

JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY FOURTH MEETING OF THE JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE, HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 21 MARCH 2007 AT MONKSTONE HOUSE, CITY ROAD, PETERBOROUGH, PE1 1JY.

Present:

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

In attendance:

Dr Jardine
Dr Parker
Mrs Quince
Mr Seymour
Mr Steer
Dr Tew
Dr Vincent
Mr Yeo

Observing:

Mr D Crawley

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Closed Session

13. Common Standards Monitoring – advice to Government (**In confidence**) (JNCC 07 P01)

1. **Chairman’s opening remarks**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Mr Andrew Thin.
- 1.2 Chairman informed the Committee that this was to be Professor Janet Sprent’s last meeting. Chairman thanked Professor Sprent for her hard work on behalf of the Committee. Chairman informed the Committee that a replacement for Professor Sprent as the second representative from SNH had already been found: Mr David Crawley. Mr Crawley would be attending this meeting as an observer.
- 1.3 Chairman made reference to his letter to Committee members of 31 January 2007 confirming that the Minister did not intend to reappoint him once his term had come to an end. Chairman informed the Committee that the recruitment process for a new chairman was underway and he urged all members to encourage interested parties to apply.
- 1.3 Chairman mentioned meetings which had taken place prior to Committee, namely:
 - i. the Vision Working Group, which had discussed desired long-term outcomes in relation to topics set out in the Framework for Nature Conservation. The Group considered the work to date and advised on the suitability or otherwise of proposed outcomes, suggested outcomes for elements of the framework where these have not yet been considered and suggested sources of information which could be used to develop the outcomes further. It was hoped that the outcomes could be revised by early May, and a full report on the work undertaken by the Group to date would be presented to the June Committee meeting; and
 - ii. the Audit and Risk Management Committee.

2. **Declaration of interests**

- 2.1 No declarations were made.

3. **Amendments to the minutes of the seventy third meeting**

- 3.1 Mr Seymour asked that his name be added to the names of those in attendance. The minutes were agreed with this amendment.

4. **Matters arising**

- 4.1 It was reported previously that JNCC had been working with Defra to explore the possibility of JNCC becoming the UK National Agency for the new LIFE+

programme. Work was halted when the European Parliament adopted a different position to the Commission and Council on various issues, including delegation of much of the budget to Member States. The Committee were informed that it was now almost certain that the LIFE+ programme would be managed centrally by the Commission and so it is very unlikely that there will be a need for Member States to set up National Agencies.

4.2 Following Dr Moser's departure from the Joint Committee, **the Committee agreed that the Chairman and Professor Usher be given delegated authority to make changes to the position statement on avian influenza as the need arises.**

5. **Presentation: *Refreshing the Biodiversity Partnership in England* - outcomes and implications**

5.1 Mr Steer introduced the item explaining that due to growing concerns and difficulties around the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and implementing the recommendations of its recent reviews, Barry Gardiner MP (Minister for Biodiversity) had called for a Workshop with two high level objectives:

- i. to explore the Ecosystem Approach as the guiding principle for future action planning, to help place site and species conservation in a more dynamic context to meet challenges including climate change;
- ii. to streamline the bureaucracy surrounding the BAP in England.

5.2 Mr Steer went on to explain that JNCC had welcomed this opportunity to promote and achieve the desired changes for biodiversity conservation as presented to Committee and agreed at the September 2006 meeting. Some of the urgent work for JNCC staff will be to discuss the ideas from this England-focussed workshop with other countries, to assist DEFRA in taking the wishes of the Minister forward and to make best use of the 25 April UK Biodiversity Standing Committee Meeting.

5.3 Committee were given a presentation by Dr Paul Rose on the outcomes of the Ministerial workshop as a precursor to discussion. The objectives of the presentation were:

- i. to update Committee on progress in taking forward their recommendations from consideration of the Biodiversity work in September 2006;
- ii. to make Committee aware of recent developments around the UK Biodiversity Action Plan;
- iii. to promote discussion of the implications for JNCC and biodiversity action more generally.

5.4 Chairman thanked Dr Rose for an informative presentation.

- 5.5 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. there was a need for a UK momentum, with devolved administrations being heavily involved;
 - ii. there was a some slight concern that the workshop had been focused on England; however, representatives from Scotland and Northern Ireland had attended alongside UK NGOs and others among the 30-40 people attending the workshop;
 - iii. the work was based around changing the structures; it was important to ensure that in changing the structures this released resources on the ground and that any changes added to the simplicity of the system to ensure outcomes were achieved;
 - iv. JNCC was best placed to provide a focus on what the 2010 targets mean at a UK level;
 - v. agreeing indicators for measurement was a huge leap forward. JNCC's consultation process on this was currently located on a secure part of the website; it was hoped to publish the results of this in early May, possibly on International Biodiversity Day; and
 - vi. more work was required with Defra on the 'Futures' paper.

6. **JNCC corporate plan for 2007-10 (JNCC 07 P03)**

- 6.1 Mr Yeo introduced the paper. An amended table for paragraph 2.2 had been produced and was tabled at the meeting.
- 6.2 Mr Yeo explained that this was a final draft of the corporate plan, with an earlier version having been discussed at the December meeting. He went on to explain that the plan continues the policy of the last few years of aligning the JNCC's work more closely with the JNCC strategy. Therefore, the proposed plan shows an increase in funding for strategic priorities such as climate change, nature conservation in the marine environment and the Overseas Territories and Global Impacts programmes. To provide additional funding for the strategic priorities, funding has been decreased in other areas, such as surveillance and monitoring and standard setting.
- 6.3 Mr Lawrence informed the Committee that the JNCC had received formal notification of its financial settlement for 2007/08. The settlement had been set at £7.913 million and indicative figures for the next two years had been set at the same level. This was a net increase of £936k over the settlement for 2006/07. Defra had provided an additional £1 million for work on marine Natura 2000. Once approved by Committee the plan would be submitted to Government for their approval.

- 6.4 In response to questions from Committee members, clarification was provided on the following points:
- i. from 2007/08, funding for CITES licensing work will be provided by the State Veterinary Service. The funding for this work is shown as income in the plan;
 - ii. the plan will be signed off by the Defra minister (Barry Gardiner), following consultation with ministers in the devolved administrations.
- 6.5 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. the text describing the Marine Management Advice programme should be amended to ensure it reflects the importance of the Marine White Paper;
 - ii. it should be made clear that although the funding for surveillance and monitoring has been reduced, this remains an important area for the JNCC. New, more cost-effective, methods of surveillance and monitoring should be investigated;
 - iii. within the Environmental Pressures programme, more funding may be needed in future years for work on climate change, depending on priorities identified by the Inter-Agency Climate Change Forum; and
 - iv. the text and targets relating to Earth heritage conservation should be reviewed to ensure that appropriate priority is given to this area of work.
- 6.6 **The Committee agreed the corporate plan for 2007-10 subject to the comments noted in 6.5 above.**

7. **Non-native species: JNCC's future priorities (JNCC 07 P02)**

- 7.1 Dr McLean introduced the paper, which summarises the current threats from non-native species to biodiversity in the UK and internationally, and sets out the arrangements in GB for dealing with non-native species using the Convention on Biological Diversity's three-stage hierarchical approach. The paper also proposes future priorities for the JNCC's work on non-native species.
- 7.2 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. invasive non-native pathogens are an important issue for nature conservation and should be included within the JNCC's work;
 - ii. the JNCC and the country agencies should aim to raise ministers' awareness of the threats posed to biodiversity by non-native species;
 - iii. work to develop a sound evidence base for policies on non-native species should include modelling;

- iv. the UK must ensure that it does not export potentially damaging species to other countries, in particular Ireland and the Overseas Territories;
- v. climate change will exacerbate the threats posed by non-native species;
- vi. a clear definition of the concept of ‘non-native’ is required in the context of climate change; and
- vii. there is an urgent need to ensure that adequate processes and associated resources are in place to detect newly-introduced invasive species and take rapid action to prevent their establishment where necessary. Robust measures to prevent the introduction of non-native species are also needed.

7.3 **The Committee:**

- i. endorsed the proposed priorities and associated actions, subject to the comments in 7.2 above;**
- ii. agreed that the country agencies should ensure their respective administrations were aware of the serious threats posed by non-native species;**
- iii. agreed that the Chairman should consider writing to ministers on behalf of the Joint Committee to help encourage a stronger leadership and co-ordination role for the Defra-led Programme Board for Non-native Species.**

8. **Raptors in Guinea: an example of JNCC’s global outreach work (JNCC 07 D02)**

- 8.1 The paper was introduced by Dr Fleming, who explained that it summarises work undertaken to support the JNCC’s CITES licensing function by commissioning research, jointly funded by Defra, in Guinea. This work aimed to provide a greater understanding of the status of raptors in Guinea and to enhance the capacity of the Guinean authorities to properly regulate their trade.
- 8.2 Dr Fleming went on to explain that the work was notable because it was the first time that the JNCC have supported fieldwork and capacity building for CITES in another country. Due to the European Community’s ban on the import of wild birds to prevent avian influenza, the immediate primary purpose of the research has, in part, been superseded. However, the outputs of the research will have other uses, including informing the proposed Convention on Migratory Species agreement on migratory African-Eurasian raptors.

- 8.3 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. an additional guiding principle for future work of this sort should be that the work should leave a long-term legacy in the collaborating countries; and
 - ii. resources should be focussed on areas where the JNCC can add significant value to what others are doing.

8.4 **The Committee endorsed the proposed criteria in section 5 of the paper for JNCC's future engagement with global outreach work, subject to the points raised in 8.3 above.**

9. **Mammal surveillance review and proposed way forward (JNCC 07 D01)**

9.1 Dr Vincent introduced the paper explaining that it proposes a forward plan for JNCC's investment in mammal surveillance. The proposal is to continue at the current level of investment (consistent with the corporate plan) but to undertake a number of activities to improve species and geographical coverage. The paper is the result of a project review using the principles developed in the Draft Strategy for Surveillance, Reporting and Research as considered by the Committee in 2006.

9.2 The overall recommendations of the paper were that JNCC should: continue to interpret the mammal data from the Breeding Bird Survey and National Gamebag Census; maintain its contribution to the National Bat Monitoring Programme, continue to support the Tracking Mammals Partnership, investigate the viability of a small mammals surveillance scheme; but not support an extension of the Winter Mammal Monitoring pilot since this added little to the other available information.

- 9.3 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. the paper should be amended to make it clear that it did not cover marine mammals at present; however, this might be subject to change in the future;
 - ii. there were no plans at present for JNCC to undertake surveillance on pine martens as their distribution at present was restricted and surveillance difficult, but we would encourage the relevant country agencies to undertake targeted schemes;
 - iii. many non-native species of mammal were being monitored within the existing surveillance programme;
 - iv. ideally the schemes should have the ability to detect trends at a national, regional or habitat level; our intention is to relate scheme findings to habitat changes when habitat information is available for this;

- v. there were limitations on what could be concluded as a result of surveillance of small mammal populations as long term data shows natural variability of populations.

9.4 The Committee endorsed the recommendations set out in the paper.

10. EC Habitats Directive: Favourable Conservation Status (JNCC 07 N02)

10.1 The paper was introduced by Mr Jones who explained that it provides an update on progress on the assessment and reporting of conservation status under the EC Habitats Directive. Mr Jones went on to explain that Member States are required to report every 6 years on their implementation of measures taken under the EC Habitats Directive. The report for 2001–2006 is currently being drafted by the JNCC on behalf of the country agencies for submission to Government. The report includes for the first time an assessment of conservation status of habitats and species listed in the Annexes to the Directive. The revised programme for the production of the UK national report was contained in Annex 1 to the paper. Government plan to submit the report by October.

10.2 In noting the paper the following points were raised:

- i. Annex 2 provided a stark summary of the situation at present;
- ii. assurance was given that the UK was on the same level with the rest of Europe. Informal networks within our own geographical region indicate a generally consistent approach is being taken;
- iii. Government and the devolved administrations have seen the summary statistics provided at Annex 2, so will be aware that much still needs to be done to bring the features of Community interest into favourable conservation status;
- iv. an explanation of what part of the structure and function is being assessed should be included in the paper, with the Biodiversity Action Plan being a key source of information;
- v. with the Environmental Liabilities Directive it is important to ensure the methodology is robust when making judgements and an audit trail is maintained;
- vi. the time for internal consultation was drawing to a close and there was a need for the information to be accurate before it is disseminated;
- vii. the business risks and implications of this work should be considered by Mr Steer and the Chief Executives.

10.3 **Committee noted the paper.**

11. **Committee forward programme 2007-08 (JNCC 07 N01)**

11.1 Committee asked for additional discussion on the development of the Framework for Nature Conservation to be incorporated into the Forward Programme.

12. **Any other business**

12.1 One item was raised:

- i. Committee was asked that the JNCC should give its approval for using the 2004 SSSI threshold statistics for raptors to ensure that these can be used at enquiries relating to objections to SSSI notifications.
- ii. **Committee agreed.**

Closed Session

13. **Common Standards Monitoring – Advice to Government (In confidence) (JNCC 07 P01)**

13.1 Item 13 was taken in closed session. The minutes for this item are contained in a confidential addendum.