

UK SPA SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2002/4
24TH SEPTEMBER 2002
10.30 - 16.30 Monkstone House, Peterborough

Approved Minutes

Present (around table):

Ian McLean (IM) (Temporary Chair) – JNCC
Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC
David Stroud (DAS) – JNCC
Andy Murdock (AM) - ABPmer
Jim Reid (JBR) - JNCC
Nigel Buxton (NB) – SNH
Ben Dean (BD) – JNCC
Claire McSorley (CMcS) - JNCC
Jeremy Wilson (JW) - Scottish Environment
Link

David Mallon (DM) - SEERAD
Allan Drewitt (AD) - EN
Andy Webb (AW) - JNCC
James Robinson (JR) – WWT
Gwyn Williams (GW) – RSPB
Charlotte Johnston (CJ) - JNCC

By video-link:

Sian Whitehead (SW) - CCW

Apologies:

Geoff Audcent (DEFRA), Ian Bainbridge (SEERAD), Dave Burges (WWF - on behalf of Wildlife & Countryside Link), Andrew Clark (NFU), Peter Clement (EN), Nicola Donlon (NAW), Ian Enlander (DOENI), Ben Fraser (EN), Colin Hedley (CLA), Trevor Salmon (DEFRA), David Smallshire (DEFRA), Chris Spray (Water UK), Jill Thomas (NAW).

1. Introductions and apologies

- 1.1. The temporary chair introduced himself and welcomed new representatives.
- 1.2. Apologies were received as listed above.

2. Minutes of last meeting (8th May 2002, 2002/3)

- 2.1. The Group approved the minutes of the last meeting without amendment.

General items

3. Marine: Boundary determination for marine extensions to classified breeding seabird SPAs (JNCC Report – CMcS)

- 3.1. CMcS gave a summary of the report as a PowerPoint presentation, focusing on the analytical methods adopted.
- 3.2. It was noted that the work assumes that all birds present in a breeding colony will use colony-adjacent waters. The surveys underpinning the JNCC approach represent snapshots in time and because of this the proportion of birds using colony-adjacent waters can be low for some species. For 'active' behaviours the densities of birds in waters beyond the limits recommended by the report are extremely low and any 'loss' of these waters likely to be of insignificant impact on the birds. The recommendations in the report are based on the best available data and while there were general consistencies in behaviours across all colonies

within the study, seasonal and diurnal variation is known to occur, but there are no data available to allow examination of the implications.

- 3.3. JNCC have considered several statistical approaches to placement of boundaries, but none are appropriate, hence, the recommended boundaries are based on visual assessment of density changes – these are consistently clear-cut.
- 3.4. The report recommends a simplistic approach to defining boundaries: straight-lines running along lines of latitude and longitude. This is the approach taken for defining marine SACs.
- 3.5. The Group discussed the concept of ‘buffer zones’ beyond the area defined by high-density usage that would act to buffer birds from impacts such as disturbance. It was agreed that there are few data that would allow generic determination of what would be an appropriate buffer zone, and that the highly variable nature of disturbance would preclude a sensible generic approach to this. It was recognised that whilst management related factors would not determine site boundaries, such issues would be considered in accordance with guidance on defining site boundaries and with management of sites under the Habitat Regulations (1994).
- 3.6. The Group endorsed the recommendations of the JNCC report.
- 3.7. JNCC will recommend that all existing breeding seabird SPAs where the species included in this report occur as qualifying features be extended into the marine environment. Concern was expressed that feeding areas were not included in this report, but it was recognised that feeding areas in both inshore and offshore waters are being considered in a complementary strand of work. It is possible that such areas will overlap or abut future extensions to seabird colonies.
- 3.8. The report does not deal with all relevant species, in particular Manx Shearwater presents a specific problem and further work will be needed to assess the use of colony-adjacent waters by these species. Manx Shearwater was considered by the Group to be a high priority for further work given the UK’s international responsibility for this species, as were terns.
- 3.9. The JNCC report will be published on the JNCC website.

4. Marine: consultation on JNCC Offshore Natura Report and review of EU Offshore Seminar in London in June 2002 (oral briefing, CJ)

- 4.1. The concluding principles of the London Seminar will be published on the JNCC website. They broadly support the approach taken by the UK in defining Natura sites in the offshore environment.
- 4.2. In brief they suggest the following considerations in selecting sites: there should be an upper size limit, areas supporting a diversity of species should be considered, a common approach across the EU may be impossible and regionalisation may be useful, site selection for feeding areas is unlikely to be appropriate for dispersed species.
- 4.3. The consultation on the JNCC report is open until the end of September, but so far little response had been received.

5. Marine: Carmarthen Bay – boundary determination (PowerPoint presentation, AW)

- 5.1. AW presented detail on the analysis JNCC had done of aerial data from 2001/02. The count data are at fine scale – 50m intervals – and spatial interpolation is used to estimate abundance between sampling points. Using GIS, graphic interpretation of densities can be produced to show areas of differing relative density. On this basis it was proposed that areas

where the cumulative density reached 95% should be included in the site. However, there are satellites of high density beyond the main areas of relatively continuous distribution and rationale for including these is less clear. Population estimates, with confidence limits, can now be derived from aerial data using distance analysis. The Carmarthen Bay population of common scoter was estimated to be 16,596 (6,468-29,618) individuals in October 2001. The population has exceeded 1% of the biogeographical population in two recent winters, but has been used by large numbers of birds since at least the first comprehensive survey in 1994/95.

- 5.2. The Group discussed the amount of data required to enable classification of a site. JNCC adopted the Ramsar approach in its selection guidelines (JNCC 1999), which requires data from five relevant seasons, but in exceptional circumstances fewer seasons can be used. These guidelines were developed specifically with terrestrial systems in mind and may not be wholly appropriate for the marine environment given that data collection is more problematic. Carmarthen Bay is atypical in the amount of data available – most areas will not have more than one or two surveys.
- 5.3. The Group endorsed the analytical approach that JNCC had taken with the aerial data, and the use of the 95% cumulative density threshold as one possible approach to including important areas in a site, but was unable to conclude whether in general principle to include satellites of high density, or how that might be achieved. The Group requested that the work be submitted to them as a report to allow for further consideration. It was also recognised that other data apart from aerial surveys may be valuable in assessing areas to include in designated sites.
- 5.4. Concern was expressed over resource levels for the marine work, given that pressures in the marine environment are increasing rapidly. This concern is not just for the short-term need for data for site designation, but also for longer term monitoring needs, and it was suggested that monitoring of birds in the marine environment be better integrated into the existing framework of bird monitoring in the UK.

Action Point 1: JNCC to distribute a report on the analysis of aerial data and boundary options for Carmarthen Bay, by end October 2002.

6. Cropped habitats (JNCC briefing)

- 6.1. This section incorporates post-meeting comments from the NFU representative.
- 6.2. Approaches to designation of cropped habitats elsewhere in Europe were discussed briefly, with a request to seek more information on the rationales for such approaches and about species other than swans and geese. This part of the project requires additional work and so the briefing prepared so far will not be published on the JNCC website.
- 6.3. In the UK there are effectively three groups of birds within the existing SPA network for which cropped habitats are important: non-breeding waterbirds, plantation woodland species, and those using cropped habitats during the breeding period (including waders and raptors). In addition, there are common species for which no SPA has been designated, such as finches. The Group agree that the list of species in Appendix I to the Cropped Habitats Information Project (CHIP) briefing would be appropriate for consideration.
- 6.4. The Group agreed that CHIP was an appropriate way to inform recommendations to the Natura 2000 Steering Group on the need to classify SPAs in cropped habitats. The list of species was prioritised in order to phase completion of the project, with emphasis placed on non-breeding swans, geese and other selected waterbirds (see published briefing). The draft *proforma* was approved, but with more emphasis on the importance of cropped habitats

relative to semi-natural/natural habitats needs incorporated. JNCC agreed to take forward the first phase of CHIP (see published briefing) and report back to the Group in May 2003.

6.5. The CHIP briefing will be published on the JNCC website.

Action Point 2: HB to finalise EU assessment of approaches to designating cropped habitats and circulate to Group prior to the May 2003 meeting.

Action Point 3: JNCC to report to the Group on development of CHIP prior to the May 2003 meeting.

7. Surveys and data release

7.1. Examples of where data release had lead to problems were given orally by agencies and NGOs. These examples serve to emphasise the complex issues surrounding bird data collection and use.

7.2. Principles for data release: this briefing had not been completed and was not presented to the Group.

7.3. Species-specific risk of data release: this briefing had not been completed and was not presented to the Group.

7.4. **Guidelines for Promoting Bird Surveys (JNCC briefing):** HB gave a brief overview of a framework that could be adopted to develop best practice guidelines for carrying out surveys and using the data gathered. The Group agreed that this framework should be combined with the 'Principles for Data Release' paper to produce an overall framework document. It was acknowledged that considerable work had already been developed on this theme and that this body of work should be fully reviewed and incorporated into the framework. It was agreed that a small group of nominated officers from key organisations should be established to take forward this work and early consultation outside of the SWG be initiated – JNCC to convene this group and report back to SWG in January.

7.5. As this entire area of work is still under development the Group agreed not to make the JNCC briefing available via the JNCC website.

Action Point 4: JNCC to convene small group of nominated officers from key organisations to take forward development of survey best practice guidelines and report to the Group at the January 2003 meeting.

8. Winter Gull Roost Survey (JNCC briefing)

8.1. HB gave a brief introduction to the status of the proposed 2002/03 Pilot winter gull survey that is being organised by the BTO, inviting comments specifically on the proposed methods.

8.2. The Group generally agreed that the proposed methods were sound, but commented that synchronisation would be very important, care would be needed in planning inland stratification so as to be able to allow derivation of confidence limits for population estimates, that 'main' sites be chosen carefully given that many birds do not arrive at roost until after dark, and that the pilot should aim to address seasonal variation.

8.3. The methods described in the briefing are provisional and so the briefing will not be published on the JNCC website.

9. Management issues (JNCC briefing)

- 9.1. Management issues, specifically data needs to inform appropriate management, are highlighted with the Group's Terms of References as an area work that should be developed. An example of how management priorities could be established was extracted from the UK National Report to the Ramsar Convention's Seventh Conference of Parties (JNCC 1999) and circulated to the Group. This kind of approach can identify common pressures across networks of sites, which may in turn identify data needs to enable interpretation of these pressures and identify actions to address them.
- 9.2. The Group agreed that there is a clear link between monitoring of the SPA network and reacting to this when it identifies generic species or ecosystem (habitat) management issues. Such monitoring will include site-based monitoring (through Common Standards Monitoring) and wider countryside monitoring (through existing schemes).
- 9.3. The Group also agreed that a steer from the Natura 2000 Steering Group on perceived data needs for meeting policy needs would be valuable.
- 9.4. The briefing will not be published on the JNCC website.

Action Point 5: On behalf of the SPA SWG, the Chair to seek guidance from the Natura 2000 Steering Group on what data are needed for meeting policy needs with regard to management of SPAs.

Species items

10. Capercaillie (oral briefing, NB)

- 10.1. Both lek and brood surveys took place in 2002, results from the latter are not yet available. Lek surveys are now regarded as the best method for determining populations, and in 2002 around 70 areas were surveyed. The maximum count from these was about five males in any one area. A full report of the 2002 surveys will be available later in 2002 and a fuller brief will be given to the Group in January 2003.

Action Point 6: SNH to give a full brief of the results of the 2002 capercaillie surveys to Group in January 2003.

11. Chough (CCW briefing)

- 11.1. SW presented the work that CCW and RSPB had done on assessing non-breeding Chough populations in Wales. There remain gaps in coverage for some of the key areas identified for non-breeding Chough. Knowledge of habitat use is not sufficient to allow a generic approach to identifying important areas and so use of areas where there has been no survey coverage cannot be generalised. The Group agreed that any possible designations would have to be based on known usage of individual fields/areas, and that future monitoring should aim to improve coverage on at least a periodic basis.
- 11.2. The briefing will not be published on the JNCC website due to sensitive information about breeding birds.

12. Bilateral discussions

- 12.1. No developments reported for Northern Ireland or Wales (except Chough issues reported above).

- 12.2. SNH staff have met the RSPB to discuss re-assessment of the RSPB's initial response to the SPA review. The RSPB are due to submit a new report to SNH soon, which will explore whether issues can be resolved within Scotland or require UK assessment.
- 12.3. EN staff have met the RSPB recently to revisit some of their continued concerns in England. They discussed the 2003 national Nightjar survey, and how this can be used to help review the SPA network. RSPB considered this to be a constructive meeting and recognise that some issues are generic and require consideration at UK level.
- 12.4. The RSPB will be producing a single report of issues that require consideration at the UK level, taking into account all of the work being done at country level, and will submit this to the Group in due course.

13. Review work programme

- 13.1. Secretariat to amend according to agreed actions from this meeting and circulate new programme prior to January 2003 meeting.

Action Point 7: Secretariat to amend work programme and circulate prior to January 2003 meeting.

14. Any other matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting

- 14.1. The Group agreed to request clarification from the JNCC Marine Natura 2000 Project Group on the timing of milestones in the development of marine SPAs.
- 14.2. Action points from the May 2002 meeting were checked. SNH is still to circulate its reports on seabirds around selected colonies, but promised to do so. EN did not report back to the Group on Scandinavian Ring Ouzel population estimates.

Action Point 8: On behalf of the SPA SWG, the Chair to seek clarification from the JNCC Marine Natura 2000 Project Group on the timing of milestones in the development of marine SPAs.

Action Point 9: EN to report back to Group on Scandinavian Ring Ouzel population estimates, in January 2003.

15. Any other business and comments on Information Papers

- 15.1. SCARABBS 2002 – Chough have increased since 1998. Full report due January 2003.
- 15.2. Winter Raptor monitoring – comments requested by end October 2002 on BTO report circulated by JNCC.
- 15.3. The current representative of Wildlife & Countryside Link is no longer able to commit to the SWG and so the RSPB agreed to seek a new representative for that group and inform the Secretariat of the candidate.
- 15.4. DEFRA circulated a letter outlining its opinion that the provisions of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive apply to an SPA all year round, despite whether the qualifying birds are present or not.

Action Point 10: Members to send any comments on the Winter Raptor monitoring information paper to JNCC by the end of October 2002.

Action Point 11: RSPB to request that the Wildlife & Countryside Link nominate another representative and forward details to the Secretariat as soon as possible.

16. Dates and venues of next meetings

- 16.1. The next meeting will be on 29th January 2003, at Barn Elms WWT Centre, London.
- 16.2. Following that, meetings will be held on 7th May 2003, at RSPB Scotland, Edinburgh, and in September 2003 (date and venue to be confirmed by Secretariat).

Attachments:

Approved minutes of 8th May 2002 meeting

UK SPA SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2002/4, 24TH SEPTEMBER 2002

Action Point Summary

(In Chronological order and not minute order, batched by work period or future meeting, lead organisation underlined)

Actions from this meeting to be discharged prior to 29th January 2003 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

(Papers to be submitted to secretariat by 15th January 2003)

Action Point 1: JNCC to distribute a report on the analysis of aerial data and boundary options for Carmarthen Bay, by end October 2002.

Action Point 4: JNCC to convene small group of nominated officers from key organisations to take forward development of survey best practice guidelines and report to the Group at the January 2003 meeting.

Action Point 5: On behalf of the SPA SWG, the Chair to seek guidance from the Natura 2000 Steering Group on what data are needed for meeting policy needs with regard to management of SPAs.

Action Point 6: SNH to give a full brief of the results of the 2002 capercaillie surveys to Group in January 2003.

Action Point 7: Secretariat to amend work programme and circulate prior to January 2003 meeting.

Action Point 8: On behalf of the SPA SWG, the Chair to seek clarification from the JNCC Marine Natura 2000 Project Group on the timing of milestones in the development of marine SPAs.

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Action Point 11: RSPB to request that the Wildlife & Countryside Link nominate another representative and forward details to the Secretariat as soon as possible.

Actions from this meeting to be discharged prior to 7th May 2003 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

Action Point 2: HB to finalise EU assessment of approaches to designating cropped habitats and circulate to Group prior to the May 2003 meeting.

Action Point 3: JNCC to report to the Group on development of CHIP prior to the May 2003 meeting.