

NERC and the City: A dinner discussion on the relevance of environmental research to the City. To be held on Tuesday, November 17, 2009 at The London Capital Club, 15 Abchurch Lane, London, EC4N 7BW at 6:30 pm for 7:00 pm.

You may never have heard of NERC – The Natural Environment Research Council. I hadn't. In fact, though its history dates back to 1965, it is really one of New Labour's brighter ideas. It is one of the seven academic research councils, based in Swindon, through which we the taxpayer pump about £2.8 billion a year into academic research in the UK. In the case of NERC, its remit is primarily (but expansively) the environment and our relationship with Mother Earth. Amongst other things, it supports (indeed, owns) the British Geological Survey, the British Antarctic Survey, the Centre for Geology and Hydrology, and the Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory – which means that it is at the forefront of international work on climate change, flooding, earthquakes and (probably) plagues of locusts. It also gets to decide when the Thames barrier should be raised.

The relevance of this to the insurance industry is obvious and NERC already has a number of joint programs with, *inter alia*, Willis, the Lighthill Risk Network and the industry's Intellectual Capital Initiative. It is also exploring work in what used to be called (before the recent unpleasantness) financial derivatives. But, despite the considerable amounts of money that it pumps into UK financial services, NERC remains a bit of a mystery for most of us in the City.

Hence this invitation. NERC has agreed to sponsor a brief programme of CSFI events, laying out what it has to offer to insurers, banks, fund managers and others in the City – in the hope of building up its own network and making sure that the work it sponsors is directly relevant to UK plc. Since it has lots of money to hand out, this is important. The first such event is a small(ish) dinner, which – I hope – will serve as a *tour d'horizon* of what NERC and those whose work is supported by NERC have to offer. About one-third of the attendees will be from the Greater NERC family, including:

- Professor John Rees, theme leader for natural hazards at NERC;
- Professor Robert Gurney, National Centre for Earth Observation and NERC;
- Dr. Kevin Horsburgh, NERC Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory;
- Professor Chris Clack, Centre for Financial Computing, UCL; and
- Dickie Whitaker, Lighthill Risk Network and Guy Carpenter.

We are also inviting several other academics whose work is funded by NERC.

What we need from our side is a good mix of enthusiasts and sceptics from the banking, insurance, fund management and VC/private equity space to ask tough questions. In the past, we at the Centre have deplored the lack of formal links between UK academia and the City, and we have run endless round-tables on the difficulty of commercialising academic research. But this is a new angle – and, to me, a potentially very fruitful one. NERC and the Centre would be very grateful if you could accept our invitation to come along and stir things up. Since NERC is generously sponsoring the dinner, I need hardly point out that you (as a taxpayer) are already on the hook.

We very much hope to see you on November 17.

Sincerely yours,

Andrew Hilton
Director, CSFI