

# UK SPA & RAMSAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

8 May 2018

11:00 – 14:30, JNCC Offices, Peterborough

## Minutes

### Attending in person

Chris Spray, University of Dundee (Chair)  
David Stroud, JNCC  
Richard Hearn, WWT  
Nigel Buxton, SNH  
Kate Jennings, RSPB  
Beth Preston (JNCC)  
Kim Wallis (Water UK)

### Telephone conferencing

Jeremy Wilson, Scottish Environment Link/RSPB  
Andy Tully, Defra (not present for whole meeting)  
Ricard Weyl, DAERA  
Ronan Owens, DAERA  
Matt Parsons, JNCC (Secretariat)  
Stephen Grady (JNCC)  
Greg Mudge, SNH  
Patrick Lindley, NRW  
Mary Roddick NRW  
Alan Drewitt, NE

### Apologies

Clive Porro (Defra)

## 1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting, noting a few new faces: Kim Wallis will, from immediate effect replace Miranda Cooper as the Water UK representative; the Chair expressed his thanks to Miranda for her valuable contributions and service to the group. Beth Preston is attending this meeting as an Observer as she is working with David on related SPA matters.

Apologies were received from Clive Porro (Defra).

## 2. Minutes of November 2017 meeting

The draft Minutes of 23 November 2017 were agreed subject to the following changes:

P1 – Chris was based in Welsh Government, not Scottish Government.

P3 – Richard Hearn, not Heard.

P5 – re SPA provision for Common Eider; “Advice on which races and/or populations should be considered...” should replace “Advice on which races should be considered...”

### **3. Review of action points from November 2017 meeting**

Action 1 (“Matt Parsons and Greg Mudge to draft a short paper to seek a final resolution to the “Eider and SPA provision” issue and seek SPAR SWG views ASAP”). Some progress had been made but no final paper is ready. Will address the issue at the October 2018 meeting, or intersessionally (by email correspondence) before then.

Action 2 (“Andy Tully and David Stroud to revise the draft ToR/work plan to take into account SPAR SWG discussion and circulate back to SWG for a quick check and onward submission to ESG for sign-off.”). Largely discharged, awaiting Executive Steering group (ESG) sign-off.

Action 3 (“Andy Tully and Clive Porro to review and revise the list of governance groups listed in the Annual Report, taking care to make clear which were operating during the period of the report and what their current status is”). Discharged (and accounted for in revision to Annual Report 2011-17).

Action 4 (“Matt Parsons to draft “marine provision” section in time for David Stroud to circulate revised report early in 2018”). Not done yet. See item 4 of current agenda.

Action 5 (“JNCC secretariat to ensure Phase 3 is an agenda item on future SPAR SWG meetings until delivery is complete”). For discussion under current agenda.

Action 6 (“JNCC and RSPB to liaise to take the “Seabirds Count” gap analysis to next SWG meeting in order to stimulate filling of the gaps”). For discussion under current agenda.

Action 7 (“JNCC to include an agenda item at next SWG to review progress with the letter from SPAR Chair to CSG over paucity of status and monitoring information”). Not discharged, as it is unclear exactly what the target audience and the precise message should be. Agreed that the target audience has to be influential decision-makers (and this could include Chief Scientists’ Group and ESG) and that the message needs to focus on obligations/priorities of SWG and identified in Third Network Review. Concluded that David would draft a letter by 22 May, for comment by SWG. Then, once agreed, letter to be sent to CSG and ESG by Chair on behalf of SWG. The 2011-17 Annual Report - when finalised – should be used as supporting evidence.

### **4. Annual Report (November 2011 - November 2017): 2<sup>nd</sup> draft.**

Chair proposed that any changes to the (non-marine parts of the) draft report should be identified and agreed at this meeting, in order to expedite its completion.

David Stroud took various comments and suggestions:

P1 -re. bullet point, it was confirmed that equal weighting to SPA and Ramsar issues should be given, despite a perception from some on the group that Ramsar has been somewhat neglected; agreed that “as required” be added to this sentence to dispel any misunderstanding. Bullet point 2, Andy Tully queried the use of “recommendations” in light of recent feedback from government departments; David Stroud suggested instead “advice and recommendations” would be an appropriate replacement since many of the species and site issues highlighted were formal recommendations that had been made by the Joint Committee to Ministers in 2001; Andy Tully and others were content with this proposed change.

P5 (paragraph 13) – Agreed that there were other papers that could be listed, e.g. where the third network Review had stimulated published scientific outputs (Spotted Crake, Red-throated Diver etc.); this could usefully form an Appendix, though it should concentrate on papers actually produced by SWG rather than ancillary ones.

Marine Provision. Need the marine section to be drafted as soon as possible in order to be able to present a complete report.

**Action 1:** David Stroud to draft a marine section and pass to Matt Parsons to check. Then circulate to SWG for comment and incorporate into main report ASAP.

## 5. Seabirds Count Census -update

Daisy Burnell, the JNCC coordinator of the census, attended this item by telephone to update the group. Fifty-four regional coordinators (mainly in Scotland and England) have been recruited and are driving forward volunteer effort. In Wales and Northern Ireland, the SNCB are leading, with a focus of counting protected sites. Tern surveys are a focus of surveys in 2018 UK-wide. There is a strong focus on “citizen science” in Seabirds Count, and social media are being targeted accordingly, plus broadcast media. RSPB have undertaken an analysis to identify key gaps in coverage and are looking at ways of financing remaining coverage. Some funding is available from Seabird Group.

**Action 2:** Daisy Burnell to circulate to SWG links to social media and other communication material being used in Seabirds Count.

## 6. Marine SPA sufficiency - update

Matt Parsons informed SWG that little progress had been made since the last meeting, while the suite of marine pSPA is being considered by Scottish Government. Defra and the Devolved Administrations are therefore awaiting clarity on this before they identify the next step with the draft UK assessment.

Greg Mudge explained that SNH were advising Marine Scotland (MS) on a Network Assessment of marine pSPA; this is to respond to questions raised by MS about the draft suite, specifically (quoting directly from MS request):

- Why we have a particular number of sites for individual species?

- Why almost “carbon copy” sites are required in the vicinity of each other? and
- Why it is necessary to incorporate migratory species for which the UK has a small proportion of the biogeographic population?

**Action 3:** Greg Mudge to circulate to SWG the findings of the Network Assessment when it is available.

Kate Jennings asked if Scottish Government were proposing to change the UK SPA Selection Guidelines as a result of this work. Greg Mudge said no, that was not the case and that MS was solely asking for clarification about the justification for the whole suite, not whether/how individual sites met the selection guidelines. Greg noted the relationship between the Network Assessment and the draft UK sufficiency assessment, explaining that SNH was mindful to not undermine that work.

Jeremy Wilson expressed his concerns for the UK assessment given the Network Assessment being undertaken in Scotland. He contrasted the successful approach taken by SWG in delivering the scientific aspects of the Third Network Review with that of the marine work, especially as SWG’s ToR includes marine aspects.

Chair identified concerns about geographical scale of assessment, and offered SWG’s expertise in providing scientific input into these topics.

**Action 4:** Chair to discuss with representatives of Defra and the Devolved Administrations to better understand how SWG can discharge its functions regarding marine aspects of the ToR.

## 7. **Article 12 (Birds Directive Reporting): update**

David Stroud noted that the UK was due to submit its national report to the European Commission in July 2019, and that plans to deliver this to timetable were on course. An SNCB and NGO advisory group is overseeing technical and scientific aspects - next meeting on 17 May 2018. Significant progress has been made on the Pressures and Threats part of the Report, also on Conservation Measures and the general narrative section. Concerning the need to report on numbers in the SPA network, a light touch approach will be necessary (as there are no resources to do anything else), basing the submission on the previous report and updating where possible. SWG will be consulted on the draft report early in 2019.

## 8. **Ramsar matters**

- UK CoP 13 Report** – Matt Parsons gave an update from James Williams, who is leading on this for JNCC. The draft Report is with the four country administrations for sign-off; once agreed it will be submitted online.
- Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP)** – David Stroud explained that STRP had met in January 2018; David noted a key policy document from STRP: the 1<sup>st</sup> Global Wetlands Outlook (40 sides, aimed at senior officials, summarising extent and status of wetlands, drivers of change, conservation

actions). This references the wetlands assessment of the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment but is not closely aligned to it and comes from a different process.

**Action 5:** Kate Jennings to help publicise the Global Wetlands Outlook report through RSPB in due course.

**c) European Regional meeting.** David Stroud explained that under the established regional grouping structure, a European group of Contracting Parties met in March 2018, and reviewed Draft Resolutions that will go to CoP 13 (both those initiated by STRP and individual states). Draft Resolutions included: intertidal wetlands (Philippines), “blue carbon” (Australia), peatlands (Denmark), one on radically revising Ramsar governance structures, that is likely to be very controversial (Switzerland).

## 9. Recent designations

**Northern Ireland:** Ronan Owens noted that there is no further update available for the two pSPA in Northern Ireland and discussions are ongoing with Defra.

**Wales:** Patrick Lindley reported that an extension to Liverpool Bay/Bae Lerpwl had been classified, as had Skokholm and Skomer marine extension.

**Scotland:** Nigel Buxton noted no SPA had been classified since the last SWG meeting, pending the Network Assessment referred to under item 6.

**England:** Alan Drewitt reported that the following SPA were classified: Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay, Poole Harbour, Liverpool bay, Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay, Outer Thames Estuary and Greater Wash.

**UK Overseas Territories:** David Stroud noted that a Ramsar site in Anguilla (Sombrero Island) is planned for designation on 22 May.

## 10. Phase 2 - update

David Stroud reported that final outputs from SWG went to ESG in November 2017, with the exception of a section on breeding Great Cormorant (omitted accidentally, but a draft now in train). The report is currently on a password-protected part of the JNCC website.

Andy Tully noted that Defra is currently seeking views from the other administrations regarding a decision that JNCC publish the phase 2 summary report on the basis that: the information is scientifically robust; does not amend existing policy; and does not tie UK governments to a particular course of action (as clarified in the footnote on the first page of the report). Mary Roddick noted that the recommendation for publication is on the 13 June NRW Board meeting agenda. Nigel Buxton will ensure that publication is raised with Scottish Government. Ronan Owens noted that DAERA NIEA is seeking clarity on who has the authority to approve the publication of Phase 2 for Northern

Ireland, given Northern Ireland has been without a devolved government since Jan 2017.

## 11. Phase 3 – update

Chair invited representatives from Defra and Devolved Administrations to indicate their intention regarding SPA classification that would comprise Phase 3.

- Ronan Owens said that while no site boundary changes or public consultation work on Phase 3 had been undertaken in Northern Ireland, DAERA NIEA have begun work which will address Annex 8 of the Phase 2 Summary Paper listed 'features recommended for classification by the second SPA Review which have yet to occur'. DAERA NIEA have asked JNCC to update Standard Data Forms for 6 Northern Ireland SPAs. This is due to features which are listed on the DAERA citations but are not formally reported to the EU via the Standard Data Form. JNCC received a list of updates required for 6 Northern Ireland SPAs on 01/05/18.
- Regarding Wales, Patrick Lindley noted the situation was unclear and discussions with Welsh Government were ongoing.
- Nigel Buxton reported that SNH were soon to complete updating/revision of SPA citations for SPA in Scotland. Nigel Buxton and Greg Mudge reported that SNH were soon to complete revision of those SPA citations for SPAs in Scotland subject to recommended changes from the 2001 SPA review.
- In England, Andy Tully reported that Defra was focussing on how to prioritise this phase; likely to commission NE to help with this assessment; also noted that NE's "designations pipeline" was currently fully subscribed.

## 12. Any other Business

AEWA update -David reported that MoP7 will be held in December in South Africa; the 7<sup>th</sup> Conservation Status Review (population size estimates, from which 1% thresholds for SPA identification derive) would be agreed at MoP7.

An International Single Species Action Plan for Velvet Scoter has been drafted (led by Denmark but with input from WWT) and will also be taken to MoP7.

**Action 6:** Richard Hearn to circulate the draft Velvet Scoter ISSAP to SWG.

Kate Jennings asked how the concept of Favourable Conservation Status was being applied within AEWA and suggested that SWG should have a role in FCS discussions; David Stroud explained that the AEWA European Goose Management Platform (which meets next in June 2018) will address FCS issues for "overabundant" goose populations.

The Chair asked that we attempt to identify leads and timetable for delivering the actions identified in the SWG work plan. David Stroud circulated a table of these actions to help the process; see Appendix for details of what was agreed.

Nigel Buxton announced that this is likely to be his last SWG meeting. The Chair extended his sincere thanks, on behalf of the SWG, to Nigel for his massive

contribution to the development of the UK SPA network (in both the terrestrial and marine environments) since the early 1990s, and for his representation of SNH on the SWG since its first meeting in November 2001. These thanks were echoed by other members of the group.

### **13. Date of next meeting**

10 October 2018 is already scheduled.

Chair suggested it would be useful, in order to drive forward the group's delivery of its workplan, to hold a meeting also in January 2019; Secretariat to seek suitable date ASAP. Chair suggested that Abberton Reservoir (an SPA) in Essex could be a suitable venue; he invited Kim Wallis to give a presentation to SWG of her recent PhD studies that were done there.

## Appendix: Taking forward work plan in 2018 and 2019

Note: Next meeting 10<sup>th</sup> October so all final products by end of September 2018 (unless stated otherwise)

Item in SWG revised Work Plan (Nov. 2017)	Delivery/authors + Milestones
Advice on which races of Common Eider should be considered in marine SPA assessment.	<b>Paper by SNH (GM) and JNCC (Oct meeting or intersessionally before then).</b>
Consider SPA provision for species where major new national surveys have become available since third SPA review (Hen Harrier).  <b>[High priority – discussion paper for spring meeting on relevant species]</b>	Also: Capercaillie  <b>Paper by SNH (NB) and RSPB (JW) by the end of September</b>  (No SPAs for Snow Bunting so do not cover)
Consider methodological approaches for the monitoring of data deficient species, especially raptors in the non-breeding season.  <b>[High priority – initiated by discussion paper for spring meeting]</b>	<b>Paper by JNCC (DAS) to summarise past SWG discussions and produce a discussion paper – with a series of options based on what resources are available and existing data sources e.g. BirdTrack has given a new stream of data available for birds.</b>  Can cover non-raptors where relevant  What is the definition of 'Data Deficient'?
Assess potential to harmonise lists of qualifying species on coincident Ramsar Sites and SPAs through application of relevant criteria.  <b>[Discussion paper for spring meeting]</b>	<b>Paper by SNH (GM &amp; NB)</b>  SNH has done this harmonisation already for all overlapping SPA/Ramsar sites in Scotland. They agreed to share this work with the SWG in the first instance.  The objective of the work is – ideally - to get similar citations for each site under different designations or understand why different designations have different species. It is currently not clear what role the SWG might help in this.  DAS will consider SPA criteria against the Ramsar criteria and look at the issue of mismatch e.g. different thresholds for the same species as related to the different designations.

Item in SWG revised Work Plan (Nov. 2017)	Delivery/authors + Milestones
<p>In the context of the third network review, further review issues related to classification of SPAs for re-establishing and colonising species and provide advice to the government administrations.</p> <p>[Initial discussion paper for spring meeting]</p>	<p><b>JNCC (DAS) to circulate paper</b> previously developed for the SWG by Helen Baker, and append list of species.</p> <p>Circulate in May and see if it is still relevant and get all to review paper and list of species. Following this circulation JNCC to further develop the paper for the next meeting.</p>
<p>Provide scientific advice on issues arising from the development and classification of SPAs in the marine environment.</p> <p>[High priority - spring meeting]</p>	<p>No progress. Awaiting views of Defra and DAs</p>
<p>Develop a plan as to how SWG can advise and promote effective measures to report internationally on the status of UK Ramsar Sites making resource-effective use of existing sources of data and information.</p> <p>[Lower priority – possibly autumn meeting]</p>	<p><b>JNCC – take forward in 2019</b> (post Ramsar CoP 13)</p> <p>There remains the unaddressed issue of the need for UK to update its Ramsar Information Sheets for substantially all its 174 Sites which are long overdue.</p>
<p>Draft and submit report on SWG activities for 2018 to UK government administrations, and publish.</p> <p>[High priority - draft for autumn meeting]</p>	<p><b>Paper by JNCC</b> – to be drafted for first meeting in 2019 informed from the minutes of SWG meetings in 2018.</p>
<p>Advise on SPA-related aspects of 2019 report under Article 12 of the Birds Directive.</p> <p>[Autumn meeting]</p>	<p><b>Paper by JNCC (DAS)</b> - Default using 2013 assessments plus available new information.</p>
<p>Consider implications of revised bird population sizes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ biogeographical estimates for waterbirds as agreed at Ramsar COP 13;</li> <li>➤ revised national estimates collated through the 2019 Article 12 process; and</li> <li>➤ promotion of means to address data deficiency in the context of deriving estimates at national scales.</li> </ul> <p>[Autumn meeting]</p>	<p><b>Paper (author likely JNCC) early in 2019</b> - after Ramsar CoP 13 and AEWA MoP 7.</p>
<p>Draft a scoping paper on the development of a decision-making process, at a UK network level, where a decline in the site interest feature(s) is attributed solely to the effects of climate change (i.e. not an effect of proximal anthropogenic influence).</p>	<p><b>Paper by NE</b> (Allan Drewitt) in consultation with SNH, NRW and others.</p> <p>Issue characterised by “don’t make mistake of attributing all avian change to climate change; this risks absolving ourselves of responsibility for mitigation of pressures”.</p>

Item in SWG revised Work Plan (Nov. 2017)	Delivery/authors + Milestones
	Evidence: Martin Muir paper.
<p>Further review issues of range provision in the context of sufficiency assessments for the UK SPA network.</p> <p>[Autumn meeting as resources allow]</p>	<p><b>Lower priority -paper deferred to 2019?</b></p> <p>DAS: Phase I assessed range insufficiency, Phase II did a first cut of implications but really only qualitative judgements – more can/should be done?</p>