

Submitted to Technical consultation on the biodiversity metric
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Confidentiality and your response

1 Would you like your response to be confidential?

No

If you answered 'Yes' to this question, please give your reason.:

2 What is your name?

What is your name?:
Carol Williams

3 What is your email address?

What is your email address?:
cwilliams@bats.org.uk

4 What is your organisation?

What is your organisation?:
Bat Conservation Trust

Part 1: Overview

Part 2: Proposals for the Statutory metric (version 4.0)

2.2 Spatial risk multiplier and wider value adjustments

5 Do you think that the spatial risk multiplier values need reconsidering to better incentivise high value off-site delivery?

Other

Provide your reasons for this answer:

On-site or adjacent to site delivery of BNG should remain the priority. This is of high importance for the species supported by the habitats lost or degraded by development and also for local communities who will lose a local natural asset if the gain is moved outside their neighbourhood. To take the units offsite could result in species such as bats, losing access to vital supporting habitats in their core sustenance zone. This would be highly detrimental and could threaten the ongoing viability of a roost.

Where these matters have been taken into consideration and offsite is considered the way forward in a case, then high value off-site delivery should be encouraged. Enhancement to or creation of high distinctiveness habitats should be given a high enough weighting in the metric to incentivise developers to deliver biodiversity uplift on these habitats. It is recognised that high distinctiveness habitats are not scored in the metric to ensure avoidance of damage or destruction, which is correct, but there does need to be the possibility to create or enhance. It is also recognised that woodland creation will not be classed as high distinctiveness habitat due to the time to reach maturity and maximum benefit being over 30 years and that the medium category is appropriate in such cases. However, the explanation of this needs to be made more prominent.

The spatial risk multiplier should not be changed generally across all habitat types, as it could lead to encouraging off-site delivery on low distinctiveness habitats.

For any off-site delivery, it will be vitally important that there is a requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies to be referred to and utilised. As it stands, due to the changing timelines of these two strands of work (BNG and LNRS preparation), the readiness of the LNRS might not be in alignment with the BNG process but the time lag should be relatively small and LNRS must be a signposted from the outset.

2.3 Supporting users in proposing realistic on-site habitats

6 Do you think that providing guidance on considerations for what habitats can be typically achieved on-site would be helpful?

Yes (if you have ideas on how this would work, provide us with details)

Provide your reasons for this answer:

Yes, we agree that providing guidance on considerations for what habitats can be typically achieved on-site would be helpful.

There have been cases of BNG delivery that consist of small parcels of habitat which may be too small to be ecologically functional and are not connected to a wider ecological network. There is a need to consider the distance to the next nearest habitat of that type, the size/scale of the habitat being provided as a minimum viable area and also local appropriateness. All of this could be set as high-level principles.

This guidance should steer developers towards deliverable and ecologically coherent proposals. However, the guidance cannot be too prescriptive as

what is appropriate will vary greatly case by case across the range of conditions in England. The guidance should set principles and give high level guidance and require input from local perspectives and priorities, such as the LNRs, for the detail. In addition, currently onsite gains have no monitoring or reporting requirements, nor any enforcement mechanism. This has been seen as a weakness when considering onsite gain. We urge the Government to introduce a requirement for the monitoring and reporting of onsite gains by ecological experts through the local planning authority and an enforcement mechanism if onsite (or off-site) gains are not delivered. Until this is addressed, the current lack of scrutiny over onsite delivery of BNG, means that it will be crucial for onsite gains to be well-designed from the outset.

2.4 Biodiversity metric guidance and case studies

7 Do you have any suggestions for additional case studies that we should produce?

Yes (provide your reasons for this answer)

Provide your reasons for this answer:

Yes. We would strongly recommend case studies for the incorporation of protected species. There is an acknowledged need for clarity in this matter. BCT has a theoretical example of how to apply the process to bats and could provide real case studies too. These are vital in ensuring that the metric is only used as a tool and that species protection and gain is clearly incorporated into the Biodiversity Net gain process. It would also be useful to have a case study for infrastructure.

8 Do you agree with the described measures and proposals to help with applying the metric to minerals developments?

Do not know

Provide your reasons for this answer:

2.5 Further improvements for the statutory metric

9 Are there any improvements you would make to the following components of biodiversity metric 3.1 in the short-term, regarding user-friendliness, simplicity or function? Provide details, specifying which element (a to f) they relate to.

Provide your reasons for this answer:

With respect to the metric calculation we are aware that high distinctiveness habitats receive a negative score. As mentioned in response to the first question, we understand that is to ensure damage and destruction of these habitats does not occur and that is correct and vital. However, it is counter intuitive to have enhancement or creation of high distinctiveness habitats scoring negatively whilst low distinctiveness habitat creation scores more highly. It is important that the metric and tool can prevent damage but still allow enhancement and creation with regard high distinctiveness habitats. We would also like to see that local distinctiveness given value. This would likely need to be via utilising the Local Nature Recovery Strategies. With respect to e) case studies, we have given our response on the need for protected species case studies in an earlier question. It would also be valuable if not all case studies only met the 10% gain but showed how it is possible to go beyond this. A case study on an infrastructure project would be helpful.

10 Do you think there are other biodiversity metrics that should be considered alongside biodiversity metric 3.1 for measuring mandatory biodiversity net gain?

Other

Provide your reasons for this answer:

We are not aware of any other metrics that are currently available to use alongside biodiversity metric 3.1. We are aware that early pilots of biodiversity offsetting in some areas, such as Somerset, successfully included species within their metrics and this would be worth exploring for the future. We would welcome any discussion on how species could be applied via a metric type of approach.

Part 3: Proposals beyond version 4.0

3.3 Species

11 Do you have any practical suggestions on how we could use species or other ecological data to improve:

Yes (provide your reasons for this answer)

Provide your reasons for this answer:

We know that species can readily be considered as part of the process and at its simplest the theoretical approach produced by consultancy colleagues and BCT can be found <https://cdn.bats.org.uk/uploads/images/Bat-Species-Core-Sustenance-Zones-and-Habitats-for-Biodiversity-Net-Gain.pdf?v=1596873761> . This approach has been widely used and real case studies can be supplied. Important in this process is knowing where key species are and their core sustenance zones. As such losses and gains of units of habitat to support these species can be calculated. It would be possible to use ongoing monitoring of impacted and adjacent roosts to see how they fare pre and post BNG provision. It would also be possible to directly sample levels of bat activity in the relevant landscapes and habitats provided by the process pre and post provision to evaluate the success of measures carried out under BNG.

Yes (provide your reasons for this answer)

Provide your reasons for this answer:

The starting point for this answer is the same as a) above. We know that species can readily be considered as part of the process and at its simplest the theoretical approach produced by consultancy colleagues and BCT can be found <https://cdn.bats.org.uk/uploads/images/Bat-Species-Core-Sustenance-Zones-and-Habitats-for-Biodiversity-Net-Gain.pdf?v=1596873761> . This approach has been widely used and real case studies can be supplied. Important in this process is knowing where key species are and their core sustenance zones. Additionally with the knowledge of the habitats of importance per species and their core sustenance zones, this knowledge can be used to aid the design of successful habitat interventions. Bats are an indicator species so will provide levels of confidence for wider species provision. It would be beneficial for all involved if the approach for species could be included in the guidance that surrounds the metric. BCT and our colleagues in the industry would be very happy to work with Defra and NE on this. Having case studies would be a big help in the short term.

3.4 Competency

12 Do you think that metric users should be required to attend a verified training course or be accredited before completing the calculation? Explain why and what these should cover.

Yes, both (training course and accreditation)

Provide your reasons for this answer:

BCT thinks that metric users should be required to both attend a verified training course and be accredited before completing the calculation. Metric assessors, e.g., LPA ecologists, should also be trained and accredited. BCT has experience in the value an accredited route can bring. This is from working with Natural England and CIEEM on the Earned Recognition pilot for ecological consultants who are applicants for bat mitigation licences. We note that there will be a time lag between mandatory BNG and a training and accreditation scheme being put in place. Local authorities will need support and funding to ensure that BNG plans are being checked with the right ecological expertise. This will be particularly important during the gap between BNG becoming mandatory and accreditation schemes with associated training coming into place. Currently, only one third of planning authorities have access to in-house ecological expertise. Ongoing monitoring of how the metric is being applied will be crucial to inform ongoing training needs, as well as changes to the metric.

Consultee feedback on the online survey

13 Overall, how satisfied are you with our online consultation tool?

Satisfied

Please give us any comments you have on the tool, including suggestions on how we could improve it: