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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

MATTERS ARISING

This paper deals with points not covered by substantive items on the agenda. The numbers relate to the minutes of the September meeting unless otherwise stated.

3.2.1 GMOs

The JNCC position statement on GMOs has been revised in the light of discussions at the September meeting of Committee, and has been signed off by Chairman. The position statement is now available on the JNCC web site, and arrangements are being made to produce printed copies for distribution.

3.2.2 Standing Orders for Corporate Governance

Draft Standing Orders for Corporate Governance were considered by the Audit and Resources Sub-Group at their October meeting and some useful comments were received. Work associated with stage 2 of the FMPR has prevented this from being progressed further and an interim statement will now be presented to a future Committee meeting.

5.3 Selection of SACs for Degraded Bog

- i. The Committee previously considered its position in relation to the objections from the peat extraction companies to the proposals for cSACs for degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration. A further meeting has since taken place between JNCC, English Nature and all but one of the principle objectors and their advisors. The meeting did not identify any new issues in relation to the JNCC advice, nor did it result in any resolution of issues, but it did help to clarify a number of points. Outside of this meeting a number of site-specific issues are being dealt with by English Nature.
- ii. English Nature will report to Government on the outcome of the public consultation in due course, and JNCC and English Nature will provide further scientific advice as appropriate.

10.3 JNCC FMPR Stage 2 – situation update

- i. The FMPR Steering Group met on 3 October to consider progress with Stage 2 and discuss papers drafted by the Review Officer. Three papers have been

prepared and circulated to the Steering Group for comment: future roles of the JNCC, funding arrangements for the JNCC and issues requiring legislative change. The meeting concluded that given slippage in September, the Stage 2 Report should be submitted to DEFRA at the end of November.

- ii. The Support Unit has continued to explore the options for improving staffing arrangements as outlined in the terms of reference. Some legal advice has been received concerning the issues relating to harmonisation of arrangements for staff members. Further legal advice is currently being sought to resolve a number of information gaps, concerning the application of employment legislation to the options identified. The country agencies' resource directors considered the staffing issues at their meeting in November, which will be discussed further at their next meeting, in light of the legal advice received and the Stage 2 recommendations. The Support Unit has provided the Review Officer with an initial evaluation of the options and outstanding issues to be addressed.
- iii. To progress the other elements of the terms of reference the Review Officer recently met with Chairman and consulted the independent members to consider the future constitution of the Joint Committee. Work has also been undertaken to review arrangements for improving the JNCC corporate planning approach, particularly regarding wider and earlier engagement with stakeholders and planning with a longer-term focus to implement the Statement of Strategic Direction.
- iv. Support Unit staff have formed a Staff Association to represent their interests throughout the Review. The Staff Association has consulted staff members to gauge views on which aspects of terms and conditions staff feel should be addressed as part of the FMPR. This information has been provided to the Review Officer.
- v. DEFRA propose to circulate the Stage 2 Report to Steering Group members to consult on the factual accuracy of the content. The Steering Group will then meet in mid to late January to discuss the report and agree the next stages, including drafting an action plan to address the recommendations and establishing a group charged with implementation.

11.3 Offshore Natura 2000 sites - Progress update

- i. Good progress has been made on the provision to Government of information necessary to identify Special Areas for Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) in the marine zone between 12-200 nautical miles from UK shores. This is in accordance with provisions of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC).

- ii. In order to deliver a final report to DEFRA/DTI by early January 2002, the current priorities are: to follow up consultation on habitat definitions and selection criteria with European scientists; to continue to clarify the potential options for selecting sites for wide-ranging marine species of birds and marine mammals; to complete the draft final report by early December for submission to DEFRA/DTI.
- iii. The contract with British Geological Survey (BGS) to identify and map Annex I habitat areas has almost been completed. Final digital copies of maps and a draft report are due imminently, with the contract due for completion by end of November. Biological and other information on these areas of habitat has been collated, and sections on Annex I habitats for the final report are in preparation.
- iv. Draft papers on options for selecting Natura 2000 sites for wide ranging species have been circulated and discussed at one Operational/Technical (Op/Tech) Group meeting in July and two in October. Discussions have been intense, and the paper is nearing completion for inclusion in the final report. It will present the processes to be followed, and options available for selection of sites for wide ranging species. There will, however, be considerable further work to be undertaken by JNCC/Agencies after submission of the final report to DEFRA/DTI, before potential sites for wide ranging species can be identified.
- v. We have received summary results from the DTI Strategic Environmental Assessment of the mature oil producing parts of the North Sea surveys (North Norfolk Sandbanks and North Sea pockmark field). However, we are still awaiting biological survey results to incorporate into the final report for the Offshore Natura 2000 project.
- vi. A draft document was circulated in September to European scientific colleagues in all Member States for comment. The document outlined our current approach to defining and selecting Annex I habitats in offshore waters, selection criteria for Annex II species, and a report on the cold water coral *Lophelia pertusa*. Several encouraging responses have been received to date, but there has been no substantive discussion on offshore habitat definitions with other Member States.
- vii. Project staff have continued to provide advice and information to a wide range of parties. A statement about the project has been prepared and is available on request. It is hoped that further detail on the project will be available on the JNCC website by the end of November which should fulfil most enquiry's for information.
- viii. DEFRA are organising a seminar for European colleagues in March/April 2002 to disseminate and receive feedback on UK's proposals for selection of SACs and SPAs in offshore waters. JNCC will provide support to DEFRA and technical input for this workshop under the current Service Level Agreement.