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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE FIFTY-NINTH MEETING OF THE JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE, HELD ON THURSDAY 19 JUNE 2003 AT THE RADISSON ROE PARK HOTEL, LIMA VADY, NORTHERN IRELAND.

Present:

Mrs Bryan (Chair)
Dr Blakiston-Houston
Professor Dodgshon
Sir M Doughty
Professor Doyle
Dr Faulkner
Professor Ingram
Mr Lloyd Jones
Dr Markland
Dr Moser
Professor Pentreath
Mr Scott

In attendance:

Miss Bigger (secretariat)
Dr Duff
Dr Galbraith
Mr Gearns (item 6)
Mrs McQueen (item 5)
Mr Steer
Mr Thomas
Mr Riddlestone
Dr Vincent
Dr Weighell (item 8)
Mr Yeo

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6. Options for launching JNCC's strategy and new corporate identity (**JNCC 03 P06**)
7. FMPR schedule of approved delegations (**JNCC 03 P09**) – *tabled*

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8. Earth heritage – conclusions from the field visit (**JNCC 03 D06**)
9. Risk management strategy and process (**JNCC 03 D07**)

10. End of year monitoring report for 2002/03 (**JNCC 03 D08**)

Information papers

11. Forward programme for Committee (**JNCC 03 N04**)
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1. **Chairman's Opening Remarks**

- 1.1 Chairman welcomed Professor Dodgshon and Professor Doyle as new members of the Committee: Professor Dodgshon as a representative from the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and Professor Doyle as an independent member. In addition, Chairman welcomed Dr Galbraith from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Dr Duff from English Nature and Mr Riddlestone (a CCW Council member who was a member of the Committee strategy sub-group).

- 1.2 Apologies were received from Sir Ewen Cameron, Dr Brown and Dr Jardine.

- 1.3 Chairman noted that some proposed papers had been removed from the agenda and some added since the draft had been circulated. The paper relating to the JNCC contract with the British Trust for Ornithology is now expected to be presented at the September 2003 Committee meeting when negotiations will have been completed. The paper covering sign off of some additions to the SPA network will also be presented at the September 2003 meeting.

- 1.4 Papers added to the agenda since the first draft were the FMPR schedule of delegations and the forward programme for Committee.

2. **Amendments to the minutes (no paper)**

- 2.1 The minutes were approved with no amendments.

3. **Matters arising (JNCC 03 P08)**

- 3.1 Dr Vincent introduced this paper which provided an update on Marine Natura 2000 following discussions on this topic at Committee in March 2003.

- 3.2 The paper included an update on the UK co-ordination process. JNCC has written to Defra to ask Government to convene a sub-group of the Steering Committee to facilitate formal policy co-ordination between Defra, the devolved administrations and other relevant bodies. A meeting of the Steering Group is now scheduled to take place in July at which terms of reference for the sub-group will be discussed.

- 3.3 With regard to the EU standardisation process, the first meeting of the

Marine Expert Group under the EC Habitats and Ornis Committees was held in March 2003 and three sub-groups were set up to consider issues relevant to the offshore marine environment.

3.4 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Dr Vincent confirmed that the first sub-group of the Marine Expert Group would consider which habitats and species should be considered for offshore Natura 2000 sites, and what amendment to the interpretation manual might be necessary.
- ii. With regard to the concept of an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas, Mr Scott noted that the University of York are carrying out a relevant study and that it might be appropriate for SEERAD, who had undertaken work on this issue, to liaise with the University regarding information exchange. Mr Scott is to provide more details.
- iii. In relation to informal stakeholder consultation on guidelines for setting boundaries, Dr Vincent confirmed that consultation had taken place with regard to offshore Habitat SACs and on seaward extension of seabird colony SPAs. Dr Vincent felt that the method adopted for inshore non-breeding SPAs had been fully tested and advised that it would be subject to informal stakeholder consultation. Areas identified using this method would come to Committee for approval.
- iv. Work has not yet commenced on offshore SPAs. A method for this work had been identified and work is expected to start in December 2003. All the foregoing marine Natura work will be closely linked to the work of the EC Habitat marine specialist group.

4. **Declaration of interests**

4.1 No declarations of interests in relation to the agenda were raised.

5. ***Strategy session – JNCC’s strategy development (JNCC 03 P07)***

5.1 The Chairman noted that the aim of the strategy session was to contribute to shaping the strategy and emphasised that the sub-group was very much open to the ideas of Committee. It was important for Committee to have an open discussion at this stage to ensure that all points could be captured. Mrs Bryan acknowledged the work of Mrs McQueen and Mr Yeo in providing support to the sub-group.

5.2 The first part of the discussion related to the draft vision presented to Committee and the second part focused on definition of some high level, long term strategic objectives.

5.3 Mrs McQueen introduced the session. The sub-group had met four times

since March 2003 and had established a process for developing the strategy and linking this to operational planning. Annex 2 of the paper provided a vision for the natural heritage of the UK which the sub-group hoped would be adopted by JNCC's member bodies and more widely. Annex 3 provided a description of the role and purpose of JNCC. This was used to develop six strategic objectives which should capture what JNCC intends to achieve over the next 10 years or more. When the strategic objectives have been agreed a strategic programme will be developed indicating how these objectives will be achieved. The strategic programme will inform an operational plan, delivered through the resources available. Work on the strategic programme will be developed at workshops involving sub-group members and staff of the Support Unit and country agencies.

- 5.4 A draft consultation programme was presented. Initially this will include JNCC, the country agencies and Governments. The second and third stages will relate to other stakeholders potentially affected by the strategy.

Vision for our natural heritage

- 5.5 As a member of the strategy sub-group, Mr Scott introduced the draft vision. He noted that the vision referred to 'our' Natural Heritage, relating to that of the UK but also that of the country agencies in relation to JNCC, stressing that it would be important for all to be comfortable with the vision formed. The sub-group had agreed that it would be beneficial for external stakeholders to share the vision too. The various strategy documents of the country agencies had been considered but it was important to focus on the 'value added' elements of JNCC's work.
- 5.6 It is important for the vision to be accessible, identifiable and unarguable in terms of sentiment. It should also align with existing Government commitments and be people-centric. Four high level objectives are outlined in the vision (paragraph 8 of Annex 2) relating to a biodiversity commitment, the ecosystem approach, benefits to people and accessibility to people. Paragraph 9 focuses on outcomes at which point it becomes clear where there are gaps in the remit of the country agencies, hence highlighting the value added nature of JNCC's work. The global footprint of 'our' (in the sense of the UK) activities is noted in the draft vision and recognised as a potentially sensitive area.
- 5.7 Paragraph 10 of the vision outlined JNCC's role but recognised that the country agencies and others also had important roles to play in some of the points listed. There are areas where the JNCC may lead and areas where the country agencies or others may lead. This part of the vision provides a link with the role and purpose of JNCC, outlined in Annex 3 to the paper.
- 5.8 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. Professor Doyle welcomed the paper and noted that as a geologist he was pleased to see a link made between biodiversity and geology. He suggested that it may be appropriate to use the term geodiversity

as this was becoming more widely recognised.

- ii. Dr Faulkner noted his enthusiasm for an excellent document. He advised that there was still some confusion over whether the vision was a UK vision or a vision for JNCC following the introduction of paragraph 10 relating to JNCC's role. Committee noted that paragraph 10 of the vision would subsequently be removed from the vision and was included at this stage to facilitate discussion. Dr Faulkner welcomed the attempt to connect with the wider socio-economic environment and suggested that with the appropriate use of words, a connection with other areas such as health and travel could strengthen perceptions of the role of nature conservation in public life. In developing the vision there is an opportunity to go beyond clichéd phrases that are well worn, such as 'sustainable development', by expanding on these to ensure that there is a clear meaning to the vision.
- iii. Mr Lloyd Jones welcomed the document and the clear acceptance that change is taking place. He noted that it should not be presumed that the aspirations outlined would be accepted by everyone and there is a need to understand the constraints.
- iv. Sir Martin Doughty noted that it is important to emphasise the positive aspects of the social and economic environment in which the strategy operates therefore recognising the opportunities as well as the negative aspects. He confirmed that the vision should be shared by the country agencies and that it would be important to relay this to the relevant councils and boards. The same would apply to the Countryside Agency. Chairman noted that she would raise this point with Sir Ewen Cameron.
- v. Professor Dodgshon noted that the environment is significantly influenced by human actions and agreed that it would be useful to recognise those actions that are positive, such as management of habitats (e.g. heathland). It is important to consider the starting point in relation to the vision in order to define achievements in the future.
- vi. Professor Ingram agreed that people can have both a positive and negative influence on the environment and noted that there has been a profound impact on the urban environment in recent years through such practices as gardening and maintenance of allotments. It has been said that 50% of people in the UK list gardening as a major pastime and this may therefore provide a channel through which to promote nature conservation more widely. In this respect, it was felt that paragraph 9 of the vision should refer to 'towns' in addition to the countryside and seas. Other pastimes such as sport can also have an influence on the environment (e.g. proliferation of golf courses can halt urban development in certain areas).

Draft statement of JNCC's role and purpose

- 5.9 Mrs Bryan introduced Annex 3 of the paper relating to JNCC's role and purpose, recognising that it is important when devising the strategy to develop a common understanding of JNCC's role. The JNCC should complement the work of the country agencies – the special functions outline the main remit of JNCC but flexible boundaries on certain areas of work could be mutually beneficial.
- 5.10 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. Committee agreed that the wording in the document could be simplified to provide a more accessible statement. The phraseology used should be more direct to convey the sense that JNCC should have more of a leadership role rather than one that purely supports. Whilst the statement reflected the current situation and strengths the Committee preferred that the document reflected the changes suggested by the vision and the fact that JNCC could take more of a leading role in certain areas of work. Mr Thomas noted that the statement could be more positive, replacing the word 'enable' with 'ensure' in the first section.
 - ii. It was suggested that paragraph 8 of Annex 3 relating to facilitating joint working arrangements could take a harder line with regard to joining up government requirements.
 - iv. JNCC's role in sustainable development was felt to be important and should be more clearly defined. It was recognised that decisions about the balance between social, economic and environmental issues should be made through the democratic process.
 - v. Dr Moser noted that it would be useful to include a closer link with the development assistance fund, in relation to the international function of JNCC and the expertise on offer.
- 5.11 **Committee noted and supported the broad approach being taken to strategy development. The draft vision for the natural heritage of the UK and the draft statement of JNCC's role and purpose were approved by Committee, subject to the points raised above.**
- 5.12 Committee proceeded to consider the priority issues that JNCC should address over the next 10 years or so and the broad approaches and activities that JNCC might adopt to address these issues, and suggested a draft set of high level, long term objectives reflecting these views. Notes from this discussion will be circulated as part of the strategy development process and the Committee will receive another paper in September 2003.

6. Options for launching JNCC's strategy and new corporate identity (JNCC 03 P06)

6.1 Mr Gearns introduced this paper, which outlined options for launching the JNCC's strategy and new corporate identity. The original idea was to launch the new corporate identity when all elements of the new organisation had been set up but the paper recommended that the new corporate identity should now be launched at the same time as the strategy. This option was supported by the Committee strategy sub-group on 14 May 2003 and the Committee FMPR sub-group on 3 June 2003.

6.2 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Committee questioned whether the timing of the launch (summer 2004) was achievable given possible legal constraints. With the project plan in place it is hoped that this date can be met.
- ii. Dr Moser noted that the paper does not explicitly describe how the new corporate identity would be developed in line with the strategy and it was agreed that a paper explaining this link would be presented to Committee. In addition, Mr Gearns noted that he would present the project plan at the September 2003 Committee meeting. It was confirmed that the launch date suggested would be before formation of a company limited by guarantee but that this should not pose any problems.
- iii. There was some discussion about a name change for JNCC and how the name of an organisation presents a certain identity to the outside world. It was agreed that this topic would not be discussed in detail at the meeting but would be brought back for further consideration in line with the communications project plan. In addition, Chairman agreed that the issue of a name change would be explored with Defra in order to gather their opinion.

6.3 Committee agreed that the strategy and corporate identity should be launched simultaneously. It was agreed that the project plan for the launch should be presented to Committee in September 2003 and that the issue of the name change be broached with Defra.

7. FMPR schedule of approved delegations (JNCC 03 P09)

7.1 Mr Yeo introduced this paper which followed Committee discussions in March 2003. The terms of reference for the Committee FMPR sub-group, which were considered at the March 2003 meeting, referred to the intention to develop a schedule of delegations for Committee approval.

7.2 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. It was noted that the Resource Directors of the country agencies are fully engaged in relevant discussions.
- ii. If any major difficulties arise during the course of the FMPR project, decisions will be brought back to the full Committee.

7.3 Committee approved the schedule of delegations noting that any problematic decisions would be brought to full Committee for approval.

8. Earth heritage – conclusions from the field visit (JNCC 03 D06)

8.1 Dr Weighell introduced this paper which was tabled following the field visit the previous day. The ‘golden thread’ of JNCC’s Earth heritage work is publication and dissemination of the Geological Conservation Review (GCR) series. This large information resource provides information relevant to both biological and geological conservation work within and beyond the agencies, and provides an important link to the ecosystem based approach that is now favoured. Work on the GCR is likely to become more and more integrated with other areas of nature conservation work.

8.2 Dr Weighell thanked Environment and Heritage staff for arranging the field visit the previous day and providing interesting and informative commentary at the various sites visited. A range of issues was covered from the small (Portrush – site of historical interest) to the large (Magilligan Point – dynamic coastal geomorphological features). The Giant’s Causeway has many designations, including World Heritage Site status, which brings benefits but also results in close outside scrutiny of all aspects of site management. Dr Weighell noted that World Heritage Site status is the only internationally recognised geological designation. However, rather than introducing new designations relating to geological features, it was suggested that existing designations be used more effectively to incorporate geological information.

8.3 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Mrs Bryan thanked Dr Faulkner for hosting the Committee meeting and noted that Committee had thoroughly enjoyed the field visit the previous day.
- ii. Professor Doyle noted that it was important to ensure geodiversity issues were not forgotten - the field visit had provided a valuable opportunity to consider how geological features related to biodiversity. Committee noted that geological features were dynamic but changed at a different timescale to many biodiversity features.
- iii. Committee noted that work conducted by inter-agency groups covering Earth heritage topics worked very well and it is important that this is carried forward during completion of and after publication of the GCR series. There is an opportunity to emphasise

what GCR covers in a broader sense, such as ecosystem processes, and this is a role that the inter-agency groups could take on.

8.4 **Committee thanked EHS for hosting the field trip and noted that it had provided an excellent opportunity to consider the interaction between geological features and biodiversity. There is an interesting future for Earth heritage and the inter-agency groups offer the opportunity to take this work forward following publication of the GCR series and in line with JNCC's strategic development.**

9. **Risk management strategy and process (JNCC 03 D07)**

9.1 Miss Bigger introduced the paper which informed Committee about the risk management strategy adopted by the Support Unit, the reporting process and next steps and Committee's involvement in the process. It was recommended that the full Committee should be kept up to date on any significant changes to the JNCC risk register and receive half yearly reports, and that the Audit and Resources sub-group of Committee should provide the forum for considering the risk register in more detail.

9.2 Mr Steer noted that although the National Audit Office had assessed that JNCC had embedded the risk management process during the year, within the day to day work of the Support Unit, he is keen to refine the process further. Risk has been a standing item at each Management Team meeting and this has proved most effective.

9.3 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Committee was pleased to note that the risk management process is becoming embedded at JNCC. As Committee cautioned, Mr Steer agreed that it is important not to be too risk averse and this has been the approach adopted within the Support Unit.
- ii. Committee was happy with the recommendation that the Audit and Resources sub-group provides the forum for more detailed discussion of the risk register at the time of the annual review and throughout the year and that, where possible, member(s) of the sub-group should be involved in the annual review workshops.
- iii. In terms of Committee papers, it was agreed that as the risk management process develops further papers presented to Committee should include a paragraph placing the subject(s) in a risk context.

9.4 **Committee approved the recommendation that the Audit and Resources sub-group should provide the main forum for Committee involvement in the risk management process but that full Committee should continue to receive half yearly reports and be notified of any significant changes to the risk register. As the risk management process is further embedded within the Support Unit, papers presented to Committee will contain an**

analysis of the risk context.

10. End of year monitoring report for 2002/03

10.1 Mr Steer introduced this paper which provided a report on performance against targets, financial, staffing and risk data for 2002/03. The paper also outlined the difficulties faced over the year in terms of the uncertainty surrounding funding of the country agency pay deals and FMPR implementation, and the impact this had on the Support Unit in terms of recruitment and budget pressures. However, despite these difficulties, target performance over the year was good with the majority of delays caused by factors outside the control of the Support Unit. Staff turnover remained at 11% for the second year running, which now seems to be a sustainable level and was below the target for the year of 15%.

10.2 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Mr Lloyd-Jones congratulated the Support Unit on meeting their financial targets in the circumstances. He noted the impact that FMPR implementation had had on the work programme together with the added burden of not being allowed any carry over facility.
- ii. Committee noted that, where possible, it was important to meet the targets relating to the number of training days for staff.

10.3 **Committee noted the impact of the uncertain funding situation on the Support Unit during 2002/03 and agreed that the small underspend was therefore a very good achievement in the circumstances. Committee welcomed the transparency of the report and recognised the importance of targets related to training.**

11. Forward programme for Committee (JNCC 03 N04)

11.1 This paper updated Committee on the forthcoming agenda items. Members were asked to participate regularly in the planning process for future meetings.

11.2 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Professor Ingram encouraged Committee to contribute to the process and noted that it would be useful to project Committee dates two years in advance.
- ii. Dr Moser noted that it is important for the forward programme to be closely linked to strategic development in order to ensure that the key elements of the strategy are drawn out and discussed by Committee.

11.3 **Committee noted the forward programme and agreed to contribute ideas as appropriate. It was agreed that the forward programme should be closely linked with strategic development and that dates for Committee meetings should be agreed two years in advance.**

12. **Any other business**

Non-native species (JNCC 03 N05) – tabled paper

12.1 This item is included in a confidential addendum to the minutes.

Aquaculture

12.5 Mr Scott advised that the Scottish Executive had recently launched ‘A Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture’, produced by a working group on which Mr Scott represented SNH. The document proposes a number of priorities for action in which SNH is expected to participate. One of the proposals is to establish a Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum (SARF) of which SNH will be a member.

12.6 An SNH staff/board subgroup had recently met to discuss how to take forward the various commitments placed on SNH, and Mr Scott proposed that the issue of the sustainability of aquaculture feed supplies could be passed to JNCC, given the developing role in the JNCC strategy for work on the global footprint of activities in Britain.

12.7 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Committee noted that Mark Tasker (a member of the Support Unit) is very knowledgeable about this issue and was aware of what was being proposed.
- ii. Mr Scott noted that he would be involved in a Scottish context and would therefore liaise with JNCC as required.

12.8 **Committee noted that they would be presented with any papers on the issue as appropriate.**

June 2004 Committee meeting

12.9 SNH agreed that they would host the next Committee field visit in June 2004. Ideas for the visit were still in their infancy but it was suggested that there might be an opportunity to consider marine issues.

12.10 Committee noted that it would be useful if the field visit covered one of the strategic issues arising from the strategy development process.