



**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY SEVENTH MEETING OF THE
JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE TO BE HELD AT 0900 HOURS
ON THURSDAY 20 MARCH 2008 AT MONKSTONE HOUSE, CITY ROAD,
PETERBOROUGH, PE1 1JY**

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Present:

Dr Bridgewater (Chairman)
Mr Casement
Mr Crawley
Professor Doyle
Professor Hill
Professor Ingram
Mr Lloyd Jones
Dr Joyce
Mr Pritchard
Professor Usher
Professor Warren

In attendance:

Professor Galbraith
Mrs McQueen
Mr Seymour
Mr Steer
Dr Tew
Mr Thomas
Dr Vincent
Mr Yeo
Dr McLean (items 6 and 14 only)
Professor Thompson (item 6 only)
Mr Jones (item 7 only)
Mrs Pelembe (item 7 only)
Dr Williams (item 8 only)
Mr Ellis (item 9 only)
Mr Way (item 11 only)

Apologies:

Mr Christensen, Mr Thin, Dr Brown, Dr Jardine, Dr Phillips

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1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1 Chairman welcomed Richard Chapman, Defra, as an observer to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Thin, Mr Christensen and Dr Brown (members) and Dr Jardine and Dr Phillips (attendees). Chairman noted that Mr Christensen had particularly emphasised his view that the committee papers become more strategic, and that perhaps technical issues could be dealt with intersessionally. Mr Lloyd-Jones agreed this was a desirable direction to develop.
- 1.3 Committee welcomed to their first meeting, Mr Casement, Chairman of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, and Dr Joyce, Member of the Countryside Council for Wales.
- 1.4 This would be the last meeting for Professor Ingram who was thanked warmly for his substantial contribution to JNCC over many years. Chairman had particularly welcomed the support Professor Ingram had provided to him as the new Chairman.
- 1.5 Professor Warren was appointed by the Committee as the Deputy Chairman, succeeding Professor Ingram in this role.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1 In relation to item 9, 'Geoconservation work within JNCC', Professor Warren declared her role on the Board of the British Geological Survey and that of her husband as a trustee of the British Institute for Geological Conservation, and Professor Doyle declared his role as Chair of the Geoconservation Commission of the Geological Society. Chairman ruled that these did not present a conflict of interests.

3. Amendments to the minutes of the seventy-sixth meeting.

- 3.1 Mr Seymour asked that his name be added to the list of attendees. Subject to this the minutes were agreed.

4. Matters arising (JNCC 08 P02)

Further points were made in relation to the matters set out in the paper as follows: (numbers relate to the paper).

- 6.i. Chairman informed Committee that the proposed North West Rockall Special Area of Conservation had been approved by Committee inter-sessionally for submission to Defra. Chairman noted he hoped that in future more matters could be dealt with in this manner to ensure a smoother and more frequent flow of business.

- 16. The Chairman emphasised JNCC's commitment to marine issues in relation to the increasing priority the issue has across Defra and the devolved administrations. SNH welcomed the strengthened collaboration with JNCC. The meeting of Chairman and Jonathan Shaw, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Marine, Landscape & Rural Affairs), was arranged for late April and Chairman would report back at the June meeting.

4.1 Additional matters arising were raised as follows:

- i. Chairman provided an update on his recent meetings.

- ii. Chairman and Professor Stephen Hopper, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, had demonstrated how the two organisations hoped to expand their work together at a meeting with Joan Ruddock, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Climate Change, Biodiversity and Waste).

- iii. Joan Ruddock had attended the conference 'Biodiversity conservation in a changing climate'. CCW and Natural England were among the conference organisers and Professor Usher and Professor Galbraith had chaired sessions. Chairman also welcomed the involvement of Barclays Bank which hosted the event.

- iv. The Crown Dependencies had welcomed the opportunity for collaboration facilitated by JNCC at a recent workshop on the Isle of Man. The Chairman had also met separately with the Manx Minister.

- v. Chairman had attended the 3rd World Congress of Biosphere Reserves: Biosphere Futures, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves for Sustainable Development.

- vi. Chairman had been impressed, on his first visit to the JNCC's Aberdeen Office, on the range of work being undertaken there. He looked forward to the office co-locating with SNH and SEPA in 2009.

- viii. Chairman noted a meeting with the Chairs of the country nature conservation agencies was being planned for Green Week in Brussels. This opportunity would enable the Chairs to expand their contacts within the European Commission.

- ix An item of Bovine TB had been deferred but would be brought to Committee when there was more clarity on the issue.

5. JNCC Corporate Plan for 2008-11 (JNCC 08 P01)

5.1 Mr Yeo introduced the paper and draft corporate plan for 2008-11 and thanked the country nature conservation agencies and Committee Members for their comments on an earlier draft. Defra, the devolved administrations and other Government departments had only recently been sent the draft plan. Feedback to date indicated broad agreement to the draft plan, but further time was needed for full consultation.

5.2 The following general points were raised in discussion.

- i. the plan reflected well the changing political situation across the UK and presented a satisfactory programme of work taking into account the reduction in funding;
- ii. the extent to which JNCC's work programmes had developed to reflect the major changes and challenges to the environment was queried. It was noted that JNCC would continue to consider emerging issues at an early stage and respond accordingly within the constraints of the current demand for advice from stakeholders and the resources provided;
- iii. the Joint Committee would review its mission and strategy during the coming year and this would provide an opportunity to address some of the points raised;
- iv. the Joint Committee should devote more of its time to strategic nature conservation issues and their policy implications. Specific subjects raised were: ecosystem goods and services; the balance of effort given to different components of biodiversity (for example, there is currently little focus on micro-organisms); soils and modern sediments.

5.3 The following points of detail were raised:

- i. the plan needs to better communicate JNCC's significant contribution to building the nature conservation evidence base and its use of it in underpinning its work;
- ii. the Joint Committee's Vision work would inform the strategy review. The existing Vision documents would prove invaluable to JNCC staff, but further work would be subsumed in the strategy review process;
- iii. *Executive Summary*, paragraph 5, bullet point 4 – It was noted that whilst JNCC has identified priority gaps in the evidence base such as fish, the list of taxonomic groups given in the plan reflect those the JNCC has the resources to cover through its surveillance and monitoring programme;
- iv. *Section 2.2.4.* bullet point 8 should be re-worded to reflect more accurately the detail of the plan. During the plan period work on

geoconservation would focus on completing publication of the GCR series which would be delivered with less resource to reflect the reduction in UK co-ordination funding. JNCC's plans for geoconservation work more widely were set out in a separate paper to this meeting (JNCC 08 D05). There is a need for JNCC to consider how it could better integrate geoconservation with nature conservation more widely;

- v. *Section 5* – Greater consistency is required in the text to reflect accurately which multilateral environmental agreements JNCC can support during the plan period;
- vi. it was intended to make the corporate plan more accessible to ministers and others by distilling it into a short document.

5.4 **Committee agreed that a further draft, addressing points raised above and comments provided by Defra, the devolved administrations and other Government departments, should be circulated to Members prior to final endorsement by the Chairman. Following this, the Plan would be submitted to Government for approval.**

6. **Review of inter-agency work: progress report (JNCC 08 D07)**

6.1 Dr Vincent introduced this paper which provided a progress report on a review of Lead Agencies, Lead Co-ordination Networks and Inter-agency Scientific Working Groups, including recommendations made to the Chief Scientists Group.

6.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. the devolved Administrations' wishes about how various statutory functions are to be delivered would need be taken into account in determining the work programmes of the inter-agency specialist groups.
- ii. the recommendation to establish a second-tier inter-agency management group reflected that more time had been required than the Chief Scientists Group had to date been able to give. However, whilst considering this recommendation, account would be taken of the need to minimise management tiers as far as practicable.
- iii. there is an increasing need for JNCC and the Country nature conservation agencies to work together to maximise the use of reducing resources.

6.3 **The Committee noted the paper. It was agreed that progress reports on work in progress could be circulated to Committee between meetings and discussed if any material issues arose.**

7. Priorities for JNCC's Overseas Territories programme (JNCC 08 D03)

- 7.1 Mr Yeo introduced the paper which reported progress made in developing and implementing the Overseas Territories programme and set out proposals for work for the next three years.
- 7.2 The Committee **noted** the paper and in discussion the following points were raised:
- i. it would be important to identify strategic issues for nature conservation in Overseas Territories, such as climate change and the need for strong legislative frameworks, which were not identified by the Territories themselves;
 - ii. participation in the conference 'Islands and the European Union: strategies in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss' would be important for JNCC's international standing. Links with the EU Overseas Countries and Territories Association were noted;
 - iii. given the global significance of the biodiversity of the Overseas Territories, it was disappointing that it was proving difficult to arrange a further meeting of the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity;
 - iv. similarly, it was of major concern that since the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's strategy review, science and the environment do not feature amongst its priorities.

8. Common Standards Monitoring – progress with the second round of monitoring and quality assurance of results (JNCC 08 D05)

- 8.1 Dr Vincent introduced this paper which provided an update on progress with the monitoring of designated sites and next steps required. He drew attention to the fact that:
- i. progress in sites monitoring appeared to be only approximately two-thirds of that in the first round;
 - ii. that only ca 5% of features had been assessed twice so far in the second round of monitoring, and that:
 - iii. work on quality assurance had been delayed. Dr Vincent pointed out that if in Wales, SSSI assessments could be made on features monitored for their SAC features, and if, in England, species features on SSSIs were reported on routinely, progress on reporting would be very much improved.
- 8.2 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. these data are of great importance in detecting change and progress and for modelling future trends and, compared with the rest of Europe and Globally, the UK's monitoring data are considered to be very

robust. However, there have been resource-based tensions between the Country nature conservation agencies in respect of this work as site management to improve condition has had to be prioritised above monitoring. Accordingly, JNCC and the Country nature conservation agencies must continue to look at innovative and risk-based techniques to optimise the resources available. It was concerning that the data from the four Country nature conservation agencies could still not easily be brought together without additional cost;

- ii. SNH felt the paper underplayed its achievement in completing first condition assessments for 94% of features. It was now in a strong position to report on the status of protected areas in Scotland. A risk-based approach was being taken to enable SNH to maintain momentum whilst having to cut back effort;
- iii. in Wales, the priority had been to get SSSIs into favourable condition and assess condition. Whilst the process had not conformed to common standards monitoring, and therefore there were problems with the data in this respect, rapid assessments of SSSI conditions had been made;
- iv. Common Standards Monitoring is important for enabling the UK to meet its obligations under the Habitats Directive. The extent to which the Environmental Liability Directive applies to SSSIs should be investigated as this could also have implications for the relative priority of this work;
- v. it would be important to use opportunities presented at the end of the process to publicise effectively the resulting data and information;
- vi. Quality assurance is a very important role for JNCC in Common Standards Monitoring.

8.3 Committee noted the paper.

9. Geoconservation work within JNCC – a forward look to 2011 and beyond (JNCC 08 D05)

9.1 Dr Vincent introduced this paper which considered the future of geoconservation within, and by, the UK, and JNCC's potential role within that. The paper reflects the context of a developing strategy for geoconservation being developed by the Country nature conservation agencies and JNCC.

9.2 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Committee welcomed the paper as being both important and timely;
- ii. in addition to the long-term conservation of geological sites the longer term aspiration for a whole landscape-scale approach (section 4 of the paper) is of critical strategic importance to nature conservation. For JNCC it is important for the link to be made between geology and geological processes and biodiversity. Committee noted that the paper

was timely in relation to SNH's work on development of strategies for Soils and Fossils;

- iii. in relation to the above point, the important issue of ecosystem resilience, to which the micro-organisms contained in soils and sediments contribute substantially, has not been studied sufficiently. A Natural Environment Research Council research programme into soils diversity could assist in some way;
- iv. additionally, to secure the political commitment and funding necessary for this work it is necessary for the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits of geodiversity, and the threats to it, to be better communicated and understood.
- iv. Professor Doyle was invited by Professor Usher to input to the Inter-agency group on Climate Change to enable the Group to consider climate change and geoconservation.

9.3 Committee asked for a further paper to be provided as part of its strategy review to support discussion on achieving better integration of geoconservation with other aspects of nature conservation.

9.4 Committee congratulated Mr Ellis, the author of the paper, on winning the Distinguished Service award from the Geological Society for his work on the Geological Conservation Review.

10. Energy and nature conservation (JNCC 08 D04)

10.1 Mr Yeo introduced this paper which provided some preliminary views to inform the preparation of a JNCC position statement on energy and nature conservation.

10.2 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. the position statement should be positive, aiming to support Defra and the devolved administrations in delivering more sustainable energy supply whilst not disrupting nature conservation;
- ii. the position statement should emphasise the need to reduce energy demand, which is currently given insufficient prominence in the energy debate;
- iii. a way forward will need to be found on landscape issues which are important in this debate and are in the scope of the country nature conservation agencies' work but outside the JNCC's remit;
- iv. whilst Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments are an important tool, they can only ensure that nature conservation issues are aired, not solved, and should therefore not be relied on as a measure;
- v. it is important to distinguish between facts and views, reflecting the range of the latter where appropriate;

- vi. discussions on energy and nature conservation need to be broadened out to include food security. Wider issues such as population growth will also need to be addressed by Government at some point;
- vii engagement with other organisations in the environmental sector will be necessary to ensure the sector presents consistent messages.

10.3 **Committee noted the intention for a draft position statement to be presented at the June meeting.**

11. Progress in developing a proposal for a terrestrial surveillance strategy (JNCC 08 D02)

11.1 Dr Vincent introduced the paper, explaining that a simplified version of it would be presented to the forthcoming meeting, in April 2008 at the UK biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee which would consider issues relating to filling important gaps in UK biodiversity surveillance.

11.2 Mr Way gave a brief presentation to the Committee to demonstrate how the three objectives of the surveillance strategy could work together. These are measuring the overall biodiversity outcome; detecting pressures affecting biodiversity/evaluating policy responses; and meeting legal and policy commitments.

11.3 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. SNH welcomed the initiative and was committed to helping to take it forward to completion. Whilst it was suggested that it could be implemented on a regional or country basis, the intention was to implement the strategy on an opportunistic basis, for instance establishing how existing surveillance schemes can be adjusted to fit with the strategy objectives when they are being reviewed.

11.4 **Committee agreed to provide any further comments during the following week.**

12. Update on inter-agency work on climate change (JNCC 08 D06)

12.1 Professor Usher introduced the paper which provided the Committee with an update on the work of the Inter-Agency Climate Change Forum and other inter-agency and international work on climate change.

12.2 **Committee noted the paper and welcomed the work set out.**

13. UK Biodiversity Action Plan – an update on developments (JNCC 08 N01)

13.1 Committee **noted** the paper which summarised the developments which had occurred in relation to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan since the last update in September 2006.

14. Fifth Quinquennial Review of Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

14.1 Dr Vincent introduced this paper which had been used to obtain the views of country agency specialists on proposed changes to schedules 5 and 8 prior to public consultation on these changes. The paper had been sent to Committee prior to the public consultation and accordingly had been provided in confidence. In the meantime, the consultation began on 12th March, 2008 and the paper was now open.

14.2 Committee **noted** the paper and in discussion the following points were raised.

- i. whilst it has been decided not to consult on the mountain hare, this species had been eradicated in large parts of Scotland and was of concern to SNH. SNH would provide Dr Vincent with the relevant information and consideration would be given to how this fits with the consultation;
- ii. CNCC or EHS would feed in issues arising from the parallel process on the Wildlife Order (Northern Ireland) 1985.

15. Any other business

15.1 Committee noted that the June meeting would be held in Inverness with a field trip based around the theme of climate change impacts at different altitudes. Confirmation of dates and times, including pre-meetings, would be provided during the following week.

15.2 The agenda and papers for the formal meeting would seek to support Committee's intention to increase the proportion of strategic-level work.