



Freshwater Biological Association Business Plan 2008-2013

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Freshwater Biological Association Business Plan 2008-2013

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1. Executive Summary

This Business Plan provides a structure for the Freshwater Biological Association (FBA). It includes specific aims for the period 2008-2013, and the proposed actions to realise these aims. The activities of the FBA will centre around three strategic objectives: meeting information needs, research and research facilitation, and membership.

The principal objective over the five year period is to make the FBA an acknowledged leader in meeting information needs, facilitated by integrated IT resources. It will support research by retaining its two centres, with optimum use being made of its research facilities and by supporting research staff, awarding grants and maintaining a key role in the proposed Cooperative Research Partnership for freshwater science. It will have a strong, active membership, success in securing major funding and a much more international presence than today. It will adopt procedures to monitor and regulate its activities. It will develop the flexibility to anticipate and respond to different areas of activity that may become important over the coming decades.

Extensive, carefully targeted marketing of products and services will determine their value to the user community. For all activities, the FBA will have mechanisms in place to determine when an activity is not financially viable and therefore may need to be curtailed. However, its position as custodian of valuable and irreplaceable resources will be weighed against purely financial considerations.

The FBA will actively expand its user constituency, to include enthusiastic individuals, conservation bodies, users of biological information in statutory authorities and non-government organisations (NGOs), industry and consultancies; where appropriate it will contribute to development of policies for freshwater management. It will enhance its value to potential users outside the United Kingdom, with particular emphasis on the developing world.

Through maintenance and enhancement of facilities, reorganisation of staff roles, targeted applications for grants and core funding, effective marketing and provision of withdrawal strategies from underperforming activities, it is anticipated that the FBA will eliminate its operating deficit within five years. During this period, the deficit will be funded from current financial reserves.

2. Vision, mission and objectives

Fresh water is a vital element for life. From the smallest microscopic organism to the largest mammal we all make demands for this essential resource. The Freshwater Biological Association's vision is to achieve a complete understanding of how our fresh waters operate, in order that they can be managed sustainably, for all their users. In order to best maintain this valuable resource we need to understand the science behind water, because only then can we appreciate the ways that our rivers, lakes and wetlands behave and understand the ecological consequences of our use of water.

Our mission is to advance freshwater science and encourage as many people as possible to adopt it as the best way to understand, protect and manage our precious water resources.

We will pursue our mission by:

- Disseminating accurate, timely and reliable information through websites, publications, scientific meetings and training courses;
- Facilitating innovative and essential research through the provision of specialist scientific facilities and the giving of grants and scholarships;
- Providing sound, independent scientific opinion to government, industry and the scientific community and acting as the advocate for freshwater biology;
- Engendering an enthusiasm for the science of freshwater biology through promotional activities and fostering an active membership of the Association.

FBA's specific objectives in pursuit of its vision are as follows:

Strategic objectives

1. To meet the information needs of those involved in freshwater research and management (whether as amateurs or professionals) by maintaining specialist information resources, along with effective knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange mechanisms.
2. To support high quality research in freshwater science by providing grants, international standard research facilities and mechanisms for facilitating research partnerships.
3. To maintain itself as a thriving membership organisation in which those committed to freshwater biology can share common interests.

Supporting objectives

4. To maintain a complement of staff and honorary research fellows with the expertise to respond to requests for information or advice.
5. To adopt a financial strategy which will ensure the FBA's long term sustainability.

In all its activities the FBA recognises that it depends entirely on its own resources, or resources that it can obtain through application to grant-giving bodies. To succeed it will demonstrate that it is working in accordance with sound business principles. It will fill a niche that others do not occupy, and/or do the things it sets out to do better than its competitors. Wherever possible it will work with, rather than against, organisations with similar objectives. It will operate with transparency and accountability and will report its activities fully and fairly.

3. Description of the organisation

3.1. General description

The FBA was founded in 1929 and incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee in 1932 (No. 263162). It was registered as a charity in 1963 (No. 214440). It occupies two centres, at Windermere in Cumbria and East Stoke in Dorset, the latter commonly being referred to as the “River Lab”.

Governance of the FBA is by a Council of trustees, all of whom are required to be members of the Association. There is a president (Sir Martin Holdgate) and a chairman (Professor Alan Hildrew). Council meets every six months. A sub-committee, the Finance and General Purposes Committee, meets 2-4 times per year to provide guidance and approval for more operational activities than those considered by full Council.

The FBA employs specialist staff to manage its estates, research facilities and information activities, in addition to staff managing administrative and governance aspects of its operations. In January 2008 it employed 25 staff members (22 in Windermere, 3 in East Stoke), equating to approximately 16 FTEs, as many staff members work part time. All staff are managed by the Director, although direct line management of most non-senior staff is delegated to senior staff members. The Director reports to the Chairman of Council.

The FBA is independent of government and other organisations and has, among its membership, freshwater scientists and amateur biologists from around the world. Membership of the FBA is achieved by application and payment of the appropriate fee; there is no nomination or election mechanism for determining membership.

3.2 Strengths

The assets and activities of the FBA are detailed in Appendix 1. Its key strengths are as follows.

- Its library is world class and has considerable strengths: it is a major historical archive of older literature; it receives approximately 100 journal titles per year through its exchange programme; it has a large collection of grey literature, not otherwise available to researchers.
- Its unpublished collection is a major resource for historical information and for identifying long term or repeated data runs.
- The Fritsch Collection of algal illustrations is a major resource for research: taxonomic, biogeographical and historical.
- It is a publisher in its own right, with expertise in using electronic media for publication and dissemination.
- Its keys to the identification of freshwater organisms are acknowledged as the definitive British keys for the groups of organisms that they cover.
- It is well known internationally for its historical activities as a research organisation.
- It is unusual among scientific associations in providing facilities for indoor and outdoor study and research at its two centres. There is a wealth of data available from field sites around the two centres, further increasing their attraction for contemporary research.
- It is recognised by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO), eligible to apply for NERC research funding.
- It has a loyal and well informed membership.
- It is developing a growing network and reputation with funding bodies such as the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.
- Its staff are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and committed to the Association.
- It is acknowledged as a major employer of qualified staff in the Windermere area.
- It owns its property outright, forming a very valuable set of assets.
- Its financial assets remain healthy, allowing it to invest where appropriate in activities that may ultimately boost its income.

4. Target audience

FBA activities will be directed towards the following groups, whilst acknowledging the fact that not all activities will be of interest to all groups:

- Professional freshwater biologists and students involved in academic research.
- Professional freshwater biologists involved in management and conservation of freshwater environments and organisms.
- Professional scientists involved in research or management of aquatic environments from a hydrological, chemical, geomorphological or socio-economic perspective, for whom an understanding of biological elements is important.
- All those involved in decision making and policy development and implementation related to managing fresh waters, including those in Government and in statutory authorities.
- All those who, whilst not being professionally involved in fresh waters, have an interest in their biology, management and/or conservation, and a desire to learn more and to share their understanding with others.
- All those involved, either professionally or in an unpaid capacity, in educating others about biology, ecology and the environment, and for whom an understanding of fresh waters would enhance their ability to teach.

In addition to individuals, the FBA has a role in supporting organisations, including the water industry, statutory authorities and independent private sector consultancies, in particular with respect to implementing key legislation such as the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive. Its target audience therefore includes these organisations as corporate members.

The FBA will support appropriate educational initiatives at all levels of school, college and university education. It will ensure that its relevance is understood both by water managers and by end users of water resources.

FBA is not a conservation association *per se*, but through its resources is able to provide support for science-based conservation programmes.

5. Evidence for interest

The FBA has carried out little formal market research to assess the interest in its products and services. However, informal feedback and actual use provides an indication of their value. Recent evidence for interest is listed below.

5.1. Meeting information needs

- Ongoing commitment by funding bodies and individuals who contribute to FreshwaterLife.
- Feedback from Environment Agency field staff, discussing information needs and optimum delivery mechanisms.
- Messages of support received by the Fritsch Collection when threatened with closure.
- Increased sales of identification keys, even those that are now out of date.
- Positive response from potential authors asked to contribute to Freshwater Reviews; it attracted unsolicited manuscript submissions even before the first paper was published.
- Requests for information and bookings for identification training courses.
- Telephone and email requests for science-based information and advice.
- Requests to comment on Government white papers.

5.2. Research provision

- Continued use of facilities by CEH.
- Commitment to long term use of hatchery by EA/NE for Pearl Mussel Project.
- Expressions of interest in Windermere hatchery facilities and East Stoke facilities from several parties.
- High quality applications for research grants.
- Requests for FBA to be CASE partner in Studentship applications.
- Cooperative Research Partnership: potential partners are investing in a scoping study which will determine the full extent of interest.
- Cooperative Research Partnership: Steering Group partners remain committed to the idea.

5.3. Membership

- New members continually being attracted.
- High membership involvement in activities such as training courses.
- New members' committees have attracted volunteers.

6. Organisation of activities

The FBA is starting the period of this Business Plan in a position where it is maintaining various different activities and facilities that it has inherited from its past. As an organisation with objectives beyond mere generation of income, the contributions of the FBA's component activities are rarely purely financial. For each activity, therefore, consideration is given to whether it is:

- essential for the FBA's existence;
- important for the FBA's existence (i.e. it could survive without it, but to the severe detriment of its objectives);
- important for the FBA's development;
- desirable, but not needed for effective operation.

FBA activities are divided into three areas (Sections 7, 8 and 9), each based on one strategic objective, plus a fourth covering the purely income generating activities (Section 10). The key areas of activity are: meeting information needs, research provision and membership. Meeting information needs is subdivided, for purely practical management reasons, into information resources and knowledge transfer. Research provision covers four very different activities, and these too are managed separately. Each of these activities is considered in detail below.

Profile enhancement is a key process that has an impact on all other areas of activity, and this is also considered in detail below (Section 11).

Each activity will be reviewed after a period of no more than two years, and annually thereafter, and its future determined on the basis of progress by that time.

7. Meeting information needs

The information holdings of the FBA will be made more accessible to users and will be linked to knowledge transfer (meetings, publications, etc.) to optimise their value. FreshwaterLife will act as the natural link; although here listed under information resources, its role in knowledge transfer is equally relevant.

7.1 Information resources

Holding information resources is considered to be important for the FBA's existence. The cost of maintaining them is high and the potential financial gains are high.

Aim: to create an integrated information resource, linked by a search and retrieval facility based on FreshwaterLife, which provides effective support for research, the Cooperative Research Partnership (CRP) and independent expert opinion.

Objectives:

- To maintain the FBA's position as a major holder of information on freshwater sciences.
- To make FBA collections integral to grant proposals that improve their access and exploit them for innovative research.
- To make FreshwaterLife website the first option for internet users seeking detailed information on freshwaters and their research.

Key financial activities:

- Secure grant income to support specific projects based upon collections.
- Secure core funding for maintenance and development of the FreshwaterLife portal.

Actions:

- Complete a major review of the potential for the library, in order to determine its most appropriate role within the FBA: as an active library or as a valuable archive, and the financial implications of each role.
- Ensure that the long term data collection programmes with which the FBA is involved continue and that the data are collected and collated into forms that make them valuable for researchers.
- Clarify ownership and management of the joint datasets held with CEH, to ensure their effective use by the scientific community.
- Manage unpublished collections and the Fritsch Collection to optimise their accessibility.
- Implement procedures for rapid and effective incorporation of new donations and acquisitions.
- Develop FreshwaterLife as an online information portal, improving its function by supporting, wherever possible, novel approaches to information retrieval.
- Extend applications within FreshwaterLife to ensure that it becomes a major repository of restricted access data and information.

7.2 Knowledge transfer

Knowledge transfer is considered to be essential for the FBA's existence, because it covers the major membership benefits. The cost of maintaining it is moderate and the potential financial gains are moderate, although grant income is potentially high.

Aim: to ensure that the FBA is recognised as a centre of expertise in disseminating knowledge related to fresh waters.

Objectives:

- To become perceived as synonymous with high quality training.
- To run conferences that are seen as essential for target audiences to attend.
- To produce publications that attract all those who are potentially interested in freshwater biology, including general readers as well as research specialists.
- To become a leader in facilitating interaction among freshwater biologists, with emphasis on two areas: freshwater recorders in the UK and professional scientists in the developing world.
- To be perceived as synonymous with expert advice on freshwater biology, including that which influences science and management policy.

Key financial activities:

- Develop an attractive portfolio of training courses.
- Improve external sponsorship for scientific meetings.
- Improve sales of books.
- Secure subscriptions for Freshwater Reviews.
- Secure grant income to support specialist training for knowledge transfer.

Actions:

- Run training courses on identification of freshwater organisms and freshwater management, provided at low cost to encourage wide involvement.
- Develop commercially priced courses with specific outputs, including accreditation and certification.
- Explore options for providing low cost accommodation at or close to FBA centres for participants in training courses.
- Develop formal links with organisations such as the Environment Agency, and universities for provision of knowledge transfer.
- Continue to develop the range of conferences convened, adding the FBA Conferences in Aquatic Biology to its Annual Scientific Meeting and joint meetings.
- Develop criteria for consideration of requests to the FBA to sponsor meetings, in order to determine their relevance to FBA objectives.
- Continue to contribute expertise and resources in order to sustain the success of SEFS meetings.
- Review the portfolio of publications, ensuring that each series has a clear identity and that there is a clear business or science case and development strategy for each new title (book or journal).
- Develop a portfolio of journals and bulletins – either independently or in association with other publishers – that cover the needs of key user communities.
- Develop specialist training for knowledge transfer on the areas covered by its two currently successful schemes: biological recorders (the Recorders and Schemes Project) and professional freshwater biologists in Africa (the African Knowledge Exchange Project).
- Develop the role of provider of authoritative, impartial advice through FBA members, Council, HRFs and staff. This will include promotion of freshwater biology as a science and as a career.
- Target community activities local to FBA centres that are likely to be of greatest publicity benefit to the FBA.

8. Research provision

This covers several currently disparate activities and assets, which will be more closely integrated with each other, and also with the FBA's information role. Activities that integrate the two roles (such as research programmes using long term datasets, Fritsch Collection or unpublished collections) will be encouraged.

8.1 Research facilities

Research facilities are considered to be important for the FBA's development. The cost of maintaining them is high and the potential financial gains are high. Many of the facilities presently maintained, if lost, would be virtually impossible to replace.

Aim: to ensure that FBA research facilities continue to be used for high quality research in a financially sustainable manner.

Objectives:

- To ensure that the FBA is recognised as custodian of valuable research facilities essential to the success of major research programmes.
- To ensure that FBA sites are recognised as centres of scientific activity, bringing together researchers from different institutions.
- To develop partnerships with universities that encourage them to use FBA facilities for research student projects.
- To ensure that each research facility is covering its costs in a sustainable way within five years.

Key financial activities:

- Secure tenants for Windermere research facilities.
- Reduce running costs for Windermere hatchery.
- Secure tenants for East Stoke research and office facilities.

Actions:

- Ensure that research facilities are widely known in the potential user community.
- Maintain facilities in a state attractive to potential users.
- Actively seek new and replacement tenants for research facilities.
- Develop ways to increase use of and income from all research facilities.

8.2 Research Staff

Research staff are considered to be desirable for the FBA. The cost of maintaining them is low for HRFs but high for salaried staff and the potential financial gains are high.

Aim: to ensure that FBA centres are homes to active communities of research scientists.

Objectives:

- To ensure that the FBA is a significant contributor to key areas of research in freshwater biology.
- To ensure that HRFs contribute actively to the FBA's profile.
- To ensure that research scientists take advantage of the FBA's IRO status by including FBA staff and/or HRFs as named investigators in grant applications.

Actions:

- Investigate the feasibility of the FBA employing salaried research staff carrying out independently funded research.
- Encourage academics in universities and research institutes to design projects for research students that can be jointly supervised by an FBA staff member or HRF.
- Ensure that Honorary Research Fellows are fully involved in FBA activities, and provide the resources they require to achieve their objectives.
- Encourage scientists employed by external organisations to be based on FBA sites, using offices and laboratories, rather than simply using the field research facilities. Encourage both long term presence and short term visits.

8.3 Grants and awards

The ability to provide grants and awards is considered to be desirable for the FBA. The cost of maintaining them is low and the potential financial gains are low. Award of grants is important if the FBA is to maintain its status as a direct supporter of research. Its situation as an independent organisation further allows it to fund activities that may otherwise have difficulty in securing income.

Aim: ensure that the FBA is identified as a source of regular research awards for studentships and specific projects.

Objectives:

- To make the FBA associated with regular funding for relevant research, including research studentships, and with grants for research that otherwise would be difficult to fund (e.g. pure ecology, taxonomy)
- To ensure that FBA awards stimulate use of FBA resources in research.

Actions:

- Provide research funding on a regular basis, including that for MSc and PhD studentships.
- Encourage applications for research that exploits FBA facilities or information resources.

8.4 Cooperative Research Partnership

The Cooperative Research Partnership (CRP) is considered to be desirable for the FBA. The cost of maintaining it is low and the potential financial gains are low.

The CRP will bring together freshwater researchers, clients and research facilities across the UK, with the FBA administering the process.

Aim: to ensure that the CRP is a successful conduit for research funds, making optimum use of FBA resources (research facilities, FreshwaterLife, etc.).

Objective:

- To ensure that the FBA is identified as the natural link between research institutes, clients and research facilities, ensuring high quality research into freshwaters.

Action:

- Play a key coordinating role in the development of the CRP.

9. Membership

The FBA has a duty to provide benefits for its members. It will ensure that these benefits are attractive and encourage people both to join and to retain their membership. Equally, members can potentially contribute greatly to the activities of the FBA, if given the opportunity for involvement. Membership is considered to be essential for the FBA's continuance. The cost of maintaining it is moderate and the potential financial gains are low, although large bequests can bring in significant income.

The FBA will strive to make membership an essential requirement for anybody involved in freshwater biology, either professionally or as an amateur, and therefore to increase numbers of members, both individual and corporate. It will offer potential members tangible benefits, and instil a sense of ownership of the Association amongst its members.

Aim: to ensure an active membership benefiting from the activities of the FBA.

Objectives:

- To make membership essential for all those involved in freshwater science, as professionals or amateurs.
- To make corporate membership an attractive option for organisations.
- To ensure the FBA is perceived as the legitimate 'voice' of freshwater biology.

Key financial activity:

- Increasing the number of corporate members.

Actions:

- Clarify and upgrade members' benefits, particularly those for corporate members.
- Advertise membership widely through publications and other organisations with activities sympathetic to that of the FBA, in order to gauge the potential for expanding membership beyond the current core of professional scientists.
- Develop ways in which members can use their membership as a vehicle for advancing their interests, influence and professional standing.
- Encourage members' involvement in the running of the Association, through members' groups to assist with the running of science-related activities.
- Convene expert groups to provide comment and advice on behalf of the Association, contributing to its knowledge transfer objectives.

10. Other activities

These are those activities that do not contribute directly to the objectives of the FBA, but use the facilities and opportunities available to generate income. These activities are considered to be desirable for the FBA. The cost of maintaining them is low and the potential financial gains are moderate or, in the case of one-off sales of assets, high.

Aim: to ensure that purely commercial activities are a net source of income.

Objective:

- Maximise income from commercial activities on FBA premises, whilst minimising initial investment and direct involvement in such activities.

Key financial activities:

- Enhance income from commercial use of Windermere facilities.
- Maintain high annual income from cash holdings and investments.

Actions:

- Investigate options for realising capital or income from the sale or lease of surplus property (Farmhouse, Station Cottage, Gas House, Annexe).
- Ensure that meeting rooms at both FBA centres are well publicised and competitively priced.
- Continue to receive ferry income by providing a competitive and reliable service for Cumbria County Council.
- Maintain income from the FBA fishing rights by increasing the number of licences and by constructing a new fishing hut so that users see a clear return for their payments.
- Explore options for reconstruction of the landing jetty at Windermere, along with the possible returns on this investment from paying users.
- Investigate options for sale or lease of the refreshment kiosk site, under terms beneficial to the FBA.
- Investigate sale of advertising space in FBA's web presence and periodical publications, ensuring that companies advertising are those most appropriate to the interests of readers of FBA material.
- Periodically review investment strategy, to ensure that financial returns are optimised.

11. Profile enhancement

Profile enhancement that supports the strategic areas of activity inevitably incurs a cost, and therefore has to be carefully targeted to maximise the return on the investment in profile enhancement. Profile enhancing activities are considered to be important for the FBA's development. The cost of maintaining them is low and the potential direct financial gains are low, although indirectly they may be high if they increase interest in other areas of activity.

Aim: to ensure effective involvement in activities that optimise the FBA's profile.

Actions:

- Encourage those involved in FBA activities – staff, HRFs, Council and general membership – to act as ambassadors for the FBA.
- Create and maintain an up-to-date and attractive FBA website that acts as a primary source of information on the FBA, its services and its activities.
- Develop a proactive communication strategy, to ensure that activities of relevance and interest are widely reported.
- Ensure that the FBA has an exhibition stand or equivalent presence at a selection of conferences and other relevant meetings each year, targeting those predicted to have the greatest number of people sympathetic to its aims.
- Review the outcomes of staff attendance at each conference in order to determine costs and benefits.
- Ensure that signage in areas of land owned by the FBA and frequented by the general public is clear and sympathetic, giving a positive message about the Association.
- Encourage staff involvement in external activities that are complementary to the objectives of the FBA.
- Continue to provide secretarial support to the Lake District Still Waters Partnership, as a way of maintaining a strong local profile in Cumbria.

Appendix 1 FBA assets and activities

Details of FBA assets and activities can be found in the range of leaflets associated with this Business Plan, all of which are available on its website.

- Information leaflet [under development]
- Meeting facilities leaflet: <http://www.fba.org.uk/index/facilities/conference.html>
- Training courses leaflet: <http://www.fba.org.uk/index/events.html>
- Publications catalogue: <http://www.fba.org.uk/index/books>
- Research Facilities leaflet: <http://www.fba.org.uk/index/facilities.html>

Appendix 2 Some of the organisations with which the FBA currently works

International development and aid organisations

UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)

Statutory authorities

British Standards Institute
Comité Européen de Normalisation
Countryside Council for Wales
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department of Environment and Heritage, Northern Ireland
Environment Agency
International Standards Organisation
Lake District National Park Authority
Natural England
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Scottish Natural Heritage

Government research organisations

Centre for Ecology and Hydrology
National Oceanography Centre
Natural Environment Research Council
Tanzanian Fisheries Research Institute

Non-government organisations

Forestry Commission
Global Biodiversity Information Facility
National Biodiversity Network
National Trust
Natural History Museum
Royal Society
The Worshipful Company of Fishmongers

Conservation societies

Association of Rivers Trusts
Buglife
Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Dorset Wildlife Trust
Plantlife
Pond Conservation
Riverfly Partnership
South Cumbria Rivers Trust
World Wide Fund for Nature UK

Information providers

International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries and Information Centers
South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity

Scientific societies

British Ecological Society
Eastern Africa Water Association
European Federation of Freshwater Sciences
Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management
Institute of Fisheries Management
International Limnological Society (SIL)
Linnean Society of London
Marine Biological Association
North American Benthological Society
Scottish Association for Marine Sciences

Universities and colleges

Bournemouth University
University of Birmingham
University College London
University of Cumbria
Durham University
Egerton University (Kenya)
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
Lancaster University
University of Manchester
Middlesex University
University of Oxford (Wildcru)
Oxford Brookes University
University of Plymouth
Queen Mary University of London
Roehampton University
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University of Ulster

Commercial companies

James Cropper
Duncan and Associates
Syngenta
Soil Mechanics
Thames Water
Titus Wilson
United Utilities
Windermere Lake Cruises

Charitable Trusts

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
Pilgrim Trust
Syngenta Foundation