

Joint Nature Conservation Committee – 102nd Meeting

Confirmed Non-confidential Minutes

Date: 19th March 2015

Time: 09:00

Venue: JNCC, Inverdee House, Baxter Street, Aberdeen, AB11 9QA

Present

Professor Ian Bateman
Independent member

Mr Guy Duke
Independent member

Professor Colin Galbraith
Independent member

Professor Chris Gilligan (Chair)
Independent Chair

Dr Joe Horwood
Natural England

Dr Hilary Kirkpatrick
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Professor Peter Matthews
Natural Resources Wales

Dr Susan Walker
Scottish Natural Heritage

In attendance

Mr Andrew Bachell
Scottish Natural Heritage

Ms Susan Davies
Scottish Natural Heritage

Dr Steve Gibson
JNCC

Dr John Goold
JNCC

Dr Tim Hill
Natural England

Mrs Sue McQueen
JNCC

Mr Paul Rose
JNCC

Mr Lawrence Way (item 9)
JNCC

Mr Marcus Yeo
JNCC

Apologies

Members: Dr Bob Brown (Independent member), Professor David Hill (Natural England), Professor Michel Kaiser (Independent member), Mr Ian Ross (Scottish Natural Heritage), Professor Lynda Warren (Natural Resources Wales).

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

1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1. Professor Gilligan welcomed everyone to the 102nd meeting of the JNCC.
- 1.2. Professor Gilligan welcomed newly appointed Independent member Professor Ian Bateman and SNH Director of Policy and Advice Andrew Bachell to their first meetings of the Joint Committee. Susan Davies was welcomed to her first meeting as Acting Chief Executive of SNH.
- 1.3. Dr Kirkpatrick advised that recruitment for a replacement for Peter Archdale on the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside had been successful, and his successor would attend the next Committee meeting in June 2015.
- 1.4. Professor Gilligan updated Committee on the work he had undertaken since the last Committee meeting, including meetings with Aileen McLeod (Minister

for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Scottish Government), Mark Durkan (Minister for Environment, Northern Ireland Executive), Carl Sargeant (Minister for Natural Resources, Welsh Government) and Lord de Mauley (Minister for Natural Environment and Science, Defra). Professor Gilligan reported that ministers were grateful for the Joint Committee's support.

- 1.5. Professor Gilligan reported that, despite early tensions, meetings with NGOs with an interest in the UK's Overseas Territories were going well. A workshop on 5 May will be held to identify shared priorities for the Overseas Territories.
- 1.6. Professor Gilligan noted that the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) had recently published a colourful, confident and assertive review of the impact of NERC-funded science. Consideration of this type of presentation should be given when communicating JNCC's strengths and successes to partner organisations as part of the revised strategy.
- 1.7. Professor Gilligan noted that both the Natural History Museum and Kew had undergone strategy refreshes which may provide opportunities for collaborative work with JNCC.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1. Mr Duke declared his work as a consultant in the natural capital arena.
- 2.2. Professor Bateman declared his membership of the Natural Capital Committee.

3. Amendments to the minutes of the November 2014 meeting (JNCC 15 03)

- 3.1 The minutes of the November 2014 meeting were agreed.

4. Matters arising (JNCC15 02) (4.7 – 4.16 in confidence)

- 4.1. The performance report for the third quarter of 2014/15 had been circulated to Committee intersessionally.
- 4.2. Professor Gilligan commended JNCC for the high level of transparency in its quarterly reporting.
- 4.3. Professor Gilligan noted that the extent of amber performance ratings in the report could create a misleading impression. He questioned whether there should be a distinction between the ratings used as an internal management tool (to identify risks and pressures) and the ratings used as an external reporting measure.
- 4.4. Committee discussed the performance report:
 - i. Dr Horwood welcomed the reduction in number of priority performance measures for 2015/16;
 - ii. Dr Walker stressed the importance of performance reporting and the importance of the Committee having the opportunity to scrutinise performance at its meetings but noted that the timing of Committee meetings led to the requirement to circulate performance reports

intersessionally. As it was important for country nature conservation body staff to discuss performance at the earliest opportunity the circulation of performance reports should not be delayed but consideration should be given to retiming the future Committee meeting schedule to better tie in with performance reporting dates so the Committee could conduct their scrutiny role in a more timely way;

- iii. Professor Matthews advised that there should be close relationship between the business plan, risk register and performance reports. Red ratings should be transparent and managed closely.
- 4.5. Mr Yeo agreed the importance of discussing performance at Committee meetings and advised that meetings are timetabled in line with reporting as far as possible. Consideration would be given when the next cycle of meeting dates are being set as to whether these can be modified to be closer to the end of each quarter to allow more timely scrutiny of performance by Committee.
- 4.6. Professor Gilligan noted that consideration would be given to the format and presentation of future performance reports.

Action point

1: JNCC staff to review the format and presentation of quarterly performance reports and the timing of Committee meetings to allow more timely scrutiny of performance matters.

5. Chief Executive's report on topical issues (JNCC 15 06)

- 5.1. Committee noted the paper which summarised a range of topical issues being dealt with by staff.
- 5.2. Professor Gilligan reported that the meeting of GB conservation body Chairs and Chief Executives had been useful. Northern Ireland was not represented at the meeting but would be invited in future. This was welcomed by Dr Kirkpatrick.
- 5.3. Committee noted that Chairs and Chief Executives had agreed to consider how the conservation bodies engage with EU processes and institutions. Mr Yeo explained that it was timely for JNCC and the country nature conservation bodies to consider this matter collectively, and potentially to develop some common goals.
- 5.4. Professor Matthews raised concerns about JNCC's engagement with the network of European Nature Conservation Agencies (ENCA). JNCC should make more effort to improve the effectiveness of ENCA or consider leaving the network,
- 5.5. Mr Duke noted that the decision to close JNCC's Brussels office a few years previously had led to JNCC having a very limited direct relationship with the European Commission.
- 5.6. Professor Gilligan noted that engagement with EU issues would be considered as part of the work on JNCC's strategy and would require further discussion with sponsors. A paper would be presented to Committee at a later date.

Action point

3: A paper discussing how JNCC and the country nature conservation bodies collectively engage with European issues to be presented to Committee.

6. JNCC's business plan for 2015/16 (JNCC 15 07) (in confidence)**7. JNCC strategy review: report from the Strategy Sub-Group (in confidence) (JNCC15 08)****8. Risk management in JNCC (JNCC 15 04)**

8.1. Mr Duke, as Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), presented the paper which summarised JNCC's approach to risk management including a revised statement of risk appetite and risk registers.

8.2. In relation to the significant risks register, Mr Duke reported that the ARAC had requested that a risk related to the quality of scientific evidence be retained, and possibly also a risk relating to the maintenance of appropriate staff skills in the changing operational context

8.3. Committee noted the significant risks register for 2015/16, the corporate risk register, the internal audit report on risk management and performance reporting, and discussed the risk appetite.

i. Dr Kirkpatrick highlighted the need for strong engagement with Northern Ireland in light of the forthcoming restructuring of government departments;

ii. Professor Matthews advised that the risk registers should give an indication of residual impacts;

iii. Dr Hill emphasised the need to communicate the level of risk being taken;

iv. Professor Galbraith noted that, in some cases, JNCC's risk appetite will need to increase.

8.4. Professor Gilligan congratulated the ARAC and JNCC staff on their treatment of risk.

9. Strategic evidence requirements for the living environment – a new vision (JNCC 15 05)

9.1. Mr Rose presented the paper that provided a vision of how monitoring and the provision of evidence on the living environment might be delivered in the future in a more strategic and efficient manner.

9.2. Mr Way, JNCC's Head of Surveillance and Monitoring, gave a presentation on the use of satellite data for habitat mapping that illustrated how new technologies can be used to produce multi-purpose outputs.

- 9.3. Committee discussed the proposals for the integrated delivery of evidence on the living environment. It was suggested that the options for delivering a shared service needed further development, and that a blend of different options might be the best approach.
- 9.4. In relation to JNCC's work on habitat mapping, Dr Horwood advised that the proposed approach would be worth a year's investment from JNCC as it could provide substantial long-term savings. Committee agreed that the Chief Scientists Group should discuss the way forward.

Action point

7: JNCC to discuss habitat mapping with the Chief Scientists Group.

10. Joint Committee forward programme (JNCC 15 09)

- 10.1. This item was not discussed at the meeting. Professor Gilligan requested that comments on the paper be carried forward to the June meeting.

Action point

8: Joint Committee forward programme to be added to the agenda for the June 2015 Committee meeting.

11. Report from the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) sub-group (oral update)

- 11.1. Dr Goold gave an oral report on the work of the MPA sub-group and an update on JNCC's work on Marine Protected Areas and achievements to date, including:
- i. work to identify SACs for harbour porpoise under the Habitats Directive;
 - ii. two offshore SPA recommendations;
 - iii. work on alternative approaches to modelling species distributions.
- 11.2. The MPA sub-group will meet on 22 April and a full report will be given at the June Committee meeting.

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

- 12.1. Mr Duke gave an oral report on the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) meeting held earlier in the week. A written report would be distributed following the Committee meeting.
- 12.2. Mr Duke advised that his term of appointment as a Committee member ended in November 2015 and that an independent member would be required to replace him as Chair of the ARAC. The ARAC recommended that Professor Colin Galbraith shadow this role from June and take on the position of Chair from December 2015. The Joint Committee endorsed this recommendation and appointed Professor Galbraith to the role.
- 12.3. Professor Gilligan noted his concern that the recent internal audit of scientific evidence had given an assessment of limited/unsatisfactory assurance. Mr Yeo explained that this rating reflected that the science quality assurance

policy is a major new policy and was audited only a few months following its launch. JNCC management had approved an action plan to address the weaknesses identified in the audit.

13. Any Other Business

- 13.1. Professor Gilligan advised of the requirement for an Independent member of the Joint Committee to take on the position of Deputy Chair. A proposal for this appointment will be presented at the June Committee meeting.

Action point
<i>9: A proposal to be presented at the June 2015 Committee meeting on the appointment of an Independent Deputy Chair).</i>