

# EPS Mitigation Licensing: Latest developments

NATURAL  
ENGLAND

**December 2015**

Dear Stakeholder

**ANNOUNCEMENT:** PUBLICATION OF THE NEW GREAT CRESTED NEWT MITIGATION LICENCE METHOD STATEMENT TEMPLATE.

Most of you will be aware through previous correspondence in the EPS Newsletters that Natural England has been working to improve the great crested newt (GCN) Method Statement template. We are pleased to announce that this will be available on .GOV.UK in early December.

There will be a 'lead out' time of the existing 'April 2013 template' to allow applicants currently completing a GCN mitigation licence application to submit with minimal disruption. **From 30 January 2016 we expect all new GCN applications to be submitted with a Method Statement using this new template.** Any new applications submitted on the 'April 2013 template' after this time will be sent back to the applicant with a request to re-submit on the new template. We will, however, accept re-submissions using the existing '2013' format until such time a licence is granted.

The new template has been user tested but if you happen to experience problems please send an email to [eps.mitigation@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:eps.mitigation@naturalengland.org.uk) setting out what the problem is and where exactly it is within the template and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

The Method Statement clearly sets out our requirements but please see the useful summary information in the following pages of this announcement, as this sets out where the most significant changes have been made.

Kind regards

Kathryn Murray, Senior Specialist – EPS Mitigation Licensing

Summary points:

- NE has acted on feedback received over the years from consultants, applicants and staff, seeking improvement to the GCN Method Statement template to aid completion and assessment. The December 2015 version has been created with a small project group within Natural England, including our most experienced Wildlife Advisers, Specialists and Senior Advisers. Natural England's Customer Panel was also invited to review this template.
- This revised GCN Method Statement template simplifies the way we ask for information used to determine the Favourable Conservation Status test. This work forms part of our on-going improvements to the licence application pack: we have published revised application forms, revised Reasoned Statement (RS) templates and removed the need to submit a RS for certain applications. Our aim is to simplify the process for applicants to enable standard responses where possible and by indicating optional and mandatory fields, plus making clear the level of information required. It will also enable us to speed up assessment of applications, as information will be presented in a standard way.
- Our project group reviewed the common issues raised in 'Further information requests' (FIRs) and 'email signature requests'. These sections of the revised template have been redesigned to make them easier to complete. We believe this new template will help reduce the amount of queries Area Teams have with individual cases; reduce the assessment time; the number of formal FIRs; and help improve the standard of Method Statement content.
- We investigated moving the template from MS Excel to Word. This was not possible as we wished to keep the helpful self-calculating formulas however the new template looks and 'feels' more like a MS Word document. This new template replaces the existing 2013 version, which will be removed from .GOV.UK.
- A number of changes have been made to tables within the Method Statement which include details on habitats present on the development site and proposed impacts.
- As we now grant annexed licences, the maps and figures which support the applications are even more important. Greater emphasis is placed on these documents. The new template clearly sets out requirements.

- The template has been tested for MAC users.

**Important information:**

Not all changes are included in Table 1 below, just the significant ones. It is therefore important to read the instructions and guidance contained within the Method Statement template prior to completing it, to ensure that no necessary information requested is omitted. This will help reduce the need for us to come back to you with further information requests, which may cause unnecessary delays to your application.

Additionally it is important to be aware that:

- The Macros in the template enable the rows to expand with the text where this is indicated, but will require users to hit enter to leave each cell, to avoid harmless messages appearing on screen. **Please retain page scaling at 130% to avoid the text becoming obscured.**
- We have significantly expanded the amount of text that can be entered in most sections of the Method Statement; however we rely on applicants to only provide us with essential information as requested within the document and not to submit large volumes of unnecessary information.

Please also ensure that you follow the [check list](#) advice on .GOV.UK which sets out what you need to submit with your licence application.

**Table 1: Main changes to the December 2015 GCN Method Statement template (from version April 2013)**

<b>Change</b>	<b>Why introduced</b>	<b>Why Changed</b>
Free-text boxes (significantly expanded)	To stop applications with volumes of unnecessary annexes of additional information being submitted.	Only being able to enter restricted text has been one of the largest causes of complaint. Text boxes have been significantly expanded to accommodate larger volumes of text. This will be kept under review. NE expects consultants to only provide relevant information, as requested within each section, and to be concise.
Excel format – but looks	We kept the template in	To help keep ‘themes’ or

more like a Word document	Excel as we wished to keep the useful self-calculating formulae, which people pre-2007 had problems calculating and led to a significant number of Further Information Requests (FIRs).	section information together. For example the 'Instructions' are now on a single tab and we have moved advice from within the actual template here; the survey information is on a single worksheet, etc.
Hyper-links to guidance at the start of the document and links to the next section, at the bottom of each section.	For accessibility, now that large amounts of information are in single tabs.	For example, the capture guidance is linked to the advice on the Method Statement (MS) worksheet rather than being contained within this section.
<p>Changes to survey section (C)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Simplified tables</li> <li>- Additional eDNA section</li> <li>- Hyper-links to additional survey information tab at end of document (new addition)</li> </ul>	<p>To make it more concise and easier for an applicant to ensure they provide the information being asked for.</p> <p>To allow surveys of up to 40 ponds to be included within the MS.</p>	<p>Helps with the assessment.</p> <p>Keeps everything in one place.</p> <p>2007 template did not have an eDNA section (new technique).</p> <p>Self-calculating formulas in survey tables for peak counts and population size class currently extend to up to 10 ponds, but we will look to see if we extend this to &gt;10 in future. Until that time, consultants still need to calculate by hand and explain within the MS.</p>
<p>Changes to Impacts section (D)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revised and simplified the tables so it is clear what is being lost to the development and the type of impact</li> </ul>	To prevent FIRs or email signature requests on issues to do with the habitat impact tables.	<p>Aid completion of tables.</p> <p>Aid assessment.</p> <p>Relying more on Figures which will become part of the enforceable licence.</p>
<p>Mitigation and compensation section (E)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tables (E3) revised in accordance with changes in Impact section</li> </ul>	Additional question in section E1 about why the particular mitigation solution was chosen and what alternatives were considered.	<p>Brings the GCN MS template in line with bats and dormice.</p> <p>Aids assessment.</p> <p>Ensures that the applicant is considering alternatives (such as timing,</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- E4 – removed guidance and added to start of document, rather than embed in the template.</li> <li>- E5 – simplified this section to aid completion</li> <li>- Changes to presentation.</li> </ul>		methodology etc).
Checklist revised List of figures and documents	Clarity on list of figures and what should be submitted as part of the MS	To ensure that people are clear on what is needed.  To reduce the number of times NE needs to seek information and changes.
Declarations on a separate page	Clarity	Ease of assessment and checking.
Additional records worksheets added  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For pond descriptions</li> <li>- For additional survey information</li> </ul>	We are often asked to provide this.	Will allow most applications to submit information in a single document and reduce the number of applications supported by a Word document.

This content was withdrawn on 12 October 2020