

# Defra Review 2011-2014

28/05/2014

March 2014 marked the end of the most recent contract between the NBN Trust and Defra. Two and half years have passed very quickly and we've delivered a wide-ranging suite of projects to support the ongoing development of the Network through many of our partners. The contract was founded on the five themes of NBN Gateway development, Improving data flow and exchange, Wider use of online recording and web services, Development of NBN Record Cleaner rule sets and supporting the Association of Local and Environmental Record Centres (ALERC) through the provision of a Development Officer.

The ongoing NBN Gateway development and associated servicing of it through data loading, satisfying access requests and providing technical help to data providers has been the bedrock of contracts over the previous years. During this iteration, we saw the establishment of the JNCC contribution contract approach and a shift to direct funding from Defra. Changes to the funding mechanism didn't however hamper development of the NBN Gateway, which carried on apace and resulted in the release of version 5 in late 2013.

The Improving data flow and exchange theme saw a mix of gap analysis and training events led by the NBN Trust, JNCC staff and LRC partners. The gap analysis work involved 23 LRCs comparing their local data holdings with those on the NBN Gateway, determining access constraints of relevant datasets they wanted to use and preparing standard texts to streamline the access request process.

The analysis showed that the amount of additional data available through the NBN Gateway ranged from around 6,000 records representing 7% of the LRC's own data holdings to 367,000 records, representing 57% of their own holdings. The mean figure was around 67,000 records, representing 21%. The number of additional datasets, which may contain relevant data, varied between 66 and 208 for the LRCs. The analysis clearly showed that there are datasets available through the NBN Gateway, which some LRCs may benefit from having access to.

The regional data management component of this theme saw basic data management workshops led by JNCC and the NBN Trust held in London and Birmingham and attended by over 70 members. Phase two of these workshops picked up on the requirement for training in how to setup online recording websites using Indicia. Events were held at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology with John van Breda and his team leading the teaching.

The regional workshops were supplemented with data management training events run by the LRCs. Over 30 events at locations including Cumbria in the far North West, Sussex in the South East and Dorset in the South West dealt with a series of locally important data management issues. Workshop topics included basic data entry and management, verification and the use of different online recording systems. Helping LRCs to engage directly with their recorders in this way has not only raised the competencies of the formal skills base being covered; it also provided opportunities to renew and refresh existing relationships with key local recorders.

The Wider use of online recording and web services has seen a suite of smaller projects and initiatives delivered. We've continued our relationship with Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL) through working with them on the development of an online recording portal for a project they are undertaking with the Royal Parks. The implementation has seen Indicia components married with their existing .net technologies to demonstrate that elements of the tool kit can be truly integrated with other ways of working. In addition they've helped us provide a snapshot of some of the issues other Indicia implementers have encountered through a review of six LRCs across the country using the technology.

Another key element of this theme has been working with CIEEM to establish a portal for ecological consultants to upload their survey records. The portal, again built on the Indicia platform, allows consultants to upload spreadsheets of species records, which can then be validated and verified using the standard iRecord toolsets, before being made available through the NBN Gateway.

Wrapping this work together has been an element of coordination, which has led to the establishment of a draft set of online recording standards, and meetings to bring developers of non-Indicia systems together to discuss ways in which we can better work together.

Staying with the data-in part of our remit is the Development of NBN Record Cleaner rule sets. These rule sets, which include information on existing distribution and date ranges when you would expect to see them, have been developed by the taxon experts, often using existing data from the NBN Gateway. The contract has allowed for the collation of rules for over 2,600 taxa from 10 taxon groups. The rule sets are available for use in iRecord and will be incorporated into NBN Record Cleaner.

The final element of this contract has been the support for a development officer for the Association of Local and Environmental Record Centres (ALERC). Tom Hunt has been in post since 2012 and has helped deliver a rich and varied work programme including support for Natural England's relationship with LRCs and the progression of ALERC's accreditation programme.