

JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY-FIFTH MEETING OF THE JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE, HELD ON WEDNESDAY 20 JUNE 2007 AT THE CLANDEBOYE LODGE HOTEL, CLANDEBOYE, BANGOR, NORTHERN IRELAND.

Present:

Dr Blakiston Houston
Dr Brown
Mr Christensen
Mr Crawley
Mr Darby (Chairman)
Professor Ingram
Mr Lloyd Jones
Mr Pritchard
Mr Riddleston
Professor Usher
Professor Warren

In attendance:

Professor Galbraith
Mrs McQueen
Mrs Quince
Mr Seymour
Mr Steer
Dr Tew
Dr Vincent
Mr Yeo

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1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Professor Doyle, Professor Hill, Mr Thin, Dr Jardine and Ms Phillips.
- 1.2 Chairman informed the Committee that this was to be Mr Crawley's first meeting. Mr Crawley had attended the March meeting as an observer.

Pre-Meetings

- 1.3 Chairman mentioned meetings which had taken place prior to the Committee meeting, namely:
 - i. the Vision Working Group. It was agreed that a whole-day meeting would be arranged to discuss matters in more depth;
 - ii. the Process Working Group. The Group had agreed a revised schedule of delegations. The revised schedule would be circulated to Committee members for approval before the next meeting; and
 - iii. the Audit and Risk Management Committee. A report of the meeting was on the Company Board agenda and would be discussed at that meeting.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1 By agreement with the Chairman, Mr Pritchard is engaged in a reasearch/advice project (in a personal capacity) for the Forestry Commission.
- 2.2 Professor Usher, Chair of Scottish Executive's Committee Research Committee on Environment - Land Use and Rural Stewardship (Programme 3).
- 2.3 Mr Lloyd Jones, chairman of the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research's finance committee.
- 2.4 Mr Riddleston, RSPB Council member.
- 2.5 Mr Darby, Vice-President of the RSPB.
- 2.6 Mr Christensen, recently appointed to the Management Board of Defra.

3. Amendments to the minutes of the seventy fourth meeting

- 3.1 The minutes were agreed subject to the amendments contained in JNCC 07 P04.

4. Matters arising

- 4.1 The paper JNCC 07 P05 detailed the matters arising. No further discussion took place.

5. Workshop: What role does JNCC have in environmental research? (JNCC 07 D04)

5.1 Dr Vincent introduced the workshop explaining that there were three papers before members. Firstly, a background paper which set out the position of surveillance and research and the results of surveillance; secondly, the paper JNCC 07 D04 which outlined the proposal for JNCC to make greater use of environmental research to provide the evidence base to support policy-relevant advice; and thirdly, a briefing note for the workshop which posed seven questions that members were asked to focus on.

5.2 In discussing the questions the following points were raised:

Q1 What can be done to improve the overall direction of UK research?

- i. it was important to draw a distinction between blue sky research and applied research and to recognise the importance of each. Blue sky research can bring major advances in scientific understanding but outcomes are, by the nature of the research, difficult to predict. We need both pure and applied research; the issue is what proportion of funding should go into each.

Q2 What should be done to improve research collaboration between funding agencies?

- i. we should consider how best we can influence the research councils to support the research work we require;
- ii. the way research is currently funded constrains the ability to undertake interdisciplinary research. Scottish Natural Heritage had successfully worked with universities, by providing funding for studentships. It was acknowledged that funding studentships could be both productive and cost-effective.

Q3 Do we wish to improve strategic collaboration between the country agencies/JNCC in the identification and carrying out of future work programmes, as the 'norm' rather than as an exception?

- i. it was generally agreed that collaboration exists to a degree, but more work should be done to improve collaboration with the country agencies. Synergy between the Joint Committee and the country agencies should be formalised;
- ii. it was agreed that the Chief Scientists Group provides a good mechanism for developing a list of research priorities, both to facilitate collaborative research between the country agencies/JNCC and for presenting to research councils. It was agreed that the Chief Scientists Group be given a clear remit and timetable, linked to research councils' timetables and agendas to draw up this list of priorities. A paper on the viability of this to be presented to the Committee in September.

Q4 If we do wish to establish better strategic collaboration, what mechanisms would we wish to institute to help this to happen?

- i. it was noted that it is often difficult for committees to prioritise long lists of research proposals, particularly where their membership included different interests. The UK's Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (UKBRAG) was named as an example of a committee which also deal with social and economic issues, but it had struggled to develop clear priorities, but, when having done so, had difficulty getting these funded.
- ii. it was noted that JNCC was at present, an associate member of the Environmental Research Funders Forum. It was agreed that the Executive Management Board would investigate the benefits of the JNCC becoming a full member of the Environmental Research Funders Forum at a cost of £10,000 per annum.

Q5 Does the Committee agree that JNCC has a strong role in facilitating links between the biodiversity/geodiversity information sectors as suggested in JNCC 07 D04?

- i. it was generally agreed that the JNCC does have a strong role as described in the paper;
- ii. it was noted that establishing gateways to access information was important, as was an ability to drill down into the data.

Q6 Does the Committee agree that JNCC should support the agencies by enhancing its focus on cutting-edge research developments relevant to biodiversity/geodiversity conservation? If so, do we need to set up a mechanism to help us to do this, e.g. a working group of leading academics in the field to help our engagement with the academic sector and its developing thinking?

- i. the generality of this was agreed but more discussion was needed on the detailed mechanisms.

Q7 Are centres for the collation and review of existing information to address important conservation questions likely to provide an important mechanism for meeting practical conservation needs in the future? If so, how do we help to ensure a suitable infrastructure of centres is established and maintained?

- i. it was agreed that using centres of information was helpful in accessing information that already exists ensuring work is carried out in an effective manner.

6. JNCC's Global Impacts programme: current and planned work - *Presentation:* (JNCC 07 P06)

6.1 Mr Yeo explained that the paper summarises work done to date within the Global Impacts programme and sets out priorities for the next year. Mr Yeo went on to explain that the programme has now reached a stage where it is linked closely to the programmes of several government departments and a key part of the strategy for the coming year is to further develop these working relationships to integrate the programme with the needs of users whilst also meeting JNCC's own strategic objectives.

6.2 In response to questions posed by Committee members, Mr Yeo made the following points:

- i. the data were derived from reputable, quality-assured sources. Where there were shortcomings, these had been noted;
- ii. the database currently focused on the seven priority countries with which Defra was undertaking sustainable development dialogues. Data on other countries would be added in due course;
- iii. information on overseas business investment would be added over the next year. Advice on the impacts of business investment and best practice would be developed; this would be aimed primarily at Government but would also be useful for industry bodies;
- iv. a user group had been established to advise on development of the database and webtool;
- v. passwords to gain access to the database would be circulated to Committee members.

6.3 Committee noted that the devolved administrations might have an interest in this work.

6.4 The Committee endorsed the proposed priorities for the coming year.

7. Future direction for JNCC's Global Advice programme (JNCC 07 D07)

7.1 Mr Yeo introduced the paper, explaining that it forms the first step in a comprehensive review of JNCC's Global Advice programme and in particular of JNCC's support for multilateral environmental agreements. The paper builds on work undertaken for the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity.

7.2 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. some of the issues raised in the review were relevant to other JNCC programmes, e.g. Overseas Territories;

- ii. achieving synergy between multilateral environmental agreements was important;
- iii. the thematic priorities in section 3.1 of the paper were supported;
- iv. it was unlikely that the 2010 targets on biodiversity loss would be met. A debate should be initiated on the priorities for work beyond 2010; and
- v. future work on the global aspects of marine nature conservation should be fully integrated with the review of the Global Advice programme.

7.3 **The Committee:**

- i. endorsed the proposed next steps.**

8. **The future of the Standards and Targets programme (JNCC 07 D03)**

- 8.1 The paper was introduced by Dr Vincent, who explained that the current content of the Standards and Targets Programme was summarised for the first time for the Joint Committee, together with the intentions for developing the projects in line with the JNCC Strategy. Dr Vincent went on to explain that a significant component of the Standards and Targets programme was joint work carried out by the statutory conservation agencies via Lead Co-ordination Networks, Inter-Agency Working Groups, but that conservation priorities had moved on since these were established and some adjustment may be needed; a review was proposed to see whether this was the case and what changes may be desirable.
- 8.2 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. we should not underestimate the importance of the need to rationalise targets, the Lead Co-ordination Networks could help with this;
 - ii. the Committee agreed that a review of inter-agency working arrangements was timely, but cautioned against making changes where current arrangements were working well;
 - iii. the Committee supported the proposal to nominate a member to join a review group to consider how interagency work develop in the future. A report to be given to the Committee in six months time.
- 8.3 **The Committee noted the priorities for the Standards and Targets programme and the current arrangements. The Committee endorsed further development of setting conservation targets as a process conducted jointly with the Vision programme and delegated to the Chairman the task of nominating a Committee member to join a review group to consider how inter-agency work should develop in the future.**

9. Fourth JNCC staff satisfaction survey - *Presentation*

9.1 Mr Yeo introduced the paper, explaining that this was the fourth staff survey to have been undertaken in JNCC. The paper provides a summary of the results and contains an action plan to address the issues raised that has been endorsed by the Executive Management Board. Mr Steer expanded on some of these points in a short presentation.

9.1 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. the survey had achieved an excellent response rate at 84% of staff, and this was commended;
- ii. it would be helpful to undertake a more in-depth comparison of the survey results with those obtained from the previous survey;
- iii. in September, the Process Working Group will discuss those aspects of the survey relating directly to the Joint Committee; and
- iv. Chairman would address some of the issues raised in the survey regarding the Joint Committee with members at their annual performance review.

10. Environmental change reflected in the state of nature (JNCC 07 N03)

10.1 **Committee noted the paper.**

11. Update on draft offshore SACs for Annex 1 habitats (JNCC 07 N04)

11.1 **Committee noted the paper, commenting on the need for sensitive and effective stakeholder consultation both prior to, and during, the consultation process.**

12. A UK Vision and Strategy for Nature Conservation (JNCC 07 N05)

12.1 **Committee noted the paper and that the Vision Working Group had discussed the paper.**

13. Annual report from the Audit and Risk Management Committee (JNCC 07 N06)

13.1 **Committee noted the paper and that this item was on the Company Board agenda for discussion.**

14. Any other business

14.1 Nothing further was noted.