



Confirmed minutes of the ninety-sixth meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on Thursday 20 June 2013 at JNCC, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough

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Present

Mr Archdale (via video conference)
Dr Bridgewater
Dr Brown
Mr Casement
Mr Christensen
Mr Duke
Mr Parry
Professor Matthews
Dr Walker
Judith Webb

In attendance

Ms Arkle (item 6)
Ms Davies
Dr Hill
Dr Gibson
Dr Goold
Mrs McQueen
Professor Platt
Mr Rose

Apologies:

Members: Professor Hill, Professor Kaiser, Mr Thin

Attendees: Mr Jardine

1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1 Dr Bridgewater welcomed everyone to the ninety-sixth meeting of the JNCC and in particular Professor Howard Platt from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) representing Helen Anderson, Peter Matthews, Chairman of Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Ceri Davies representing NRW.

2. Declaration of Interests

- 2.1 Judith Webb declared her work with the Forestry Commission on wildlife disease and biodiversity, and her role on the Audit and Risk Management Committee for Forest Research. This was not considered to present a conflict of interest for any items at this meeting
- 2.2 Mr Duke declared his work as Director Europe and Research (the Environment Bank Ltd) and as Senior Visiting Research Associate, University of Oxford. This was not considered to present a conflict of interest for any items at this meeting.

3. Amendments to the confidential minutes of the March 2013 meeting (JNCC 13 P08)

- 3.1 The minutes were agreed subject to the amendment laid out in JNCC13 P08

4. Matters arising (JNCC 13 P09)

- 4.1 There were no matters arising from the March 2013 Committee meeting.

- 4.2 From action points noted at the March 2013 Committee, Dr Bridgewater noted the following:
- i. milestones for 2013/14 had been agreed;
 - ii. JNCC could play an important role in supporting the country conservation bodies in accessing EU funding.
- 4.3 Dr Bridgewater advised that a letter asking Natural Resources Wales to nominate an NRW Board member of the Marine Protected Areas sub-group would be sent soon.

5. Chief Executive's report on topical issues (JNCC 13 D04)

- 5.1 Committee noted the issues raised in the paper.
- 5.2 Dr Brown, Chair of the Joint Committee's Marine Protected Areas sub-group, gave an update to Committee on the work of the sub-group:
- i. Dr Walker has retired from the sub-group and she was thanked for her work and support. Professor Furness, from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), will now be SNH's Board representative on the sub-group;
 - ii. the formal submission of 16 consultation packages for offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) has been made to Marine Scotland;
 - iii. JNCC advice has been prepared for submission to Defra for six potential offshore Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs).
- 5.3 Dr Brown advised of potential risks around the review by the sub-group of draft submissions to government within tight timescales, recommending that this issue is raised with the Audit and Risk Management Committee (ARMC).
- 5.4 Dr Bridgewater advised that the risk should be noted but that a quality outcome would be preferable to a flawed submission agreed in haste.
- 5.5 Dr Bridgewater thanked the MPA sub-group for their work and noted that Joint Committee had delegated sign off of MCZ work to him.
- 5.6 Mr Yeo gave an update on the Habitats Directive report due for submission to the European Commission. Mr Parry requested that a lessons learnt exercise be undertaken to capture difficulties in the reporting process.
- 5.7 Mr Yeo explained the purpose of Defra's Strategic Alignment Programme and the wide-ranging implications it will have for the whole Defra network. It was noted that JNCC's remit as a UK organisation must be taken into account in future decision making.
- 5.8 The UK Government review of European Union (EU) competencies, analysis of EU action and how it affects the UK was noted and the following points were made in discussion:
- i. JNCC will not make a formal submission to the review;

- ii. EU funding is vital to support future delivery of UK nature conservation priorities;
- iii. it would be appropriate for Dr Bridgewater to update Ministers on JNCC's position on EU issues as part of their regular meetings.

5.9 Ms Davies explained that the Welsh Minister is proposing a joint inshore and offshore marine plan.

Action point: Ms Davies to circulate proposed Welsh inshore/offshore marine plan.

6. JNCC's Triennial Review (JNCC 13 P11)

- 6.1 Dr Bridgewater welcomed Ms Arkle, Defra Deputy Director (with responsibility for sponsoring JNCC's Review), to the meeting.
- 6.2 Ms Arkle explained the Triennial Review process and thanked Mr Yeo, Dr Bridgewater, Committee and JNCC staff for supplying evidence to support the Review.
- 6.3 Ms Arkle noted that the Triennial Review had identified strong support for JNCC and that the organisation is held in high regard.
- 6.4 Committee noted the conclusions in the final draft of the report on JNCC's Triennial Review. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. the openness of the Triennial Review process was appreciated by Committee and the significant efforts made by the review team to engage the devolved administrations should be commended;

Conclusion 1:

- ii. there is potential for JNCC to do more in the Overseas Territories and Committee should address strategic issues relating to the Territories and Crown Dependencies. Committee should be included in the distribution of information about this programme of work;

Conclusion 2:

- iii. with increasing challenges to evidence, JNCC's leadership role in promoting and communicating science should be monitored and improvements sought where sensible;
- iv. JNCC should explore with Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser the respective roles of Defra and JNCC as scientific advisors on nature conservation issues;
- v. JNCC should also explore with Defra what it sees as JNCC's role in providing a clear voice in Europe should entail. It does have a unique selling point in the European Commission structures and this should be built upon;

Conclusion 3:

- vi. JNCC's role is highly valued by CNCC and NIEA. Issues regarding the value placed on JNCC by DoE (NI) and representation of its interests at Committee could be resolved through improved communication, including the forthcoming review of funding;
- vii. there is also a requirement for involvement with the new marine division of the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland;
- viii. membership of Committee should reflect its distinct role of strategic delivery from that of strategic commissioning by Government and operational delivery by staff;
- ix. there is a need to strengthen the mechanisms for Defra and the devolved administrations to establish a common view of priorities and convey this to JNCC and the country conservation bodies.

Conclusions 4 and 5 were discussed separately under item JNCC 13 P13.

Conclusion 6:

- x. addressing funding issues is very welcome. JNCC recognises that it will need to continue to look at smarter ways of working in the light of continuing funding constraints. Defra would be reviewing whether more authority could be given back to Chief Executives of Arms Length Bodies for administrative matters such as recruitment to improve efficiency and enable them to respond more easily to tight timescales.

6.4 Ms Arkle thanked Committee for their comments and made the following points:

- i. the Government is under increasing scrutiny in terms of its evidence base for policy and needs to have scientific credibility. The strength of policies is only as good as the input received from delivery bodies. Currently, Defra's science standards and those of other bodies differ and this must be addressed;
- ii. JNCC should look at ways of improving relationships with stakeholders in relation to Overseas Territories work;
- iii. issues for JNCC's sponsorship bodies regarding the funding formula and transparency will be addressed in the forthcoming funding discussions.

6.5 Mr Yeo noted that work with the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies makes up only three percent of JNCC's effort and resource.

6.6 Committee agreed that the Triennial Review sub-group, with membership extended to include Mr Duke and Professor Kaiser, should agree an action plan and oversee progress against the review findings. Committee would retain ownership of the process and would receive an update at the November Committee meeting.

6.5 Peter Bridgewater thanked Ms Arkle and expressed JNCC's willingness and commitment to swift implementation of the recommendations.

7. Proposed changes to JNCC's governance arrangements (JNCC 13 P10)

- 7.1 Mrs McQueen presented the paper which detailed proposed changes to governance arrangements developed from options discussed at the March 2013 meeting of the Joint Committee.
- 7.2 The following points were made in discussion:
- i. it is essential that any changes enable company directors to properly discharge their responsibilities;
 - ii. the proposed business acumen for Committee members should include the ability to challenge, scrutinise and support Support Co business;
 - iii. a return to four meetings a year would be appropriate to deliver Committee's functions;
 - iv. an increase in the number of meetings rotated through the different countries of the UK would help to raise JNCC's profile and to improve communication across all administrations within the UK;
 - v. there must be clarity on the position of the Audit and Risk Management Committee (ARMC) in relation to the Joint Committee and Company Board;
 - vi. future agendas would need to differentiate between the focus on strategy and delivery;
 - vii. the revised Schedule of Delegations must include an audit trail of delegations, and include delegations specific to the Chair;
 - viii. the Committee has a role in relation to health and safety and this must be reflected in meeting agendas.
- 7.3 The Committee endorsed the proposed changes. The revised arrangements will be presented at the November Committee meeting, with implementation from January 2014.

8. Proposals for the delivery of conservation advice relating to offshore renewable energy (in confidence) (JNCC 13 P13)

9. Joint Committee's role in science leadership (JNCC 13 P12)

- 9.1 Mr Rose introduced the paper which proposed a future role for Committee in developing science thinking on key nature conservation issues across the UK.
- 9.2 The following points were made in discussion:

- i. papers commissioned from the inter-agency Chief Scientists' Group are infrequent. Previously more overview and strategic discussions were fed through to Committee;
 - ii. the role of the inter-agency Chief Scientists' Group needs to be explicit in future governance arrangements;
 - iii. the Chief Scientists' Group has the expertise to interface with policy developers and this potential should be maximised;
 - iv. science leadership (as referred to in Triennial Review Conclusion 2) is about how evidence is scrutinised and how emerging evidence demands are addressed. A science leadership approach should encompass the co-ordination of approaches to nature conservation;
 - v. JNCC should take a more proactive role in defining what the science should be;
 - vi. social science needs to receive more attention from the broader nature conservation community;
 - vii. Committee should bring together science skills from the country nature conservation bodies and take on a horizon-scanning role.
- 9.3 Dr Bridgewater thanked Committee for their comments and agreed that the Chief Scientists' Group should investigate Committee's role in science leadership and feed back suggestions for future discussions.
- 9.4 Committee endorsed the proposed role in developing science thinking on key nature conservation issues across the UK. They agreed that protected areas and evidence strategy are themes that should be discussed at the November Committee meeting. Agri-environment incentives were also agreed as an important topic for future discussion, along with the protection of mobile species, the management of invasive species and the role of social sciences in nature conservation.

Action point: Chief Scientists' Group to suggest topics for future discussion by the Joint Committee.

10. Wildlife disease and biodiversity (JNCC 13 D03)

- 10.1 Mr Rose introduced the paper which outlined the processes through which animal and plant diseases are dealt with in the UK, and the various elements of ongoing work and review in the UK and Europe.
- 10.2 The following points were made in discussion:
- i. the animal and plant disease environment is rapidly changing, with increasing opportunities for JNCC input into initiatives;
 - ii. efforts should be made to create linkages between terrestrial, marine and freshwater issues;
 - iii. there is currently an absence of any discussion around soils and their role in transmissal and propagation of wildlife disease;

- iv. other transmission routes; such as imports of stone, should be considered;
- vi. wildlife disease and biodiversity could enable opportunities for carefully managed citizen science engagement, as outlined in the Triennial Review recommendations;
- vii. animal and plant disease issues should be seen as a cross-cutting problem as there are links to human health;
- viii. EU legislation on free trade must be considered in thinking about the balance between free trade and biosecurity;
- ix. economics, and the cost of disease, should be included in future thinking.

10.2 Committee endorsed the recommendations for JNCC's work on wildlife disease. The recommendation to ministers that action on legislation is taken forward was agreed.

Action point: Mr Rose to circulate information on examples of work undertaken by JNCC on topics relating to wildlife disease and biodiversity.