggestion: Maurice will communicate this decision and ensure that all the agreed deliverable are completed and ask Györgyi whether the budget was appropriate. **ACTION 13**

The Management Board then discussed whether there should be a new AHIA call. The Board considered that the citizen science project was successful: it engaged the network very effectively (making an effort to involve as many people as possible and providing the opportunity for participants unable to attend the meeting in person to join electronically), has resulted in tangible outputs and is perceived to have been good value for money. On this basis a further call is recommended.

The original intention of allocating budget for travel and accommodation, not personnel costs, was discussed and supported despite some concern that this might limit the participation of some partners or individuals. It was agreed that it is difficult to set a limit both because costs will vary according to where meetings are held and how many participate. Furthermore, the Management Board support the concept of involving as many partners as possible in these projects. The Management Board would like at all times to ensure that the projects represent value for money but consider that their earlier estimate of 25,000 Euros remains a reasonable cost and recommend this

as a limit to any future project subject to feedback from Györgyi on the costs of the citizen science project.

The Management Board recommend that the current selection process is satisfactory and ask the Council to agree that the Management Board instigate a call to select a new AHIA project with a budget limit of 25,000 Euros. The process would be managed by Lawrence with support from Maurice, Györgyi and Jiska. **ACTION 14**

Györgyi also proposed that the project team should continue their work as an ALTER-Net activity on citizen science, looking for funding for their cooperation. The Management Board gave some support to this suggestion and decided to ask for a written proposal from the project team to take this forward. **ACTION 15**

Environmental History project ['Back to the Future']

Andy reported that this project is ongoing but most elements are complete or nearly so. Only the progress of the Slovakian sub-project is of concern. A paper has been produced by the Austrian group but further publications and other outputs (e.g. maps) are being considered. The Management Board supported the idea of a web-based presentation, including an overview of all sub-projects, with appropriate communication to highlight these outputs.

Multi-site experiment

An update on the current multi-site experiment was presented. The project is well on track and the experimental work is scheduled to finish by the end of 2105.

The Management Board recommend a new call and, providing Council agree, will implement the procedure. **ACTION**

Mobility Fund

A total of 3 schemes were approved by the committee (Allan Watt, Philip Roche and Jiska van Dijk). Two of the 3 schemes were approved to attend 'ALTER-Net activities', that is one person got travel reimbursement to attend the ALTER-Net summer school (September 2014) and a number of persons got travel/hotel reimbursement to attend the Ghent Conference planning meeting (December 2014). One Mobility Scheme was approved to 3 researchers from SYKE to meet researchers of NINA.

The Management Board recommend stricter implementation of the Mobility Scheme, that is, the reimbursement of travel and accommodation to true exchange meetings with researchers from different ALTER-Net partners. The guidelines should state more clearly that no mobility fund will be provided to attend ALTER-Net activities defined under the yearly work programme.

9. EU projects ALTER-Net

Ongoing work, led by Petteri, on ALTER-Net participation in H2020 calls and other funding sources was presented and discussed. This includes plans for greater sharing on information on upcoming opportunities, and meetings to discuss potential proposals. It was agreed that Petteri, Jiska and Allan would take this work forward and present options to the Council. **ACTION**

The Management Board briefly discussed potential lessons learnt from the proposals to be submitted in April 2015. Because of the involvement of several people on the Management Board in these proposals, it was agreed that the Management Board should discuss this further at their next meeting. Meanwhile, the Management Board suggested that Council discuss the issue at their next meeting or, if they also feel that this is premature, at some later date.

10. Infrastructure – status and links to LTER-Europe and Lifewatch

Michael presented a detailed report on infrastructure activities, including the production of an ALTER-Net position paper *Biodiversity research infrastructures requirements*. Prefaces for different user communities (EC stakeholders, Research Infrastructures, IPBES, biodiversity research, Network of Knowledge) are still required and lead authors were identified for each. EC stakeholders and Research Infrastructures are already done; IPBES – Maurice; biodiversity research – Andy to consider who should do this; Network of Knowledge – Carsten. Michael will send a further draft to the others first. **ACTION 16**

Authorship of the paper was also discussed and it was agreed that it should be limited to ALTER-Net authors. Allan will look at it from an EPBRS perspective. **ACTION 17**

Michael also summarised the collaborative work involving ILTER, ExpeER and EnvEurope resulting in a full upgrade of the DEIMS webservice, enabling integrated access to site metadata, site data and contacts.

11. Communication

Andy and Ben reported on impressive activity on communication. One potential problem is that feedback on communication isn't often received. Summer school students, however, regularly provide feedback on the web-site, which Andy acts on. Further redesign is planned, although the Management Board consider that the current web-site is very effective. Regular revision of the Communications Strategy is also planned.

A revised brochure will be available for the conference and the annual letter to partners will be accompanied by copies of the brochure. Partners are also invited to make their brochures available at the conference.

The Management Board welcome offers of support to the over-stretched communications team.

12. Finances

The financial reports were presented and discussed. The Management Board welcomed their new format.

13. Preparation for Council meeting

Papers for the next Council meeting from all Activity leaders should be submitted to Tessa, Maurice and Allan as soon as possible and by 5th May at the latest. They should succinctly (one page maximum) summarise progress and clearly state the proposed objectives for the coming year, and the budget requested. **ACTION**

14. Any other business

Next ALTER-Net conference:

The following suggestions for the next conference were briefly discussed:

- IPBES regional assessment
- CAP and greening
- Ecosystem research and business
- Biodiversity conservation

15. Date and venue of next meeting

It was agreed that there should be two Management Board meetings per year, one where as many members as possible attended in person and one virtual meeting. It was agreed that the virtual meeting should be done by Visimeet, which was successfully used during most of this meeting. The only problem encountered was an internet problem that affected all computing facilities at CEH

Edinburgh on the second day of the meeting. No suggestions for a meeting venue were received but it was proposed that the meeting should include some form of physical activity.