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**JNCC 06 M04
December 2006**

JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY THIRD MEETING OF THE JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE, HELD ON THURSDAY 7 DECEMBER 2006 AT MONKSTONE HOUSE, CITY ROAD, PETERBOROUGH, PE1 1JY.

Present:

Dr Blakiston Houston
Dr Brown
Mr Darby (Chairman)
Professor Doyle
Professor Hill
Professor Ingram
Mr Pritchard
Mr Riddleston
Professor Sprent
Mr Thin
Professor Usher
Professor Warren

In attendance:

Professor Galbraith
Mrs Quince
Mr Seymour
Mr Steer
Dr Vincent
Mr Yeo

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Closed Session

12. Common Standards Monitoring – development of advice to Government (**In confidence**) (**JNCC 06 D12**)

1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mr Poul Christensen and Mr John Lloyd Jones.,
- 1.2 Chairman welcomed Professor David Hill (Natural England Council member), Mr Andrew Thin (Scottish Natural Heritage chairman) and Mr David Pritchard and Professor Michael Usher (two new independent Committee members) to their first meeting.
- 1.3 Chairman mentioned meetings which had taken place prior to Committee, namely:
 - i. the Vision Working Group, which had discussed work in progress on the outcomes component of the Framework for Nature Conservation and feedback from meetings with country agency Councils and others. The next steps will include the use of the ideas in JNCC's advice, further stakeholder engagement, further work on outcomes and determining how the Framework might be applied to the Overseas Territories;
 - ii. the Audit and Risk Management Committee; and
 - iii. the workshop on prioritising the work of JNCC using the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1 Mr Pritchard declared his interest in item 6 as a Director of Wetlands International and as an employee of the RSPB.

3. Amendments to the minutes of the seventieth meeting (JNCC 06 P17)

- 3.1 A paper detailing amendments to the minutes was agreed.

4. Matters arising (JNCC 06 P23)

- 4.1 Committee discussed further items from the minutes of the September meeting, which were not covered by substantive items on the agenda of this meeting:
 - i. Item 5. The first meeting of the new Inter-Agency Climate Change Forum has been arranged for 18 December. Professor Usher will become the new Chair of this Group, but is unable to attend the December meeting, which will be chaired by Mr Riddleston.
 - ii. Item 14. At the September meeting, Committee agreed that JNCC should take on the role of UK National Agency for Life+, subject to certain conditions being met. Since the meeting, the European Parliament has voted against the delegation of 80% of the LIFE+ budget to member states and a conciliation process will be needed to resolve the differences between the Parliament's and Council's positions.
 - iii. Item 13.2. A paper on non-native species will be prepared for the March 2007 Committee meeting.

- iv. Committee were informed that a decision at the last meeting (action point 4.2), to write to Defra Ministers regarding the marine Natura 2000 programme had been deferred, as Chairman and Mr Steer had met Mr Gardiner recently and had raised the issue face to face.

5. National Biodiversity Network – future requirements (JNCC 06 P18)

- 5.1 Dr Vincent introduced the paper, which summarised the current status of the NBN and set out the action that is required to ensure the initiative achieves its full potential. Specifically:
 - i. to increase the proportion of the available data accessible via the NBN; and
 - ii. ensure that data available via the NBN meets the needs of conservation practitioners, including the country agency and JNCC staff, and can be readily accessed by them.
- 5.2 Dr Vincent explained that the paper identifies 14 specific actions and next steps. Dr Vincent reminded the Committee of the need to ensure that the NBN Trust is sufficiently resourced. He confirmed that the work aligns with NBN's strategic priorities.
- 5.3 In discussion, the following comments were made:
 - i. Local records centres were a key source for providing data to the NBN. The NBN Trust were focussed on assisting centres to make data available by identifying data that are expensive to mobilise and critical data sets. However, where data are expensive to mobilise; the solution lies in prioritising and channelling resources where they are needed;
 - ii. the computing power of the system allows the holding of in excess of 100 million records;
 - iii. it was important to consider the needs of the customers of NBN and work towards the country agencies having access to the NBN through their intranets to encourage its use in supporting policy advice;
 - iv. the Data Acquisition Group were considering the practical implications for the use of Biodiversity data, and how this could be achieved across the UK.;
 - v. recognition of the strategic use of data was important. 3.2 of the paper should include a requirement to look at this issue across the board;
 - vi. it was recognised that gathering habitat data was difficult due to a number of different initiatives in the country agencies and Northern Ireland. However, it was important to focus efforts on habitat data and its use for land use issues; and
 - vii. the full potential of NBN in Northern Ireland had not been felt. Technical problems and resources had prevented successful transfer of data. Northern Ireland members confirmed that they were happy to make data available to the NBN and would endeavour to help achieve this.

5.4 The Committee, subject to concerns on the need for enhanced action to mobilise data, approved the actions and the process for implementation.

6. Corporate Plan 2007-10 (JNCC 06 P21)

- 6.1 Mr Yeo introduced the paper and gave a presentation which detailed the main priorities for JNCC's corporate plan for 2007-10. Mr Yeo explained that the plan was based on indicative funding of £7.081 million for each of the three years of the plan, compared to £6.977 million for 2006/07. Mr Yeo informed members that funding for 2007/08 was expected to be confirmed by Government in January 2008. Mr Yeo explained that flat funding for three years poses significant problems for JNCC as it takes no account of unavoidable budgetary pressures such as pay increases and inflation. In order to counter this, further efficiency savings are being considered, alongside a small reduction in staffing over the next two years.
- 6.2 Mr Yeo confirmed that the main features of the corporate plan have been previously discussed with the Joint Committee's Process Working Group and the JNCC sponsors group, which includes representatives from UK Government departments, devolved administrations and country agencies.
- 6.3 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. the corporate plan reflects discussions within the Committee over the past two years, and staff were commended for capturing the Committee's thinking;
 - ii. work on Overseas Territories had been given a high profile in the plan and it was proposed to make resources available to undertake proactive as well as reactive work in this area. The Overseas Territories were seen as a unique scientific laboratory with great potential for monitoring environmental change;
 - iii. the Access to Information programme should mention the work to mobilise the Geological Conservation Review data;
 - iv. funding for 'reserved' functions and 'UK co-ordination' functions are shown separately in the plan, but it is not possible to assign expenditure to the separate countries of the UK;
 - v. on page 18, it would be helpful for the summary table to include external funding as well as grant-in-aid;
 - vi. the plan should be amended to reflect the importance of the 2010 biodiversity loss target.
- 6.3 The Committee were advised that minor amendments and comments could be e-mailed to Mr Lawrence following the meeting.
- 6.4 Committee were advised the plan would be submitted to the March 2008 meeting for final approval.**

7. Common Standards Monitoring – lessons learned from the first six-year report (JNCC 06 P19)

7.1 Dr Vincent introduced the paper, explaining that the Committee considered an initial paper on this topic at its September meeting and further consultation had been requested to be undertaken with the country agencies, with a view to this paper being presented. Dr Vincent went on to explain that the paper identifies 13 lessons and 30 recommended actions. The paper takes account of issues arising from consultations with the inter-agency Monitoring Group and with the Chief Scientists Group.

7.2 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. active engagement with the agencies was important to ensure a sufficient Quality Assurance process was in place and the guidance implemented consistently. More flexible and less prescriptive guidance would enable the agencies to implement the guidance in a resource efficient way;
- i. consideration be given to using two categories for recording favourable recovery:
 - a. unfavourable recovering
 - b. unfavourable but under positive management;
- iii. Lesson 2 – use of area as well as number of features. The size of populations and features in face of a changing environment would provide valuable information. It was recognised that quantifying habitats in area terms would be costly, but should be considered and costed carefully in the action plan. The use of student s to collect this information might be a way of maximising resources available; and
- v. it was important for JNCC and the country agencies to work together to carry forward this work into the action plan stage, as it was important not to lose the principle. Commitment from the country agencies to the action plan needed to be clear to ensure effective delivery.

7.3 The Committee:

- i. endorsed the lessons summarised in the paper;**
- ii. approved the drawing up of an action plan to guide the implementation of the specified actions.**

8. Improving the flow of information from surveillance to support advice provision (JNCC 06 P20)

8.1 The paper was introduced by Dr Vincent, who explained that the paper advances how JNCC can use the surveillance data available to it to provide influential evidence on progress towards the achievement of nature conservation objectives and also on the pressures affecting the environment. Dr Vincent went on to explain that the paper proposes a process for turning surveillance data into evidence and conclusions, and recommends improvements to speed up the process and make it more effective.

- 8.2 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. the work was an important function for JNCC but different methods of collecting data across the country agencies should be taken into account and incorporated;
 - ii. consideration be given to using the Surveillance and Monitoring Interagency Group to follow up this work;
 - iii. the paper provides a good foundation but could emphasis how this work relates to the NBN and how it will apply to the 2010 target;
 - iv. consideration should be given to focussing the NBN effort on mobilising data on areas where there are known problems; and
 - v. if the process is endorsed, JNCC's programmes will be adjusted to fit with it.

8.3 The Committee endorsed the approach.

9. Marine Mapping – current and future direction (JNCC 06 P22)

9.1 Dr Connor introduced the paper explaining that it summarises the work undertaken by JNCC and its partners on marine habitat mapping to date, identifies areas of future need within the context of anticipated future uses of marine mapping information, and identifies areas for future work. Dr Connor went on to explain that the project has a high profile within the UK Government and in Europe and one of the key benefits was the offshore SAC survey programme. Dr Connor drew Committee's attention to section 3 and the JNCC website for further information.

- 9.2 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. the mapping work already undertaken has drawn heavily on data supplied by a range of project partners and other organisations, e.g. HABMAP;
 - ii. however, whilst not immediately obvious from the maps, there was still an enormous lack of data for some areas. It was therefore important to communicate the message that much work has already been done in this area but future funding is crucial;
 - iii. future needs included harmonising dissemination products and communicating a message of joined-up thinking;
 - iv. funding limitations will continue to contain data collection. A change in thinking amongst users was important to ensure a more secure funding stream;
 - v. figure 1 illustrates the differences between the large amount of data acquired for land as opposed to the sea;

- vi. the JNCC should investigate whether the Environmental Liabilities Directive applies to marine work. If it does this could be a lever for securing a stronger funding stream;
- vii. it was important to encourage supply of marine data from commercial companies;
- viii. consideration be given to increasing the public's understanding of the sea.

9.3 The Committee:

- i. reviewed progress in marine habitat mapping, including the three web applications;
- ii. discussed and commented on the paper in light of the JNCC strategy, future policy drivers and advice needs; and
- iii. endorsed the proposals for progressing work in this area.

10. Towards achieving a representative suite of habitat SACs in UK waters: update on progress(JNCC 06 N09)

10.1 The Chairman introduced the paper which was presented to members for information. Chairman explained that the paper provides a resume of work undertaken to complete the UK series of marine Special Areas of Conservation, with particular attention to the identification of areas in the 12-200n mile zone.

- i. A point was raised in relation to the sufficiency of data for the North Anglesey Reef. Clarification would be sought from CCW as to the situation regarding this site.

10.2 Committee noted the paper.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 Two items were raised:

- i. a date for the June meeting, including field visit, should be discussed with EHS and CNCC;
- ii. if possible, papers should be sent out to members further in advance of meetings.

12. Common Standards Monitoring – Advice to Government (In confidence) (JNCC 06 D12)

12.1 Item 12 was taken in closed session. The minutes for this item are contained in a confidential addendum