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## **JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

### **REVISION OF JNCC'S STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

**Paper by Marcus Yeo**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1. As discussed at Joint Committee in June 2002 (JNCC 02 D04 *Strategy development: engagement with Government*), the Support Unit has begun a process of revising JNCC's Statement of Strategic Direction. The main purpose of the revision is to ensure that the strategy addresses Government's priorities and objectives.
- 1.2. Meetings to discuss JNCC's strategy have been arranged with key UK Government departments, devolved administrations and country agencies. The first of these meetings (with DEFRA) was held on 11 September. The other meetings will take place over the next two months.
- 1.3. The Support Unit has also been considering how the strategy should inform the development of future work programmes and how it relates to the corporate planning process.

#### **2. Feedback from meeting with DEFRA**

- 2.1. Staff from the Support Unit met with DEFRA officials on 11 September to discuss JNCC's Statement of Strategic Direction. Representatives from European Wildlife, Global Wildlife, Environment Protection International, Global Atmosphere, and Sea Fisheries Conservation were present.
- 2.2. In broad terms, DEFRA expressed approval for the existing Statement of Strategic Direction. They were particularly supportive of JNCC's role in providing advice on international and marine conservation issues, in co-ordinating the development of integrated monitoring and surveillance programmes, and in advising on biodiversity research priorities (see 2.3.-2.6.). More discussion is required to agree what services JNCC could offer in advising Government on strategic nature conservation objectives and sustainable development issues (see 2.7.-2.8.).
- 2.3. JNCC suggested that strategic priorities for **international conservation advice** included developing more effective implementation and reporting practices (through building synergies between multilateral environmental agreements), providing scientific advice at an early stage in the development and implementation of policy initiatives, and giving early-warning and intelligence on emerging initiatives. DEFRA felt that JNCC could offer more support to

UK Government in the international arena, but noted that it was essential to be selective and focus on agreed priorities.

- 2.4. DEFRA greatly valued JNCC's advice on **marine conservation issues**. They drew attention to the increasing demand for work relating to surveillance and monitoring in the marine environment, implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives in inshore and offshore waters, and the OSPAR Convention. Over the next few years, obligations to establish and protect the Natura 2000 series were considered to be the highest priority for Government.
- 2.5. DEFRA agreed that JNCC had a key role to play in developing a more integrated approach to **biodiversity monitoring and surveillance**. Rationalisation of existing effort will be required to ensure that schemes provide adequate coverage of habitats and species across the UK's terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine environments, both in and beyond protected sites. Other important work will include continued development of the National Biodiversity Network and other tools for disseminating biodiversity information, and establishing links with European partners so that the status of biodiversity in the UK can be placed within the context of European trends.
- 2.6. DEFRA considered that JNCC's role in **biodiversity research** went beyond supporting its other programmes into advising Government on research priorities and influencing others to undertake such research.
- 2.7. The Quinquennial Review Stage 2 report flagged up the need for UK Government to develop a **vision and long-term objectives for biodiversity conservation** in the UK, and suggested that JNCC was well-placed to provide advice in this respect. However, DEFRA questioned the need for this work, since the Government response to *Sustaining the variety of life* already provided a set of biodiversity objectives. DEFRA regarded the implementation of existing obligations as the priority, and they did not want a new set of objectives. JNCC could have a role in the further evolution of biodiversity objectives through intelligence gathering, horizon-scanning, and acting as a 'think-tank'. JNCC representatives responded by asking whether existing objectives did not need setting within the context of a vision of the desired state of UK nature.
- 2.8. There was agreement that any JNCC role in **sustainable development** must be clearly defined. JNCC was not going to be a major player but could contribute usefully to specific issues. DEFRA supported the development of ecosystem management approaches in the UK, and agreed that JNCC had a part to play here, e.g. by identifying best practice and preparing practical guidance on implementation. In terms of encouraging sustainable use of resources, it was agreed that JNCC should concentrate on issues where a UK perspective was needed, e.g. fisheries, climate change and atmospheric pollution. DEFRA confirmed that JNCC had a role in influencing international debate on key issues relating to environmental aspects of sustainable development, and advising on the development of sustainability indicators.

### 3. Taking the strategy forward

- 3.1. Consultation with Government will be completed during October. Following further discussion with the country agencies, the revised strategy will be presented to Joint Committee for final approval in December.
- 3.2. It is intended to use the revised strategy as a framework for corporate planning. An initial attempt has been made to map the proposed targets for 2003-2006 to the themes contained in the existing strategy statement. This has presented some difficulties, and additional work may be required to sharpen the definition of certain themes.
- 3.3. The strategy will provide an overarching statement of JNCC's direction over the next 10 years. Translating this into work programmes will require further discussion and analysis, in particular to identify priorities and consider resource requirements. It is proposed to do this by dealing with each strategic theme separately. The work will be undertaken by the Support Unit, calling on the expertise of country agency staff and independent Committee members as appropriate. Committee has a key role to play in this process, and will be involved through a series of discussion papers and workshop sessions at Committee meetings over the next year. A programme will be drawn up for the December Committee meeting.

### 4. Input from Joint Committee

- 4.1. The Joint Committee is asked to:
  - i. **note** the progress that has been made in consulting with Government; and
  - ii. **approve** the proposed process for using the revised strategy to inform the development of work programmes.