



Chief Executive's report on topical issues

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Chief Executive's report on topical issues

Paper by Marcus Yeo

1. Funding for 2014/15 and beyond

1.1 Discussions have started with government regarding JNCC's budget for 2014/15. We are anticipating budget reductions, in line with the financial profile agreed as part of the 2010 Spending Review, but the exact position is uncertain, especially in relation to funding for marine activities. The situation is complicated by the review of JNCC's funding arrangements that will be undertaken by Defra and devolved administrations over the summer, following the completion of the Triennial Review. This could lead to significant changes in how JNCC is funded.

1.2 The next Spending Review will set high-level government budgets for 2015/16 onwards. It will be published at the end of June.

2. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

2.1 Following review by the Committee's MPA Sub-Group, detailed information packages for 16 possible Nature Conservation MPAs in offshore Scottish waters were submitted to Marine Scotland on 10 June. Marine Scotland will consult on the possible sites over the summer, as part of a consultation that will also include the first Scottish National Marine Plan and renewables planning.

2.2 Alongside the consultation, Marine Scotland will provide information on an indicative suite of marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) so that stakeholders can see the full range of potential marine sites in Scottish waters. In June, the Executive Management Board endorsed an indicative suite of offshore marine SPAs in Scottish waters for submission to Marine Scotland. We are also continuing to work closely with SNH and the other country conservation bodies to identify inshore SPAs.

2.3 JNCC staff are supporting Defra as they prepare for designation of the first tranche of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) later this year.

3. Habitats Directive report

3.1 The third six-yearly UK report on implementation of the Habitats Directive is due for submission to the European Commission in July. The bulk of the report comprises assessments of the conservation status of 77 habitats and 123 species.

3.2 Responses to the consultation, which closed on 10 May, have been dealt with. JNCC staff are working with government administrations and country

conservation bodies to address a small number of outstanding stakeholder concerns.

4. Defra's Strategic Alignment programme

- 4.1 Defra are undertaking an ambitious Strategic Alignment programme that will have wide-ranging implications for the whole Defra network (i.e. the core department and its arm's-length bodies, including JNCC). The aim is for the network to operate as 'one business' and to achieve 30% cost savings.
- 4.2 One of the activity streams relevant to JNCC concerns evidence and science, and is likely to consider different options for commissioning and delivering environmental monitoring across the Defra network. Another activity stream is concerned with reducing the costs of back-office functions through shared services.
- 4.3 Governance for the Strategic Alignment programme includes a group of senior Defra officials and ALB Chief Executives. JNCC has recently been asked to join this group. This will enable us to have an input to decisions and ensure that solutions take account of JNCC's unique characteristics, such as our UK remit.

5. Review of EU competences

- 5.1 The UK Government is carrying out a comprehensive review of the EU's competences, to be concluded in 2014¹. The review will comprise an analysis of EU action and how it affects the UK. Government departments are consulting widely as part of the exercise, including with the devolved administrations. In May, Defra and the Department for Energy and Climate Change issued a call for evidence in the areas of environment and climate change (including biodiversity).

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/review-of-the-balance-of-competences>