



The one-hundred-and-fourth meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to be held at 0915 hours on 8 September 2015, Natural Resources Wales, Ty Cambria, Cambria House, 29 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0TP

This paper is provided to the Joint Committee for decision/discussion or information. Please refer to the minutes of the meeting for Committee's position on the paper.

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Chief Executive's report on topical issues

Paper by Marcus Yeo

1. JNCC strategy

- 1.1. Following extensive input from Committee members and JNCC staff, a strategy discussion document was finalised in August (see Annex 1). The document contains proposals for a new vision, mission and strategic objectives for JNCC. Comments on the proposals are now being sought from government administrations, country conservation bodies, and other key stakeholders.
- 1.2. Work is underway to develop JNCC's principal workstreams in line with the strategy. Papers setting out proposals for JNCC's role in relation to natural capital and standards/advice are presented to the September Committee meeting. Papers on evidence and offshore marine activities are scheduled for discussion at the November Committee meeting.
- 1.3. Recruitment of a JNCC business development manager is well advanced. This post will lead work to identify business opportunities for JNCC and generate additional income.

2. Review of JNCC

- 2.1. As part of an ambitious network-wide transformation programme Defra has proposed a fundamental review of JNCC, similar in scope to the Triennial Review undertaken in 2012-13. Officials in each of the devolved administrations have informally agreed to this proposal, which would be jointly led by JNCC's four sponsor administrations.
- 2.2. Terms of reference for the review have been drafted but have not yet been finalised. It is likely that the review will be overseen by a steering group comprising representatives from government administrations, country conservation bodies and JNCC. The current proposal is to complete the review by March 2016, so that it can inform decisions on JNCC priorities and funding following the Spending Review.
- 2.3. The draft JNCC strategy will be a major contribution to the review.
- 2.4. The Committee's Strategy Sub-Group will maintain oversight of the review on behalf of the Committee.

3. Stakeholder engagement

- 3.1. The JNCC Chief Executive had a brief introductory meeting with Rory Stewart (Defra Minister for Environment and Rural Affairs) on 2 July. A meeting between the minister and the JNCC Chair is being arranged. Meetings with devolved environment ministers are being arranged for the autumn.
- 3.2. The Chief Executive has held meetings in recent weeks with the Chief Executives of each of the country conservation bodies and senior staff in

government administrations. An active programme of high-level stakeholder engagement will continue over the autumn.

Annex 1

Putting nature at the heart of wealth and wellbeing

A strategy for the Joint Nature Conservation Committee

August 2015

Purpose of this paper

1. The purpose of this paper is to propose a new strategy for JNCC. It is intended as a basis for discussion with JNCC's sponsors and other stakeholders over the next few months.
2. The strategy has been designed to meet evolving challenges and opportunities facing nature conservation, including:
 - i. increasing recognition of the value of the natural environment in supporting economic growth and underpinning people's wellbeing;
 - ii. devolution, which continues at varying paces and directions in the different countries of the UK;
 - iii. budget pressures, which are driving the public sector to reassess its priorities and how they are delivered;
 - iv. new and emerging knowledge and technologies.
3. JNCC's unique remit means we are well placed to respond to these challenges, building on our established strengths and operating within our existing statutory remit.
4. This paper proposes a new JNCC vision and mission and a new set of overarching objectives.

Introduction

Natural capital and our wealth and wellbeing

5. New policy approaches based on the concepts of natural capital and ecosystem services acknowledge that a healthy natural environment is at the heart of a thriving economy and is essential to people's wellbeing.
6. Natural capital is our 'stock' of land, air, water and biodiversity. This stock underpins the economy by producing value for people, both directly and indirectly. Value is attached to benefits deriving from ecosystem services which flow from natural capital, including clean air and water, food, energy, wildlife, recreation and protection from natural hazards. Ecosystem services in the UK and overseas are worth billions of pounds every year to the UK economy and provide immense social benefit. Our wealth and wellbeing can only be sustained through policy that safeguards natural capital and ecosystem services.
7. Biodiversity underpins almost all ecosystem services. Nature is therefore at the heart of a flourishing economy and the wellbeing of society. A diverse, healthy, properly

functioning natural environment provides the foundation for sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. Better understanding of the value of nature will help to protect nature itself, as well as securing economic benefits and improving quality of life.

8. Putting this into practice depends on integrated management of natural resources in terrestrial and marine environments, and a full appreciation of the value of nature. Such an approach is increasingly being incorporated into government policy in all parts of the UK:
 - i. in England, natural capital is central to the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper, and the Natural Capital Committee has been established to advise on the state of England's natural capital;
 - ii. in Scotland, natural capital is incorporated in various strategies and policies, including the Government's Economic Strategy and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy;
 - iii. in Wales, environmental policy, notably through the Environment (Wales) Bill, is focused on the integrated management of natural resources which is based on the concept of ecosystem services;
 - iv. in Northern Ireland, natural capital and ecosystem services are features of evolving thinking on environmental management.
9. The term natural capital as used in this paper thus embraces the various approaches of the four administrations by which nature is integrated within green economies.

JNCC and our UK role

Key facts about JNCC

Governance

- JNCC was established by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to coordinate UK-wide issues when nature conservation was devolved.
- JNCC is led by the Joint Committee, which brings together non-executive members from the nature conservation bodies for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and independent members appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under an independent Chair.
- The majority of JNCC's funding is provided by Defra, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Department of Environment in Northern Ireland.

Staff

- JNCC employs approximately 170 staff based in offices in Peterborough and Aberdeen, with outposted staff in other parts of the UK.
- Staff have wide-ranging scientific and technical expertise, extensive knowledge of environmental policy at global, European and national levels, and skills in working with other organisations.

10. JNCC is a public body with a statutory remit to advise the UK Government and devolved administrations on UK-wide and international nature conservation. Our role includes the UK's marine waters and its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. We bring together the country nature conservation bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are the only UK government environmental body with a UK-wide remit.

11. Our UK role is important because:
 - i. we provide the coordination and standards that UK and devolved governments need to meet EU and international requirements consistently and efficiently, while recognising the differing approaches to devolution across the countries of the UK;
 - ii. we provide cost-effective environmental evidence; we do this through innovative techniques, economies of scale and avoiding duplication of effort;
 - iii. we set environmental standards that ensure a level playing field for industry across the UK;
 - iv. we provide advice that recognises the shared biogeography of the UK and adjacent parts of Europe.

12. JNCC has a strong record of success. For more than two decades, we have provided robust evidence and trusted advice on nature conservation to enable governments to achieve their policy objectives. JNCC is recognised as a highly cost-effective model for supporting devolved policy delivery.

13. JNCC is successful because:
 - i. we operate effectively at the interface between science and policy, providing evidence to enable governments across the UK to develop and implement policy at a range of scales;
 - ii. we are highly skilled at working in partnership (with other government bodies, NGOs, research institutes and industry) to build consensus and find solutions.
 - iii. we have strong technical skills in marine and terrestrial ecology, nature conservation policy and practice, data management, and related disciplines;
 - iv. we are rooted in the country nature conservation bodies, so able to understand devolved and operational demands while taking a wider view;
 - v. we are able to respond quickly to new policy initiatives and emerging environmental risks, and to apply new technologies in a practical manner;
 - vi. we provide a UK, European and global perspective and consider nature conservation within a wider policy framework.

Examples of JNCC successes

- We provide status and trend information for over 3,000 species, working in partnership with non-governmental organisations and harnessing volunteer effort worth £8.6m a year at a fraction of this cost. The information influences policy development, helps developers and regulators meet environmental requirements, and meets EU reporting requirements.
- Our advice to governments has led to the designation of around 40 protected areas in the UK's offshore waters with a total area approaching 100,000 km². These sites protect a wide range of species, habitats and ecosystem services, and enable the UK to meet EU and international commitments.
- We have led UK and EU projects to produce seabed maps and an associated habitat classification. The maps provide essential baseline information for marine planning and management.
- We provide cost-effective compliance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species by advising on over 16,000 licence applications a year. Our work supports sustainable, regulated wildlife trade that benefits the UK economy and contributes to the livelihoods of the poor in exporting countries.

JNCC's vision

14. Our proposed vision is for nature to be at the heart of wealth and wellbeing.

JNCC's mission

15. Our proposed mission for the next five to ten years is to continue to be a trusted, effective and efficient advisor to governments across the UK and associated territories on nature conservation, natural capital and ecosystem services.
16. We will maintain our focus on biodiversity and extend the reach and utility of our work, using natural capital as a guiding principle.

JNCC's objectives

17. We propose five overarching objectives to guide our work for the next five to ten years. By achieving these objectives, we will make a substantial contribution to sustaining and enhancing natural capital and ecosystem services in the UK, including its marine waters and Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Our work will focus on biodiversity and its contribution to natural capital and ecosystem services. We will explore the potential for a wider JNCC role in relation to natural capital and ecosystem services, recognising the benefits nature brings to the economy and society.
18. The objectives recognise the ongoing character of our existing services to governments across the UK but take into account the need to evolve to be responsive to the changing context in which we work. We will continue to provide the high-quality, evidence-based advice that governments need, as well as increasing the utility, value and effectiveness of our services.
19. We will seek opportunities to test new approaches, take measured risks, and demonstrate early successes. We will remain flexible, and adapt our approaches in the light of experience and evolving requirements from governments.

Objective 1: Provide high-quality, cost-effective and accessible evidence on biodiversity, ecosystem services and natural capital

20. Improving quality of life and securing economic benefits while protecting nature demands that decision-makers have good access to relevant and robust environmental evidence.
21. For many years JNCC has funded long-term schemes to monitor biodiversity across the UK. Our team of experts, working in partnership with a wide range of bodies, has a proven track record of using the best available science and new technologies to collect, analyse, disseminate and interpret data. In this way we enable the countries in the UK to turn their shared investments into a shared asset with substantial added value. We provide environmental evidence to a range of public, private and voluntary users across the UK to inform decision-making at multiple scales and for multiple purposes.

22. Building on this, JNCC will:
- i. make, and advise on, strategic investments in monitoring biodiversity, natural capital and ecosystem services and the causes of change;
 - ii. use technological and scientific advances to increase the quality, cost effectiveness and accessibility of environmental evidence;
 - iii. work with a range of partners to apply evidence and analysis to support valuation and accounting of natural capital and ecosystem services;
 - iv. improve the flow of environmental evidence to decision-makers in the public, private and voluntary sectors;
 - v. increase the use of, and engagement in, citizen science through partnerships with non-governmental organisations;
 - vi. address strategic evidence needs to increase certainty for developers, regulators and investors.

Objective 2: Facilitate joint working to deliver shared solutions in a devolved United Kingdom

23. Achieving governments' goals for the environment presents challenges and opportunities. Addressing these effectively demands collaboration between different countries and across different sectors. Collaboration also provides opportunities for partners to boost resource efficiency by sharing learning, avoiding duplication and benefiting from economies of scale.
24. JNCC is a forum for the four country conservation bodies to work together to discharge JNCC's statutory UK role and meet EU and international obligations. We also have strong partnerships with other governmental and non-governmental bodies across the UK and internationally.
25. We produce scientifically robust standards and methods for use across the UK, supporting legal compliance, ecological coherence, efficient processing and a common language and approach between sectors. We work at the policy-science interface, providing evidence-based advice to develop and deliver policy at a range of scales.
26. Building on this, JNCC will:
- i. convene current and new partners from across the UK and internationally to identify and solve emerging problems (e.g. invasive non-native species) and exploit shared opportunities (e.g. new conceptual approaches and technologies);
 - ii. apply innovative approaches to increase value for money through shared work, improved methods, new technology, data and scientific standards;
 - iii. support governments in meeting their EU and international obligations by shaping international agendas and supporting implementation, taking full account of devolved interests, and enhancing communications with country bodies and other stakeholders on international matters;
 - iv. develop decision support tools for the private and public sectors, and develop standards in relation to natural capital;
 - v. adapt our work to support changes in devolved responsibilities and approaches.

Objective 3: Play a lead role in applying science and technology to meet new challenges and opportunities

27. Nature conservation is underpinned by knowledge of ecology and other scientific disciplines. Interdisciplinary work with social and economic disciplines is becoming increasingly important as emphasis shifts to integrated management of natural resources.
28. JNCC has an established role in leading scientific debate on topical environmental issues, using our extensive scientific expertise and our relationships with practitioners, policy makers and academics across the UK and internationally.
29. Scientific and technological advances offer tremendous potential to improve the quality, timeliness and cost-effectiveness of environmental evidence and advice. Examples include the use of remote sensing and environmental DNA to enhance the evidence base, and mathematical and computational modelling to inform prediction and decision making. JNCC has been at the forefront of applying new technologies.
30. Our work helps the countries in the UK share the costs and risks associated with trialling new technology and to bridge the gap between conceptual thinking and operational practice.
31. Building on this, JNCC will:
 - i. facilitate research on key aspects of biodiversity, natural capital and ecosystem services, through improved links with research organisations, and translate research into practical applications;
 - ii. convene partners to review nature conservation science and its practical application, learning from European and global experience;
 - iii. provide a powerful UK voice for nature conservation science nationally and abroad;
 - iv. test and apply innovative approaches and new technologies to enhance quality and value for money.

Objective 4: Advise on sustainable use of natural resources

32. JNCC's role in providing UK-wide evidence and advice helps the four countries of the UK maintain and restore biodiversity and achieve sustainable management of their terrestrial and marine environments. We have developed expertise in application of an ecosystem approach to environmental management, building on international best practice.
33. JNCC has a distinct role in offshore marine waters, supporting UK governments and industry to use our seas sustainably. JNCC actively supports the stewardship of marine biodiversity and natural capital through our scientific work and our advice to public authorities and industry on sustainable management, both within marine protected areas and in wider offshore waters.
34. JNCC also provides expert advice on the UK's use of natural resources from other countries, for example through trade. JNCC's international work includes advising on the UK Overseas Territories, which support a rich biodiversity and whose economies are often highly dependent on the local natural environment.

35. Building on this, JNCC will:
- i. support the development and implementation of integrated approaches to managing biodiversity, natural capital and ecosystem services in marine and terrestrial environments across the UK;
 - ii. help industry make sustainable decisions by advising on the business risks associated with the use of natural capital and the preparation of natural capital accounts;
 - iii. provide scientific advice to complete the designation of marine protected areas in UK offshore waters;
 - iv. provide scientific advice on management of the offshore marine environment, including protected areas;
 - v. change the way we work to reflect ongoing changes in devolved responsibilities for the offshore zone;
 - vi. provide advice based on robust evidence to meet specific customer requirements in the Overseas Territories;
 - vii. expand our role in advising on the UK's use of biodiversity, natural capital and ecosystem services in other countries.

Objective 5: Provide a high-quality, cost-effective service to our customers

36. Budget pressures are driving the public sector to reassess priorities and how to deliver them at a time when government policy is increasingly putting the environment in a wider socio-economic context.
37. JNCC is well placed to address these challenges by building on our track record as a highly cost-effective model for providing evidence-based advice as set out in this strategy. In this way we will increase the value we provide to governments across the UK.
38. To achieve this, JNCC will:
- i. be responsive and adapt to the changing needs of its principal customers across the UK;
 - ii. develop a more enterprising culture, extending core work in new ways, providing new products and services to existing customers and expanding our customer base and funding sources;
 - iii. raise our profile to increase understanding of our value, relevance and potential and to increase the utility of our work through improved dissemination of outputs tailored to the needs of a range of end-users;
 - iv. develop staff to ensure their skills are aligned with JNCC's strategy;
 - v. review complementarities in expertise and resources between JNCC and our partners, and promote synergies through existing and new partnerships;
 - vi. continue to search for efficiencies in all aspects of our business to ensure we offer the best possible value for money to governments.