

# ERIC NE

## Environmental Record Centre North East

### Information Sheet

#### Background

##### *What is ERIC?*

ERIC stands for Environmental Records Information Centre. It will be the regional environmental records centre for the North East of England, covering Northumberland, Tyne & Wear, County Durham and Tees Valley.

##### *What will ERIC do?*

ERIC will hold information on important species, habitats and sites in the North East. Such data is currently held by a wide range of organisations in a number of different formats and is often difficult to access. ERIC will bring all this together, put paper records into an electronic format if necessary, validate and verify data, and improve access to biodiversity information in the region.

In the short-term ERIC will hold and/or manage:

- A regional species database
- Available GIS data on BAP priority habitats
- GIS boundary data for Local Wildlife Sites, SSSIs, SPAs, SACs and Ramsar sites in the region.

As ERIC grows and becomes more established the range and number of data sets that it will hold will grow. In the longer term it is hoped that ERIC will also hold data on the region's geology and geomorphology.

##### *Why do we need ERIC?*

Access to good quality biodiversity information is needed by a wide range of organisations to inform their work and to ensure that they meet their statutory requirements. Currently there is no single repository for biodiversity data in the region. Data is highly dispersed and kept in a number of different formats (including paper records) so for the majority of organisations getting hold of the full range of data they require is a difficult or impossible task. ERIC will make access to biodiversity data much simpler.

The information held by ERIC is relevant to:

- Nature conservation organisations and local BAP processes
- Monitoring and setting of regional and local sustainability and environmental indicators
- Development control planning

- Strategic planning (regional and local)
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process
- Research and education
- Site management

*What kinds of information will ERIC be able to provide?*

Amongst the products that ERIC will be able to provide are:

- Details of habitats, designated sites and notable species found within a user defined area (such as a local authority boundary or a project or planning application area)
- Habitat maps showing the locations of specific habitats throughout the region
- Distribution maps for species
- Lists of all notable or BAP species found within the region or within specific districts

*Where will ERIC get the information it uses?*

ERIC will directly own very little of the data it utilises. Instead it will hold and manage data on behalf of other organisations. It is anticipated that ERIC will hold data provided by, among others, Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, the National Trust, local Wildlife Trusts, Local BAP partnerships, local authorities, local species recorders and recording groups.

New data will be added as it becomes available from organisations and individuals.

## **Management of ERIC**

*Who will run ERIC?*

A fundamental principal of ERIC is that it will work for and be directed by its users rather than by any one single organisation. A Governing Board which includes representatives from the wildlife trusts, the local BAP partnerships, local authorities and regional recorders has been set up to oversee the management of ERIC.

*Where will ERIC be based?*

ERIC is being hosted by Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums and is based in the Great North Museum: Hancock in Newcastle upon Tyne.

*Won't a single base in Newcastle be too remote for many data providers?*

ERIC will manage the organisation of biological data for the whole region. The physical base for ERIC is in Newcastle but staff work closely with local Wildlife Trusts and local biodiversity partnerships and through them the wider conservation communities in each sub region. The aim is that ERIC becomes the means by which all local organisations manage their biological data.

*What is the timescale for creating ERIC?*

We aim to achieve a fully functional ERIC by the autumn of 2010. However ERIC will become operational in late January 2010, building on the work of previous initiatives such as the EYE Project (Exploring Your Environment) This will mean that a region-wide facility for storing both habitat and species data will exist for the first time.

### **Relationships with data providers**

*I am a local recorder. Why should I share my data with ERIC?*

ERIC will provide many benefits to organisations working in biological recording such as

- Organisation of biological data into an electronic format that can be easily searched and transferred
- Provision of expertise/training to enable small groups to manage their data efficiently and in a compatible format enabling a two-way flow of information
- Access to additional records/habitat information (including historical)relevant to individual groups or individual recorder
- Provision of biological data to improve decision making at all levels (local, regional and national)

Currently it is difficult for organisations to gain access to the biodiversity information that they need to inform their work. Sharing data with ERIC will ensure that it can be used by planners and nature conservation professionals to help protect and conserve the species and habitats that you care about.

*I would prefer to share my data with my local Wildlife Trust or BAP partnership*

Sharing your data with ERIC will ensure that it can be used by your local Wildlife Trust or BAP partnership. It is likely that your Wildlife Trust or BAP will request your permission to share it with ERIC anyway. ERIC should not be seen as being separate or remote from these but rather as the mechanism by which local nature conservation organisation manage their own biodiversity information. ERIC will have strong links with local organisations and these organisations will help to control the direction and activity of ERIC.

*What control will I have of data shared with ERIC?*

The ownership and intellectual copyright of all data shared with ERIC will remain with the original recorder or recording organisation. ERIC will have data sharing agreements with recorders which will allow data owners to specify how the data can be used and who it may be passed to. Many recorders will be familiar with such agreements through data sharing with the EYE Project or the Durham Biodiversity Data Service.

*Some of my records are for sensitive or protected species. Would ERIC make these available to third parties?*

ERIC, in common with other biological records centres in the UK, will have written protocols for dealing with protected or sensitive species records. Access to these records would be controlled to legitimate biodiversity uses by known individuals. The data sharing agreements that recorders would sign will give them the opportunity to identify which species they regard as being sensitive and to specify what controls should be placed on access to this data. As data owner you will retain control of who can see your records.

*Will ERIC be making a profit from my records?*

ERIC will be a not for profit organisation and any money it makes (for example from data searches by ecological consultants) will be put back into supporting biological recording and biodiversity conservation – see 'Funding and Resourcing' questions below.

## **Funding and Resourcing**

*How will ERIC be funded?*

ERIC has initial funding to run for 18 months. We will be seeking core funding for ERIC from a few key organisations with a particular interest in regional biodiversity data management. Additional funding will be gained through services to ecological consultants. We will also be looking to set up Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with data users.

*Will there be a charge for using ERIC?*

Recorders and organisations will have free and open access to the data that ERIC is holding and/or managing on their behalf. Likewise it is anticipated that the core funding provided for ERIC will mean that conservation organisations and recorders will not be charged for routine data requests. If an organisation is making a more intensive use of ERIC then it may be encouraged to make an annual contribution to ERIC's running costs or enter into a Service Level Agreement for data provision.

Charges will be made for commercial data enquiries (e.g. those that come from ecological consultants working on behalf of a commercial client). Charging policies will be in place in early 2010.

*What will happen to any money that ERIC makes?*

ERIC will be run on a not for profit basis. Any money made once core running costs are met (for staff employment etc.) will feed back into supporting recording and biodiversity conservation in the region. Uses for the money could include:

- Commissioning of new survey work to support biodiversity conservation
- Support or training for voluntary recorders
- Hypothecation – i.e. contributing to charitable bodies or recording groups whose information is being used in paid data searches.

Decisions on how any surplus will be spent will be made by the partners in ERIC.

*Shouldn't the information be freely available without a charge?*

Data management is a time consuming job that requires a dedicated staff input. In situations where ERIC imposes a charge for its services it will not be charging for data as such - which in most cases will not be owned by ERIC anyway - but rather the cost of managing data (e.g. ensuring that it is in a compatible format with other information held) and carrying out data searches. The same principal is used by all other biological records centres in the UK.

*How do I find out more information about ERIC?*

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