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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

INVOLVEMENT OF THE JNCC AND COUNTRY AGENCIES IN THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COUNCILS (EEAC)

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1. Background

- 1.1 The European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC) is a network of statutory environmental or sustainable development advisory councils in EU Member States and candidate countries. It aims to facilitate the sharing of information and experience across Europe, and, where appropriate, to influence environmental or sustainable development policy at the EU level by providing independent advice. More information on the objectives of the EEAC is available on their website (<http://www.eeac-network.org>).
- 1.2 Most of the work of the EEAC is undertaken by working groups, which are usually established for specific issues of common interest. There are currently six working groups dealing with:
 - marine environment;
 - sustainable development;
 - energy policy;
 - agricultural and land use policy,
 - biodiversity policy;
 - environmental governance.
- 1.3 The EEAC was established in the early 1990s. Since its establishment, the activities of the network have included the preparation of position statements regarding the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the development of the 6th Environmental Action Programme, and more recently, the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy. The agriculture working group is one of the longest running groups and has helped to influence reviews of the Common Agricultural Policy via meetings with the European Commission and influencing papers. The marine working group has recently prepared a position statement regarding the draft EU document “Towards a Marine Thematic Strategy”. This statement was agreed in September 2004 and has subsequently been submitted to the European Commission.
- 1.4 The EEAC and its working groups are serviced by a secretariat that provides administrative support and disseminates information, establishes contacts with

non-member Councils, gathers intelligence, and establishes contacts with the EU institutions. While currently hosted by the Dutch Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and the Environment (RMNO), from March 2005 the secretariat will be hosted in Brussels by the Belgian MiNa-Raad (Environment and Nature Council of Flanders).

- 1.5 The EEAC has a Steering Committee that oversees the management of the network and the EEAC secretariat. The current chairman is Professor Franc Lobnik, the President of the Slovenian Environment Council (CEPRS). In January 2005, he will be succeeded by Frans Evers from the Netherlands Advisory Council for Research on Spatial Planning, Nature and Environment (RMNO).
- 1.6 From January 2005, the EEAC will establish a 'stichting' (equivalent in many respects to a company limited by guarantee) under Dutch law to provide administrative services for the network, including financial and human resource management. The stichting will have a board that will report to the Steering Committee.

2. Involvement of the JNCC and country agencies in the EEAC

- 2.1 The JNCC, along with the three GB nature conservation agencies, the Royal Commission for Environmental Pollution (RCEP) and the UK Sustainable Development Commission (UKSDC), is a member of the EEAC. The annual cost of membership is 5,000€
- 2.2 The UK bodies have played a prominent role in the EEAC for a number of years. For example, early on in the development of the network English Nature hosted the secretariat (1997-1999). Over the last year the UK Nature and Landscape Office in Brussels has provided office space for the secretariat.
- 2.3 From January 2005, the JNCC will take on the role of 'office supervisor' for the EEAC for a period of two years. This will involve supervising the activities of the secretariat and overseeing financial administrative arrangements. Consequent on taking on this role, the JNCC will have a place on the Steering Committee and the board of the stichting. In 2005, the JNCC will be required to cover some of the secretariat costs (approximately 15,000-20,000€) but from 2006 it is expected that the network will be able to meet this expenditure.
- 2.4 The JNCC and country agencies have participated in much of the work undertaken by the EEAC's working groups. In particular, Michael Scott (Deputy Chairman, SNH) has chaired the marine working group and led the development of the marine thematic strategy position statement, and Sue Collins (Policy Director, English Nature) has been instrumental in setting up and chairing the biodiversity working group.
- 2.5 English Nature, alongside the other nature conservation agencies, RCEP and the UKSDC will be hosting the annual EEAC conference at Heythrop Hall, Oxfordshire in September 2005.

3. Discussion

- 3.1 The EEAC network is unique, and participation in it provides the JNCC and country agencies with an opportunity to build relations in Europe with similar advisory bodies, with consequent advantages in facilitating sharing of best practice, technical expertise and EU intelligence. For example, the secretariat has recently completed a year-long study of the national sustainable development councils in each member country. Results from the work have been fed into the review of the EU SDS, and have been relayed back to the member countries involved.
- 3.2 The activities of the EEAC over recent years have increased its political profile in the EU policy arena. As its political influence continues to grow, the EEAC is likely to be an increasingly useful forum through which the country agencies can work to build relationships with European institutions and help to influence the development of policy. The marine working group's recent work on the "Towards a marine thematic strategy" position document and the development of a constructive working relationship with DGs Environment and Fisheries are examples of improvements in this area. This potential is also starting to be realised through the sustainable development working group, which is in the initial phases of developing a strategic partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee. The profile of the EEAC in the European institutions has increased as a result of the various interactions of the working groups with Commission officials and a high-level meeting with Catherine Day (Director-General, DG Environment) and her officials in June 2004. It was agreed at this meeting that the EEAC would meet with the Commission on an annual basis.
- 3.3 There are some risks associated with involvement in the EEAC. With six UK member councils, attendance at working group and annual meetings can be dominated by the UK, particularly at those meetings where organisations send several representatives. There is therefore a risk of alienating other member councils who may feel the UK is driving the direction of the work. This is something that the JNCC and country agencies take account of when preparing for these meetings. It will be important to continue to build trust and enhance inter-agency co-operation to ensure there is a balanced representation of UK bodies at EEAC meetings.
- 3.4 The increasing profile of the EEAC also carries with it some risks. The JNCC and the agencies will need to ensure that processes are in place to manage the EEAC's relationship with the European institutions as they develop, and that the communication of key messages is appropriate. Key to this is proactive engagement with the Steering Committee and secretariat. The JNCC and English Nature will both be represented on the Steering Committee in 2005-06, and the JNCC role as 'office supervisor' will provide more scope for reviewing and managing the activities of the secretariat.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The EEAC network is unique, and UK membership has delivered benefits for the JNCC and the agencies through enhancing their ability to engage in Europe on environmental and sustainable development issues. The profile of the UK agencies within the network is increasing due to the current and upcoming European environmental policy agenda, the presence of the JNCC and English Nature on the Steering Committee, the acceptance by the JNCC of the office supervisor role, and the hosting by the UK members of the annual conference in 2005. This carries with it some opportunities, but also some risks. Provided these risks are actively monitored and collectively managed by the UK agencies it is considered that on balance the opportunities presented by membership of the EEAC outweigh the risks.