

BARS eNews

The e-newsletter of the UK Biodiversity Action Reporting System

Second Edition

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BARS Team Update



Oliver Grafton
Programme Manager

Katharine Parkes
Project Officer

John Bedford
Technical Assistant

Oliver is to become a father for the first time over the Christmas period. The festive bundle is due to arrive on December 20th. Oliver will be on paternity leave following the Christmas break and will return to work on 24th January.

Katharine Parkes remains on sick leave. No firm details but we are hopeful she may begin a return to work in the New Year. We send her our best wishes for a happy Christmas.

BARS Development: Implications for current BARS

What are we doing?

The BARS team are leading a programme of phased development which will add new capabilities to the Biodiversity Action Reporting System. Work has begun on the first phase which we hope to complete and release by April 2011. This will add new mapping capabilities, refreshing the standards used to describe action and add a first version data import facility. We hope to then move to a second phase to add more flexible action reports aggregating statistics for any defined geographic area. We don't expect to move to this second phase before April. A final phase will then follow to reassess the management of biodiversity action plans and projects.

We are now part way through the first phase of development which is aimed at ...

- **Building new mapping capabilities** to view the actual distribution and report biodiversity action across a landscape.
- **Tightening data standards** for recording biodiversity action to support more flexible aggregated reports on what is actually taking place within different geographic boundaries, e.g. a country, county, or national park.
- **Importing action data** in a standard way that can be used by partners to populate BARS remotely, building content towards greater completeness.

It is hoped that a successful technical build and website implementation of this first phase will be released by April 2011. It is not yet clear how rapidly we will be able to progress the second and third phases of development following this. However, the initial set of improvements will really add value for anyone involved in planning biodiversity action, especially those coordinating work across partnerships.

How will BARS change?

In staging development a distinction has been made between Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP) and Biodiversity Action. The first two phases of development are specifically aimed at biodiversity action. These initial phases will not add new functionality for the recording, management or reporting of BAPs in BARS. Whilst there is certainly no intention to reduce BAP level functionality during development we think some of the action level changes will have implications. We will seek to minimise the impact of these until we are able to complete the third and final phase of development. Each phase of development will be released as it is completed.

The first phase of development will be released in April. This should have minimal impact on existing functionality and use of the current site. We hope to release the new mapping functionality alongside what is already available. However, there are significant changes required behind the scenes to populate and operate these maps. It should be possible for us to manage these changes independently to some degree, but there are things you could do now to help ensure your actions are compatible with the new capabilities. *Further advice is provided in the training & support article below.* An annotated PowerPoint presentation illustrating the likely new action mapping capabilities and future reporting abilities is *available to [download from the website](#).*

The second phase of development is unlikely to be release until summer of 2011 at the earliest. This will seek to add new action search and reporting tools which build on the new mapping. When these are released they will replace the current action search tools and reports. At this stage it will be necessary to manage a full transition to the new spatial database and the old database will no longer be maintained. It is this stage of development that is likely to have implications for current BAP level functionality. These should be minimal but may not be fully resolved until the third phase of development can be completed.

The third phase of development is much less clear at this stage but will aim to reassess the management of biodiversity action plans and projects in BARS. The decision to leave this till last in part reflects the current uncertainty that remains over the future approaches to BAP within each of the four countries. The work will depend heavily on further clarity on the country biodiversity strategies and their reporting requirements and the resource available. In the mean time all associated actions will be transferred to the new system and we will aim to minimise disruption to the links and reports currently available for the parent BAP.

Do I need to do anything to my actions in current BARS?

Actions in the current system need to be copied across to a new spatial database. This is necessary to enable action mapping and future spatial reporting when released. Initially this will be run alongside the existing database, but after later development phases the current database is likely to be disabled. We are preparing a full translation table to illustrate how all current action data fields will be mapped across to the new system and the decisions that have to be made. It should be possible for us to do this translation independently to some degree, but your input will help maximise the compatibility of your action data with new mapping and also future reporting functions.

We have prepared some guidelines on some steps we know you could take now to better prepare your actions for transfer. We will trial an automated translation in the new year which will help us clarify further issues we need to manage. Some refinements may only be possible once the new system and tools are available.

In the mean time can I continue to record and update actions in current BARS?

Yes. Between now and April you can continue to add and update actions in BARS in the usual way, but we would encourage you to:

- a) add a grid-reference to describe the location
- b) check that the action categories you use are compatible with those being used in the new data standard.

Following April we may add some additional guidance to the existing action capture/editing tools to help manage compatibility between the parallel action data standards. Later next year we hope to release a new action capture tool that will mark completion of the move across to the new data standard.

Can I continue to record and update Biodiversity Action Plans in current BARS?

Yes. Initial development is not intending to affect existing functionality at the BAP level. However, the action level changes implemented as part of the second phase of development are likely to have some implications that we will need to manage. The third phase of development will aim to reassess the management of biodiversity action plans and projects in BARS. It is not yet clear when it will be possible to carry out this phase of development or what decisions might be made. In the mean time we intend to maintain as closely as possible current BAP level recording and reporting abilities.

System Maintenance & Hosting July – December 2010

BARS Maintenance

Thank you for continuing to report website bugs and issues via the “contact us” link on the website. Below is a summary of maintenance tasks that have been completed since Summer:

- ✓ 'Additional comments' added by users when editing Targets now appear on LBAP Partnership target-based reports.
- ✓ Reminders and prompts for users to update 'Action Goals' and 'Resources' added/updated
- ✓ Two new threat categories (Habitat loss / degradation fragmentation, Disease) added the list of threat categories for assessments.
- ✓ Numerous text updates and clarifications
- ✓ Notification emailing system updated

Training & Support : Articles

3 things you can do now to better prepare your actions new functionality

1. ACTION LOCATION

Background: The new system will be spatially enabled meaning it will be able to understand and represent locations. Knowing exactly where an action is taking place will allow it to be better represented within action maps and contribute to future action reports for relevant geographic areas.

What can I do now? Prioritising current actions, you can add a grid reference to describe the location of your action more precisely in the current version of BARS. This will enable the new system to map the action as a dot on a map and determine whether it should contribute to future spatial reports.

What can I do later? Once the new action capture/editing tool is available it will be possible for you to describe a polygon (boundary) on a map to indicate the location and extent of a new or existing action. This is the location information that will be encouraged for all new action added to BARS. A full version of the new action capture/editing tool may not be available until the second phase of development is complete.

What if you do nothing? As a default we will attempt to associate the action with a polygon describing the geographic area of the BAP to which it relates, e.g. LBAP boundary. However, it may be inappropriate to map some or all of these actions because the boundary available too large (e.g. Country BAP), or inappropriate for the type of action (e.g. a County boundary may usefully represent the location and extent of education & awareness raising actions, whereas field boundaries would be more appropriate for habitat or species management actions). It will also limit their ability to contribute to future spatial reports (e.g. cannot tell if an action with a country boundary is actually taking place within an LBAP boundary).

2. ACTION TYPE CATEGORIES

Background: The action categories within BARS are being restructured and shortened. The current two tier approach is being retained, but the terminology changed to better represent the biodiversity objective of the work being carried out. The first tier will continue to establish the broad type of action. The second tier will now be used to indicate the biodiversity objective that the particular action is aimed towards. This reflects an attempt to disaggregate the relatively short term practical action taken from what can often be a longer term biodiversity objective. For example: in 2002 fell 10ha of conifers, in 2005 relax grazing pressure to allow natural regeneration. These are two habitat management actions which contribute towards a shared biodiversity objective to restore heathland habitat on a site.

We have prepared an **Action Category Translation Table** to illustrate how current categories of action match across to the new action type / biodiversity objective structure. This can be [downloaded from the BARS website](#). By referring to the table you can determine which categories are being retained and how we plan to represent them in the new structure. It should be possible for us to do this translation independently to some degree, but in some cases your input will help maximise the value of the data transferred. We have prepared the following guidelines on some steps we know you could take now to better prepare your actions for transfer.

What can I do now? The translation table will be used to automate as far as possible the transfer of action categories from the current structure to the new one. There are some things you can do now to improve the accuracy of this transfer for your actions. The majority of current categories are to be retained, renamed or translated across to the new system. However, there is an intention to drop a small number of existing categories either because they do not represent practical biodiversity action, are not well used, or are types of information best managed by other information systems. Anyone adding actions to the current version of BARS should ensure they use existing categories that will be retained in the new system.

Those of you with actions in the current system can use the translation table check to see how your action categories will be carried across. We believe that in the majority of cases there is little use made of the categories we plan to drop. Where they are used we think the actions against them could often be represented by other categories. This is an opportunity to review the action categories you currently use and, especially for those allocated to be dropped, consider whether they are better represented by a category that the table indicates will be retained. When we actually perform the data transfer we will notify anyone with actions in categories to be dropped and seek to help reallocate them. If you have any specific concerns do get in touch. It may be that these can be addressed once the new system is available to use.

What can I do later? As part of the April release we are considering how we might make it easier for you to confirm the actual biodiversity objective of an action. A full version of the new action capture/editing tool may not be available until the second phase of development is complete.

In many cases the data translation we conduct should automatically translate your actions to the most appropriate action type and biodiversity objective. However, in some cases current sub-categories could potentially fit several objectives. In these cases the translation table indicates the biodiversity objective that we will use as a default. For this we have taken a precautionary approach and selected the lesser of the possible objective types. This may not be correct and you may wish to reallocate the action to the greater biodiversity objective once the new system is available.

In cases where actions are recorded against a sub-category that is to be dropped, the action will be retained against the parent category alone. In the few cases where the parent category is to also be dropped the actions will be retained but their ability to be included in action maps and future spatial reports will be severely limited. Once the new version of BARS is available you will be able to allocate a new action type and biodiversity objective to these actions where appropriate.

What if you do nothing?

As a default we will attempt to translate current actions from their current categories across to the new structure. The implication of doing nothing now or later to refine the action type and biodiversity objective allocated to your actions depends on how your actions are currently categorised in BARS.

Were an action is currently recorded against a category that could fit several biodiversity objectives in the new system the default we allocate may not be accurate. This will result in a misrepresentation of the work in action maps and future spatial reports.

Were an action is recorded against a category that will not be retained in the new system the action will be retained but their ability to be included in action maps and future spatial reports will be severely limited in the new system.



3. DATA CLEANING

In preparing for the new mapping and later reporting capabilities it is a good time to encourage a data spring clean in BARS. We would like to encourage you to archive any actions you feel are no longer appropriate or valid for reporting in BARS.



<http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk/>

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