



IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF JNCC COMMUNICATIONS

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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF JNCC COMMUNICATIONS

Paper by Sue McQueen

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Effective communication skills are essential to JNCC in successfully fulfilling its statutory duty and strategy to provide advice, disseminate knowledge, and foster understanding of UK and international nature conservation issues. As policy makers seek solutions to the environmental problems arising from climate change and the economic recession it is particularly important that we are able to clearly communicate the policy-relevant information and analysis arising from our work and to show the role of biodiversity in addressing these issues.
- 1.2 This paper sets out how we intend to increase our contribution to improving awareness and understanding of nature conservation, and the contribution JNCC makes to it, whilst reducing the cost and negative environmental impact of our communications activities.
- 1.3 The paper also sets out proposals for how Committee members could address the need to improve dialogue about JNCC's contribution to sponsor bodies' goals, and increasing collaboration to maximise cost-effectiveness. This was identified by Committee through its self-assessment in December (JNCC 09 D09) and through consultation on the 2010 business plan (JNCC 10 P01).

2. Key messages

- 2.1 As JNCC's work is wide-ranging, the subject matter we communicate will also continue to be wide-ranging. However, there are a small number of simple messages about nature conservation that we need to convey through all of our communications activities to ensure the relevance of the information is understood (annex 1). Similarly, there are a small number of messages about the nature and role of JNCC that we need to convey to ensure the organisation is understood and valued (annex 2).
- 2.2 It is intended to use the key messages in two ways:
 - i. Firstly, every communications product we produce will include specific messages which explain and illustrate the key messages. For

instance a scientific report on the findings from a monitoring scheme would be introduced with a simple explanation that might include:

- the contribution the species make to the ecosystem function and/or economy;
 - the impacts of pressures or measures on its status and trends and the sort of measures that are important for its protection or recovery;
 - the collaborative approach taken to delivering the scheme and the benefits derived from this.
- ii. Secondly, we will use the messages as a framework to prioritise between competing demands for communications resources and to commission products from programmes or projects that are less active in communicating their outputs. For example the framework will be used at a small scale to determine Nature News content.

3. International Year of Biodiversity

- 3.1 JNCC has signed up as an International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) to help promote understanding of biodiversity.
- 3.2 Our aims for the year, and beyond, are to improve the effectiveness and value for money of the full range of our communications work, providing clearer messages about biodiversity conservation issues and improving access to the information and data we produce.
- 3.3 We are collaborating with partner bodies to ensure that, where JNCC has contributed to the issues they plan to promote under IYB, complementary information is available on our website.
- 3.4 We are also implementing a modest programme of events for IYB (paragraph 4.3).
- 3.5 Finally, we have established a new part of the website called *Natural Solutions* (<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=5187>) to illustrate how biodiversity helps society to meet a wide range of challenges and intend to provide monthly think-pieces on a range of conservation issues.

4. Communication channels

Website

- 4.1 JNCC's website is a highly cost-effective way of disseminating information and data to all of JNCC's specific stakeholder groups and to the general public. It is a vast resource with c. 12000 pages and visited by thousands of

people per year (e.g. October 2009 the site was visited 98 000 times by 53 000 unique visitors who viewed 700 000 pages).

- 4.2 In response to research and feedback received from our stakeholders we are on track to deliver, by the date of the Committee meeting, the key performance indicator for 2009/10 to improve navigation and consistency as follows:
- i. a modified structure to provide alternative routes to key content (geographical and thematic) and simplified with fewer categories;
 - ii. top-level content focussing on JNCC key messages and priorities and copy-edited to present a consistent communication style;
 - iii. modernised design of the pages to simplify navigation, readability and ease of use and to promote recognition of JNCC as a respected source of information on the web.

Corporate Publications

- 4.3 JNCC produces corporate publications as a means of raising awareness and understanding of nature conservation issues, the role of JNCC and its current and potential future contribution in addressing these, and to meet the requirements of external accountability.
- 4.4 A number of changes will be made to the suite of publications to improve their effectiveness in delivering these objectives, to get better value for money, and to reduce their negative environmental impact as follows:
- i. the content of publications will be more tightly focussed and targeted to specific audiences. In general this will mean publications will be shorter. Additional information will be provided through JNCC's website;
 - ii. time-limited information on areas of particular interest e.g. developing or potential future work, JNCC's contribution to different policy or geographical areas etc. will be produced on a low-cost short-run basis;
 - iii. hard copy publication will be reduced. Electronic versions will be provided to the majority of recipients through email and the JNCC website.
 - iv. a consistent design will be applied to all publications in order to increase recognition and reduce design costs;
- 4.5 Specific changes to the current suite of publications are outlined in annex 3.
- 4.6 The principles set out above will also be applied to publications associated with specific work areas.

Events

- 4.7 Recently we co-hosted, with the Linnean Society, a very successful event for over a hundred natural and social scientists and policy advisers to consider new ideas for tackling the major threats to biodiversity.
- 4.8 In June, we will deliver a stakeholder event with European institutions and other member states in Brussels. The workshop aims to take forward the outcome from the Global Biodiversity Mechanisms conference, that took place last May, to seek greater efficiency and a more proactive approach to Multilateral Environmental Agreements by addressing thematically the main drivers of biodiversity loss.
- 4.9 In September we will sponsor, with the Environment Agency and Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, an international conference to achieve greater integration of conservation within the management of river systems.
- 4.10 Beyond this year it is intended to deliver one or two events of this type each year, to collaborate with stakeholders in addressing key nature conservation issues. Similarly, we will take collaborative opportunities provided by other organisations to contribute to addressing key issues.

5. Branding

- 5.1 Branding guidelines have been developed, at low cost, to ensure consistency in the presentation of our work on the website, in hard copy form and in day to day communications. The value added by the 'world of life' logo, and associated designs for the website, stationary, publications, lapel badges etc. includes the following:
 - i. visual information in the logo will promote understanding of the purpose of JNCC's work;
 - ii. as a strong design it will be remembered and improve recognition of JNCC as the source of the information;
 - iii. the templates in the design package will reduce future financial and manpower design costs of individual products.

6. Committee members' roles

- 6.1 In its recent self-assessment of Committee effectiveness the need was identified to strengthen relationships with Defra and the devolved administrations and country conservation body Boards/Councils. Proposed action to address this is set out below.

Country conservation body members

- i. Routinely accompany the JNCC Chairman at meetings with devolved ministers;
- ii. Use other Ministerial meetings and meetings with senior officials in the devolved administrations to convey appropriate information about JNCC and/or its work. Briefings could be sought from JNCC to support these as necessary;
- iii. Provide feedback, or an opportunity for matters arising, from JNCC meetings to be discussed at Board and Council meetings. Minutes would be circulated directly to members of country council Boards/Councils to support this;
- iv. Provide an annual invitation to the JNCC Chairman and Managing Director to meet with the Council/ Board, or a sub-group, to discuss issues such as devolved administrations priorities as they relate to JNCC, other shared issues and JNCC performance and plans;
- v. Encourage Council/Board members to participate in Joint Committee meetings, for instance summer meetings held in the relevant country.

Independent Members

- i. Participate in JNCC events, or other organisations events of relevance to JNCC's issues;
- ii. Use non-JNCC opportunities to convey JNCC's key messages and/or information about JNCC's role where appropriate. Briefings could be sought from JNCC to support these as necessary;
- iii. Provide feedback to JNCC's Director of Corporate Services on any issues of relevance to JNCC arising in the course of non-JNCC work.
- iv. Deputise for the Joint Committee Chairman at meetings and events.

ANNEX 1 – KEY MESSAGES: NATURE CONSERVATION

Summary

1. Biodiversity is the essence of life.
2. Biodiversity is being lost at an unprecedented rate.
3. Our choices, individually and collectively, determine the fate of biodiversity.
4. Wise choices are based on sound, scientific evidence.
5. Good governance, consistent across all sectors and at all levels, creates a framework for choices supportive of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

1. What biodiversity is and why it matters. In particular:

- i. biodiversity comprises the wide range of ecosystems, species and genes that form the web of life on Earth;
- ii. biodiversity has a critical role, and economic value, in supporting basic natural services upon which humans depend (e.g. fresh water, fertile soil, clean air, pollinating crops and cleaning up waste);
- iii. the loss of diversity matters because it is the interaction between organisms that regulates the natural processes (such as the growth cycles of plants, the mating seasons of animals, and weather systems) that keep the global ecosystem in balance.

2. The decisions we make as individuals and collectively determine what biodiversity and geodiversity we have now and what we will leave for future generations. In particular:

- i. under the right conditions biodiversity can be sustained for future generations;
- ii. however, biodiversity and geodiversity is declining because the pressures we are placing on it are too great, e.g. through habitat transformation and over-exploitation of species;
- iii. it is essential that the impact on biodiversity and geodiversity is taken into account in policy development and decision making at all geographical scales and across all sectors.

3. What measures taken to protect and enhance nature are successful and what we can learn from them. In particular:

- i. despite an overall decline in biodiversity and geodiversity in the UK and elsewhere, certain measures taken by governments, individuals and organisations to protect and enhance it have proved successful;

- ii. we can learn from our successes (and our failures) to develop cost-effective approaches that can be applied elsewhere;
- iii. as many biodiversity and geodiversity issues are multi-national and multi-sectoral, collaboration is necessary to establish effective measures both in the UK and more widely.

4. A solid evidence base is needed to inform decision-making. In particular:

- i. the cost of addressing the consequences of the decline in biodiversity and geodiversity is significant – but the cost of inaction is even greater;
- ii. in order to minimise this cost we need to take preventative action informed by a robust evidence base. We must know the status of biodiversity and geodiversity, how it is changing, and why it is changing;
- iii. measures to provide shared access to the vast data resources held by organisations in the UK and internationally, as well as encouraging gaps to be filled efficiently, are critical in enabling evidence to be produced cost-effectively.

5. Nature conservation requires governance that integrates action across sectors and at different geographical scales. In particular:

- i. sustaining biodiversity into the future requires sympathetic actions and decisions being taken at all geographical scales and across all sectors;
- ii. cost-effectiveness of nature conservation advice, policy and practical measures can also be enhanced by organisations working together;
- iii. good governance, consistent across all sectors and at all levels, is critical in creating a framework for choices supportive of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

ANNEX 2 – KEY MESSAGES: JNCC’S DISTINCTIVE ROLE AND COMPETENCIES

- 1. JNCC helps to make devolution work by providing support to all four administrations.** In particular:
 - i. through our role as UK Government advisors in European and global fora we influence policy development at these scales taking into account the interests of all the UK administrations;
 - ii. through collaboration with the country conservation bodies and others we ensure devolved policies and approaches within the UK meet current and future European and international requirements.

- 2. JNCC works to ensure the evidence-base needed for policy making at all levels is provided cost-effectively.** In particular
 - i. using our strong scientific and technical expertise, our knowledge of policy requirements at global, European and national levels for evidence and our extensive network we:
 - i. design cost-effective biodiversity monitoring and surveillance strategies to meet multiple requirements;
 - ii. provide tools and mechanisms through which government bodies, non-governmental organisations and individuals make their data freely available for use in policy-making and enterprise;
 - iii. provide policy-relevant evidence and encourage gaps to be filled by the research community.

- 3. JNCC provides our stakeholders with a dispassionate, long-term, perspective of priorities and investment needs.** In particular:
 - i. we have a very limited operational role, and are therefore not driven by our own requirements for information or prospects for growth or reduction as a result of policy change;
 - ii. as a result our advice can be relied on as scientifically and technically sound and offering optimum value for money.

- 4. JNCC delivers nature conservation services for the offshore marine environment and supports conservation in the UK’s Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.** In particular:
 - i. we provide advice and evidence to the UK Government and devolved administrations to support nature conservation offshore. We collaborate closely with the relevant country conservation bodies to join up issues that relate to both inshore and offshore areas;

- ii. we support nature conservation in the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies by providing advice to UK government and the governments of the Territories and Dependencies themselves. Our strategy is to use the relatively small level of resource provided by JNCC to build and enable the sharing of expertise, e.g. through regional hubs, and to lever resources from funding and research programmes for use by the Overseas Territories.

ANNEX 3 CORPORATE PUBLICATIONS

1. Nature News will be tailored to the interests of the policy-makers and influencers that JNCC advises and works in partnership with. Supplementary information will be provided through JNCC's website for those stakeholders and for JNCC's other stakeholder groups. The home and news pages of the website will provide timely news in between issues of Nature News.
2. The Annual Report will be a much leaner publication that provides the information required for accountability to the UK and devolved Parliaments only. Additionally a short 'Review of the Year' will be produced to report performance against our key targets and to explain and highlight particular achievements.
3. Basic information about JNCC and its work will be published as a short booklet with a flap at the back in which to place loose inserts so it can be tailored to different audiences. More information about JNCC will be provided on JNCC's website.
4. Corporate Plans will continue to be produced as a printable, electronic publication only. Additionally, time-limited information on areas of particular interest e.g. developing or potential future work, JNCC's contribution to different policy or geographical areas/ administrations etc. will be produced on a low-cost short-run basis.