

# JNCC MARINE NATURA 2000 PROJECT GROUP MINUTES

## FIFTH MEETING 9<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2004

11:00 – 15:00 JNCC, MONKSTONE HOUSE

### APPROVED MINUTES

#### Present (around table):

Jan Pentreath (JP) (Chair) - Joint Committee

Malcolm Vincent (MV) - JNCC

Charlotte Johnston (CJ) - JNCC

Caroline Turnbull (CT) - JNCC (secretary)

Jim Reid (JR) - JNCC

David Connor (DC) (up to item 7) - JNCC

Andy Webb (AW) - JNCC

Helen Baker (HB) (items 1-4 and 8 onwards) - JNCC

Dan Laffoley (DL) (up to item 7) - EN

Paul Gilliland (PG) (up to item 7) - EN

Angela Moffat (AM) (items 1-4 & 8 onwards) - EN

Peter Clement (PC) - EN

John Baxter (JB) (up to item 7) - SNH

Nigel Buxton (NB) - SNH

#### By video-link:

Mandy McMath (MM) (up to item 7) - CCW

Catherine Gray (CG) (item 8 onwards) - CCW

#### Apologies:

Mark Tasker (JNCC)

Wyn Jones (JNCC)

Allan Drewitt (EN)

Sian Whitehead (CCW)

Adam Cole-King (CCW)

Claire McSorley (JNCC)

Ben Fraser (EN)

Kirsten Ramsay (CCW)

Howard Platt (DoENI)

Ian Bainbridge (Scottish Executive)

### 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

JP welcomed the attendees. Apologies noted as above.

### 2. Minutes of the fourth Marine Natura Project Group Meeting and matters arising

The minutes were approved without amendment. Action points from the last meeting were all completed with the following exceptions which will be carried over as action points 1 to 3 from this meeting:

AP2: Awaiting the updating of the JNCC website – scheduled for April (**now AP1**).

AP10: MV will produce the paper for Chief Scientists February meeting and circulate to the group (**now AP2**).

AP11: Work is on schedule to be completed in April '04 (**now AP3**).

### 3. EU & UK Marine working groups

#### 3.1 EU Habitats/Ornis Committee Marine Expert Group

CJ reported that the Marine Expert Group (MEG) met on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> November and that the three main work strands are ongoing:

Conclusions have not yet been reached on habitat definitions. Sandbanks are still the main problem with Germany still wishing to submit sandbanks which are wholly below 20m. The Dogger Bank site has been resolved by considering the bank as a whole and submitting it as a trans-national site, thus including an area less than 20m deep (the UK section). Stony reefs still need some resolution regarding particle size and there are discussions over what text should be included for the interpretation of submarine structures habitat. The group remarked that assurance was needed from the Commission that any changes to the interpretation of sandbank habitat would not have implications on the existing site series which has been proposed by the UK. It was noted that the Commission had not been forthcoming on this issue.

The paper drafted by the UK on site selection was well received but needs re-drafting to reflect a wider EU view. CJ will complete the re-drafting of the paper in February.

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The paper on management was widely regarded by MEG as being inadequate and a substantial revision is awaited.

CJ also reported that UK comments on the EU bird list had not been fully incorporated and that efforts are being made to rectify this. No progress has been made on revisions to the Annexes for habitats and species but it is likely that this will occur on a long timescale, possibly linked to those of the marine thematic strategy.

## 3.2 UK Marine Natura groups

CJ highlighted that the new Defra-led Marine Sub-group composed of government, devolved administrations, NGOs and the JNCC would be considering papers to go to the MEG and also items from the Natura 2000 and Ramsar Steering Committee. It will be timed to meet prior to MEG meetings. The group questioned the lack of agency representation in the Marine Sub-Group especially with regards to issues of developing policy. It was recommended that agency personnel pursue this individually with Defra.

### **AP4 The group to pursue agency representation on the UK Marine Sub-Group via discussions with Defra and the devolved administrations.**

The group considered the flow diagrams presented in paper MN2KPG5\_1 and agreed that it reflected accurately the complex system of groups now involved with Natura 2000, Ramsar and OSPAR MPAs. It was agreed that the title of the final diagram would be modified to be less inclusive. It was noted that the diagrams did not represent the process for site selection and designation accurately since this frequently was between organisations and not through group interactions. It was highlighted that it was important to be aware where the decision-making was occurring and that time and influence should be spent wisely given the number of groups to engage in.

## 4. OSPAR

### 4.1 Update from MASH and for BDC 2004 (habitats, species and MPAs)

CJ reported her attendance with DC at the MASH meeting in November where it was agreed that two species of seahorse (*Hippocampus hippocampus* and *H. guttulatus*) and four habitats (*Modiolus modiolus*, intertidal mussel beds, *Sabellaria spinulosa* reefs and maerl beds) would be recommended for addition to the Initial OSPAR List of threatened and/or declining species and habitats. These additions will be considered at the Biodiversity Committee meeting 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> February 2004. The Netherlands is leading on the work to develop what should be done for the species and habitats on this list and the UK will need to comment on this work at some point. CJ also advised the group that the UK has agreed to examine all existing marine Natura 2000 sites for their suitability for submission as OSPAR MPAs. The UK will report on this at the next MASH meeting in September/October 2004.

### 4.2 Definition of an ecologically coherent network of MPAs

The group noted that the UK has agreed to lead on the development of what constitutes an ecologically coherent network of sites with support from BirdLife. CT clarified that staff from the Irish Sea Pilot Project, involved in marine strategy and at BirdLife have also received the first draft of the paper which is provided to the group in paper MN2KPG5\_2. The group highlighted that the critical section of the paper would be the practical application of the theoretical aspects and it was agreed that how this was presented would be critical to the take up of the paper both in the UK and within the OSPAR contracting parties.

### **AP5 Group to provide comments to CT by 27<sup>th</sup> February to be incorporated into a further iteration of the Networks paper.**

## 5. Selection of SACs for Annex I habitat interest features

### 5.1 Update on submission of draft sites

CT reported to the group that of the seven sites discussed at the last project group meeting, five sites would be put before the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in March 2004 for recommendation to Defra as SACs for Annex I habitat interest features. These are: Haig Fras, Wyville Thomson Ridge, Saturn *Sabellaria spinulosa* reef, Scanner pockmark and pockmarks near Braemar oil field. The boundary of Wyville Thomson Ridge has been modified to take account of comments tendered at the last project group meeting. These sites will have a caveat attached to explain that these are subject to no substantive changes being made to the definition of the relevant habitat in the EU Interpretation Manual

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as a result of discussions at the EU MEG. The Dogger Bank site will be discussed with Germany and the Netherlands prior to its submission to Committee to ensure agreement of a boundary between the three member states.

## **5.2 Progression of Group 2 areas of habitat**

The paper MN2KPG5\_3 was welcomed as a first step at identifying what work would be needed to designate a representative suite of habitat SACs in UK offshore waters. It was agreed that CJ and CT would meet with English Nature to enable coordination of effort. It was highlighted that consistency of approach must be ensured throughout the selection of the suite of sites with special reference made to the assessment of structure and function. The group discussed whether it was sufficient to present a case for costs for the bare minimum of sites and agreed that it was important to include all costs associated with site designation and to build in contingency for delays. It was also noted that the bare minimum should not be presented as ideal and that full representation and replication are desirable in the Natura network. Priorities for survey should also be reflected in any further iteration of the paper. The group agreed that discussion with Defra and other government departments on funding for marine Natura is necessary.

**AP6 The group to provide detailed comments on paper MN2KPG5\_3\_Grp2Prog to CT by 27<sup>th</sup> February.**

**AP7 CT/CJ to revise paper MN2KPG5\_3 and use to develop detailed timetable and costs for JNCC's marine Natura 2000 programme.**

**AP8 JNCC to meet with Defra to discuss funding of marine Natura 2000 site identification and designation.**

## **6. Selection of SACs for Annex II species**

### **6.1 Update on harbour porpoise**

MV reported that the paper for Chief Scientists Group would be written over the following week and circulated to the Project Group and Inter-agency Marine Mammals Working Group for comment. After examination by the Chief Scientists (25<sup>th</sup> February) the paper may then go to Committee if deemed appropriate.

## **7. Timetable for SAC progress (inc. agency updates)**

CJ reported that survey in 2004 would comprise of ground-truthing of Blackstones Banks and possible collaboration with SNH to survey the Outer Hebrides rock platform. DC added that the Interreg MESH project would contribute to this programme. PG reported that English Nature hoped to have a scoping list of sites by the end of December 2004 which would include some areas for which survey would be necessary. MM confirmed that no surveys were planned in Welsh waters for the coming year.

**AP9 CT to update timetable to reflect the points highlighted in the project group meeting.**

## **8. Seaward extensions to seabird breeding colony SPAs**

### **8.1 Progress on programme and analysis**

AW reported that work to produce a paper for the SPA & Ramsar Scientific Working Group was on schedule. Further survey is scheduled for Manx shearwater (to take place on Rum) and red-throated diver (hopefully on Shetland or on Rum depending on funding).

## **9. Marine SPAs for inshore aggregations of non-breeding birds**

### **9.1 Developing generic guidance for boundary definition – update on the Tay and Liverpool Bay analyses**

JR reported that the guidelines paper (provided to the project group 9<sup>th</sup> September 2003) had been revised in the light of comments received and would now be presented to the March 2004 Joint Committee meeting. The main methods paper which underpins the guidelines will be circulated to the project group in late February.

Analysis of the Tay indicates that another year of data is necessary to draw reliable conclusions. Incorporating the survey data from winter 03/04 will enable reporting in the autumn.

AW presented the data analysis for Liverpool Bay. It was highlighted that black scoter numbers exceeded the threshold in both seasons in the south sector and one season in the north sector. Red-throated diver numbers exceeded the threshold in both seasons in both sectors. Therefore, a site can be

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recommended for both species. Numbers of little gull satisfy the minimum fifty rule but the data is only from one season. The group discussed boundary options for an SPA in Liverpool Bay and noted that guidelines approved by the Joint Committee in March 2003 favoured a simple boundary rather than one with many nodes/vertices or based on a depth contour. MV highlighted that the Joint Committee could endorse an SPA in Liverpool Bay once it was confirmed that the bird population satisfied the SPA guidelines. The group noted that it was not possible to notify the area for an assemblage since other species were not present in sufficient numbers and also there was a lack of contextual information to judge whether the site was the most appropriate.

**AP10 JR to circulate to the group the inshore aggregations of non-breeding birds methods paper in late February for comment.**

### **9.2 List of marine areas containing high concentrations of birds**

MV reported that a letter highlighting marine areas containing high concentrations of birds which may be considered for SPAs had been sent on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2004 and tabled it at the meeting. It was stressed that attempts should be made to make Defra and other government departments aware of the urgent need to complete the suite of marine SPA in the light of increased pressure on marine areas from other stakeholders.

## **10. Progress in marine SPAs**

### **10.1 Analysis for aggregations of seabirds away from the coast**

JR reported that he was awaiting a response from the DTI on funds for the preliminary work on aggregations away from the coast. It is hoped that this work will commence in the forthcoming financial year.

### **10.2 Timetable for work**

JR reported that a timetable and costs for marine SPAs had been produced and refined since the last meeting. This underlined the need for substantial additional resources to be provided to the process if the work is to happen. The group noted that the process would be long and data hungry. It was also stressed that the different strands of work could not be de-coupled since this would remove context from decision-making on specific SPAs. The similarity between funding needs for offshore marine habitat SACs and marine SPAs was noted along with the need to prioritise work over the next financial year. The group agreed that resources for the completion of the marine Natura 2000 network should be pursued as a priority (cross reference to Action Point 8).

## **11. Papers to working groups and the Joint Committee**

### **11.1 SPA & Ramsar Scientific Working Group**

Paper on decisions and planned work for colony SPA extensions. To be dealt with inter-sessionally.

### **11.2 Joint Nature Conservation Committee (March '04)**

Natura 2000 paper containing an update on Natura 2000 including timetable and costs, request for signing off guidelines for identifying SPAs for inshore aggregations of non-breeding waterbirds, request for approval of five offshore habitat SACs.

Report on outcome of the Irish Sea Pilot.

Update on the Interreg proposal on marine mapping.

### **11.3 EU Marine Experts Group (March '04)**

Revised site identification paper.

### **11.4 Papers for 6<sup>th</sup> Project Group (May '04)**

Second draft of Networks paper.

## **12. Any other business**

None.

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## Summary of action points

<b>Action point number</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Action by</b>	<b>Action on</b>
1	Place approved working guidance on boundary definition onto the JNCC website	Next meeting	CJ
2	Draft paper to propose the next steps for harbour porpoise work for the consideration of the Chief Scientists Group and then Joint Committee, taking into account comment from the Project Group and Inter-agency Marine Mammal Working Group.	25 <sup>th</sup> February	MV
3	Provide a paper on decisions and planned work for colony SPA extensions to the SPA & Ramsar Scientific Working Group.	April '04	AW
4	Pursue agency representation on the UK Marine Sub-Group via discussions with Defra and the devolved administrations	Ad hoc	Group
5	Provide comments to CT to be incorporated into a further iteration of the Networks paper.	27 <sup>th</sup> February	Group
6	Provide detailed comments on paper MN2KPG5_3_Grp2Prog to CT.	27 <sup>th</sup> February	Group
7	Revise paper MN2KPG5_3 and use to develop detailed timetable and costs for JNCC's marine Natura 2000 programme	April '04	CT/CJ
8	Meet with Defra to discuss funding of marine Natura 2000 site identification and designation.	April '04	JNCC
9	Update timetable to reflect the points highlighted in the project group meeting.	Next meeting	CT
10	Circulate to the group the inshore aggregations of non-breeding birds methods paper for comment.	Late February	JR