

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 1 DECEMBER 2010

10.30 – 15.30, Natural England, Touthill Close, Peterborough

Approved Minutes

Attendees:

* = via telephone or video-link

Ian Bainbridge – Chair (SNH)*	Kate Jennings (RSPB)
Ed Mountford – Secretariat (JNCC)	Kerstin Kober (JNCC)*
Andy Musgrove (BTO)	Michael McLeod (Scottish Government)*
Andy Tully (Defra)*	Nigel Buxton (SNH)
Ant Maddock (JNCC)	Richard Hearn (WWT)
Claire Collyer (CLA)*	Sarah Anthony (Natural England)
Conor McKinney (Scottish Government)*	Sian Whitehead (CCW)*
David Stroud (JNCC)	Steven Dora (Scottish Government)*
Gavin Siriwardena (BTO)	

Apologies:

Chris Bingham (JNCC)	Richard Evans (Scottish Environment Link)
Ian Enlander (NIEA)	Simon Hopkinson (Defra)
Jeremy Wilson (Scottish Environment Link)	Stephen Hull (ABP Marine Enviro Res Ltd)
Jim Reid (JNCC)	Susan O'Brien (JNCC)
Miranda Davis (Water UK)	

1. Welcome and apologies

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Introductions were given and apologies received (see above). Poor weather had affected attendance and more people than usual joined the meeting via telephone or video-conference.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

- 2.1. Draft minutes for the previous SWG meeting were tabled and approved without change. The Secretariat was asked to publish these on the SWG webpage.

Action Point 1 (01/12/10): SECRETARIAT to publish minutes of the last meeting on the SWG webpage.

3. Feedback from consultation with the SPA Review Executive Steering Group

- 3.1. The Secretariat briefed the Group on an e-mail consultation that had taken place during November with the SPA Review Executive Steering Group (ESG). Four items were considered: (i) overall progress with Phase 1 of the SPA Review; (ii) the independent review of Phase 1 work; (iii) the Cropped Habitats Decision Tree work; and (iv) plans for future reviews of the SPA network.

Overall progress with Phase 1

- 3.2. ESG were generally content with progress made and the standard of work. There was a question about the testing of the SPI and Decision Framework after March 2011: whether this fell into Phase 1 or 2 of the Review? Also, when was it envisaged that the Country Agencies and Devolved Administrations would be in a position to consider possible new SPAs or amendments to existing sites? The ESG agreed that they ought to meet in late January 2011. There was a concern that the volume of material likely to come to ESG at this time might present a slight risk to the timetable of work.

Independent peer review

- 3.3. ESG was asked to clarify the scope and objectives of the peer review. They recognised that the Site Provision Index, Cropped Habitats work and the main Decision Framework combined science, policy, legislation and management, but felt that all but the science fell outside the brief of the SWG (the countries having responsibility for setting policy, deciding on management options and interpreting the law). They agreed that the focus of the peer review should be scientific, recognising the difficulties of trying to tease the science from policy, legislation and management, and that the scope should be to ensure that the scientific aspects of the Decision Framework are logical, valid, appropriate and unbiased.

Cropped Habitats Decision Tree

- 3.4. ESG were provided with a copy of the latest version of the Cropped Habitats Decision Tree and associated notes from BTO. They were content with the general direction of this work. Various points of detail, improvements to clarity and other adjustments were requested. Subject to these provisions and a period of testing, it was felt that this work should greatly assist decision making on cropped habitats. Although it was useful to see the progress papers, there was no guarantee that ESG would not have more comments when the options and implications were fully set out in the final submission from the SWG.

Future SPA Network reviews

- 3.5. ESG also commented on plans for future reviews of the SPA Network. It was apparent that this was something that needed further consideration and discussion. Although ESG did not reach any firm conclusions or make any commitments, the general consensus appeared to be that the UK should certainly continue to endeavour to get into a position where the terrestrial SPA Network could be viewed as being 'substantially complete'. It was suggested that this might be the case once the current review is completed. However, it was questioned if it was necessary to agree on future reviews at this stage: does it make a difference as to how the current review is conducted?
- 3.6. The SWG discussed setting out a target date for a future review of the SPA Network. There would be clear merit in doing this: (i) it would enable a coordinated approach across the UK; (ii) it would allow the Country Agencies and other bodies to forward-plan in terms of SPA implementation and the timing of delivery of relevant bird surveillance data and other information (see item 6.3 for example); (iii) it would set out the UK Government's long-term intent to the European Commission and others; (iv) within a decade some elements of the SPA network would not have been reviewed for 25 years and would be under-pinned by population data of a similar age; (v) there is clear evidence that certain SPA qualifying species have changed substantially in abundance and range and further significant changes are anticipated (as illustrated by the preliminary findings of the

CHAINSPAN project). It was also noted that the current review was not comprehensive and was mainly concerned with matters that could not be addressed during the 2001 Review. It was agreed that in principle a full review of the SPA Network should be planned to commence in about 2020. The Secretariat agreed to assist the Chair in seeking the views of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee on the scope of a future review, setting out a formal recommendation to this effect to include in the SWG Annual Report.

Action Point 2 (01/12/10): SECRETARIAT to assist the Chair in drafting a formal recommendation from the SWG that in principle a full review of the SPA Network should be planned to commence in about 2020.

4. Feedback from N2KR Forum and Steering Committee meetings

- 4.1. Defra (Andy Tully) provided feedback on the recent meetings of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Forum and Steering Committee, where the SPA Review was discussed. Both groups were content with progress and made no substantive comments. The proposals to independently peer review scientific aspects of Phase 1 were endorsed.
- 4.2. The Chair reported that the Steering Committee had accepted the SWG's 2008-09 Report and the two recommendations from the SWG had been noted. The two recommendations regarding eider populations and the publication of methodological and other work related to marine SPAs would be considered at the next meeting of the UK Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group.
- 4.3. The Steering Committee also agreed that the Forestry Commission should be contacted to invite them to provide representation on the SWG.

Action Point 3 (01/12/10): CHAIR to take the recommendations in the SWG 2008-09 Report regarding eider populations and the publication of methodological and other work related to marine SPAs to the next meeting of the UK Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group.

Action Point 4 (01/12/10): CHAIR to contact Forestry Commission to invite them to provide representation on the SPAR SWG.

5. Overview of progress with Phase 1 of the SPA Review

- 5.1. JNCC (Ant Maddock) updated on progress with Phase 1 of the SPA Review since September 2010, referring to an overview paper that had been circulated beforehand. This included revised deadlines for the remaining work. A detailed work plan was available via Google docs (<https://docs.google.com/>).
- 5.2. The table below summarises the timetable and deadlines. Final sign off of Phase 1 was planned for October 2011. Good progress had been made with the collection of population and site-level data for SPA Review species. All population estimates at the biogeographic and UK/GB/all-Ireland levels had been collected; and most of the species site-level counts had been acquired and formatted. BTO had prepared draft reports for the five ECJ species and completed their work on the Cropped Habitats Decision Tree – finalised versions of these pieces of work would be submitted to the next meeting of the Executive Steering Group for sign off. Future work and timetabling of the Site Provision Index, the Decision Framework,

the Peer Review and ECJ case law were to be dealt with later under the related agenda items.

Timetable and deadlines for the main parts of Phase 1 of the SPA Review

	December 2010	January 2011	February 2011	March 2011	April 2011	May to September	October 2011
1. Population and site-level data; ECJ reports	<u>Deadline for all data for 42 SPA species, plus ECJ reports on 5 species</u>	<u>Deadline for full APEP data</u>	<u>Deadline for Ramsar data</u>	All information from the BTO contract received and approved			
2. Cropped habitats	<u>Deadline for cropped habitats decision tree</u>			All information from the BTO contract received and approved			
3. SPI		<u>Deadline for workable model of SPI</u>		[Adjust SPI subject to Peer review]	Update SPI with new data		
4. Framework		<u>Deadline for workable model of Framework</u>		[Adjust Framework subject to Peer review]	Update framework with new data	Test and complete framework by September	
5. Peer review			<u>Deadline for Peer review</u>				
6. ECJ case law			Work on and complete ECJ case law reference report				
							Sign off final products to countries

- 5.3. Attention was drawn to the timetable for the peer review contract and the need to work on both the Site Provision Index and Decision Framework, so that these were ready for the peer review which needs to be completed before the end of the financial year. Thereafter, the focus would be on the ECJ case law work, the testing of the Phase 1 guidance within SWG, and preparation of the final Phase 1 report.
- 5.4. Concern was raised that the timetabling did not seem to allow time for the SWG to run all the species included in the SPA Review through the Decision Framework. This was critical if the sufficiency of the SPA Network for these species was to be considered properly. JNCC advised that there were several months to do this during April-September 2011, but no detailed planning had taken place.
- 5.5. Further work was requested to set out an overall structure for the publication that would be produced at the end of Phase 1. It was suggested that the contents list of the 2001 Review was a useful a starting point. Information would certainly be needed to explain how the guidance from Phase 1 should be used in Phase 2. This advice was something that the Country Agencies would welcome and their input into its production was requested. It was pointed out that, in discussions with the European Commission, it was important that such decision-making processes were thoroughly documented and formally published.
- 5.6. JNCC agreed to prepare a draft work plan for the SPA Review tasks for April-October 2011 and an outline of the final outputs from Phase 1. This would be done in liaison with the Chair and Country Agency representatives, and would be presented for discussion at the next SWG meeting.

Action Point 5 (01/12/10): JNCC (Ant Maddock) to prepare (i) a draft work plan for the SPA Review tasks for April-October 2011 and (ii) an outline of the final outputs from Phase 1, in liaison with the Chair and Country Agency representatives, and to present this for discussion at the next SWG meeting.

6. Bird population estimates and site-level count data

- 6.1. BTO (Andy Musgrove) provided an update on the Phase 1 contract work being undertaken for Defra and JNCC to collate bird population estimates and site-level count data. Prior to the meeting a set of spreadsheets had been circulated which included the population estimate data, a summary of progress with the site-level data, and an example of site-level data for Storm Petrel.
- 6.2. Population estimates had been fully compiled for all but three of the SPA Review species populations at the biogeographic, GB, UK and All-Ireland levels. Of the three estimates that were not fully complete, those for the Spotted Crake and Corncrake only require final verification which was in hand. The estimate for the Kingfisher was taken from APEP2. This was the best available and adequate for practical use. It might, however, be updated in a few months as part of the APEP3 process, once issues to do with scaling of counts, etc., are resolved.
- 6.3. Concerns were raised that some of the population estimates were based on relatively old data, e.g. 1999 for the Spotted Crake, and use of these might be questioned, particularly if trend data showed that such species had declined in recent years. It was pointed out that this was one of the reasons why a target date should be set for a future review of the SPA Network, i.e. so that delivery of up-to-date species population and site-level data could be aligned with work to review species SPA suites. In the case of the Spotted Crake, the national survey was completed just after 2001 Review so the time lag to the current review was long. However, the SWG had considered the data in 2004 and agreed to defer formal review of the SPA suite until the current review.
- 6.4. BTO were asked whether any of the population levels might be significantly lower now, when compared with the data used in this review. They confirmed that the covering notes mentioned all of the main caveats and in their view the data was the best available. SWG asked BTO to cite the primary source of data when referring to the 'location of previous estimates' and check that all comments in the spreadsheet were suitable for public presentation. In the case of the Spotted Crake, it was suggested that it might be possible to use recent site count data to generate a population trend since the 1999 national survey. Subject to these points, **SWG approved the population estimate data presented in the spreadsheet.**
- 6.5. Site-level count data had been acquired for 36 species populations and consistently formatted in an Access Database. The data for Red Kite have been acquired and just need formatting. 20 of these datasets are already in the public domain and can be shared freely. The remaining 17 are confidential and an approach needs to be agreed to access these datasets. For three populations (Hen Harrier non-breeding, Merlin non-breeding, Ring Ouzel breeding) there appeared to be no suitable site-level data. JNCC remarked that it was the same for Hen Harrier and Merlin when the 2001 Review was conducted and wondered when the situation would change. It was agreed that it would be sensible for BTO to acquire Hen Harrier roost count data, even though these data were patchy and not ideally suited for the purposes of the review, they might prove useful.
- 6.6. This left six populations for which site-level count data were required. Breeding Hen Harrier, Golden Eagle, Merlin and Peregrine all had national census data and a process was taking place that would hopefully result in access to these data. However, there were no comprehensive census data available for breeding Honey Buzzard or Osprey. Although a substantial amount of Honey Buzzard data had

been received from the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, this was still incomplete in terms of detail, and it has been a long-term problem to enhance the quality of data submitted for the species. There was also great sensitivity amongst raptor workers who held data on this species and it might be necessary to negotiate further with individual data holders and even ask study groups to assess number of pairs within/outside SPAs. It was agreed that the SWG should send a request to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel concerning the desirability of enhancing national Honey Buzzard data.

- 6.7. Data had similarly been received for Osprey; these were detailed in some areas and more summarised in others. Not all data holders were prepared to make their detailed data available, but one had offered to help by indicating how many Ospreys in their area were within or close to existing SPAs. SNH expressed concerns that the current network of SPAs would be inadequate to properly cover the expanding Osprey population, and they may have to try to work directly with those individuals who held relevant site data.

Action Point 6 (01/12/10): SECRETARIAT to assist the Chair and David Stroud in drafting a request to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel from the SWG concerning the desirability of enhancing national Honey Buzzard data.

- 6.8. Subject to the additional work that had been outlined by BTO and specific requests during the meeting, **the SWG approved the site-level data work** and thanked BTO for their diligent work.

7. ECJ species reports

- 7.1. BTO (Andy Musgrove) reported on progress with ECJ species reports for the SPA Review. Draft reports had been produced for four out of the five UK species involved. The reports had been circulated before the meeting and covered Smew, Crane, Montagu's Harrier and White-tailed Eagle. Information on the location of the last three species was set out in a set of confidential annexes.
- 7.2. The SWG commented that it was important that the technical wording in the later sections of the ECJ reports was correct and that the discussion might be better summarised as a series of bullet points.
- 7.3. The Smew report highlighted the fact that, although this species occurs regularly in the UK, no SPAs have been selected for it because levels of occurrence, even at sites with the largest numbers, fall significantly below the threshold of 50 which is used as a minimum in selecting sites for wintering waterbirds. Although the SWG had reviewed this rule in the past, there were a limited number of exceptions and Smew could be another. It was suggested that the rule could be generally amended to say that if a species was on Annex I of the Birds Directive then an exception could be made. The Group agreed to prepare an options paper on the subject to take to the next Executive Steering Group meeting, with JNCC leading on this. Further discussion of this rule would take place at the next SWG meeting.

Action Point 7 (01/12/10): JNCC (David Stroud) to prepare paper to take to next the SPA Review Executive Steering Group meeting setting out possible options as regards application of the 'minimum of 50 rule' in light of the ECJ-Irish ruling.

- 7.4. The remaining report on the Kingfisher was nearly complete. BTO said it was not so obvious what to do with the Kingfisher in a site-based context, because it

occurred widely in low abundance and so finding sites that met with a 1% national population threshold was difficult. There were no obvious SPAs and even the largest were unlikely to support significant numbers of Kingfishers as they were designated for coastal, montane, heathland or peatland habitats. It was recommended that BTO looked at the overlap with SACs, notably the Severn, Tweed or Wye. BTO agreed, but pointed out that this didn't resolve a further problem in that underlying information on the number of breeding Kingfisher pairs was lacking (it was not available via WeBS).

- 7.5. It was advised Kingfisher sites would probably need to be selected under Stage 1.4 of the SPA selection guidelines, with the most likely relevant selection factor being relatively high population densities. BTO suggested that a future way forward might be to use Waterways Breeding Bird Survey data to model Kingfisher densities and relate this to existing the SPA and SAC network. This would serve as a basis for further fieldwork. Provisional data collected for the current Bird Atlas had been examined, but seemed too crude even at a 2 x 2km resolution. It was agreed that current data on Kingfisher were not ideal and a specific survey of breeding numbers might be required. Although there was an onus to progress SPAs for the species, it was pointed out that classification still needed to be built on robust information. JNCC offered to ask Irish colleagues to see what approach they had taken for the Kingfisher, and to also raise the matter with the Inter-Agency Ornithological Group.
- 7.6. BTO agreed to finalise and circulate the Kingfisher report within a week, setting out options as regards the best way forward. SWG would provide comments on all of the reports with two weeks, but a further iteration may be required before the report on the Kingfisher could be finalised.

Action Point 8 (01/12/10): JNCC (David Stroud) to contact Irish authorities about how they have approached Kingfisher SPAs in light of the ECJ-Irish ruling.

Action Point 9 (01/12/10): BTO to send draft ECJ Kingfisher report to circulate via the Secretariat within the next week.

Action Point 10 (01/12/10): ALL MEMBERS to provide further comments on the five ECJ species reports by 18 December (send to Andy Musgrove, cc: Ant Maddock, David Stroud, Ed Mountford).

8. Cropped Habitats Decision Tree

- 8.1. BTO (Gavin Siriwardena) updated on the Cropped Habitats Decision Tree work for the SPA Review. Comments had been received further to the last SWG meeting and a sub-group meeting held on 13 October. A revised version of the tree and associated notes had been produced for the consultation with the Executive Steering Group. Although some minor amendments had been made recently, comments from the ESG had not been built into the documents circulated just before the SWG meeting.
- 8.2. JNCC recommended that the SWG approved the work that had been done on the cropped habitats under the BTO contract. Any further work, including revisions in light of the comments from ESG and presentation to the ESG for sign off, would be dealt with later. BTO asked the SWG if any structural changes or further case studies were needed.

- 8.3. The **SWG approved the cropped habitats work done by BTO** and thanked them for what was a very useful contribution to the SPA Review. Some further work would be required, which could be dealt with by others at a later stage. The next main step was to incorporate cropped habitats into the Decision Framework. A few concerns were expressed about how the information would be used and particularly if the Decision Tree was meant to address both existing and new sites. Although some of the detail in the case studies could be improved, these were viewed as fit-for-purpose, i.e. to trial the Decision Tree. A few other minor requests for changes were made to BTO.
- 8.4. The Group agreed that members should send any further comments on the cropped habitats work to BTO within two weeks. These would be included in any revisions at a later date.

Action Point 11 (01/12/10): ALL MEMBERS to provide further comments on the Cropped Habitats Decision Tree work by 18 December 2010 (send to Gavin Siriwardena, cc: Ant Maddock, David Stroud, Ed Mountford).

9. Site Provision Index & SPA Decision Framework

- 9.1. JNCC (David Stroud) advised that since the last SWG meeting no substantive progress had been made on either the Site Provision Index (SPI) or Decision Framework to aid consistent review of SPA suites. RSPB were continuing to work on a Principal Component Analysis of the SPI and the guidance on other 'conservation measures' under the EU Birds Directive to incorporate into the Decision Framework. A draft paper describing the completed SPI was planned before the end of December, which would build in the Delphi analysis undertaken earlier in the year.
- 9.2. It was suggested that a working group was established to meet in January 2011 to further progress the integration of the SPI, Cropped Habitats Decision Tree and Decision Framework. Membership was invited and JNCC, NE, RSPB and SNH responded. It was recommended that work on these topics should continue, so that when the working group met a draft paper had been prepared showing how these might be best integrated.

Action Point 12 (01/12/10): RSPB and JNCC (David Stroud) to continue work on the Site Provision Index aiming to circulate a draft paper via the Secretariat before end of December 2010 and a finalised version to feed into Action Point 14 by end of January 2011.

Action Point 13 (01/12/10): JNCC (David Stroud) to continue to lead work to develop the Decision Framework to aid consistent review of SPA suites to feed into Action Point 14 and to conclude this by end of January 2011.

Action Point 14 (01/12/10): JNCC (Ant Maddock) to organise agreed working group meeting in January 2011 to further progress the integration of the Site Provision Index, Cropped Habitats Decision Tree, and Decision Framework to aid consistent review of SPA suites.

10. European case law work

- 10.1. JNCC (Ant Maddock) updated on plans for the ECJ case law work, which was required for the SPA Review. These were discussed at a meeting of a sub-group on 27 October (attended by RSPB, JNCC, SNH). Subsequently, it was agreed that David Stroud was probably the best person to do this work (rather than an external contractor) and 3-4 days had been set aside for the task in April 2011. It was reiterated that care would be taken to avoid any reinterpretation of judgements reached by the ECJ. SWG was content with this approach and noted that the implications of the work needed to be reflected in the Decision Framework.

11. Peer review work

- 11.1. JNCC (Ant Maddock) updated on the plans for the independent peer review of selected parts of the Phase 1 work for the SPA Review. Problems had arisen because the scope and objectives for the work had not been set out clearly, and the Executive Steering Group was asked for guidance with this (see item 3.3). They advised that the peer review needed to focus on the scientific aspects of the Site Provision Index, Cropped Habitats work and the Decision Framework.
- 11.2. JNCC and Defra were currently working on a new version of the specification for the work, making clear just what should and should not be considered. The aim was still to conclude the peer review by the end of February 2011. The new specification should be ready before the end of December and it would be circulated to the SWG for comment. Depending on progress with the SPI, it may not be necessary to include the SPI in the peer review contract if this work has been submitted to a peer reviewed journal as is planned. The Group was asked to suggest candidates with relevant statistical and conservation biology knowledge to carry out the peer review. JNCC agreed to consult further on this if deemed necessary.

Action Point 15 (01/12/10): JNCC (Ant Maddock) to produce revised specification for the independent peer review work and circulate via the Secretariat before end of December 2010.

12. Additional issues for the SPA review to consider

- 12.1. At the last SWG meeting, JNCC (David Stroud) had circulated a summary of issues considered by the SWG previously where there may be merit in their inclusion in the next review publication. The SWG was asked if there were any additional comments or issues to add. The Group commented that it was important that to stay within the requirements of by the Birds Directive in terms of the provision for different races and populations of birds. It was agreed that further comments would be sent by email.

Action Point 16 (01/12/10): ALL MEMBERS to provide further comments on the 'Issues to include in the next SPA Review' paper by 18 December (send to David Stroud, cc: Ant Maddock, Ed Mountford).

13. Next steps for the SPA Review

- 13.1. JNCC (Ant Maddock) went through the list of forthcoming work and deadlines for the SPA Review, as detailed in the table under item 5.2.
- 13.2. The Executive Steering Group (ESG) would be meeting in late January 2011 to: (i) sign-off the population estimates and site-level count data, the five ECJ species reports and cropped habitats work; and (ii) to consider progress with the SPI and Decision Framework. The final report from the BTO contract would be ready for approval at the next SWG meeting in early March, and the ESG would sign off this off at their meeting in April 2011.
- 13.3. The testing phase during April to September 2011 would involve running all the species identified in the SPA Review Terms of Reference through the Decision Framework, to assist in decisions on the sufficiency of UK SPA network provision, including cropped habitat requirements.

14. Update on recent EU process developments

- 14.1. JNCC (David Stroud) provided a verbal update on recent developments in terms of relevant EU processes. Attention was drawn to three events:
 - (i) a Sub-Group meeting of the Expert Group on Reporting under the Nature Directives, which took place on 26 October 2010 to consider the alignment and synchronisation of progress reporting under the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive;
see http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/monnat/library?l=/expert_reporting/work-package_reporting/sub-group_meetings/meeting_25-10-2010&vm=detailed&sb=Title
 - (ii) an Ornis Committee meeting on 15 November 2010, which included a useful presentation about Marine SPAs, about which RSPB agreed to provide further details;
see http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/wild_birds/library?l=/ornis&vm=detailed&sb=Title (may require registration with CIRCA to get full access to view information on recent meeting)
 - (iii) an International Conference on 23-24 November 2010 on 'Bird Conservation in the EU: planning for recovery action and sustainable use', which was connected with the results of a review of the processes that lead to the development and approval of Species Action Plans and Management Plans and Key Concept documents;
see http://www.birdlife.org/eu/eu_events.html

Action Point 17 (01/12/10): RSPB to provide the Secretariat with further information about the recent Marine SPA presentation at the annual ORNIS meeting.

15. Update on Marine SPA work

- 15.1. JNCC (Kerstin Kober) updated the SWG on progress with marine SPA identification and classification. Details are provided in Annex A.

16. Updates on country implementation

- 16.1. SNH reported that Scottish Ministers had classified six new Golden Eagle Special Protection Areas on 28 October 2010.

17. Other matters

Update of Ramsar Information Sheets

17.1. Further to the paper circulated by JNCC (David Stroud) before the previous SWG meeting on the update of Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS), the SWG were informed of the main conclusions reached on this paper at the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee meeting on 4 November 2010:

- (i) JNCC should proceed with dialogue with the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies with the aim of submitting updated RIS for relevant Ramsar sites during 2011;
- (ii) update of RIS for sites in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be deferred until after the Ramsar CoP11 in April 2012;
- (iii) deferment has the potential advantage that the Ramsar CoP11 will discuss a revised 'simpler' format for RIS, which may make the UK updating process significantly simpler;
- (iv) as part of the revision of RIS and associated guidance, it is anticipated that an on-line processes will be developed for submission of RIS, which may significantly improve the transfer of relevant information.

Defra added that, despite the decision to defer, there was still a need to progress various issues that were outstanding.

CHAINSPAN project

17.2. A brief report had been circulated before the meeting setting out progress with CHAINSPAN project (Climate Change Impacts on Avian Interests of the SPA Network). This set out the project aims and methods and results to date. About 80% of the modelling was complete. Model fit was very variable. For many species there is significant uncertainty associated with the abundance predictions at any one site, but the broad direction of change suggested by the models is more likely to be accurate. An example of the detailed outputs for changes in the abundance of Knot was given. These show that Knot numbers are predicted to decline at most sites with an overall northwards shift in distribution. The modelling outputs for all wintering waterbirds and indicated that many sites were predicted to experience a substantial turnover in individuals, with some species declining whilst others would increase.

17.3. Further work was planned to complete the modelling and write up the findings within the financial year. A substantial report is due in March 2011, together with an interactive website that would allow users to undertake their own analyses based on different scenarios. It was anticipated that a presentation of the CHAINSPAN results would be timely at the summer SWG meeting.

Future Atlantic Marine Environment (FAME) project

17.4. RSPB advised on a recently approved INTERREG project that was focused on the Future Atlantic Marine Environment (FAME). This is a major seabird monitoring and tracking project that involves RSPB and partners from France, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. In the UK, the project will undertake monitoring and remote tracking of Shag, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Fulmar and Razorbill at their breeding colonies. FAME will also support seawatches for Balearic Shearwaters during late summer and autumn. The information will be used to inform RSPB's advocacy with Government and the Conservation Agencies on the survey, identification and

delineation of potential marine SPAs. It was suggested that the project team was asked to make a presentation on the project at the summer or autumn SWG meeting.

18. Progress with Action Points from last meeting

18.1. A note had been circulated before the meeting detailing progress on the agreed Action Points from the last SWG meeting. All of the actions had been completed or an update on progress had been given during the meeting.

19. Next SPAR SWG meeting

19.1. The date and venue for the next SWG meeting were agreed as 3 March 2011 in Peterborough.

Action Point 18 (01/12/10): SECRETARIAT to organise next SWG meeting on 3 March 2011 in Peterborough.

Annex A – Progress to date with marine SPA identification and classification (JNCC Marine SPA team)

The JNCC Marine SPA team is working on the identification of four types of SPA:

1. contiguous extensions to existing seabird colony SPAs to support maintenance behaviours, e.g. preening and loafing;
2. important inshore areas used by waterbirds outside the breeding season for wintering, moulting or while on migration to or from breeding grounds;
3. important offshore areas used by marine birds, primarily for feeding, both during and outside of the breeding season; and
4. other types of SPA for species that are not readily captured by the above three categories.

1. Colony extensions

Based on at-sea surveys and radio-tracking, extensions into the marine environment of existing seabird colony SPAs have been recommended for six species of seabird:

- Northern Fulmar and Northern Gannet (2km)
- Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill and Common Guillemot (1km)
- Manx Shearwater (at least 4 km)

Extensions for other species have been deemed inappropriate. Several reports and two papers in peer reviewed journals have been published on this work.

Scotland

The advice has been implemented in Scotland with 31 existing seabird colony SPAs in 2009.

England

In England, no seabird colony SPAs have been extended yet, but there are provisional plans to consult on one site in 2011/2012. Natural England awaits results from JNCC work on Terns before proceeding with a further two sites.

Wales

In 2010 CCW recommended to the Welsh Assembly Government that extensions were made to three seabird colony SPAs in Wales. Progress towards classification of these is largely a matter for the Welsh Assembly Government.

Northern Ireland

One existing SPA in Northern Ireland comprises both marine and terrestrial components. The marine component of this may be extended in future to align with JNCC recommendations, but no firm date for this has been determined. Another SPA for Manx Shearwater may also be extended though again there is no firm timeline.

2. Inshore aggregations of waterbirds

A programme of autumn/winter aerial and shore-based surveys for Divers, Grebes and Seaduck of 46 coastal areas of search around the UK was established in 2002. The survey programme is scheduled to end after the winter of 2010/11. Analyses of the aerial survey data are underway and several reports have been produced. One paper deriving from this work has appeared in a peer-reviewed journal and another is currently being drafted.

Scotland

To date, seven possible sites with boundary options, off eastern and northern Scotland, have been delivered to SNH for consideration. A further nine potential sites off western and northern Scotland, will be delivered to SNH by March 2011, along with information on an additional six areas of search that did not support important numbers of waterbirds. During

2011/12 further analyses will be undertaken, in close collaboration with SNH, with a view to determining the most suitable territories for classification, anticipated in 2012/13.

England

In England, two entirely marine SPAs have been classified, the Outer Thames Estuary SPA and Liverpool Bay SPA. Three other areas of search may be considered for classification in the future:

- The Greater Wash holds nationally important numbers of Terns, Divers and Little Gulls, but further consideration of this area is being deferred until 2012/13 when a population estimate for Little Gull will be known and when Tern work will have reported.
- The Solway Firth holds nationally important numbers of wintering Red-throated Diver and SNH and Natural England are in discussion about progression of the site to classification.
- Analyses for a possible site off south Cornwall will be completed in 2011/12, but it is not known yet whether there are sufficient data to proceed with this site.

A report on the Greater Wash has already been produced; reports on the Solway Firth and south Cornwall will be delivered in 2011.

Wales

In Wales, Carmarthen Bay SPA was classified in 2003 as first wholly marine SPA in the UK. Liverpool Bay SPA was classified in 2010. For a third area, Cardigan Bay, it is not known whether this possible site will be considered for classification. A report on Cardigan Bay will be delivered to CCW before the end of 2010.

Northern Ireland

Following the requisite number of years of survey, a report on Belfast Lough in Northern Ireland will be delivered to the Council for Nature Conservation and Countryside by March 2011. It is not known whether this possible site will be progressed to classification.

3. Offshore aggregations of seabirds

Seabird distributional data from the European Seabirds at Sea database have been analysed using spatial modelling across the British Fishery Limit, to identify concentrations of seabirds that might merit consideration for protection within SPAs. After strict application of the UK SPA Selection Guidelines, several possible aggregations have emerged from the analyses, but only for a small number of species and mostly off Scotland. In order to address the species and geographical gaps, an alternative approach – one that focuses on the likely feeding areas of existing SPA colonies – is currently being trialled.

The technical report is in press. A plain English guide to the work has also been drafted. The viability of the new approach is currently being assessed and this will be reported on in December. Government and Country Agencies are being made aware of developments here.

4. Other SPAs

The four work areas under this strand of work (identifying SPAs for Terns, breeding Red-throated Divers, Balearics Shearwater and European Shag), are being conducted at a UK-level.

Terns

One of the major work areas for the Marine SPA team is the identification of feeding areas used by Terns during the breeding season. A habitat model is to be used to predict potentially important sites for Arctic, Common, Sandwich and Roseate Terns. For Little Terns, shore-based observations at selected sites will be used to determine the extent of important coastal areas for this species. Two out of three years of fieldwork around the UK

have been completed and habitat modelling is under way. Natural England has commissioned analyses of Tern data obtained from the renewable energy industry, which will supplement results from JNCC work.

One interim report on the Tern work has been produced and two others are being drafted. A final year's fieldwork is planned for 2011. Initial advice on possible SPAs for Terns based on all available data is planned to be delivered in 2012, but with further fine-tuning and boundary analyses likely to be necessary thereafter.

Breeding red-throated Diver

For breeding red-throated Divers, habitat suitability modelling has indicated areas that are important to the species in the breeding season. Models have been informed by four years of fieldwork data. A report on the work has been drafted and distributed to Scottish Government and SNH. This report requires some additional analysis to place the results of the habitat suitability modelling in an SPA context. It is scheduled for completion and delivery to SNH by March 2011. The identified important areas will be assessed for their suitability as additional SPAs in collaboration with SNH during 2011/12.

Balearic Shearwater

One year (of a planned two year project) to identify important areas for post-breeding concentrations of the Balearic Shearwater has been completed. Funding constraints have prevented further work, but Natural England are keen to address this. They are currently working on a funding proposal that might allow this to be prioritised in 2011. A desk-based study exploring the use of other data sources has been proposed. Advice on any possible SPAs would be delivered in 2012.

European Shag

The feasibility of using habitat suitability modelling to identify possible additional areas associated with the 13 European Shag UK colony SPAs was explored, but proved too costly to implement. This decision was informed by a pilot study on the distribution of Shag in the Firth of Forth. Alternative lower input solutions are being considered, such as the possibility of identifying areas based on outputs from the other strands of SPA work and the pilot study. A decision on possible sites for this species will probably be made in 2011, but with the possibility of further analyses being necessary.

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

ACTION POINTS AGREED AT SWG MEETING 1 DECEMBER 2010

Action Point 1 (01/12/10): SECRETARIAT to publish minutes of the last meeting on the SWG webpage.

Action Point 2 (01/12/10): SECRETARIAT to assist the Chair in drafting a formal recommendation from the SWG that in principle a full review of the SPA Network should be planned to commence in about 2020.

Action Point 3 (01/12/10): CHAIR to take the recommendations in the SWG 2008-09 Report regarding eider populations and the publication of methodological and other work related to marine SPAs to the next meeting of the UK Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group.

Action Point 4 (01/12/10): CHAIR to contact Forestry Commission to invite them to provide representation on the SPAR SWG.

Action Point 5 (01/12/10): JNCC (Ant Maddock) to prepare (i) a draft work plan for the SPA Review tasks for April-October 2011 and (ii) an outline of the final outputs from Phase 1, in liaison with the Chair and Country Agency representatives, and to present this for discussion at the next SWG meeting.

Action Point 6 (01/12/10): SECRETARIAT to assist the Chair and David Stroud in drafting a request to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel from the SWG concerning the desirability of enhancing national Honey Buzzard data.

Action Point 7 (01/12/10): JNCC (David Stroud) to prepare paper to take to next the SPA Review Executive Steering Group meeting setting out possible options as regards application of the 'minimum of 50 rule' in light of the ECJ-Irish ruling.

Action Point 8 (01/12/10): JNCC (David Stroud) to contact Irish authorities about how they have approached Kingfisher SPAs in light of the ECJ-Irish ruling.

Action Point 9 (01/12/10): BTO to send draft ECJ Kingfisher report to circulate via the Secretariat within the next week.

Action Point 10 (01/12/10): ALL MEMBERS to provide further comments on the five ECJ species reports by 18 December (send to Andy Musgrove, cc: Ant Maddock, David Stroud, Ed Mountford).

Action Point 11 (01/12/10): ALL MEMBERS to provide further comments on the Cropped Habitats Decision Tree work by 18 December 2010 (send to Gavin Siriwardena, cc: Ant Maddock, David Stroud, Ed Mountford).

Action Point 12 (01/12/10): RSPB and JNCC (David Stroud) to continue work on the Site Provision Index aiming to circulate a draft paper via the Secretariat before end of December 2010 and a finalised version to feed into Action Point 14 by end of January 2011.

Action Point 13 (01/12/10): JNCC (David Stroud) to continue to lead work to develop the Decision Framework to aid consistent review of SPA suites to feed into Action Point 14 and to conclude this by end of January 2011.

Action Point 14 (01/12/10): JNCC (Ant Maddock) to organise agreed working group meeting in January 2011 to further progress the integration of the Site Provision Index, Cropped Habitats Decision Tree, and Decision Framework to aid consistent review of SPA suites.

Action Point 15 (01/12/10): JNCC (Ant Maddock) to produce revised specification for the independent peer review work and circulate via the Secretariat before end of December 2010.

Action Point 16 (01/12/10): ALL MEMBERS to provide further comments on the 'Issues to include in the next SPA Review' paper by 18 December (send to David Stroud, cc: Ant Maddock, Ed Mountford).

Action Point 17 (01/12/10): RSPB to provide the Secretariat with further information about the recent Marine SPA presentation at the annual ORNIS meeting.

Action Point 18 (01/12/10): SECRETARIAT to organise next SWG meeting on 3 March 2011 in Peterborough.