

# UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

## MEETING 2007/2 4<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2007

9.30 - 14.40 EHS, Klondyke Building, Belfast

### Approved Minutes

---

#### Present (around table):

Ian Bainbridge (IB) (Chair) – Scottish Government  
Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC  
David Stroud (DAS) – JNCC  
Ian Enlander (IE) – EHS  
Nigel Buxton (NEB) – SNH  
Richard Hearn (RH) – WWT  
Miranda Davis (MD) – WaterUK

Ben Dean (BD) – JNCC  
Gwyn Williams (GW) – RSPB & on behalf of Wildlife & Countryside Link

#### Via video-conference:

Anthony Mould (AM) – Natural England

#### Apologies:

Lucy Adams (ABPmer), Diana Reynolds, Louise George & Wendy Twell (NAW), David Mallon, Steven Dora & Phil Alcock (Scottish Government), Ben Underwood (CLA), Andrea Graham (NFU), Bob Ford (Defra), Jeremy Wilson (SEL), Sian Whitehead (CCW), Jim Reid & Andy Webb (JNCC).

---

### 1. Welcome and apologies

1.1. New representatives were welcomed to the Group. Apologies were received as listed above.

### 2. Minutes of last meeting (23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007, 2007/1) <sup>1</sup>

- 2.1. The minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007 meeting were accepted with minor changes and will be published on the JNCC website.
- 2.2. It was agreed that any further circulation of the 2010 SPA review paper that went to the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee must reflect the decisions of that committee. The Group agreed that these decisions should be reflected in the minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007 meeting.

**Action Point 07/2/1: Secretariat to add the decisions of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee on the 2010 SPA review paper to the minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007 meeting.**

### 3. Feedback from the May 2007 meeting of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee (Chair)

- 3.1. FORA: The Chair tabled an e-mail from Defra that sought views on whether marine protected areas work (including Natura) should be considered by the existing N2KRSC or the recently created UK Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group (MBPSG). Members of the Group expressed concerns that a division in decision making may lead to inconsistencies in policy on SPAs. It was agreed that the SPAR SWG had a cross-cutting role and should continue to be consulted and advise on the scientific approaches for identifying marine

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2007 February meeting of the SPAR was cancelled.

SPAs, and it was noted that it is the only forum that allowed for consultation with the NGOs over scientific issues. The Group agreed that the Chair should write to the Chairs of the two government groups outlining the role of the SPAR SWG and requesting that the Group be recognised by both of these policy making fora and consulted accordingly.

- 3.2. 2006 Annual Report: The N2KRSC noted the report, but was unable to accept the recommendation relating to breeding red-throated diver as this was a marine issue and suggested that the SPAR SWG now put this recommendation to the MBPSG.
- 3.3. CHIP: The N2KRSC acknowledge the paper and requested some additional information, specifically examples of the implications of the paper's recommendations for species falling into each category in Table 2 (management system vs. species specialism). JNCC had selected chough, golden plover, dark-bellied brent goose and corn crake as representative species and would develop a paper for submission to the November meeting of the N2KRSC (it will be circulated to SPAR prior to that meeting).

**Action Point 07/2/2: Chair to write to the Chairs of the N2KRSC and Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group highlighting the role of the SPAR SWG and requesting that both groups recognise this role and consult the Group in future.**

**Action Point 07/2/3: Secretariat to submit the 2006 SPAR SWG Annual Report to the Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group for consideration at their next meeting.**

**Action Point 07/2/4: JNCC to assess the implications of the recommendations within CHIP for four example species, circulate this to the SPAR SWG and submit to N2KRSC.**

#### **4. 2010 SPA & Ramsar (avian) Networks Review – project planning (JNCC; SPAR\_041007\_1)**

- 4.1. JNCC introduced a project plan for the 2010 SPA review that was based on the scope agreed by the N2KRSC. The plan showed where consultation with the SPAR SWG would occur in relation to distinct streams of work. It was agreed that once the scope and plan were finalised, which depended on funding outcomes, that a clearer role for the SPAR SWG would need to be set out.
- 4.2. EHS queried the context for review of site provision in Northern Ireland and it was confirmed that this would again be in an all-Ireland context. It was noted that this would require consulting with Irish colleagues on appropriate all-Ireland population thresholds.
- 4.3. SNH commented that it was committed to the review, but was currently in discussions with Scottish Government over priorities and scope, and how the outcomes could be implemented. Prioritising for this review would not necessarily mean that other areas of work identified in the scope but considered of lower priority would not be done, but some things may need to be considered over a longer time-scale than the current review allows. The Scottish Government will write to Defra once it has finalised its position, and SNH will seek to circulate this position statement to the SPAR SWG.
- 4.4. RSPB informed the Group that it had recently completed its response to the proposed scope and this had been sent to the Secretariat and Chair just before this meeting. RSPB view remains that the SPA network is not nearly complete and that if the review is too narrow in its coverage that it will not support the review exercise. The Chair commented that the RSPB paper touched on both science issues (including a list of species that RSPB believes need to be reviewed) and policy issues, and that RSPB may wish to consider formally writing to the Chair of the N2KRSC. The RSPB paper will be circulated with the minutes of this meeting.

- 4.5. The Group agreed that it would be beneficial to discuss country-specific priorities and those of the RSPB at its next meeting and that any additional formal responses on the scope of the 2010 SPA review should be sent to the Secretariat before the end of December 2007.

**Action Point 07/2/5: Secretariat to circulate the RSPB response to the proposed scope of the 2010 SPA review.**

**Action Point 07/2/6: Members of the Group to send any formal responses on the scope of the 2010 SPA review to the Secretariat by the end of December 2007.**

**Action Point 07/2/7: Group to discuss responses to the scope of the 2010 SPA review at its February 2008 meeting; Secretariat to prepare a short briefing document.**

## **5. Marine SPAs: update on progress (JNCC Aberdeen; PowerPoint presentation)**

- 5.1. JNCC gave a full overview of progress in developing advice on marine SPAs. A summary of the status of surveys and analysis for non-breeding waterbirds was presented, along with a timetable for future work.
- 5.2. For breeding red-throated diver, JNCC now had sufficient data to model usage of inshore waters; this will be for the whole sea area around the species' breeding distribution and should be ready by the end of October 2007. Some additional field work may be needed to ground-truth the final model. The outcome of this work should be identification of areas that support important numbers of red-throated divers in the breeding season; these areas will include those with strong links to SPAs for breeding birds, but may also include other areas used by birds breeding outside of the SPA network and summering birds that do not breed (immatures). It was noted that some information on the presence of immature birds around breeding areas might be available from oil spill records.
- 5.3. Survey work on use of marine waters by breeding terns is ongoing and due to be completed in 2011; a modelled approach to identifying important feeding areas may be possible, but it is too early to be certain.
- 5.4. ESAS (seabirds at sea data) is being analysed by a kriging technique to produce density mapping; the report is due January 2008. A second phase of analysis will follow and is due to be reported in late 2009. All of the work will be peer-reviewed and publications will be audience-specific to ensure that the outcomes are communicated clearly (based on JNCC's marine SPA communications strategy). It was commented that the ESAS data are dated and that new data collection may be necessary to account for dynamic ocean processes; other data on habitats, fish, etc. may help in developing a model that can rely on the ESAS analysis but take account of subsequent change. It was requested that JNCC host technical workshops at key stages in the analysis to inform development of a final approach and that members of the SPAR SWG be invited to participate.

**Action Point 07/2/8: JNCC Aberdeen to present results of the modelling of use of marine waters by breeding red-throated divers at the October 2008 meeting of the SPAR SWG.**

**Action Point 07/2/8a: JNCC to consider holding statistical and ecological peer review workshops to inform the development of the approach to identification of sites for aggregations of birds in the 'offshore' marine environment.**

## **6. Lough Neagh: report on the study of diving duck declines (EHS PowerPoint presentation)**

- 6.1. The number of non-breeding waterbirds using Lough Neagh has halved over the last 20 years, with significant declines in many species of diving duck. EHS has commissioned

research which has taken account of the international context for the species concerned and other indicators of the ecological status of the lough.

- 6.2. EHS reported that the results suggested that the ecological status of the lough is good and that the cause of diving duck declines is most likely to be re-distribution to elsewhere in the flyway, probably in response to climate change. The conclusion has been that no remedial action is needed and that there is negligible chance of recovering the numbers of diving ducks to former levels via localised management approaches. Similar declines are being noted in these same species elsewhere within Ireland.
- 6.3. The Group agreed that the study demonstrates good practice in the approach to assessing causes of change in status of birds on a protected site and should be more widely published. EHS commented that the study would not have been possible without the long-term monitoring of a number of parameters at the site, and whilst this is expensive it allowed robust conclusions to be drawn and avoided expensive and potentially inappropriate management being undertaken. It was suggested that the Lough Neagh study could be summarised in the 2010 SPA review under site condition assessments/management issues. It was suggested that a broader review of short-stopping could be beneficial, especially in relation to our ability to detect such change in behaviour as distinct from population decline.

**Action Point 07/2/9: JNCC to consider using Lough Neagh study within the 2010 SPA review to demonstrate approaches to site condition assessment/management.**

## **7. Treatment of New Populations: concept note (JNCC; SPAR\_041007\_2)**

- 7.1. JNCC introduced the approach taken to develop concepts for treatment of new populations under Article 4 of the Birds Directive.
- 7.2. It was noted that the approach failed to review species that had become established in UK, but then declined and disappeared; i.e. examine stability/viability in establishing populations. The principles could also apply to well established species that are still expanding in range, or to species whose ranges are shifting in response to widespread pressures like climate change. However, it was agreed that the current concepts paper should focus only on new populations and that this should be clear, but that mention should be made of dynamics of population distribution.
- 7.3. It was suggested that the protective requirements of the species need to be taken into consideration, for example SPA provision may not be useful for re-introduced red kites. It was recognised that no re-introduced species had been used to develop the concepts, but it was commented that such species may reflect the release locations rather than the most suitable areas for site based conservation. JNCC agreed that the next step in developing these concepts could include review of red kite settlement data to look for any potential differences.

**Action Point 07/2/10: Members to provide JNCC with comments on the treatment of new populations paper by the end of November 2007.**

**Action Point 07/2/11: JNCC to refine the concepts paper on treatment of new populations and present it to the February 2008 meeting.**

## **8. Bilateral discussions**

- 8.1. EHS: A paper on the SPA process had been sent to Council and EHS will be working with JNCC to finalise implementation of the 2001 SPA Review. Currently looking at a possible site for golden plover, but declines already seen due to changes in management. Red kite re-

introduction now agreed by EHS and will begin summer 2008. Research on hen harrier nest selection is nearly finalised and a report will be available soon; will share this with SPAR when ready. The boundary of the Lough Neagh Ramsar site is not being reviewed.

8.2. RSPB: Aware that there is still a need to share chough data with CCW.

8.3. SNH: Two sites (Renfrewshire Heights and Oronsay & South Colonsay) are currently with minister for classification decision. SSSIs have been notified in support of Strath Carnaig & Strath Fleet Moors and Slamannan, and SPAs will be sent to minister soon. Sleet Moss is being considered by the Advisory Committee on SSSIs and consultation on West Inverness-shire Lochs closes at the end of October 2007. Five areas are currently being considered for golden eagle, in addition to a significant extension to Cairngorms and Caenlochan which will be with the minister at the end of the year. SNH is close to submitting advice to Scottish Government on extensions to 31 breeding seabird colonies. The Scottish crossbill survey will take place this winter and currently bidding for funds to do merlin survey in 2008 and marine surveys for terns.

8.4. NE: The extension to the Humber has been classified and the consultation report for Mersey Narrows & North Wirral Foreshore is with Defra. The consultation report for the Nene Valley will be sent to Defra soon. Consultation on an extension to Porton Down will start soon and the departmental brief for Dungeness will also be submitted to Defra soon. The paper to Board on the RSPB IBA/SPA project has been delayed while SSSI approach being considered.

## **9. Any other matters arising from the minutes/discharge of actions**

9.1. Most actions from the May 2007 meeting had been discharged, with the exceptions of 07/1/5 (discussion of Defra thematic priorities for the Forum) which it was agreed would be struck out and 07/1/12 (peregrine specification) which will be taken forward during 2008/09.

9.2. It was agreed that the subject of shifts in population distributions should be discussed in future by all fora, and that SPAR SWG could develop briefing on this to initiate discussions.

## **10. Any other business**

10.1. None raised.

## **11. Work programme review**

11.1. It was agreed that discussion on the role of the SPAR SWG in the 2010 SPA review should be included in the agenda for the February 2008 meeting and that JNCC should provide briefing to aid that discussion.

11.2. Brief discussion on the frequency of meetings concluded that the current three meetings per year was likely to be the minimum required once the 2010 SPA review had begun and so current scheduling would stand.

**Action Point 07/2/12: JNCC to provide briefing to aid discussions at the February 2008 meeting on the role of the Group in the 2010 SPA review.**

## **12. Dates and venues of next meetings**

12.1. 21<sup>st</sup> February 2008, hosted by SNH (Edinburgh).

12.2. May 2008 – Secretariat to trawl for dates in last two weeks of May; WWT offered to host (venue to be confirmed).

**Attachments:**

Approved minutes of the 23<sup>th</sup> May 2007

RSPB response to the proposed scope of the 2010 SPA review

Revised list of Members of the SPAR SWG

# UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2007/2, 4<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2007

## Action Point Summary

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

### **Actions to be discharged prior to February 2008 meeting: (A request for papers will be sent out nearer the time)**

Action Point 07/2/1: Secretariat to add the decisions of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee on the 2010 SPA review paper to the minutes of the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007 meeting.

Action Point 07/2/2: Chair to write to the Chairs of the N2KRSC and Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group highlighting the role of the SPAR SWG and requesting that both groups recognise this role and consult the Group in future.

Action Point 07/2/3: Secretariat to submit the 2006 SPAR SWG Annual Report to the Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group for consideration at their next meeting.

Action Point 07/2/4: JNCC to assess the implications of the recommendations within CHIP for four example species, circulate this to the SPAR SWG and submit to N2KRSC.

Action Point 07/2/5: Secretariat to circulate the RSPB response to the proposed scope of the 2010 SPA review.

Action Point 07/2/6: Members of the Group to send any formal responses on the scope of the 2010 SPA review to the Secretariat by the end of December 2007.

Action Point 07/2/7: Group to discuss responses to the scope of the 2010 SPA review at its February 2008 meeting; Secretariat to prepare a short briefing document.

Action Point 07/2/10: Members to provide JNCC with comments on the treatment of new populations paper by the end of November 2007.

Action Point 07/2/11: JNCC to refine the concepts paper on treatment of new populations and present it to the February 2008 meeting.

Action Point 07/2/12: JNCC to provide briefing to aid discussions at the February 2008 meeting on the role of the Group in the 2010 SPA review.

### **Actions from this meeting to be discharged at a later date:**

Action Point 07/2/8: JNCC Aberdeen to present results of the modelling of use of marine waters by breeding red-throated divers at the October 2008 meeting of the SPAR SWG.

Action Point 07/2/8a: JNCC to consider holding statistical and ecological peer review workshops to inform the development of the approach to identification of sites for aggregations of birds in the 'offshore' marine environment.

Action Point 07/2/9: JNCC to consider using Lough Neagh study within the 2010 SPA review to demonstrate approaches to site condition assessment/management.