



House of Commons  
Science and Technology  
Committee

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**Proposed merger of  
British Antarctic Survey  
and National  
Oceanography Centre**

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**Sixth Report of Session 2012–13**





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Science and Technology  
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# Proposed merger of British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre

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**Sixth Report of Session 2012–13**

*Report, together with formal minutes*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 31 October 2012*

## Science and Technology Committee

The Science and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Office for Science and associated public bodies.

### Current membership

Andrew Miller (*Labour, Ellesmere Port and Neston*) (*Chair*)  
Caroline Dinenage (*Conservative, Gosport*)  
Jim Dowd (*Labour, Lewisham West and Pinge*)  
Gareth Johnson (*Conservative, Dartford*)  
Stephen Metcalfe (*Conservative, South Basildon and East Thurrock*)  
Stephen Mosley (*Conservative, City of Chester*)  
Pamela Nash (*Labour, Airdrie and Shotts*)  
Sarah Newton (*Conservative, Truro and Falmouth*)  
Graham Stringer (*Labour, Blackley and Broughton*)  
Hywel Williams (*Plaid Cymru, Arfon*)  
Roger Williams (*Liberal Democrat, Brecon and Radnorshire*)

The following members were also members of the committee during the parliament:

Gavin Barwell (*Conservative, Croydon Central*)  
Gregg McClymont (*Labour, Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East*)  
Stephen McPartland (*Conservative, Stevenage*)  
David Morris (*Conservative, Morecambe and Lunesdale*)  
Jonathan Reynolds (*Labour/Co-operative, Stalybridge and Hyde*)

### Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental Select Committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No.152. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)

### Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/science>. A list of reports from the Committee in this Parliament is included at the back of this volume.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in printed volume(s). Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Dr Stephen McGinness (Clerk); Jessica Montgomery (Second Clerk); Xameerah Malik (Senior Committee Specialist); Darren Hackett (Senior Committee Assistant); Julie Storey (Committee Assistant); Henry Ayi-Hyde (Committee Office Assistant); and Nick Davies (Media Officer).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Science and Technology Committee, Committee Office, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general inquiries is: 020 7219 2793; the Committee's e-mail address is: [scitechcom@parliament.uk](mailto:scitechcom@parliament.uk).

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## Summary

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In September 2012, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) announced a consultation process on proposals to merge the British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre. It argued that there was a strong strategic case for the merger, arising from scientific synergies between the organisations, a drive to maximise the social and economic impact of scientific research output and a need to make the most cost-effective use of marine and polar infrastructure. NERC was due to make its final decision on merging these institutes in December 2012. However, in October 2012, it announced that this decision would be brought forward, citing concerns about the effects of uncertainty regarding the future of the organisations.

A number of serious concerns have been raised with us about the prospect of merging the British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre, and the way in which the consultation has been handled. We consider it important that these concerns are addressed by NERC before any further action is taken. NERC has not properly consulted on whether a merger is the best way to achieve its objectives for marine and polar science. It has not provided an adequate evidence base to support its case for a merger, with the absence of projected cost savings being particularly notable. In addition, NERC does not appear to have given adequate consideration to the British Antarctic Survey's geopolitical role when drafting its consultation proposals. Nor has it demonstrated an awareness of UK political commitments on protecting the environment, and polar regions in particular.

We recognise that NERC is facing a number of financial challenges. However, it has not made the case that merging the British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre would help meet these challenges. NERC should consider whether its aims could be achieved by means other than a merger. Future consultations should be carried out with better engagement with scientists and other stakeholders.



# 1 Introduction

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## Polar science

1. Polar science gives an insight to the working of key global mechanisms; polar regions influence global sea level, the carbon cycle, and ocean circulation. Polar ecosystems and marine biodiversity are also of significant ecological and economic importance.<sup>1</sup> The Southern Ocean in particular has a “disproportionately important” influence upon the Earth system, as it connects the major ocean basins, links shallow and deep components of overturning ocean circulation currents, and influences global biochemical cycles.<sup>2</sup>

2. Britain is a leading participant in polar science and Antarctic affairs. The size of the UK’s scientific operation in Antarctica, and the number of peer-reviewed papers produced from this operation, are second only to the USA.<sup>3</sup> The majority of these papers were authored or co-authored by the British Antarctic Survey.<sup>4</sup>

## British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre

3. The British Antarctic Survey (BAS) is often described as a jewel in the crown of British science.<sup>5</sup> For over 60 years it has been responsible for the majority of Britain’s scientific research in and around the Antarctic.<sup>6</sup> It counts amongst its research successes the discovery of the Antarctic ozone hole,<sup>7</sup> the development of the Antarctic Treaty,<sup>8</sup> and successful negotiation for a marine protected area in the Southern Ocean.<sup>9</sup> The Science Minister described the British Antarctic Survey to us as a “national and international asset” producing world class environmental science.<sup>10</sup> The British Antarctic Survey employs approximately 400 staff and is based in Cambridge, UK. It operates three research stations in the Antarctic (Rothera, Halley and Signy), two stations at South Georgia (King Edward Point and Bird Island), five planes and two ice-strengthened ships.<sup>11</sup> The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is the British Antarctic Survey’s parent body and provides the majority of its funding.<sup>12</sup> The British Antarctic Survey has a flat cash settlement from NERC through to 2015. However, NERC has “concerns that continuing pressures on its funding and the impact of external factors such as the price of fuel, may

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/about\\_bas/publications/pspe.pdf](http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/about_bas/publications/pspe.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Written evidence submitted by BAS, para 22 - MS22

<sup>3</sup> Written evidence submitted by BAS, para 11 - MS22

<sup>4</sup> Written evidence submitted by John Dudeney - MS33

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/exclusive-british-polar-research-in-crisis-7627014.html>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/about\\_bas/our\\_organisation/who\\_we\\_are.php](http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/about_bas/our_organisation/who_we_are.php)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/about\\_antarctica/geography/ozone.php](http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/about_antarctica/geography/ozone.php)

<sup>8</sup> Written evidence submitted by BAS, para 12 - MS22

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/about\\_bas/news/news\\_story.php?id=1054](http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/about_bas/news/news_story.php?id=1054)

<sup>10</sup> See oral evidence transcript

<sup>11</sup> Written evidence submitted by BAS – MS22

<sup>12</sup> Though other funding is used from research grants and external contracts.

cause problems for [the British Antarctic Survey] in maintaining the logistics it depends upon to deliver its science”.<sup>13</sup>

4. The National Oceanography Centre is a NERC-owned research centre. It was formed in April 2010 by the merger of NERC-managed elements of research bodies in Liverpool and Southampton.<sup>14</sup> It undertakes research “to address the oceans’ influence, impacts and potential to help address the big societal challenges of food and energy sectors, biodiversity and climate change”.<sup>15</sup> A “significant” part of the National Oceanography Centre’s income comes from NERC’s national capability funding line, which has been “constrained” in recent years.<sup>16</sup>

## Proposed merger

5. In June 2012, NERC announced that there “is a strong strategic case for the merger of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and National Oceanography Centre (NOC)”.<sup>17</sup> It gave the following reasons for this proposal:

- “Growing awareness of the scientific synergies between marine and polar science and the opportunities to integrate these areas of science more closely to address the most ambitious scientific questions;
- The need for a long term vision for translating ocean and polar science into timely, beneficial economic and social impact, given the critical role of these ‘frontier environments’ in addressing the challenges of increasing pressures on natural resources and rapid environmental change; and
- Recognition of the increasing costs of providing major marine and polar infrastructure and of the need to plan and deliver this in the most cost-effective way, particularly at a time of downward pressure on public finances.”<sup>18</sup>

6. In September 2012, NERC launched a consultation entitled “BAS/NOC merger”.<sup>19</sup> This asked for views on a number of issues relating to a possible merger, with the intention that NERC Council would consider a scientific and business case for a merger in December 2012.<sup>20</sup> However, on 24 October, NERC announced that this decision would be brought forward to 1 November. NERC cited concerns about the effects of uncertainty regarding the future of the two organisations as the reason for the change.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/press/releases/2012/04-bas-funding.asp>

<sup>14</sup> <http://noc.ac.uk/about-us/our-organisation>

<sup>15</sup> Written evidence submitted by NOC, para 1 - MS18

<sup>16</sup> Written evidence submitted by NOC, para 28 - MS18

<sup>17</sup> BAS/NOC merger consultation document, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>, para 1 (referred to hereafter as “Consultation document”)

<sup>18</sup> Consultation document p1 para 1, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Consultation document, p1, title, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Consultation document p2 para 9, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/work/boards/council/bas-noc.asp>

## Our inquiry

7. As part of our marine science inquiry we requested written evidence regarding NERC's support for marine science in polar and non-polar regions. During the course of this inquiry we received a number of written submissions regarding NERC's proposals to merge the British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre. There were clear concerns about these proposals and the manner in which the consultation process was being carried out. Given these concerns, we felt NERC's proposals should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. We therefore thought it important to take evidence on this issue prior to NERC making its decision on the merger. As NERC will be making their decision the day following our evidence session, we have undertaken to publish this report in time for it to inform their deliberations. We await the decision on the merger with interest and may return to this issue in the future.

8. On 31 October 2012 we heard evidence from Edmund Wallis, Chair, NERC; Professor Duncan Wingham, Chief Executive, NERC; Professor Ed Hill, Interim Director of the British Antarctic Survey and Director of the National Oceanography Centre; and Rt Hon David Willetts MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science. We are grateful to those who provided oral and written evidence.

9. In this report we consider some of the concerns that have been raised with us regarding NERC's consultation process. We comment on the content of the consultation document and raise questions about whether the strategic case for a merger has been made. We highlight the absence of data relating to purported cost savings from the consultation. We also comment on broader issues relating to potential geopolitical implications of changes to the British Antarctic Survey and environmental considerations.

## 2 NERC's consultation

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### The topic for consultation

10. In September 2012, NERC announced that it would carry out a “consultation on proposals to merge BAS and NOC”.<sup>22</sup> This announcement stated there was a strong strategic case for merging the institutes. However, despite being described by NERC as a consultation on the proposed merger, the consultation document did not request views on whether a merger between the National Oceanography Centre and British Antarctic Survey was appropriate or desirable, or what alternative measures could be taken to achieve the desired strategic outcomes. Instead, the document indicated that “NERC is consulting its staff and stakeholders to invite ideas on how to implement the intended changes”.<sup>23</sup> The decision to merge appeared to have been taken in advance of the consultation. We have been told that British Antarctic Survey staff did not regard this as proper engagement.<sup>24</sup>

11. Three key senior British Antarctic Survey staff, the Director, Deputy Director and Head of Corporate Services, have recently left the organisation.<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, Professor Ed Hill was appointed as interim Director of the British Antarctic Survey by the Chief Executive and Chair of NERC, without an open competition for the post.<sup>26</sup> NERC Chair, Edmund Wallis, assured us that this was normal procedure for interim roles.<sup>27</sup> Professor Hill is also currently Director of the National Oceanography Centre. In addition to his appointment as interim Director of the British Antarctic Survey, he was selected to lead the merger team and prepare the business case for the merger.<sup>28</sup>

### The strategic case

12. The three reasons given for the proposed merger are: increasing scientific synergy between marine and polar science; translating scientific research into economic and social impact; and improving the cost-effectiveness of operations.<sup>29</sup> Whilst these are commendable goals, no evidence was provided in the consultation document that a merger would achieve them. In addition, NERC expanded these objectives later in the document, to include:

- Focusing the UK scientific community on integrating research programmes;
- Tackling the scientific problems of greatest global significance involving the oceans and polar regions within the Earth system context;

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc.asp>

<sup>23</sup> Consultation document para 2, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Written evidence submitted by Dr Julian Huppert MP – MS35 ; and written evidence submitted by BAS employee – MS36

<sup>25</sup> Written evidence submitted by John Dudeney - MS33

<sup>26</sup> Further written evidence submitted by NERC , para 14 – MS16a

<sup>27</sup> See oral evidence transcript

<sup>28</sup> Further written evidence submitted by NERC , para 14 – MS16a

<sup>29</sup> Consultation document para 1, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

- Translating scientific knowledge into societal impacts;
- Stimulating the development and application of new observing technologies;
- Securing efficiency savings;
- Maximising resources available for science; and
- Strengthening organisational resilience and operational flexibility.<sup>30</sup>

Later, in written evidence to the Committee, NERC outlined a third set of objectives for the merger:

- To provide a future pathway for NERC strategic polar science presently delivered by the British Antarctic Survey that provided for the sustainability of the polar science activity;
- To integrate NERC strategic marine science presently delivered by the National Oceanography Centre and British Antarctic Survey to allow for the most ambitious scientific programs addressing the large-scale complex problems of ocean and polar climate system;
- To integrate NERC ship planning, operations and future procurement to provide the most effective, combined strategic use of the NERC marine fleet, and to ensure that future NERC ship provision seeks to optimise blue-water and polar requirements in single ship purchases; and
- To fully engage the wider HEI [Higher Education Institute] community in NERC polar science at a strategic level and through increased interactions with the university sector, and to provide transparent access to all NERC polar infrastructure in a similar manner to that achieved for NERC marine infrastructure.<sup>31</sup>

We have therefore seen three different perspectives on why NERC considers a merger desirable and what the proposed new Centre would achieve. This gives the impression that NERC's thinking on what it hopes to achieve through the merger is still developing and is not yet concluded.

## Business case for the merger

13. One of the three “fundamental reasons” for NERC’s decision to change the structures supporting the British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre is “recognition of the increasing costs of providing major marine and polar infrastructure and of the need to plan and deliver this in the most cost-effective way, particularly at a time of downward pressure on public finances.”<sup>32</sup> NERC described the pressures on its funding arrangements as follows:

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<sup>30</sup> Consultation document para 15, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Further written evidence submitted by NERC , para 13 – M516a

<sup>32</sup> Consultation document para 1, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

NERC has had to accommodate a 3% cash reduction in its resource budget, amounting to an 11% real terms reduction by 2014/15. It also had its baseline capital budget reduced by 50%.<sup>33</sup>

14. The consultation document stated that:

Quantification of the expected costs and savings arising from the merger will form part of the business case that will be presented to Council in December. The numbers will depend on detailed assumptions which will be made, taking into account comments on the consultation document. It would thus be premature to pre-empt that process by offering figures at this stage.<sup>34</sup>

No detail or indication was given in the consultation document regarding the possible costs or savings arising from the merger. It therefore appeared that NERC was consulting on proposals for which one of the primary justifications was the need to reduce costs without providing any indication of the extent to which the proposals would result in cost reductions.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, NERC Council itself was not due to see a business case for the merger until December.<sup>36</sup>

## Managing research vessels

15. The British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre manage almost all of NERC's large research infrastructure, for example research ships and polar research stations. The British Antarctic Survey operates two ice-strengthened Royal Research Ships, the RRS *James Clark Ross* and the RRS *Ernest Shackleton*.<sup>37</sup> These provide logistics and science support to the Survey's operations.<sup>38</sup> NOC operates two research vessels on behalf of NERC, the RRS *Discovery* and RRS *James Cook*.<sup>39</sup>

16. As part of the consultation, NERC outlined concerns that "the cost of operating NERC's research ships is rising as a proportion of its budget due to fuel, a shrinking resource base etc" and stated that it was "investigating the most effective ways of utilising and sharing these assets".<sup>40</sup> Under its proposals:

NERC's four Royal Research Ships [...] would become a single fleet within the new Centre with unified management of ship-related functions (e.g. marine operational activities, marine HR, marine engineering, maintenance and ship fuel procurement). The focus for ship management would be at Southampton. In order to operate

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<sup>33</sup> Further written evidence submitted by NERC, para 2 – MS16a

<sup>34</sup> Consultation document para 5, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> During oral evidence, Professor Hill stated that the merger would result in savings of £500k per annum. However, this figure, and detail on how it was arrived, is not given in the consultation document.

<sup>36</sup> Written evidence submitted by Research Councils UK/NERC evidence, para 11 – MS16

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/living\\_and\\_working/research\\_ships/index.php](http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/living_and_working/research_ships/index.php)

<sup>38</sup> The RRS *James Clark Ross* in particular has some of Britain's most advanced facilities for oceanographic research. [http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/living\\_and\\_working/research\\_ships/index.php](http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/living_and_working/research_ships/index.php)

<sup>39</sup> <http://noc.ac.uk/research-at-sea/ships>

<sup>40</sup> Written evidence submitted by Research Councils UK/NERC evidence, para 43 – MS16

NERC's fleet in an effective and fully-integrated way it will be desirable to harmonise marine staff and a variety of ship management processes and procedures over time.<sup>41</sup>

17. NERC has carried out a number of reviews of its ship operations in recent years, most recently in 2008/09 and 2011/12. These reviews have concluded that closer working between research vessels was desirable, where possible, but that the highly integrated nature of the British Antarctic Survey's operations in the Antarctic made the British Antarctic Survey's management of the RRS *James Clark Ross* and RRS *Ernest Shackleton* the most cost effective and efficient option.<sup>42</sup> The Marine Science Coordination Committee's Marine Research Vessels Group is due to publish a draft assessment of research vessel operations in autumn 2012.<sup>43</sup> This is expected to conclude that significant savings would only be achieved by reducing the number of vessels being operated. Changes to management or collaboration would provide only modest savings.<sup>44</sup> Despite the cost of ship operations being a key driver for NERC's desire to reorganise ship management, no information was given in the consultation document regarding the expected savings to be achieved from changing how the fleet is managed. The outcomes of previous reviews do not suggest that there are significant savings to be made in this respect.

18. We also heard about potential difficulties associated with merging the British Antarctic Survey's polar ships with the rest of the fleet, given their specialist nature. In particular, we heard that safe operation of the British Antarctic Survey's ice-strengthened ships requires different equipment and different skills from its crew, compared to other research vessels.<sup>45</sup> Changing the management of the fleet could also have implications for the safety of operations at sea, if the ability of staff to respond quickly to emergencies was diminished by a more diffuse management structure, especially as the nature of these emergencies may be unique to polar environments.<sup>46</sup>

## Geopolitical considerations

19. The British Antarctic Survey is at the forefront of Antarctic science. However, this is not its only purpose. The Survey has a dual role in carrying out valuable scientific work whilst also contributing to Britain's presence in the South Atlantic and Antarctic. It is notable, for example, that the Science Minister's recent trip to the Antarctic included a visit to the Falkland Islands.<sup>47</sup> He restated the Government's commitment to Britain's presence in the South Atlantic and Antarctic during our evidence session with him, and stated that this presence would not be altered by NERC's proposals.<sup>48</sup> The British Antarctic Survey stated that its role included providing advice to the UK Government regarding the polar regions and overseas territories in South Georgia, the South Sandwich Islands and British

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<sup>41</sup> Consultation document paras 57-58, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Mike Richardson written evidence

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/mscc/groups/marine-research-vessels-group/>

<sup>44</sup> Written evidence submitted by Mike Richardson – MS32

<sup>45</sup> Written evidence submitted by Dr John Dudeney – MS33

<sup>46</sup> Written evidence submitted by Dr John Dudeney – MS33; and written evidence submitted by Robert Culshaw – MS34

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.bis.gov.uk/news/topstories/2012/Mar/science-of-antarctica>

<sup>48</sup> See oral evidence transcript, NERC also stated this commitment.

Antarctic Territory.<sup>49</sup> This geopolitical aspect to the British Antarctic Survey's work is notably absent from considerations in the consultation document, save for a brief note that "the name British Antarctic Survey is internationally recognised".<sup>50</sup> There are therefore serious concerns regarding whether NERC has the competence to take decisions that potentially have such geopolitically significant consequences. During oral evidence, the Science Minister and NERC Chair conceded that there are lessons to be learned from how the geopolitical aspect of this matter have been handled during the consultation.

## Environmental concerns

20. NERC identified a number of economic opportunities that it hoped the new Centre would be in a position to exploit. It identified the oceans and polar regions as "frontier environments" where "there will be increasing economic activity in the coming decades—not least because of increasing pressures on natural resources".<sup>51</sup> It also stated that a "key objective" of the Centre would be to "establish itself as a hub for innovation to harness and support growth of widely dispersed UK scientific and technological expertise to exploit these opportunities".<sup>52</sup> In NERC's long-term vision, the Centre would have a role in "de-risking major investment decisions in hostile, unfamiliar environments".<sup>53</sup> The Environmental Audit Committee raised questions with us regarding this commercial focus. It highlighted the importance of advancing scientific research but cautioned that "while such research might incidentally make it easier for those engaged in shipping, fisheries and oil and gas extraction, NERC's research should not explicitly facilitate commercial resource exploitation".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Written evidence submitted by BAS - MS22, para 10

<sup>50</sup> Consultation document para 26, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Consultation document para 18, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Consultation document para 20, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Consultation document para 19, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Correspondence from the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee to the Chair of the Science & Technology Committee, 26 October 2012 – MS37

## 3 Conclusion

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21. Britain is a preeminent force in polar and particularly Antarctic science. Given the success of our scientific output in this field and the geopolitical considerations involved in operating in the Antarctic, any proposed change to the organisation of the British Antarctic Survey must have a strong evidence base.

22. **We recognise that there is challenge for NERC to save money.** However, NERC has committed to maintain its Antarctic activity at pre Spending Review 2010 levels.<sup>55</sup> NERC has argued that this merger would improve the financial management of the centres, and savings appear to be a key driver for the merger.<sup>56</sup> Despite this, NERC has not presented any information regarding the savings it believes could be made by a merger. We welcomed the Ministers suggestion to establish a ring-fenced funding line for Antarctic infrastructure and logistics. We will respond to his invite to consider this as part of our marine science inquiry.

23. **The consultation has been confused and lacks transparency. In addition, the manner in which the consultation has been handled seems to have had a damaging effect upon staff morale at the British Antarctic Survey.**<sup>57</sup> The consultation document presented the decision to merge the British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre as made; it did not present alternatives and does not request views on whether a merger should proceed. The strategic case for the merger presents a number of desirable goals; recognising scientific synergy, increasing research impact, reducing costs, but it does not give any evidence that a merger between these two research centres will achieve these goals, let alone whether a merger is the best way to achieve them. NERC has not provided any meaningful evidence base for the proposals that have been put forward.

24. **We have concerns that NERC has not taken seriously the loss of several senior staff at the British Antarctic Survey.** There are also questions about whether Professor Hill is the most appropriate person to run the consultation and merger, given his role as Director of the National Oceanography Centre and appointment by NERC's Chief Executive as interim Director of the British Antarctic Survey. This could create an impression that the consultation process lacks openness or objectivity.

25. Real concerns have been raised regarding both the content of NERC's consultation and the way in which the consultation has been run. We consider that these concerns require proper consideration by NERC. Given the strength of feeling against the merger, NERC should reconsider whether these proposals are appropriate and seek to properly address the concerns that have been raised by us and others responding to the consultation. **We recommend that before embarking on any merger, NERC considers whether its aims might be achieved by other means. We also recommend that NERC should ensure that future changes are conducted with better engagement with scientists, this Committee and other stakeholders.**

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<sup>55</sup> Further written evidence submitted by NERC, para 6 – MS16a

<sup>56</sup> Consultation document para 15 and para 1, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/consult/bas-noc-merger-consultation.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Written evidence submitted by Dr Julian Huppert MP – MS35

# Formal Minutes

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**Wednesday 31 October 2012**

Members present:

Andrew Miller, in the Chair

Stephen Metcalfe  
Stephen Mosley  
Pamela Nash

Sarah Newton  
Graham Stringer

Draft Report (*Proposed merger of the British Antarctic Survey and National Oceanography Centre*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 25 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for placing in the Library and Parliamentary Archives.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 7 November at 9.00 am

# Witnesses

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**Wednesday 31 October 2012**

**Rt Hon David Willetts MP**, Minister for Universities and Science

**Professor Ed Hill**, Interim Director of British Antarctic Survey and Director of National Oceanography Centre, **Edmund Wallis**, Chairman of the NERC, and **Professor Duncan Wingham**, Chief Executive of the NERC

## List of printed written evidence

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- 1 Research Councils UK (MS 16)
- 2 Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) (MS 16a)
- 3 National Oceanography Centre (MS 18)
- 4 British Antarctic Survey (MS 22)
- 5 Dr Mike Richardson GMG (MS 32)
- 6 Dr John Richard Dudeney OBE (MS 33)
- 7 Robert Culshaw (MS 34)
- 8 Dr Julian Huppert, Member of Parliament for Cambridge (MS 35)
- 9 BAS employee (MS 36)
- 10 Correspondence from the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee to the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee (MS 37)

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The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

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Seventh Report	The Forensic Science Service	HC 855 (Cm 8215)
Seventh Special Report	Astronomy and Particle Physics: Government and Science and Technology Facilities Council Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1425
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Eighth Special Report	UK Centre for Medical Research and Innovation (UKCMRI): Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of session 2010–12	HC 1475
Ninth Report	Practical experiments in school science lessons and science field trips	HC 1060–I (HC 1655)
Ninth Special Report	Strategically important metals: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1479
Tenth Special Report	Peer review in scientific publications: Government and Research Councils UK Responses to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1535
Tenth Report	Pre-appointment hearing with the Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Technology Strategy Board	HC 1539–I
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