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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE

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1. Existing arrangements

- 1.1 The Joint Committee is comprised of 13 members: the chairman and one other member from each of English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales; the chairman of the Countryside Agency; two representatives from Northern Ireland; and four independent members (including the chairman of the Committee). The independent members are currently Sir Angus Stirling (chairman), Professor Bill Heal, Professor Jan Pentreath and Professor David Ingram.
- 1.2 Independent members are each usually appointed for a term of three years, and are expected to spend at least 2½ days/month on Committee business. They work with the other Committee members to ensure that the JNCC complies with statutory requirements for the use of public funds, to establish the strategic direction of the organisation, and to oversee its work programme.
- 1.3 In addition to regular participation in Joint Committee meetings, independent members have become involved in JNCC's work in various other ways. For example, all Committee members have been assigned to particular work areas, reflecting their interests and expertise (see JNCC 98 P6 *Assignment of Committee members*). These arrangements are intended to encourage the involvement of members in specific subject areas, e.g. by participating in working groups or helping to prepare papers.
- 1.4 The role of independent members was discussed at the December 1998 Committee meeting, when it was noted that their expertise and knowledge were not being fully exploited. It was agreed that their input could be enhanced in three ways:
 - i. informing JNCC about the work and ideas of other organisations;
 - ii. alerting the Committee to evolving issues which have the potential to become important for nature conservation;
 - iii. taking the lead on long-term issues.
- 1.5 As a result of the discussion at the December 1998 Committee meeting, actions were taken to strengthen the role of independent members. Examples of recent JNCC work to which independent members have contributed include the following:

- i. A Committee subgroup was established in September 1999 to review the case for including the subtidal areas of the Severn Estuary within the pSAC. The subgroup was chaired by Sir Angus Stirling and also included Professor Janet Sprent as an independent member.
- ii. Professor Crawley contributed to the inter-agency working group co-ordinating the Fourth Quinquennial Review of Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.
- iii. Professor Heal has chaired the inter-agency Species Status Steering Group.
- iv. At the June 2000 Committee meeting Professor Crawley introduced the issue of the conservation of veteran trees, leading to a subsequent programme of work undertaken by the Woodland Lead Co-ordination Network.
- v. At the March 2002 Committee meeting it was agreed that Professor Pentreath should chair an inter-agency group to co-ordinate the selection of marine SACs and SPAs.
- vi. Independent members have actively participated in the work of the Resources and Audit sub-committee.
- vii. Professors Heal and Pentreath made a substantial contribution to the Committee's FMPR sub-group.

2. The JNCC Quinquennial Review

- 2.1 As part of the Quinquennial Review of the JNCC, the reviewing officer consulted the independent Committee members and considered how their role might be developed. His recommendations are contained in Chapter 9 of the Stage 2 report.
- 2.2 The reviewing officer proposed that the role of the independent members should be to complement country agency perspectives and to provide a wider perspective on scientific issues, in particular by developing a strategic approach to European/international issues.
- 2.3 The Stage 2 report contains several recommendations relating to independent members. These include:
 - i. a greater role for independent members in Joint Committee business (e.g. through participation in working groups);
 - ii. increased liaison with Government scientific advisers, research councils, academic bodies and NGOs;

- iii. additional independent expertise on land use policy issues (when future appointments are made), to supplement the perspective provided by the chairman of the Countryside Agency;
 - iv. possible increased representation of independent members on the Committee.
- 2.4 These views have been endorsed by the JNCC FMPR sub-group. Issues relating to the role of independent members are currently being considered by the Government/agency JNCC review steering group.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Independent members make an essential contribution to the work of the Joint Committee, and there is the potential to enhance their roles in various ways. This should take into account the changing political landscape in the UK (in particular, devolution and the formation of DEFRA) and the increasing influence of European and global factors on nature conservation in the UK.
- 3.2 It is recommended that the following actions are taken:
- i. ensure better dialogue between Support Unit staff and independent members, e.g. hold informal briefing sessions before/after Committee meetings in Peterborough, and develop more structured work programmes for key issues requiring the involvement of independent members;
 - ii. provide greater opportunities for independent members to meet with senior officials in Government, the European Commission, etc.;
 - iii. enhance the role of independent members in horizon scanning and liaison with other organisations, and improve arrangements for feeding this information back to the Committee and the Support Unit;
 - iv. encourage independent members to have more contact with the country agencies, e.g. by occasionally attending relevant meetings and receiving major publications and papers;
 - v. involve independent members more closely in the early stages of corporate planning and strategy development (to parallel country agency involvement through the Joint Management Group and Chief Executives' Group);
 - vi. reassess the assignment of independent Committee members to specific subject areas, in particular to utilise their scientific expertise in considering long-term strategic issues;
 - vii. when the opportunity arises, consider widening the knowledge base of Committee, by appointing independent members with scientific expertise in areas such as land use policy or sustainable development.