



Chief Executive's report on topical issues

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Chief Executive's report on topical issues

Paper by Marcus Yeo

1. 2013/14 performance update

- 1.1. The quarter three performance review was circulated to Committee members on 5 February.
- 1.2. Out of 25 priority performance measures (PPMs) for 2013/14, 23 were rated Green or Amber/Green at the end of quarter three (i.e. fully or substantially on track). Two PPMs were experiencing significant problems and were rated Amber/Red; an additional two PPMs were predicted to move to Amber/Red in quarter four.
- 1.3. Where performance difficulties have been experienced they are largely attributable to insufficient staff resource in critical areas. Underlying issues include an increase in staff turnover, lengthy delays in filling some vacant posts, and changing priorities during the year leading to reassignment of staff. To mitigate these problems in 2014/15 the Executive Management Board has taken a more rigorous approach to prioritisation, reflected in a reduced number of PPMs in the 2014/15 business plan. This will help us to direct resources to the most critical areas of the business. We are also considering how to improve communication with government administrations and country conservation bodies as in-year adjustments are made to work programmes.
- 1.4. The financial forecast at the end of quarter three indicated that JNCC would achieve close to full spend of grant in aid by the end of the year, with a reasonable balance of expenditure across funding streams. This position was unchanged at the time of writing this paper (first week in March).

2. Triennial Review follow-up

- 2.1. Good progress continues to be made against the Triennial Review implementation plan (see paper D09 for the November 2013 Joint Committee meeting).
- 2.2. A major achievement has been the delegation of renewables advice in English offshore waters to Natural England. Following signature of the formal authorisation document by the Chief Executives of JNCC and Natural England in December, handover of casework to Natural England is now almost complete. For the time being JNCC is maintaining some input to casework relating to Dogger Bank SAC.

3. Structure review

- 3.1. EMB has decided to undertake a structure review of JNCC to identify whether changes are needed to the current structure of directorates, teams and programmes. The review is intended to:

- i. improve cohesion across JNCC so that we can share best practice and establish common approaches across the wide range of work we undertake. This will enable us to provide more joined-up advice to government and others and to optimise the use of resources;
 - ii. increase flexibility in the way we use staff in order to respond effectively to rapidly changing agendas and to optimise efficiency;
 - iii. improve transparency for JNCC's funding bodies and other stakeholders, conveying our work programmes and associated costs in a way which is meaningful for them and allows them to take decisions about priorities and funding;
 - iv. provide sufficient senior staff capacity to deliver work programmes effectively;
 - v. ensure that overall costs are affordable.
- 3.2. The first phase of the review will be completed in the summer when decisions will be made on the future organisational structure. Implementation of any changes will take place by April 2015.

4. Update on Defra's One Business programme

- 4.1. Defra have decided to establish a new corporate services directorate within the department to consolidate delivery of procurement, estates information and communications technology (ICT) and communications support functions across the Defra network. Other functions may be added in due course. Implementation will be phased, with network bodies joining in tranches.
- 4.2. No decisions have yet been made as to whether JNCC will obtain services from the new corporate services directorate. We will track developments in the new directorate and will consider whether to obtain services from the directorate or maintain them separately when there is sufficient information to consider the business case.
- 4.3. Following an extensive prioritisation exercise, an Evidence Investment Strategy (EIS) for the Defra network has been drafted. It presents an overview of the current/planned evidence priorities across Defra and the network, and an assessment of longer-term evidence challenges and how they will be addressed. JNCC's work generally fits well with the direction of travel indicated by the EIS. The EIS will be published in May.