



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT ON TOPICAL ISSUES

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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

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Paper by Marcus Yeo

1. Habitats and Birds Directives implementation review

- 1.1 The Habitats and Wild Birds Directives Implementation Review was published by Defra in March¹. As discussed at the March Joint Committee meeting, it contains 28 measures intended to improve implementation of the nature directives, in particular by reducing delays and minimising costs to business while ensuring that development is sustainable.
- 1.2 JNCC staff have drawn up a plan for delivering JNCC's contribution to the 28 measures. The main areas requiring JNCC input relate to improving the evidence underpinning decision making and facilitating nationally significant infrastructure projects in offshore waters. The inter-agency Chief Scientists Group have agreed that many of the measures should be given a UK dimension.
- 1.3 A cross-Government Major Infrastructure and Environment Unit has been established to coordinate work on nationally significant infrastructure projects. A multi-stakeholder Major Infrastructure and Habitats Group, chaired by the Defra Secretary of State (Caroline Spelman), will hold its first meeting in July.
- 1.4 Implementation of the review is regarded as a high priority by Defra and is a priority performance measure in JNCC's business plan for 2012/13. However, at the time the business plan was finalised the resource requirements of the work had not been fully assessed. It is now clear that implementation will require significant staff input over the next few months, and is likely to have implications for some of the other priority performance measures for 2012/13.

2. Marine Strategy Framework Directive

- 2.1 On 27 March the four UK administrations launched a joint consultation on implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)². The key requirement of the Directive is for Member States to take measures to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) for their seas by 2020, and the consultation includes proposals for UK characteristics of GES and for UK targets and indicators of GES. The consultation closes on 18 June.
- 2.2 JNCC played a lead role in steering the development of the draft set of indicators and relating to biodiversity and ecosystem protection.

¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13724-habitats-review-report.pdf>

² <http://www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2012/03/27/marine-strategy-framework-1203/>

3. Marine Conservation Zones

- 3.1 Draft formal advice on Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) was submitted to Defra by JNCC and Natural England on 18 May. This is a major achievement that represents a huge body of work by staff in the two organisations. We are on track to submit the final formal advice on 18 July.
- 3.2 More details are provided in a paper for discussion at the June Committee meeting.

4. UK Biodiversity Framework

- 4.1 The UK Biodiversity Framework has been finalised and is awaiting ministerial sign-off prior to publication.

5. Government Digital Service

- 5.1 Plans to establish a single government website (led by the Government Digital Service within the Cabinet Office) are progressing rapidly. Key points are:
 - i. all central government departments and the vast majority of their arms length bodies will be expected to move their organisational websites to the new website (GOV.UK);
 - ii. GOV.UK will include a) corporate information on government bodies, b) content aimed at the public and business (replacing Directgov and Business Link, and c) specialist content for expert and professional users;
 - iii. GOV.UK will be launched in autumn 2012. The transition of departmental and arms length body websites to GOV.UK is scheduled for completion by April 2014.
- 5.2 Arms length bodies that wish to maintain an independent website have to submit a bid for exemption to Cabinet Office by 12 June 2012.