

Joint Nature Conservation Committee – 101st Meeting

Unconfirmed Minutes

Date: 20th November 2014

Time: 09:00

Venue: JNCC, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough, PE1 1JY

Present

Mr Peter Archdale
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Dr Bob Brown
Independent member

Mr Guy Duke
Independent member

Professor Chris Gilligan (Chair)
Independent Chair

Professor David Hill
Natural England

Professor Colin Galbraith
Independent member

Dr Joe Horwood
Natural England

Professor Michel Kaiser
Independent member

Dr Hilary Kirkpatrick
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Mr Ian Ross
Scottish Natural Heritage

Dr Susan Walker
Scottish Natural Heritage

Professor Lynda Warren
Natural Resources Wales

In attendance

Miss Helen Ellwood (item 10)
JNCC

Mr Mike Evans
Natural Resources Wales

Dr Steve Gibson
JNCC

Dr John Goold
JNCC

Dr Tim Hill
Natural England

Dr Ron McDonald
Scottish Natural Heritage

Mrs Sue McQueen (except items 7-9)
JNCC

Mr Paul Rose
JNCC

Mr Mark Tasker
JNCC

Dr Clare Whitfield (item 8)
JNCC

Mr Marcus Yeo
JNCC

Apologies

Members: Professor Peter Matthews (Natural Resources Wales).

Attendees: Ms Ceri Davies (Natural Resources Wales), Mrs Helen Anderson (Northern Ireland Environment Agency), Mr Colin Armstrong (Department of the Environment Northern Ireland).

1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1. Professor Gilligan welcomed everyone to the 101st meeting of the JNCC, including JNCC Support Co. staff Miss Ellwood, Mr Tasker and Dr Whitfield.
- 1.2. Professor Gilligan welcomed newly appointed independent member Professor Colin Galbraith to his first meeting of the Joint Committee. Professor Ian Bateman has also been newly appointed as an independent member.
- 1.3. Professor Gilligan updated Committee on the work he had undertaken since the last Committee meeting, including meetings with Sir Harry Studholme (Chair of the Forestry Commission) Professor Ian Boyd (Defra Chief Scientific Adviser) and other senior Defra officials.
- 1.4. Mr Rose and Professor Gilligan had met with the Scientific Advisor Committee at Scottish Natural Heritage where offshore wind farm developments were discussed. Professor Gilligan thanked Dr McDonald for organising the meeting.
- 1.5. Professor Gilligan had met with Dr Andy Clements and Dr James Pearce-Higgins from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and reported that relations between JNCC and BTO are strong. BTO had shared their revised strategy at the meeting.
- 1.6. Professor Gilligan had chaired a protected areas workshop with the country nature conservation bodies, NGOs and members of the academic community. The workshop, organised by JNCC, was very successful and indicative of JNCC's convening power.
- 1.7. Professor Gilligan noted that the Natural History Museum is revising its strategy for science and public engagement which may provide opportunities for collaborative work with JNCC.
- 1.8. Professor Gilligan agreed with Committee to revise the order of items on the agenda. The minutes, however, follow the order of the published agenda.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1. Professor Galbraith declared his suite of interests that had been disclosed under the terms of his appointment to the Joint Committee.

3. Amendments to the minutes of the September 2014 meeting (JNCC14 N09)

- 3.1 The minutes of the September 2014 meeting were agreed with an additional amendment to the list of members at the September meeting. Dr Horwood was present for the entire meeting and not absent for item 7 as stated in the unconfirmed minutes.

4. Matters arising (JNCC14 N10)

- 4.1. Mr Yeo reported that the request for JNCC for the same delegated authority that Natural England has to approve external recruitments for frontline jobs had been rejected by Defra. The decision was made on the basis that Defra did not accept that JNCC staff could be regarded as frontline staff, or supporting frontline staff. Other avenues to address this issue will now be

explored with sponsorship. Mr Yeo advised that JNCC currently has ten percent of posts unfilled.

- 4.2. Tim Andrews, from Defra Sponsorship, advised that the decision had been based on Cabinet Office guidelines. The same restrictions are applied to all public bodies
- 4.3. The Committee expressed disappointment at this decision and the impact it may have on JNCC's ability to meet government priorities.
- 4.4. Mr Archdale advised that this would be his last Joint Committee meeting as the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside are looking to appoint a new Deputy Chair.
- 4.5. Committee noted progress in completing the action points from the September 2014 meeting. Professor Gilligan requested that the country nature conservation bodies should continue to consider where they might engage JNCC in liaison with NGOs.
- 4.6. Professor Gilligan noted the recent publication of a revised chapter on Lowland Grasslands as part of the Guidelines for selection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and proposed that alternative processes for signing off future revisions should be explored. Mr Rose agreed that the process should be reviewed and advised that discussions on accelerating the review were underway with the Chief Scientists Group.
- 4.7. Professor Gilligan reported that JNCC is contributing to the SNH Scientific Advisory Committee's review of marine renewables assessment. Dr McDonald noted that Scottish ministers had recently consented windfarm developments in the Forth and Tay. Professor Gilligan suggested that it would be helpful to hold an informal meeting of scientists from a range of organisations to discuss approaches to assessing impacts of windfarms on bird populations.

5. Chief Executive's report on topical issues (JNCC 14 D09) (5.2 in confidence)

- 5.1. Committee noted the paper which summarised a range of topical issues being dealt with by staff.
- 5.2. (In confidence)
- 5.3. Professor Gilligan thanked JNCC staff, and in particular Dr Battersby, for organising the protected areas workshop.
- 5.4. Dr Kirkpatrick advised that the ongoing work on protected areas and their role in biodiversity conservation should be raised in any future engagement with the Northern Ireland environment minister. In particular the benefits of protected areas in relation to tourism and sustainable economic development should be reflected.

6. JNCC's business plan for 2015/16 (JNCC14 P16) (in confidence)

7. Performance report for quarter 2 2014/15 (JNCC14 P15)

- 6.1. Mr Yeo presented the paper that provided information on JNCC's overall performance and financial position for the second quarter of 2014/15. The Executive Management Board considered that corporate performance was generally good. Although several priority performance measures (PPMs) were rated Amber, slippage against milestones is relatively minor, and it is anticipated that work will be brought back on track by the end of the year.
- 6.2. Dr Walker was concerned about the number of PPMs rated Amber, and felt that the overall position was 'satisfactory' rather than 'good'. She asked for confirmation that PPM 2.5, rated red for finance, was being addressed. Mr Yeo explained that there are risks around some areas of spend, with contracts still to be let and several outstanding staff vacancies, but work was being undertaken to address this.
- 6.3. Dr Kirkpatrick advised that the benefits of JNCC's work (e.g. in saving money) should be emphasised to the devolved administrations. Professor Hill suggested that opportunities to generate income from JNCC outputs could be explored.
- 6.4. Dr Walker noted that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) had discussed the risk ratings and had advised that risk 9 (insufficient funding to remain effective in fulfilling JNCC's role and meeting customer's expectations) was scored too low for likelihood and impact. Risk 6 (greater scrutiny of JNCC's advice to government) should be expanded to include challenge from NGOs.
- 6.5. The Committee **approved** the proposed changes to milestones for priority performance measures.

8. Nitrogen deposition impacts on biodiversity (JNCC14 D10)

- 7.1. Dr Whitfield gave a presentation on JNCC's work on nitrogen deposition to inform Committee about:
 - i. the relevance of JNCC's nitrogen deposition work;
 - ii. the evidence held on the impacts of nitrogen deposition in the UK;
 - iii. JNCC's role and how JNCC works collaboratively with the country nature conservation bodies.
- 7.2. Professor Gilligan thanked Dr Whitfield for a very clear paper and requested that the presentation be shared with Committee members for wider circulation.

Action point

1: Nitrogen deposition presentation to be circulated to Committee for further dissemination.

9. UK harbour porpoise dSAC proposals and sufficiency considerations (JNCC14 P17) (in confidence) and UK harbour porpoise dSAC proposals: a summary of selection method and process (JNCC14 P18) (in confidence)

10. UK marine habitat classification (JNCC14 P14)

- 10.1. Miss Ellwood gave a presentation on the UK Marine Habitat Classification and JNCC's role in its initiation and more recently its further development.
- 10.2. Dr Brown asked how the habitat types in the new classification system could be applied to the priority habitat types listed for protection in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) without having to go through a whole new re-designation process. Miss Ellwood explained that one of the objectives of the update is to ensure the changes would be compatible with the priority habitat types and a correspondence table will be produced to show the relationship between the old and new classification systems and the priority habitat types.
- 10.3. Dr Horwood acknowledged the importance of the work but noted that the current UK MPA network is designed on the basis of a list of broad-scale habitats from the current classification system. He enquired whether if the new classification were to change substantially, would the current work have implications for the network. Miss Ellwood explained, that, in addition to the point made in 10.2, the wider implications of the work will always be considered before decisions are made and as a result the changes that could be made over the next few years may be restricted.

11. Strategy review (oral update)

- 11.1. Mrs McQueen gave an update on progress on the review of JNCC's strategy and reported that the JNCC Strategy Sub-Group had met on 14 November, following internal meetings of JNCC's senior staff. Discussions had focused on high-level strategic options for JNCC.
- 11.2. Professor Gilligan noted that the strategy meetings had been creative and were beginning to shape an emerging vision for JNCC. Professor Gilligan thanked JNCC staff for their input to strategy discussions.
- 11.3. Professor Hill advised that customer mapping would be key to the new strategy and that JNCC should develop options for future business models. Mr Duke endorsed this approach and said that JNCC should consider supplying goods and services to a wider range of customers than at present.
- 11.4. Dr Walker advised that the strategy should aim to broaden the relevance of what JNCC does.
- 11.5. Professor Gilligan noted that the Sub-Group would prepare a think piece on JNCC's strategic direction to be presented to Committee members to enable them to discuss the proposed changes with stakeholders and feed back to the Sub-Group.
- 11.6. Committee **approved** the draft terms of reference for the JNCC Strategy Sub-Group.

Action point

2: JNCC to prepare a think piece on the strategy review for circulation to the country nature conservation bodies.

12. Report from the MPA sub-group (oral update)

- 12.1. Dr Brown gave an oral report on the work of the MPA sub-group and an update on Marine Protected Areas work and achievements to date, including:
 - i. work to identify SACs for harbour porpoise under the European Habitats Directive;
 - ii. Scottish marine SPA proposals and the timetable for 2015;
 - iii. the work required to meet targets for the sufficiency of seabirds;
 - iv. the work to address issues where proposed inshore/offshore sites cross boundaries.
- 12.2. Dr Brown commented on the continued efforts of JNCC marine staff to deliver work to support the designation of marine protected areas.

13. Report from the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (oral update)

- 13.1. Mr Duke gave an oral report of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) meeting the previous day. A written report would be distributed following the Committee meeting.
- 13.2. Mr Duke welcomed the appointment of independent Committee members Professor Bateman and Professor Galbraith and noted the need to fill the existing member vacancy and forthcoming vacancy for ARAC Chair.

14. Any Other Business

- 14.1. On behalf of the Committee, Professor Gilligan thanked Mr Archdale for his insight, commitment and work for JNCC over the past six years.
- 14.2. To mark the milestone of the 101st meeting, Committee was joined by staff at Peterborough and by videolink with staff at Aberdeen for coffee and a celebratory cake-cutting. The occasion was also marked by a small exhibition of memorabilia and reflections from staff who had been with JNCC since it was formed in 1991.