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Marine management advice

JNCC advises Government on activities in the marine environment that affect nature conservation, including fisheries, mineral extraction and renewable energy developments

Nature conservation in the marine environment has taken an increasingly high profile on the JNCC agenda and this area of our work continued to grow during the reporting year. Following on from JNCC's earlier work in relation to the Review of Marine Nature Conservation and the Irish Sea Pilot, JNCC has been closely involved in preparatory work in anticipation of major changes in legislation covering the marine environment. The Marine and Coastal Access Bill was introduced into the Westminster Parliament in December 2008, and is expected to complete its passage through Parliament by autumn 2009. The Marine (Scotland) Bill was introduced in April 2009. JNCC has offered advice to both the UK and Scottish Governments and has responded to formal consultations on the legislative proposals.

At the same time, JNCC has continued to play its role in helping to manage the impacts on biodiversity of existing human uses of the marine environment. During 2008/09, JNCC drew up draft guidance for users of the sea on how to avoid disturbing cetaceans (dolphins, porpoises and whales) in recognition of an obligation under the EU Habitats Directive to minimise disturbance.

Throughout the year, JNCC staff provided advice concerning offshore industries. This included a detailed response to a Strategic Environmental Assessment of offshore energy development by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), which covered potential

locations for oil and gas exploration and for new windfarms in the seas around the UK. JNCC advises DECC on the nature conservation implications of offshore energy throughout all stages of development, from planning to production and

through to decommissioning. In addition, energy companies are encouraged to consult with JNCC during the design stages of projects so that they can be aware of any nature conservation issues that may result from their activities.



**Fishing trawler heading out to sea
Shetland, Scotland**

The north-east Atlantic, including the seas around the UK, includes some of the world's most productive fisheries – annual landings account for about a tenth of the total world production of fish. This total includes fish for human consumption, industrial fishing and shellfish fisheries. Fisheries can have an adverse effect on marine biodiversity, for example through damage to the seabed and bycatch of non-target species. During the year, JNCC staff spent a significant amount of time preparing

for a review of the EU Common Fisheries Policy, which will be completed in 2012. JNCC is working with other organisations to ensure that implementation and further reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy takes full account of biodiversity. JNCC fisheries staff were also closely involved in the public consultation on the first offshore Special Areas of Conservation, which were submitted to the European Commission in September [see Chapter 8].

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JNCC deals with more than 400 consultations a year in this area. During the reporting year there was a substantial increase in the number of consultations that dealt with new offshore renewable energy projects, a trend that is expected to continue in future years.

There was also a similar upswing in the number of consultations for the offshore extraction of

marine sand and gravel, reflecting increased demand for house building in the south-east of England and for the London Olympics. JNCC made a contribution to Regional Environment Assessments for aggregate extraction by the Crown Estate for the Eastern English Channel and the Outer Thames Estuary.



Offshore aggregate gravel extraction
The 'Sand Falcon'

The marine aggregate industry has made a voluntary commitment to ensure regional sustainability of marine sand and gravel extraction by undertaking Regional Environmental Assessments (REAs) for key areas of activity. JNCC and the country conservation bodies are involved in the REA process, and JNCC and Natural England are members of the Regulatory Advisors Group, which has developed principles, guidance

and methodologies for the REAs. The trailer suction hopper dredger 'Sand Falcon', operated by CEMEX UK Marine Ltd, is typical of the modern purpose-built marine aggregate dredgers that operate in licensed areas off the coast of England and Wales. The vessel was built in 1998, and has a hopper capacity of 8,500 tonnes of sand and gravel.

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Balearic shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*
Seabirds and bycatch

The problem of seabirds being caught as bycatch during fishing operations was discussed at a meeting in March 2008 of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) seabird ecology expert group, which is chaired by JNCC's Jim Reid. Following that meeting, advice was delivered by ICES to the European Commission in May 2008. The Commission is now expected to compile a plan of action to reduce seabird bycatch throughout EU waters.

Bycatch is a particular problem for the Balearic shearwater, a critically endangered species that breeds around the Balearic Islands and occurs in waters off south-west Britain during the non-breeding season. In the Mediterranean, Balearic shearwaters are vulnerable to bycatch during longline fishing.

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