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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

JNCC STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Paper by Sue McQueen and Marcus Yeo

1. Introduction

- 1.1. At its meeting in December 2002, the Joint Committee agreed a Statement of Strategic Direction that summarised the JNCC's current activities and outlined possible future directions. At the same meeting, the Committee asked a sub-group of members to work with the Support Unit Management Team to develop a more focused strategic direction, including long-term objectives and clear priorities. In March 2003, the Committee agreed terms of reference for the Strategy Sub-Group.
- 1.2. This paper presents the main outputs from the Strategy Sub-Group to date: a draft vision for the natural heritage of the UK and a draft statement of the JNCC's role and purpose in relation to this vision. It describes the process by which these have been developed and the next steps in the JNCC's strategy development.

2. Summary of work undertaken by the Strategy Sub-Group

- 2.1. Between March and May 2003 the Strategy Sub-Group has met three times, and has made substantial progress in developing the JNCC's strategic direction.
- 2.2. The Sub-Group has agreed a process by which the JNCC's strategy will be developed. This is presented diagrammatically in Annex 1. Through workshop-style sessions, it has also progressed the first two stages of the process shown in Annex 1, namely developing a vision for the UK's natural heritage and a statement of the JNCC's role and purpose. Drafts of these two documents are presented in Annexes 2 and 3 respectively.
- 2.3. Support Unit staff have provided information to the Sub-Group to inform discussion at its meetings and various groups of staff have also commented on the views and ideas generated by the Sub-Group. This exchange of information, ideas and views has greatly facilitated the preparation of the draft documents.
- 2.4. Other stakeholders in the vision have not yet had opportunities to comment on and inform the views generated by the Sub-Group. However, an approach to consultation has been agreed, and an outline consultation plan has been prepared to ensure that key stakeholders have an opportunity to inform the strategy at the appropriate time.

3. Purpose of the vision and the statement of the JNCC's role

- 3.1. The vision and the statement of the JNCC's role are key documents that will establish the organisation's top-level strategic direction. They are intended to instill a clear sense of purpose and to provide long-term direction to the specific tasks and strategies that the JNCC will undertake and the approach taken in delivering them.
- 3.2. The vision is intended to be an inspirational statement relevant to all bodies involved in nature conservation. It describes the desired state of the UK's natural heritage in terms of biological and geological diversity, but also acknowledges the wider sustainable development benefits. It is intended to provide a context for the policies and strategies of the JNCC and its member bodies and ultimately for Government and other organisations that are responsible for, or influence, the environment.
- 3.3. The main purpose of the statement of the JNCC's role is, at this stage, to inform the development of top-level strategic objectives for the JNCC that are relevant to the vision for the UK's natural heritage. As the process of strategy development continues it can be redrafted as a 'mission' – a concise statement of what the JNCC is trying to achieve in relation to the vision.

4. Development of strategic objectives

- 4.1. Determining a set of strategic objectives for the JNCC is a critical part of the strategy development process. The objectives should:
 - i. be long-term (a period of around 10 years is often used);
 - ii. focus on the priority issues that the JNCC needs to address;
 - iii. convey what the JNCC will do in relation to these issues and why;
 - iv. be limited in number (probably no more than 10).
- 4.2. The objectives will guide the development of a strategic programme – the specific tasks and strategies that the JNCC will undertake over the coming years. An important component of the strategic programme will be long-term and short-term targets associated with the objectives. These targets should be challenging, achievable and prioritised within the context of available resources.

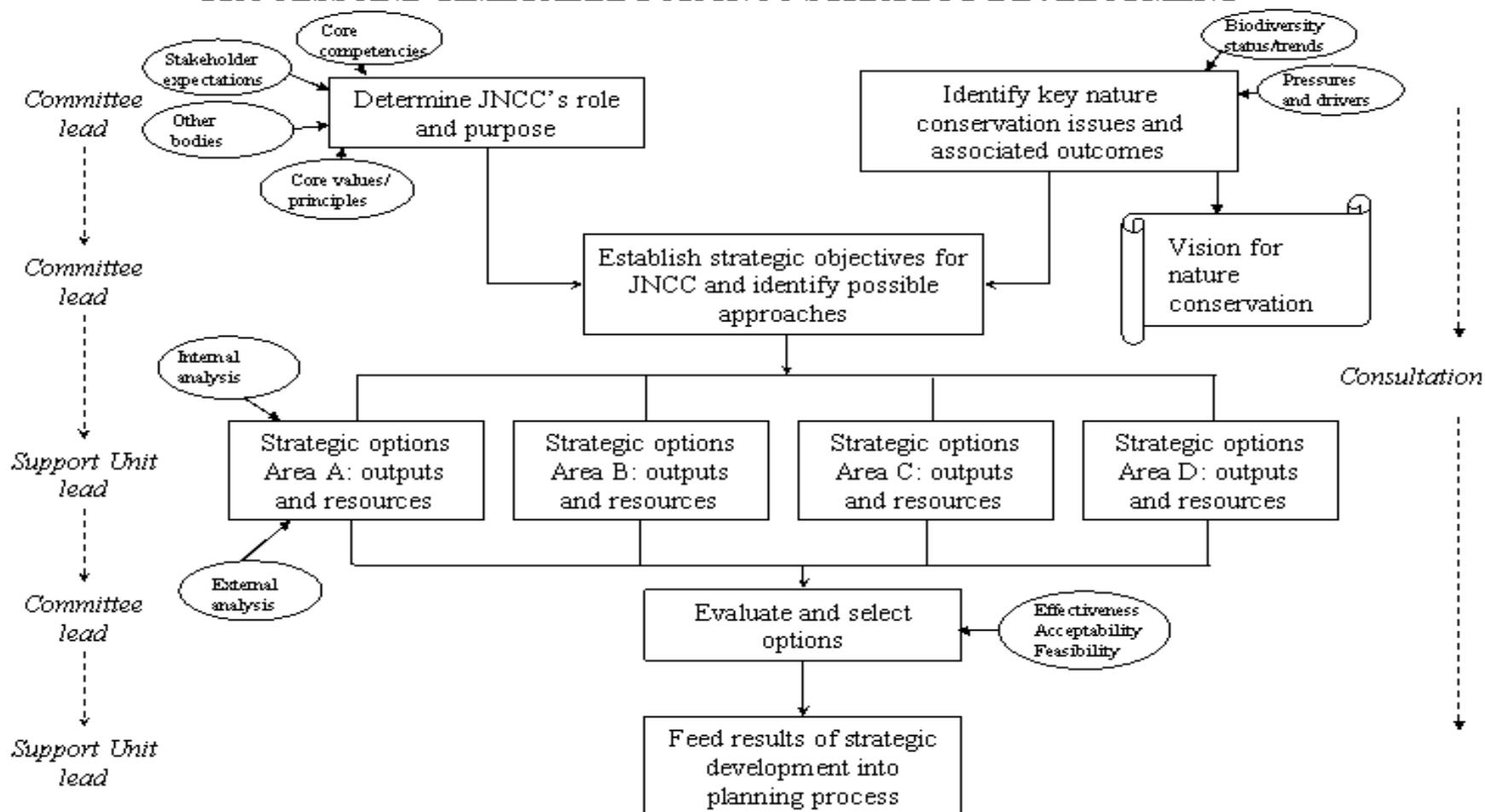
5. Next steps

- 5.1. Once the Committee has established a draft set of strategic objectives, a series of workshops involving Support Unit staff and members of the Sub-Group will be held to develop the strategic programme. The workshops will a) analyse strategic issues in relation to the objectives, b) identify possible actions and strategies to address these issues, and c) determine the resources associated with different options. The Sub-Group and the Support Unit Management Team will then assess the available options and select an appropriate programme of work.

- 5.2. At its meeting in September the Committee will be asked to consider and advise the strategic programme. Implementation plans will then be drawn up through the usual corporate planning process. The strategic programme will also inform the preparation of a bidding document for the 2004 Spending Review.
- 5.3. Consultation on the strategy will begin in early summer. Discussions with Defra will be initiated early in the consultation process, with the devolved administrations being drawn in at a later date. Priority will also be given to meeting with the executive boards of the JNCC's member bodies at an early stage and subsequently with their councils/boards.
- 5.4. It is anticipated that the strategy, and associated implementation plans, will be refined in conjunction with a wide range of stakeholders. As the strategy develops, the bodies that are likely to be affected by the emerging strategic direction will be identified and appropriate consultation arrangements will be put in place.

Annex 1.

PROCESS AND TIMETABLE FOR JNCC STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT



Annex 2. A draft vision for the natural heritage of the UK

A VISION FOR OUR NATURAL HERITAGE

A collage of stunning photographs illustrating the values of nature – arranged around a triangle made from the words Environment, Society, Economy, with the selected title from the above options in the middle.

Our Vision

The countryside, towns and seas will be rich in biological and geological diversity, supporting a thriving economy and improving everyone's quality of life

A VISION FOR OUR NATURAL HERITAGE

1. The natural world is rich and varied. It comprises millions of species of living organisms, which interact with each other and with the physical environment (air, water and soils) to form functional units or ecosystems. This biological diversity (often called biodiversity) is complemented by a diverse range of landscapes and geological features. The natural environment has changed over time and therefore we in the UK have a unique inheritance, a unique present, and will have a different and unique biological and geological diversity in the future.
2. People are intimately linked to the natural environment. Indeed, the present natural heritage of the UK has been significantly influenced by human activity, and our current activities will lay the foundation upon which future generations will depend for their well-being. A healthily functioning environment, rich in biological and geological diversity, will not only be of benefit to all of the plants, animals and micro-organisms with which we share this planet, but also provides us all with:
 - a better place to live, work and play;
 - improved mental and physical well-being;
 - a source of enjoyment, inspiration, learning and cultural identity;
 - sustainable economic benefits, including food production, timber, building materials, recreation, tourism and flood control;
 - a source of employment; and
 - better environmental quality.
3. The state of our natural heritage is therefore a key measure of our ability to achieve sustainable development – development that can yield the greatest continuous benefit to the present generation, while maintaining the potential to meet the needs of future generations.
4. The natural heritage of the UK has developed largely as a result of natural processes over many millions of years. However, in recent millennia the activities of humans have placed increasing pressures on the natural environment and have changed it significantly. Farming and fishing practices, industrial processes, urban development, transport, mineral extraction and other activities which have used natural resources unsustainably have impoverished our natural heritage, leading to a huge loss and degradation of biological and geological diversity.
5. Despite these trends much has been achieved to conserve our natural heritage during the last few decades. Thus in the UK today we have strong wildlife legislation, and many of the best remaining examples of species, habitats and geological features are protected. Public awareness of the importance of nature is growing, public access to nature is improving, and policies are increasingly recognising the importance of the environment as a cornerstone of sustainable development.
6. Our vision for the natural heritage is ambitious. It describes a future in which our relationship with the natural world is fundamentally different from that of the last century, while taking into account the processes that have shaped the environment in the past. It applies to all of the UK, including the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. But equally importantly, it places the UK within a wider geographic and conceptual context, emphasising the contribution that the UK can make to nature

conservation at a European and global scale, and also the impact of activities within the UK on the natural heritage in the rest of the world (our ecological ‘footprint’).

7. In the coming years, we intend to build substantially on the progress of the last decade, by enhancing the biological and geological diversity in the fields, forests, moorlands, wetlands, freshwaters and coasts of our countryside, in our urban areas, and in the seas. We will promote the application of an ecosystem-based approach as a means of achieving sustainable development – accepting that humans are an integral component of the natural environment, and seeking to integrate environmental protection with economic growth and social equity. We want all members of society to have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from our natural heritage. This approach also recognises that nature is dynamic – change is inevitable, and the key to success is supporting and maintaining ecosystem functions and processes.
8. **To achieve our vision, we will pursue four high-level objectives:**
 - **to halt and reverse the current loss of biological and geological diversity;**
 - **to maximise the potential for nature to flourish within the appropriate biogeographical context by maintaining, and where appropriate restoring, an environment that supports natural ecosystem processes and functions;**
 - **to achieve sustainable economic and social benefits from the use of natural resources;**
 - **to ensure wide and equitable access for people to nature.**
9. **More specifically we will seek to achieve the following outcomes:**
 - **The countryside and seas of all parts of the UK (including its Overseas Territories) will support a rich diversity of biological and geological features that are characteristic of the local environment and contribute to the wider global natural heritage:**
 - **all regions of the UK, on land and in the sea, should support large-scale functioning ecosystems in which natural processes have been re-established and all human uses of natural resources are sustainable;**
 - **all features of international significance in the UK (including habitats, species, landscapes and geological features) should be maintained at, and where appropriate restored to, a sustainable, ecologically-healthy level;**
 - **there will be a coherent, inter-connected network of protected areas across the terrestrial and marine environments of the UK, and all protected areas will be in ‘favourable condition’, taking into account both national standards and local distinctiveness.**
 - **All elements of the UK’s society should be able to enjoy wildlife in their immediate neighbourhood, both now and in the future, and should have the means to understand and appreciate the natural heritage.**

- **No biological or geological diversity anywhere in the world should be subject to inequitable or unsustainable effects because of UK activities (including trade in both imported and exported goods, overseas aid and investment, international travel, and transboundary pollution).**

10. These objectives can only be delivered through partnership – it requires all bodies within the UK, as well as society at large, to contribute fully and efficiently to the attainment of the vision. The JNCC will make an appropriate contribution by:

- monitoring and reporting regularly on the state of nature across the UK;
- showing leadership and excellence in nature conservation science, advice and management, both in the UK and abroad;
- basing decisions on the application of sound science and the precautionary principle;
- communicating our vision, goals and information to everyone for improved decision-making, both in the UK and internationally;
- advising government, businesses and individuals on how they can undertake and benefit from sustainable use of the natural heritage;
- encouraging all stakeholders in the environment to work in an integrated way towards achieving the vision;
- working in partnership with other environmental organisations to maximise effectiveness in re-building our natural heritage;
- engaging with the processes and organisations that promote social and economic goals to help deliver better outcomes for nature and people;
- responding to the threats and opportunities posed by changes in the natural environment;
- securing and delivering resources to support the above.
- influencing international policies and agreements so they are in line with our vision;

Annex 3. A draft statement of the JNCC's role and purpose

1. The JNCC provides a mechanism for the statutory nature conservation agencies in the UK to work together to discharge their responsibilities for the UK as a whole and internationally. This arrangement enables benefits for biological and geological diversity to be delivered through a robust and coherent approach. The country agencies work in conjunction with the devolved administrations and through the JNCC provide complementary advice to the UK Government, enabling it to meet its national and international obligations.
2. Through the JNCC the country agencies work in partnership to co-ordinate nature conservation policies and practices across the UK, where this is desirable for scientific or political reasons or is more efficient than the agencies acting individually. The JNCC enables the agencies to look outwards from the UK – to place their work in a European and global context, to exchange knowledge and experience with organisations in other countries, and to influence the development of international legislation, strategies and policies. The JNCC also plays a role in horizon scanning and collecting intelligence on international proposals and initiatives, interpreting this information, and feeding it back to the agencies and other nature conservation practitioners in the UK.
4. The JNCC has a specific role to play in supporting Government in its custodianship of biological and geological diversity in the offshore marine environment (beyond 12 nautical miles) and in the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.
5. Government also has responsibilities for the impact that activities originating in the UK (e.g. trade in goods and materials, tourism and transboundary pollution) have on biological and geological diversity outside the UK. The JNCC is in a favourable position to provide advice to Government to help them to meet these responsibilities.
6. One of the JNCC's key strengths is in optimising the collection, collation, management, synthesis and dissemination of information necessary to ensure that decisions affecting biological and geological diversity, ranging from site safeguard to policy development, are based on robust data. It has the potential to enhance the use that is made of this information by predicting changes in the natural environment, e.g. in response to resource use policies, so that effective responses can be developed.
7. The JNCC is skilled in providing advice that is based on a sound understanding of the science of nature conservation, takes account of experience in the UK and elsewhere, and reflects the wider relevant European and global framework. There is potential to expand our understanding of the social and economic implications of nature conservation activities and so set our scientific advice more firmly within the context of sustainable development.
8. The JNCC has considerable expertise in facilitating joint working arrangements and partnerships with organisations that hold a wide range of skills, expertise and information. This encourages different stakeholders in the environment to work towards common standards and goals. The JNCC uses its collective expertise as a 'think-tank' for considering major national and international issues and advising on the application of new approaches. There is potential for the JNCC to work with a wider range of public sector, voluntary and industry bodies in multi-disciplinary partnerships that have the potential to deliver greater benefits for nature conservation.