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REPORT FROM THE MARINE PROTECTED AREAS SUB-GROUP

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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

REPORT FROM THE MARINE PROTECTED AREAS SUB-GROUP

1. Background

1.1 The Joint Committee Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Sub-Group held its second meeting on 17 May 2010. Agenda items discussed were:

- i. terms of reference
- ii. Natura 2000 consultation
- iii. Ecological Network Guidance for Marine Conservation Zones
- iv. Options for offshore Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

2. Terms of reference

1.1 The group agreed that its main roles are (inter alia) to:

- i. maintain an overview of the UK MPA work;
- ii. provide a steer on contentious issues and/or those for which there is no clear recommendation;
- iii. review progress and report to Joint Committee. It was agreed that the group would review its role in one year's time.

3. Natura 2000 consultation

3.1 The group received a verbal briefing on the changes to SAC and SPA proposals following formal consultation. The group agreed the importance of due process in endorsing the final SAC and SPA documents (two joint SACs, two offshore SACs, and one joint SPA). It was agreed to receive inter-sessionally a summary of the consultation responses, a summary of the material changes to documents, and the final SAC/SPA documents, to enable endorsement to meet the government deadline for cabinet committee submission of 22 June.

4. Ecological Network Guidance for Marine Conservation Zones

4.1 The group welcomed the document as a critical milestone in the MCZ process. Various suggested amendments were made for further consideration either before publication or when the document might be reviewed. The document was endorsed under JNCC's offshore remit as formal guidance to regional projects on the ecological criteria for selection of marine conservation zones. The group noted that the Natural England board would be considering

the document on 24 May with the request for parallel endorsement under its inshore remit.

5. Options for offshore SPAs

- 5.1 The group discussed an options paper based upon the JNCC work to identify offshore aggregations of seabirds, with a view to offshore SPA classification. The group agreed that there was no clear basis on which to determine which of the options should be used to recommend SPA classification and that there would be a danger in forming a position on any particular option. The group agreed that a more strategic piece of work would be appropriate to:
- i. examine the objectives of the Birds Directive, to see which options might be most suitable;
 - ii. clarify what offshore SPAs might achieve in practice; and
 - iii. analyse what might be achieved in the round by SPA and/or wider protection measures.
- 5.2 The infraction risk and possibility of early engagement with the European Commission were noted.