

JNCC MARINE NATURA 2000 PROJECT GROUP
MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING, 25TH SEPTEMBER 2002
11.00 - 16.00 JNCC, MONKSTONE HOUSE

Present (around table):

Jan Pentreath (JP) (Chair) - Joint Committee
Malcolm Vincent (MV) - JNCC
Mark Tasker (MT) - JNCC (from item 3)
Andy Webb (AW) - JNCC
David Connor (DC) - JNCC
Jim Reid (JR) - JNCC
Allan Drewitt (AD) - EN (from item 8)
Caroline Turnbull (CT) - JNCC (secretary)
Paul Gilliland (PG) - EN

Nigel Buxton (NB) - SNH
Charlotte Johnston (CJ) - JNCC
Helen Baker (HB) - JNCC
Claire McSorley (CM) - JNCC

By video-link:

Adam Cole-King (ACK) - CCW
Mandy McMath (MM) - CCW

Apologies:

Ian Enlander (EHS)
Wyn Jones (JNCC)
John Baxter (SNH)

Ian Bainbridge (Scottish Executive)
Dan Laffoley (EN)
Simon Northridge (SMRU)

1. Welcome and apologies for absence.

JP welcomed all members to the inaugural meeting of the group and introduced himself. Apologies were received as listed above.

2. Marine Natura 2000 Project Group.

2.1 Terms of reference and membership.

Comments on the terms of reference (paper 1_0902_MN2KPG) were invited.

The group is charged with its remit by the Joint Committee with special attention on advising the Joint Committee on remaining work on marine Natura 2000 sites, setting the remaining work within the context of wider marine strategy and providing recommendations when necessary.

The Terms of Reference were agreed with the proviso that “recommended” would be inserted in point one before “UK marine Natura 2000 site series”. The group agreed that clarity needed to be sought on the relationship between it and the DEFRA led Natura 2000 Steering Group or any marine sub-group that was subsequently set up.

Core membership of the Project Group is interagency, plus a standing invitation to the chair of the SPA Scientific Working Group.

Action Point 1 - Project Group members to let CT know which individuals should or should not be copied Project Group papers directly by email.

Action Point 2 - JNCC to contact Ian Enlander (EHS) to clarify participation from EHS/DoENI.

Action Point 3 - Project Group members to check job titles on list of members of Project Group and submit corrections to CT.

3. Developing a UK Marine Nature Conservation Strategy.

MV briefed the group on the development of the Irish Sea Pilot Project as part of the Review of Marine Nature Conservation (RMNC). The work of the Project Group should be supportive of the vision set out by the RMNC/Marine Stewardship Report. Links between the work produced by the Irish Sea Pilot and the Project Group should be identified and used for mutual benefit.

Action point 4 - MV to prepare a briefing on progress in RMNC, ISP and Marine Stewardship Report initiatives for the next meeting.

4. Report from DEFRA Offshore Natura 2000 European Seminar, June 2002.

The seminar had been a success with useful discussion on JNCC Report 325. The methodology proposed for identifying potential SPA sites in the UK was endorsed by the delegation with some reservations over statistical methodology expressed by BirdLife International. Other European countries are undertaking work to identify fully marine Natura 2000 sites, and useful contacts were made with Germany and the Netherlands. The notes and concluding principles of the European Seminar were issued by DEFRA to participants on 25.9.02 and will be published on the JNCC website in October 2002.

5. Report on timetable for selection of marine Natura 2000 sites in UK offshore waters.

MV asked for comment on the draft timetable presented in paper 3_0902_MN2KPG. The group agreed on the timings set out for the different strands of work and requested additional tasks for 'bird species not already covered by existing proposed work' and for the 'identification of additional nearshore habitat SACs in territorial waters' by country agencies.

Action point 5 - JNCC to revise timetable for the selection of marine Natura 2000 sites in UK waters for the next Project Group meeting.

6. Selection of offshore SACs for Annex I habitat interest features.

6.1 Consideration of draft guidelines on SAC boundary selection for Annex I habitats, with Darwin Mounds proposed boundary as an example.

Comments on the guidelines for defining boundaries for Annex I habitat SACs and the recommendation to take forward the suggested Darwin Mounds pSAC boundary were invited. Although the Group agreed that simple boundaries involving the minimum practical number of straight lines was to be preferred, some unease was expressed by one or two members about the boundary being drawn so as to facilitate conservation rather than being drawn tight to the interest feature as mapped. After some discussion, the majority view was that the primary objective was to relate the features on the sea floor to the activities on the sea surface that would adversely affect them, and to do so in the simplest way possible, particularly with a view as to how best to control and hence regulate such activities. The group therefore agreed that the boundary for the Darwin Mounds suggested in Figure 1 of paper 4 should be recommended to DEFRA. The guidelines were agreed subject to deleting the sentence 'If practical could be used' in point 2 of Paper 4.

The group acknowledged the difficulties associated with interpolated seabed features and habitat, and that the accuracy and precision of mapping these will decrease with distance from shore.

Action point 6 - Comments to be sent to CJ on guiding principles for habitat boundary placement by 9.10.02.

Action point 7 - CJ/CT to prepare paper for Joint Committee meeting in December 2002 to approve boundary determination guidelines.

6.2 Discussion on application of selection criteria for offshore Annex I habitats.

CT introduced the rationale behind the production of paper 5, highlighting the difficulty in applying Annex III selection criteria other than 'representativity'. The group agreed with the rationale of using representativity to produce a 'first cut' of regions where possible SAC sites may be placed in offshore waters. Other selection criteria will not be ignored, and will be used in the further evaluation of sites to

be consistent with the requirements of the Directive and the methodology applied to inshore site selection. Bilateral discussions will ensure that the suite of proposed offshore sites and additional SACs in territorial waters are co-ordinated (see item below also).

The first tranche of sites should only include sites that will be included in the UK site series irrespective of additional sites which may be identified within territorial waters. This will mean that some sites will be proposed to Government before the complete set of marine sites is identified.

Action point 8 - CT to produce a paper providing information on the quality and nature of the regions with a view to determining best examples of sub-types of habitat.

7. Selection of additional SACs in UK Territorial Waters.

7.1 Reports from the Country Agencies.

PG (EN) reported that work is now planned to look at existing information to identify a scoping list of potential additional habitat SACs in English territorial waters away from the coast. However, further work beyond this, e.g. surveys to inform boundary placement, is not currently possible without additional resources.

MM (CCW) reported that no additional work on marine SACs is planned for CCW because their existing SACs extend a long way from the coast. If an offshore proposed SAC extends into Welsh territorial waters, then CCW will regard it as a boundary issue to be resolved bilaterally with JNCC.

Similar timescales need to be adopted for identifying habitat SACs, both within and outside territorial waters.

No report was available from Scottish Natural Heritage in the absence of JB (see action point 9).

MV reported that EHS is evaluating further maerl bed sites in the context of the marine SACs series.

The group agreed that there was no alternative but to develop a complete series of marine habitat SACs between 0 and 200 nautical miles and that, as much as possible, this would have to be accomplished within a common timescale.

Action point 9 - JNCC to organise bilateral discussions with country agencies to ensure that development of an offshore site series is compatible with proposed sites in territorial waters. The results of which will be considered within the UK context by the project group.

8. Selection of SACs for Annex II species.

8.1 Report on analysis of data for harbour porpoise and further work.

JR reported that the SMRU report had been received and would be circulated shortly. Conclusions highlighted from the report included: analyses were exploratory; only weak conclusions about areas of regular high density could be drawn; three areas appeared more dense than the background though results were tentative; it was unclear whether further method development would help the identification of areas of regular high density; and there was insufficient information to identify calf:adult ratios. The report by Seawatch should be available by early November and MM will circulate it. Adequate discussion of harbour porpoise site identification cannot occur until both reports have been received. Both reports will be independently refereed.

Action point 10 - JR and MM to circulate reports when received from contractors.

Action point 11 - JR and MM to summarise the two harbour porpoise reports, discuss and plan next steps with Inter-agency Marine Mammal Group, and report back to the next project group meeting.

9. Seaward extensions to seabird breeding colony SPAs.

9.1 Consideration of boundary recommendations.

CM presented a synopsis of the work undertaken by JNCC to identify generic seaward extensions to seabird breeding colony SPAs. Clarification was sought over whether the birds were using the water regularly and whether the proposed extensions encompassed the majority of the birds from the colony. Assurance was given that the water was used regularly by the birds, with the majority visiting the water

daily. The point was made that ecological dependence of the birds on the seawater area adjacent to the colony needs to be demonstrated for seaward extensions to be appropriate. There must, in all cases, be a clear audit trail to demonstrate the decision making processes for the extensions to SPA colony boundaries.

The boundary determination guidelines were accepted, subject to further consideration on management, with modification according to SAC boundaries to allow shapes other than boxes to be used where appropriate for the ease of enforcing control over activities within it.

Action point 12 - CJ/JR to prepare paper for Joint Committee meeting in December 2002 on guidelines for determining marine extensions to SPA colonies to incorporate justifications for conclusions.

9.2 Report on SPA Scientific Working Group discussions of 24.9.02.

The SPA Scientific Working Group endorsed the analytical approach and boundary recommendations for those species covered by this work, but underlined the need for further work to address the needs of other species.

10. SPAs for inshore aggregations of non-breeding birds.

10.1 Consideration of draft guidelines on boundary selection for SPAs for inshore aggregations of non-breeding birds, with Carmarthen Bay pSPA proposed boundary options as an example.

JR outlined the background to Carmarthen Bay pSPA and AW explained the methods that were employed to determine the limits of the pSPA.

The Group discussed whether the selection of Carmarthen Bay would set a precedent that might prejudice future work on inshore aggregations of non-breeding birds. The group agreed that the technique used for Carmarthen Bay was appropriate for the Carmarthen Bay data, but flexibility in methodology must be maintained. It was agreed that it would be unwise to draw up detailed guidelines for boundary selection for this type of SPA from the experience gained from only one site, and that further work was needed to develop generally applicable guidance. The boundary from headland to headland, incorporating the 'satellite' areas, was nevertheless recommended as the best option to recommend to CCW for the seaward boundary of Carmarthen Bay pSPA. The SPA Scientific Working Group will discuss further the definition of 'regularly occurring' for marine species where data availability was less than for coastal and terrestrial populations.

Action point 13 - SPA Scientific Working Group to consider the definition of 'regularly occurring' in the context of marine sites and data availability.

10.2 Report on SPA Scientific Working Group discussions.

The SPA Scientific Working Group endorsed the analytical approach used to analyse aerial data. They expressed uncertainty about the issue of boundary placement based on satellites of dense bird occurrence.

11. Further work required on marine SPAs.

This item was not fully discussed because it was felt that the immediate priority was to get on with the existing deadlines. JNCC to incorporate these three strands of work in to the revised timetable for the next meeting.

12. Proposed timetable for future meetings.

It was suggested that three meetings a year of the Project Group would be sufficient. Work needing to be agreed between meetings will be done inter-sessionally by email. The next meeting will be in the first two weeks of February with a date to be canvassed by email.

Next meetings of the SPA Scientific Working Group: 29th January 2003 and 7th May 2003.

Next meetings of the Joint Committee: 10th December 2002 and March 2003.

Action point 14 - CT to canvas for dates for the next Project Group meeting to be held in the first two weeks of February 2003 in order to set date by 17.10.02.

13. Any other business.

None.

Summary of action points

Action point number	Action	Date due	Action by
1	Feedback any individuals who should or should not be copied Project Group papers directly.	Next meeting	Group
2	Contact Ian Enlander (EHS) to clarify participation from EHS/DoENI.	Next meeting	JNCC
3	Check job titles on list of members of Project Group and submit corrections to CT	Next meeting	Group
4	Prepare a briefing on progress in RMNC, ISP and Marine Stewardship Report initiatives for the next meeting.	Next meeting	MV
5	Revise timetable for the selection of marine Natura 2000 sites in UK waters for the next Project Group meeting.	Next meeting	JNCC
6	Comments to be sent to CJ on guiding principles for habitat boundary placement.	9.10.02	Group
7	Prepare paper for Joint Committee meeting in December 2002 to approve boundary determination guidelines.	December 2002	CJ/CT
8	Produce a paper providing information on the quality and nature of the regions with a view to determining best examples of sub-types of habitat.	Next meeting	CT
9	Organise bilateral discussions with country agencies to ensure that development of an offshore site series is compatible with proposed sites in territorial waters.	On an <i>ad hoc</i> basis	JNCC
10	Circulate reports when received from contractors.	When possible	JR & MM
11	Summarise the two harbour porpoise reports, discuss and plan next steps with Inter-agency Marine Mammal Group and report back to the next project group meeting.	Next meeting	JR & MM
12	Prepare paper for Joint Committee meeting in December 2002 on guidelines for determining marine extensions to SPA colonies to incorporate justifications for conclusions.	December 2002	JR/CJ
13	Consider the definition of 'regularly occurring' in the context of marine sites and data availability.	January or May 2003	SPA Sci Wkg Group