JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

MATTERS ARISING

This paper deals with points not covered by substantive items on the agenda. The number relates to the minutes of the March 2003 meeting.

7.   **Marine Natura 2000**

There have been a number of developments since the Joint Committee considered this issue in March 2003.

7.1   *EU Standardisation process*

The first meeting of the Marine Expert Group established under the EC Habitats and Ornis Committees was held on 5 March 2003. It was agreed that the Group would be co-chaired by Michael O'Brian, of the European Commission, and Trevor Salmon, of Defra. The Group established three sub working groups to consider issues relevant to the offshore marine environment. These are, firstly, a subgroup to propose which Annex 1 habitats and Annex II species under the Habitats Directive, and which Annex 1 and migratory species under the Birds Directive, should be considered for Natura 2000 site listing, and to propose definitions of marine habitats, and also any needed amendments to the Interpretation manual. This subgroup is chaired by Denmark and the UK is <u>not</u> a member, though the UK corresponds with it. The second subgroup will propose the best means of locating and assessing these habitat types and species, and will also propose site selection rationales. It is chaired by the UK. The third subgroup will consider   management   measures   for   site   protection,   and alternative/complementary conservation measures for wide-ranging species. It is chaired by The Netherlands, and the UK is a member. The date of the next meeting of the Marine Expert Group is expected to be October 2003.

7.2   *UK co-ordination process*

As stated at the March 2003 Joint Committee meeting, JNCC wrote to Martin Capstick at Defra, expressing the need for a UK-wide co-ordination forum for marine Natura 2000 sites under the UK Natura Steering Committee to facilitate formal policy co-ordination between Defra, the devolved administrations and other relevant bodies. We have not received a response to this letter and are pressing for one.

7.3   *Concept of ecologically-coherent network of Marine Protected Areas*

At its March 2003 meeting, the Joint Committee requested a brief paper on the rationale behind the concept of an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (the marine Natura 2000 site series), and how this related to the level of biological information needed to justify site selection. Coincidentally, JNCC has recently let a contract (under the Irish Sea Pilot project) with the University of York to set out clearly state-of-the-art thinking *inter alia* on developing a network of Marine Protected Areas, the basis of the selection of these, and the ecological relationships between sites in the network. This contract is due to report in July 2003. JNCC will utilise its findings in the preparation of a brief note to Committee, as requested, for the Committee's September 2003 meeting.

7.4   *Further progress on the marine Natura 2000 project*

The Project Group met on 29 May 2003 and discussed the foregoing, current work and the project's future timetable. Since the Committee's March 2003 meeting, JNCC has continued to test out its methodology for determining site boundaries (and, utilising the existing SPA selection guidelines, therefore the means of selecting SPAs), for inshore aggregations of non-breeding seabirds, using data available for the Tay estuary. Guidance will be formulated during the summer of 2003 and used on a further dataset (Liverpool Bay) during the summer and autumn. It is expected that draft guidance will be presented to the Joint Committee at its December 2003 meeting, together with an update on work on the other principal elements of the project.