

Environment Bulletin



Network Rail to adopt Defra Biodiversity Metric for measuring the net impact of capital development projects on biodiversity

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Overview

Since 2017 Network Rail has operated a bespoke Biodiversity Calculator using a metric created by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to account for biodiversity losses and gains resulting from development works. It had been planned to update the Network Rail Biodiversity Calculator (NRBC) once the Defra v2.0 metric was released to keep the two tools aligned.

In July 2019 Defra published the updated Defra Biodiversity Metric v2.0 as a beta test version; Natural England are now promoting the v2.0 metric for immediate use and will gather user feedback to finalise the tool in Spring 2020.

A number of practical factors have been considered:

- Defra v2.0 is currently a beta version, and could be updated again in early 2020;
- Natural England have provided a fully functional Excel calculator platform for using the v2.0 metric, along with extensive published guidance;
- Natural England have committed to further reviewing and updating their biodiversity metric at appropriate intervals as national strategies and methods for measuring net biodiversity impacts continue to evolve.

Based on these factors it has been decided that Network Rail should not continue investing resources to maintain a bespoke NR Biodiversity Calculator and should instead move to adopting the Defra/NE metric.

Discussion points

New Network Rail infrastructure development works that:

- satisfy the NR/L2/ENV/015 requirements for undertaking biodiversity accounting, and
- are at GRIP 3 or earlier (and equivalent work phasing for Works Delivery) at the date of this Bulletin; should start using the new Defra/NE v2.0 beta calculator with immediate effect. This will generate early experience of the operability of the new toolkit, and support Defra/NE's request for beta testing feedback.

Network Rail infrastructure development works that satisfy the NR/L2/ENV/015 requirements for undertaking biodiversity accounting, but have already passed GRIP 3 (and equivalent work phasing for Works Delivery) at the date of this bulletin may continue using Network Rail

Network Rail will establish a technical working group (TWG) on Biodiversity Accounting. The TWG will focus on working through and resolving challenges in consistently applying Net Gain Biodiversity outcomes, particularly on infrastructure development projects. The shift to using the Defra Biodiversity Metric will be included in the TWG remit. Volunteers for membership of the Biodiversity Accounting TWG are being collated.

The Natural England link below provides access to Defra Biodiversity Metric v2.0 documents
<http://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/>

The Defra 2.0 calculator, guidance documents and 'user feedback' survey will either be hosted

Biodiversity Calculator (NRBC) if baseline assessments have already been completed using the NRBC. These works may transition to the Defra/NE v2.0 beta calculator on a voluntary basis.

Withdrawal of the NRBC will require a variation to NR/L2/ENV/015 (para. 6.1), which currently specifies use of the NRBC only. STE will manage those changes to the L2 standard during the post-implementation review, to be completed within 6 months.

or linked via our Safety Central pages. We will also set up a redirect message in Safety Central to steer people to the Defra tool.

If you have any queries please contact an STE Environment Team member direct, or via the SustainableDevelopment@networkrail.co.uk mailbox. Alternatively you could post on the Yammer sites for Environment and Sustainable Development.

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