



**UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SEVENTY EIGHTH MEETING OF THE
JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE HELD AT 0915 HOURS ON
THURSDAY 19 JUNE 2008 AT SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE, GREAT GLEN
HOUSE, WESTERCRAIGS, LEACHIN ROAD, INVERNESS IV3 8NW**

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THURSDAY 19 JUNE 2008 AT SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE, GREAT GLEN
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Present:

Dr Bridgewater
Dr Brown
Mr Christensen
Mr Crawley
Professor Doyle (items 1 – 12 only)
Dr Joyce (by video conference)
Mr Pritchard
Mr Thin (items 6-13 only)
Professor Usher
Professor Warren

In attendance:

Professor Galbraith
Dr Jardine (items 6 – 13 only)
Mrs McQueen
Dr Tew
Mr Thomas (items 1 – 12 only)
Dr Vincent
Dr Williams (items 1 – 11 only)
Mr Yeo

Apologies: Mr Casement, Professor Hill, Mr Lloyd Jones (Members), Dr Phillips, Mr Seymour, Mr Steer (attendees)

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7. Report of the 2007-08 Offshore SAC Consultation (**JNCC 08 P07**)

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13. Fifth Quinquennial Review of Schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (**JNCC 08 P04**)

1. Dr Bridgewater's opening remarks

- 1.1 Dr Bridgewater thanked SNH for providing an enjoyable and informative field visit the previous day and their generous provision of dinner the previous evening.
- 1.2 Dr Bridgewater was encouraged that arrangements had been made for a meeting of the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity but was disappointed that this was subsequently cancelled. A new date would be sought.
- 1.3 Consultation was underway with the devolved administrations on the outcome of interviews for a further Independent Member to replace Professor Ingram. The successful candidate was anticipated to be appointed prior to the September Committee meeting.
- 1.4 Committee congratulated Mr Pritchard on being awarded the Wetland Conservation Award in the category Science, in recognition of his outstanding achievements, major contributions and support to the Convention, by the Ramsar Convention Standing Committee.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1 In relation to item 8, 'Adapting to climate change...' Professor Warren declared her role as a member of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution which would be undertaking a study on adaptation to climate change. In relation to item 9, 'Conferences and meetings of the parties...' Mr Pritchard declared that he is currently engaged as a consultant to the Ramsar Secretariat. Mr Christensen declared his membership of Defra's Management Board. Dr Bridgewater ruled that these did not present a conflict of interests.

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

- 3.1 The minutes were agreed.

4. Matters arising

- 4.1 Committee noted the paper and additional matters arising as follows:
- 4.2 A cordial and useful meeting between Dr Bridgewater and Jonathan Shaw, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Marine, Landscape and Rural Affairs) had taken place to discuss marine biodiversity issues. Issues of balancing nature conservation and sustainable development had been discussed.

5. Energy and conservation

- 5.1 A workshop session was held to consider how energy production methods impact on biodiversity, landscape and access and what further implications new technology might have. In introduction, Dr Bridgewater stressed the importance of engaging in this issue to ensure environmental considerations are taken into account in Government policy. Mr Yeo added that JNCC and the country conservation bodies were working closely on the issues and would bring to Committee, at the appropriate time, a draft position statement.
- 5.2 Dr Williams began the session with a brief presentation outlining a number of key issues including: the International Energy Agency's predictions for increased energy demand, associated CO₂ emissions and rise in average temperatures; the drivers for energy policy at national, European and global levels; the UK Energy Strategy and questions about the adequacy of the target for reduction of CO₂ emissions; the need to establish an effective UK energy mix to meet demand and the long lead-in times for establishing this; and the adequacy of the UK's renewable energy target in response to the European Union's target of a 20% share for renewable energy by 2020.
- 5.3 Two groups considered the issues and the following points were fed back to the full meeting:

Wind energy

- 5.4 Production will continue to increase. The British Isles has the best wind energy opportunities in Europe.
- 5.5 Impacts would depend on two primary factors: scale and location of developments. The increasing size of turbines enables development in deeper, offshore, areas with different impacts to those in terrestrial areas and shallower waters.
- 5.6 Payback periods are a key consideration. Better information is required about estimated payback periods, which vary according to location of installations.
- 5.7 In marine areas there is potential for biodiversity benefits, such as formation of artificial reefs around turbines and fisheries exclusion zones. Effective spatial planning is required to enable benefits to be realised effectively.
- 5.8 Impact of infrastructure to distribute energy from areas of production to consumption is a key consideration. The potential for energy-intensive industries to relocate to be near sources of energy production and the resulting impacts of such industry was also raised.

Solar energy

- 5.9 Rapidly developing technologies, enabling more efficient generation and use in a wider range of weather conditions could lead to the very small proportion of energy produced in this way in the UK increasing substantially.
- 5.10 Economic incentives to offset front-end costs and removal of other barriers would lead to greater take-up by households and businesses. This decentralised form of production was anticipated to bring environmental benefits.

Synfuels

- 5.11 Disbenefits include opencast mining and energy-intensive extraction processes.

Decentralisation

- 5.12 There are huge opportunities for decentralisation but this may only ever make up a small proportion of energy production.
- 5.13 Potential benefits include production technologies that are tailored to local circumstances, and reductions in transmission losses.
- 5.14 Potential disbenefits include environmental costs of some production technologies e.g. solar panels – a whole life carbon assessment of technologies is required.
- 5.15 Fragmentation of decision making associated with decentralisation poses risks and opportunities for the environment.

General issues

- 5.16 Reduction of energy usage is critical. Rising costs will help to drive this but social expectations would also need to change. A popular mantra equivalent to 'reduce-reuse-recycle' is needed.
- 5.17 Different production technologies will evolve over different timescales and so the overall energy mix will change over time.
- 5.18 The energy mix will need to take account of the resilience of the various production methods in relation to peaks in demand although, similarly, consideration should also be given to the possibility of engineering changes to demand patterns to match supply.
- 5.19 The UK will wish to become more self-sufficient in meeting its energy needs (energy security).

5.20 Clarity is needed on the targets for carbon reduction and the extent to which these are adequate.

5.21 In conclusion Committee agreed:

- i. JNCC and country conservation body specialists should continue to work together to develop clear lines of advice on the best energy mix for biodiversity and landscape to feed into policy development. The focus should be on the overall environmental footprint of production technologies and not just carbon emissions.
- ii. JNCC's specific role is to enable advice to be developed within a UK and European context and to address the issues at a strategic level.

6. JNCC strategy

6.1 Dr Bridgewater reported the outcomes of a meeting in Brussels, during Green Week, of the Chairs of the Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and JNCC to review how JNCC and the country conservation bodies work together. Dr Bridgewater would bring into the process Mr Casement who had been unable to attend the meeting.

6.2 Dr Bridgewater highlighted the different responsibilities of the JNCC for providing services to the country conservation bodies, for dealing with cross-cutting issues at a UK level and for biodiversity in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. The main conclusions of the meeting were:

- i. the Joint Committee should aim to be more strategic and to find different ways of working to achieve this;
- ii. the strategy should be refreshed to ensure that JNCC's activities are directed in the best way for the country conservation bodies and Government;
- iii. better relationships need to be developed between the JNCC and country conservation bodies.

6.3 Dr Bridgewater would seek the views of Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for the Environment, on the outcome of the Chairs' discussion at a meeting in July. Discussions would also take place with senior JNCC staff. At the September Committee meeting, consideration of JNCC'S strengths and weaknesses and possible ways forward would form a substantial part of the agenda.

6.3 In discussion the following points were raised:

- i. Better ways of dividing up the Committee's work need to be sought as formal meetings provide limited time. Whilst sub-groups would be considered as a mechanism to do this arrangements would need to avoid increasing the amount of resource needed to support them;

- ii. roles need to be clear. JNCC and the country conservation bodies need to be aware of each other's work to avoid duplication and there needs to be a clear distinction between the work of JNCC and that of the country conservation bodies. The expertise of JNCC Support Co. staff complements that of the Joint Committee and country conservation bodies and should be more explicitly recognised. The relationship between the company Board and the Joint Committee should take more explicit notice of the reason the two groups exist;
 - iii. the country conservation bodies should be invited to state what is strategically important to them to enable JNCC to act more strategically;
 - iv. increasing devolution creates opportunities for JNCC.
- 6.4. The stakes of the Ministers in devolved Governments, as well as those of the Defra Secretary of State, were recognised and it was noted that the Dr Bridgewater had not yet had the opportunity to meet Ministers in Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 6.5 The draft Framework for UK Nature Conservation could provide a framework to consider strategic issues and the intention to look at how it should be taken forward was welcomed.

7. Relationship between EU directives affecting nature conservation

- 7.1 Mr Yeo introduced this paper which considered the overlaps between the Birds, Habitats, Water Framework, Environmental Liability and Marine Strategy Framework Directives. The paper was developed following a workshop with the Institute of European Environmental Policy and UK conservation bodies and identified a number of cross-cutting issues, for each of which the implications of overlap between directives was explored.
- 7.2 In discussion the following points were raised:
- i. the overlaps between the Directives have not generally been problematic for the country conservation bodies;
 - ii. implementation in different parts of the UK varies. JNCC's role is to deal with cross-border issues and ensure that the UK context is understood to inform implementation;
 - iii. in relation to paragraph 1.3, the precautionary principle underpins all EU legislation and doesn't differentiate the Habitats and Birds Directives from other relevant directives. The greater weight given to the Habitats and Birds Directive is because they have clear mandatory requirements;

- iv. the site protection mechanisms established under the Habitats and Birds Directives are relatively inflexible and there will be pressure to address this because of climate change.

7.3 Committee agreed that arrangements should be put in place to improve collaborative working on EU Directives across the UK conservation bodies, for instance to share information and experience, monitor existing and proposed legislation and policies, and identify opportunities to secure positive outcomes for biodiversity and geodiversity. Existing mechanisms should be used for this wherever possible.

8. Adapting to climate change: opportunities and priorities for biodiversity conservation

8.1 Professor Usher introduced this paper which set out possible opportunities and priorities for biodiversity conservation in relation to climate change adaptation. The paper was formulated from ideas arising from an Inter-agency Climate Change Forum workshop held in June 2007 and developed since.

8.2 The paper had been discussed at a further meeting of the Forum immediately prior to Committee and Professor Usher made the following points as a result of those discussions:

8.3 Whilst the figures on predicted rises in temperature as a result of climate change (paragraph 1.1) were from the most recent Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change report, there was widespread opinion that these were conservative estimates;

8.4 In addition to greater connectivity for wildlife across landscapes (paragraph 4.3), the overall biological functionality of landscapes was an important issue for adaptation.

8.5 Any extension to the Environmental Change Network (paragraph 5.2) should have sufficient predictive ability to inform adaptation planning.

8.6 Of possible actions relating to climate change adaptation that could be undertaken by the Forum (paragraph 8.2), the development of communications products to aid practitioners, policy makers and researchers was considered to be particularly important.

8.7 In discussion the following points were made:

- i. The Forum should operate at a strategic level, ensuring that duplication of effort is avoided and that work undertaken supports the work of the country conservation bodies. The membership of the Forum, including staff and Board members from each of the conservation bodies, should help to achieve this. For example, JNCC and the Forum should ensure that development of high-level positions and policy advice (paragraph 8.2.i) is focused on UK-wide and international processes, and does not

conflict with the role of the country conservation bodies in providing advice to their respective administrations;

- ii. adaptation in the UK is primarily a role for the country conservation bodies. Different measures in different parts of the country will, however, benefit from being informed by the UK and wider geographical context. It is also relevant to make links with other European countries;
- iii. whilst the Forum is focussing on adaptation from a nature conservation perspective, it should bear in mind that Governments have a wider range of interests they must consider in relation to adaptation. A key aim should be to make the case for nature conservation, e.g. in supporting adaptation in other sectors;
- iv. communications products should recognise the low level of understanding of key concepts such as ‘natural environment’, ‘adaptation’ and ‘ecosystem’, and be aware that confusion can be caused by using ‘adaptation’ to mean both adaptation of the natural environment and changes in human behaviour;
- vi. in the face of climate change we must accept that the character of the ecosystems we have at present will inevitably change – we cannot simply preserve the status quo;
- vii. the type of adaptation activities undertaken will be influenced by consideration of timescales. JNCC and the country conservation bodies should be taking a long-term view;
- viii. ecological thresholds (6.3.v) are important but will be extremely difficult to identify in practice;
- iv. discussions with the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution have taken place with a view to ensuring effective input to the Royal Commission’s planned work on adaptation to climate change;
- v. connectivity is less of an issue in the marine environment than it is terrestrially. Other factors such as the impact of fisheries on the resilience of fish populations to environmental change, and of invasive alien species on the character of biological communities, need to be taken into account in establishing measures to support adaptation in the marine environment;

8.8 The Committee agreed the Forum should continue its work, taking into account the points raised above, and noted that the work of the Forum over the previous year would be reported on at the December Committee meeting.

9. Conferences and meetings of the parties to Multilateral Environmental Agreements in 2008: common themes and approaches

9.1 Mr Yeo introduced this paper which summarised the main outcomes from the recent Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD CoP) in Bonn, set out a number of cross-cutting themes relevant to forthcoming international meetings on multilateral environmental agreements, and suggested possible lines to pursue in the provision of advice to UK Government. The paper had been circulated to country conservation bodies for comment. Mr Yeo reported that Defra had formally thanked JNCC staff for their significant contribution to the UK delegation at the CBD CoP.

9.2 Dr Bridgewater thanked the country conservation bodies for supporting a side event on implementation of the Convention at the CBD CoP. The event had successfully conveyed UK success stories to an international audience.

9.3 In discussion the following points were raised:

Climate change (section 3 of the paper)

- i. the focus on adaptation is good; we need to clarify the positive role that biodiversity can play in climate change mitigation and adaptation;

Ecosystem services and human health (section 4 of the paper)

- ii. the Ecosystem Approach needs to be developed further to enable practical application; existing perverse incentives for biodiversity conservation need to be addressed as well as guarding against the creation of new ones;
- iii. valuation of ecosystem goods and services could potentially undermine nature conservation, e.g. some habitats and species apparently may not provide economically significant goods and services;

Avian influenza and other wildlife diseases (section 6 of the paper)

- iv. JNCC's work needs to broaden out from avian influenza to other zoonotic diseases;
- v. good communication is needed to prevent ill-considered reactions to zoonotic diseases, such as wide-scale culling, becoming a major risk to biodiversity;
- vi. the key message should be that prevention is cheaper than cure;

Invasive alien species (section 7 of the paper)

- vii. the recently published GB strategy for invasive non-native species contains principles that are relevant internationally.

9.4 Committee agreed that the key messages should be refined following further consultation, including with the country conservation bodies. A short paper would subsequently be circulated to all Committee members. A suitable opportunity would be sought for the Joint Committee to discuss ecosystem services.

10. Annual report from the Audit and Risk Management Committee

10.1 Mr Pritchard advised that the internal audit opinion should give Joint Committee good confidence in the systems and controls in place. He suggested that the paper be dealt with at the Board meeting following the Joint Committee meeting.

10.2 Committee noted the paper.

11. Any other business

11.1 The Committee approved a change to a Key Performance Indicator in the 2007-10 Corporate Plan relating to public consultation on offshore SPAs and associated advice. This was necessary because in the final quarter of 2007-08 the associated Government timetable was changed.

11.2 Members asked for papers to be circulated further in advance of meetings. It was explained that the vast majority of papers are provided within the timescales set out in Committee's Standing Orders. Where papers are provided late there are good reasons for this. Dr Bridgewater agreed that the timescales for providing papers would be reviewed as part of the Committee's strategy discussions.

11.3 Professor Doyle highlighted SNH's new Fossil Collecting Code. Committee congratulated SNH on the Code.