

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2005/1 26TH JANUARY 2005

09.30 - 15.00 SEERAD, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh

Approved Minutes

Present (around table):

David Stroud (DAS) (Acting Chair) – JNCC

Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC

Ben Fraser (BF) - EN

David Mallon (DM) – SEERAD

Nigel Buxton (NB) – SNH

Stephen Dora (SD) - SEERAD

Jeremy Wilson (SEL)

Gwyn Williams (GW) – RSPB & on behalf of
Wildlife & Countryside Link

Lucy Adams (ABPmer)

Jim Reid (JR) - JNCC

Sian Whitehead (SW) – CCW (by video
conference)

Apologies:

Ian Bainbridge (SEERAD), Trevor Salmon (Defra), Louise Vall (Defra), Andy Swash (Defra), Ian Enlander (EHS), Trish Fretten (NAW), Wendy Twell (NAW), Andrew Clark (NFU), Colin Hedley (CLA), Peter Cranswick (WWT), Andy Webb (JNCC).

1. Introductions and apologies

1.1. Apologies were received as listed above. The Acting Chair welcomed new representatives.

2. Minutes of last meeting (30th September 2004, 2004/3)

2.1. Under 3.3, sentence amended to more fully reflect sentiments of letter from Chair of Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee: It also requested that the Group develop a more strategic approach in dealing with new data and prioritise within its work programme.

2.2. Action point 3 amended as follows: Secretariat to revise the Ramsar Review advisory note and circulate to the Group. Chair to present the advisory note to both the Ramsar Review Steering Group and the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee, and to request a steer on the way to proceed.

2.3. Under 7.1, delete SPA and add conservation.

2.4. Under 11.3, add to last sentence: ...species at the present time, and should be revisited in the 2008 review.

2.5. Under 11.4, add to last sentence: The Chair agreed to approach the Sea Eagle Team for this information, and the Group to consider this prior to the 2008 review. Action point 14 amended accordingly.

2.6. The minutes of the 30th September 2004 meeting were accepted with these agreed amendments.

General Items

3. Annual Report for 2004: discussion of first draft

- 3.1. A number of amendments to the text of the report were agreed. In particular, it was agreed to flag when a SPAR SWG recommendation had already been considered by the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee (N2RSC). Appendix 5 to the report required review and a general indication of priority introduced. It was also agreed that the work programme should indicate when an agenda item had been discharged.
- 3.2. Uncertainty over the role of the SPAR SWG was voiced in light of the letter from the Chair of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee and it was queried whether the SPAR SWG could make direct representations to JNCC, including of a policy nature. It was confirmed that the ToR do not provide a formal reporting line from the SPAR SWG to JNCC. However, as JNCC was a member of the SPAR SWG, it was able to consider the outputs from the Group in advising Government. JNCC noted that consultation with the Group was an important part of its own process for developing advice, demonstrated clearly by the marine SPA work, but that it may not always agree with views from the Group. It was agreed that a cover note to the Annual Report, by the Chair, should clarify this issue.

Action Point 05/1/1: Secretariat to revise the Annual Report in line with agreed amendments and re-circulate for final comments, setting deadlines according to the timing of the April N2RSC meeting.

Action Point 05/1/2: Chair to write a cover note to the Annual Report clarifying the roles of JNCC and SPAR SWG.

4. Ramsar Review: response of Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee to SPAR SWG advisory note

- 4.1. The N2RSC considered the SPAR SWG advisory note on the Ramsar Review at its January 2005 meeting. No substantive debate occurred and the principal concern related to synergy between the timing of update of the SPA network and possible updates to the Ramsar network. One possible solution to the Ramsar Review might be to conduct this during the next review of the SPA network in 2008. More formal feedback will be given in the minutes of the N2RSC meeting.

5. Range of measures to achieve desired conservation status

- 5.1. In response to a request from the SPAR SWG (28 January 2004; 3.1 and Action Point 1) the N2RSC had indicated in its minutes of 16 June 2004 that the SPAR SWG should develop a concept note on the range of measures required to achieve the desired conservation status of birds in the UK, noting priorities for further consideration.
- 5.2. It was agreed that the current work on both chough and CHIP could inform a concept note and that JNCC should take the lead in preparation. However, caution may be necessary in inferring too much from relatively data rich species like chough. Corncrake was also highlighted as a species to consider in developing these concepts.
- 5.3. It was agreed that elements of a concept note should include assessment of species-specific conservation strategies, the tools that have been used and the effectiveness of the tools. One of the outputs should be assessment of target setting, especially in relation to proportional representation in the UK SPA network.
- 5.4. It was suggested that given precedents in European case-law that a concept note should not approach the issue from the perspective of other measures being an acceptable alternative to SPA classification. It was noted that the recent BirdLife International analysis of the EU

SPA network has demonstrated that Annex I birds are faring better inside the SPA network than outside and this indicates that as a conservation mechanism SPA classification is working.

Action Point 05/1/3: JNCC to develop a concept note on achieving desirable conservation status for chough as an output of the work of the chough sub-group in May 2005, exploring how this might be developed for other species. Group to discuss further at its May 2005 meeting.

6. Marine SPAs (JNCC briefing/JR): timetable for development of guidance

- 6.1. JNCC tabled a brief paper (based on a wider marine timetable developed for the agency Chief Scientists) outlining its intended timetable for developing guidance, completing analytical work and developing boundaries for marine SPAs. It was noted that the timetable was resource dependent and that not all elements of work were as yet funded.
- 6.2. Guidance for extending breeding seabird colony SPAs should be complete in December 2005 and include Manx shearwater, but exclude red-throated diver and tern species. Further research is required for the latter species and is currently unfunded; hence, timetable for these latter species is uncertain.
- 6.3. Data collection and analysis for non-breeding sea ducks, divers and grebes is ongoing and a prioritisation exercise is underway to allow further timetable development (see agenda item 7 below).
- 6.4. ESAS data analysis is planned for 2005, but is resource dependent.
- 6.5. Limitations to achieving the timetable were discussed; there are still major gaps in data, some elements could be completed more quickly with some additional funding, but others depended on a limited skills resource which could not be developed rapidly. It was noted that lack of resources is hindering a more strategic approach to establishing marine SPAs. RSPB welcomed progress to date, but was alarmed at some aspects of the timetable given the threats in the marine environment.

7. Marine SPAs (JNCC briefing/JR): priorities for further work

- 7.1. JNCC introduced a paper on prioritising survey and analytical work for marine SPAs, noting that prioritisation was necessary given funding and skills resource limitations.
- 7.2. The Group was supportive of the approaches to prioritisation, but it was noted that more work on identifying areas for consideration may be necessary; the table of areas under consideration appeared too limited for some species. It was agreed that clearer definition of how the list of areas had been derived was required.
- 7.3. The JNCC briefing commented that there is a requirement for the Natura 2000 series of protected sites as a whole to be a coherent ecological network. This generated some debate and agreement that this required a policy steer from the N2RSC; JNCC offered to remove reference to ecological coherence from the paper. However, it was agreed that the Group needed to consider the vision for the marine SPA network and that the principles being developed for the terrestrial suite could inform those for the marine environment. It was agreed that this topic should be developed as part of the 2008 review.
- 7.4. The Group was invited to comment on the JNCC paper by 9th February 2005. JNCC to revise paper prior to public consultation.

Action Point 05/1/4: SPAR SWG members to comment by 9th February 2005 on JNCC paper on priorities for further work in developing marine SPAs.

8. Cropped Habitats Information Project (CHIP; JNCC briefing/HB): Phase 2 species accounts and schedule

- 8.1. JNCC had circulated both the WWT comments on the Phase 1 accounts and a report containing the Phase 2 accounts and a summary interpretation. The Phase 2 report also detailed proposals for completion of the project; draft final report will be considered at the September 2005 meeting with subsequent referral of advice to the N2RSC in summer 2006.
- 8.2. All agreed that further work was needed in addition to the species accounts. Improvements to the summary table were noted and will be developed by JNCC. The proposed timetable for completion of the project was accepted.
- 8.3. RSPB requested that their paper to the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Forum (Implications of recent site casework for the definition of SPA boundaries and the application of the Habitats Regulations; circulated to SPAR SWG with papers from this meeting) should be taken into consideration in drafting the final CHIP report. JNCC noted this request and agreed to consider the paper.

Action Point 05/1/5: SPAR SWG to comment back to JNCC on the CHIP Phase 2 species accounts by the end of March 2005.

Action Point 05/1/6: Secretariat to add to the Group's work programme the agreed CHIP timetable.

Species Items

9. Chough (JNCC update/DAS)

- 9.1. The chough sub-group will meet again in March 2005 and will report the outcomes of its work to the May 2005 meeting of the Group. The outputs will focus on; principles for establishing generic boundaries for breeding sites, a risk analysis with respect to differing conservation strategies, a review of sites/areas and priorities, progress on establishing a chough database, and principles for setting SPA network targets for chough.
- 9.2. The sub-group has made substantial progress in collating data and identifying gaps in knowledge – it will circulate draft outputs for comment prior to finalising its May report.

Action Point 05/1/7: Chough sub-group to report outcomes of its work to the May 2005 meeting of the Group.

10. Spotted crane (JNCC briefing/DAS): advisory note on status and SPA provision

- 10.1. This item was deferred to the May 2005 meeting.

11. Bilateral discussions

- 11.1. EHS and RSPB have met to discuss the RSPB IBA/SPA project outputs for Northern Ireland; another meeting is planned to discuss the EHS response.
- 11.2. The Welsh RSPB IBA/SPA project has been completed and submitted to CCW, but as yet no bilateral meeting has been requested by RSPB.

- 11.3. SNH has sought approval from Scottish Ministers to progress 15 SPA additions in Scotland: Scottish Ministers are expected to make an announcement shortly.
- 11.4. The RSPB IBA/SPA report for England has been received recently by EN and is currently under consideration.
- 11.5. RSPB noted that the IBA/SPA review had taken longer than anticipated, but now that it was complete they would make copies on CD and circulate to the Group. A summary table had been circulated with papers for this meeting; it was noted that where it mentions criteria having not been met that this related to IBA criteria and that rows in the table were exclusive, hence, no site should appear more than once. RSPB may publish a summary of the review along with boundaries, but will take comments prior to this.

Action Point 05/1/8: RSPB to make CDs of the entire IBA/SPA project output and circulate to the Group.

12. Any other matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting and discharge of actions

- 12.1. No matters arising.
- 12.2. All immediate actions from the meeting of the 30th September 2004 have been discharged, with the following exceptions/notes:
- 12.2.1. AP6: outputs from chough sub-group will now be reported at the May 2005 meeting.
- 12.2.2. AP8: JNCC awaiting response from Wetlands International on treatment of goosander populations in Europe.
- 12.2.3. AP10: Group to comment on spotted crane briefing (in papers of 30th September 2004 meeting) by the end of February 2005.
- 12.2.4. AP12: Spotted crane advice note will now be submitted to the May 2005 meeting.
- 12.2.5. AP14: carried forward (Chair to seek advice from Sea-eagle Team on status of population).

13. Work programme

- 13.1. Secretariat to revise and re-prioritise, adding more detail on the issues under consideration, a column detailing discharged items and a row for the 2008 review.

14. Any other business

- 14.1. RSPB requested that the N2RSC update the SPAR SWG on progress in implementing the 2001 SPA Review. Acting Chair agreed to discuss this with the SPAR SWG Chair and Defra representatives.

Action Point 05/1/9: Acting Chair to discuss the RSPB's request for the N2RSC to provide the SPAR SWG with an update on progress in implementing the 2001 SPA Review with the SPAR SWG Chair and Defra representatives.

15. Dates and venues of next meetings

- 15.1. 25th May 2005, JNCC Peterborough

15.2. 5th October 2005, CCW Bangor

Attachments:

Approved minutes of the 30th September 2004 meeting (2004/3).
Second draft of the 2004 Annual Report.

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2005/1, 26TH JANUARY 2005

Action Point Summary

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

Actions from this meeting to be discharged prior to 25th May 2005 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

(Papers to be submitted to secretariat by 9th May 2005)

Action Point 05/1/1: Secretariat to revise the Annual Report in line with agreed amendments and re-circulate for final comments, setting deadlines according to the timing of the April N2RSC meeting.

Action Point 05/1/2: Chair to write a cover note to the Annual Report clarifying the roles of JNCC and SPAR SWG.

Action Point 05/1/3: JNCC to develop a concept note on achieving desirable conservation status for chough as an output of the work of the chough sub-group in May 2005, exploring how this might be developed for other species. Group to discuss further at its May 2005 meeting.

Action Point 05/1/4: SPAR SWG members to comment by 9th February 2005 on JNCC paper on priorities for further work in developing marine SPAs.

Action Point 05/1/5: SPAR SWG to comment back to JNCC on the CHIP Phase 2 species accounts by the end of March 2005.

Action Point 05/1/6: Secretariat to add to the Group's work programme the agreed CHIP timetable.

Action Point 05/1/7: Chough sub-group to report outcomes of its work to the May 2005 meeting of the Group.

Action Point 05/1/8: RSPB to make CDs of the entire IBA/SPA project output and circulate to the Group.

Action Point 05/1/9: Acting Chair to discuss the RSPB's request for the N2RSC to provide the SPAR SWG with an update on progress in implementing the 2001 SPA Review with the SPAR SWG Chair and Defra representatives.