



The one hundred and thirty-third meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to be held at 11.00 on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 and 09.30 on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at Defra, 2 Marsham Street, SW1P 4DF, London

This paper was 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.

To view other Joint Committee papers and minutes visit <https://jncc.gov.uk/about-jncc/who-we-are/joint-committee/>

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*“Turning science into action for nature, people and the planet.”*

## Minutes of the 132<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee Confirmed

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022  
Time: 11:00  
Venue: Virtually via MS Teams

### Present

#### Members

Professor Mel Austen  
Independent member

Mr Charles Banner KC  
Independent member

Ms Cath Denholm  
Independent member

Professor Clare Fitzsimmons  
Natural England

Professor Colin Galbraith  
Independent Chair

Dr Hilary Kirkpatrick  
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Ms Aoife Martin  
NatureScot

Professor Tom Meagher  
Independent member

Professor Julian Orford  
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Professor Steve Ormerod  
Natural Resources Wales

#### Attendees

Mr David Collins  
JNCC

Dr John Goold  
JNCC

Dr Gemma Harper  
JNCC

Ms Lynn Heeley  
JNCC

Dr Tim Hill  
Natural England

Ms Manaswita Konar  
JNCC

Professor Christine Maggs  
JNCC

Dr Sara McGuckin  
Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mrs Tracey Quince  
JNCC

Ms Eileen Stuart  
NatureScot

Helen Wilkinson  
Natural Resources Wales

Dr Steve Wilkinson  
JNCC

## Apologies

### Members

Lord Blencathra  
Natural England

Sir David Henshaw  
Natural Resources Wales

### Attendees

Ms Ceri Davies  
Natural Resources Wales

## 1. Closed session

- 1.1. There are no minutes for this item.

## 2. Chairman's opening remarks

- 2.1. Professor Galbraith welcomed members and attendees to the 132<sup>nd</sup> meeting.
- 2.2. Professor Galbraith welcomed Professor Clare Fitzsimmons to her first meeting.
- 2.3. Professor Galbraith paid homage to the life and contribution of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second. Professor Galbraith, on behalf of the Joint Committee, extended deepest sympathies to His Majesty the King and all members of the Royal Family.
- 2.4. Professor Galbraith informed members that the Joint Committee would be participating in the boardroom apprenticeship pilot programme, a scheme run by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The pilot is for 2 years (2 x 12-month programmes) and is a board learning, development, and placement programme. The programme will provide practical boardroom experience, knowledge, and skills to aspiring board members.

## 3. Declaration of interests

- 3.1. No additional declarations were made.

## 4. Confidential minutes of the June 2022 Meeting (Official-sensitive) JNCC 22 29D

- 4.1 This item was taken in confidence.

## **5. Matters arising (Official) (JNCC 22 30P)**

- 5.1. There were no matters arising for this meeting.
- 5.2. The Joint Committee **noted** the report of outstanding actions in Annex 1 of the paper.

## **6. Chief Executive's Report on Topical Issues (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 22 31P)**

- 6.1 This item was taken in confidence.

## **7 JNCC 2030 – reviewing the overarching strategy draft (Official-sensitive) JNCC 22 32D**

- 7.1 This item was taken in confidence.

## **8 UK Nature Recovery and CBD CoP15 (Official-Sensitive) (JNCC 22 33P)**

- 8.1 This item was taken in confidence.

## **9 Report from the Chief Scientists Group (Official-Sensitive) (JNCC 22 34P)**

- 9.1 This item was taken in confidence.

## **10 JNCC Staff Conference (Official-Sensitive) (JNCC 22 35P)**

- 10.1 This item was taken in confidence.

## **11 Updates from around the UK (Official) (JNCC 22 36P)**

- 11.1 *Scotland:* avian influenza is still a significant issue. NatureScot are leading a taskforce for managing avian influenza in Scotland. Six golden eagle chicks have been transported to South Scotland, bringing the population to 39. This is the largest population in 300 years. The Nature Restoration Fund to fund multi-year projects that focus on restoring and protecting habitats will support bids up to £250k. The new consultation on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy was launched in June. The consultation closed on 13<sup>th</sup> September. This will be the basis for a new and ambitious strategy to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and reverse it by 2045.

- 11.2 *Northern Ireland*: The Joint Committee expressed their condolences on the death of Helen Anderson. Professor Galbraith agreed to send condolences on behalf of the Committee. The Biodiversity Strategy is being developed and stakeholder workshops are planned. There is currently an equality impact assessment consultation underway focussing on peatland. CNCC are planning to hold horizon scanning sessions and welcome ideas or advice on the process. The Green Growth Strategy Team are working to understand the underpinning of the Climate Change Act and will follow up discussion regarding the amount of peatland restoration needed.
- 11.3 *Wales*: Avian influenza is having an impact on the Grassholm gannets with a publicly visible impact due to the visibility of dead birds. This will have an effect on wildfowling. Bird ringing is both a means of understanding the mortality but also presents a risk relating to spreading the disease. A deep dive group involving both NGOs, academics, and governments as well as other stakeholders has been set up. The Welsh First Minister agreed to convene a summit on water issues around SAC rivers at the Royal Welsh agricultural show. Board recruitment in NRW is underway. A new corporate plan is being drafted. More evidence is needed relating to how biodiversity is delivered by nature-based solutions. A Peatland action restoration programme is underway in Wales Professor Ormerod agreed to share details with CNCC/DAERA.
- 11.4 *England*: the new Prime Minister has made a recommitment to nature positive 2030 and a recommitment to biodiversity and biosecurity. The government commitment to net zero is expected to come to the fore in the next few years. Working with the agenda of the new England farming minister will be discussed by the NE board at their next meeting. Some progress has been made on nutrient neutrality. There is now a ban on the use of horticultural peat. A new national trail is in place – 197 miles coast to coast, from St Bees in Cumbria to Robin Hood’s Bay in North Yorkshire. 22 landscape recovery projects have been announced. Avian flu is having a huge impact on the Farne islands – none of the Tern chicks got off the island this year. There has also been a large impact on the Gannet colony on Farnborough. Natural England are currently recruiting new members for their Board.
- 11.5 Members noted the updates, highlighting JNCC’s work on avian influenza and how well JNCC convenes the UK response to emergencies.
- 11.6 Professor Galbraith suggested this agenda item could be structured to deal with common themes in future meetings and he would consider a possible structure for future meetings.

Action point(s)
AP05 Professor Ormerod to share details of the peatland action restoration programme underway in Wales, with CNCC/DAERA.
AP06 Professor Galbraith to agree a structure for the “Updates from around the UK” item for future meetings.



## Minutes of the 132<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee Unconfirmed

**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup> September 2022

**Time:** 09:30

**Venue:** Virtually via MS Teams

### Present

#### Members

Professor Mel Austen  
Independent member

Mr Charles Banner KC  
Independent member

Ms Cath Denholm  
NatureScot

Professor Clare Fitzsimmons  
Natural England

Professor Colin Galbraith  
Independent Chair

Dr Hilary Kirkpatrick  
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Ms Aoife Martin  
NatureScot

Professor Tom Meagher  
Independent member

Professor Julian Orford  
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Professor Steve Ormerod  
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#### Attendees

Mr David Collins  
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Ms Eileen Stuart  
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Helen Wilkinson  
Natural Resources Wales

Dr Steve Wilkinson  
JNCC

### Apologies

## Members

Lord Blencathra  
Natural England

Sir David Henshaw  
Natural Resources Wales

## Attendees

Ms Ceri Davies  
Natural Resources Wales

## 1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1 Professor Galbraith welcomed members and attendees to day two of the 132<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

## 2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1 No new declarations were reported. Professor Galbraith emphasised the importance of keeping declarations up to date.

## 3. Feedback on renewables engagement event (Official-Sensitive) (Oral)

- 3.1 This item was taken in confidence.

## 4. Report from ARAC on 12<sup>th</sup> September (Official) (Presentation)

- 4.1 In summarising the key issues discussed at the ARAC meeting on 12 September, Mr Banner made the following points:
  - i. The Internal Audit plan was on track with some minor changes to timelines to take account of JNCC resourcing pressures and annual leave. The procurement audit had received a moderate rating. 14 medium priority recommendations were raised. ARAC agreed to the revision of deadlines for three outstanding audit recommendations.
  - ii. ARAC noted the service improvement from GIAA and agreed that the decision regarding tendering for the internal audit contract should be put on hold until November, when further evidence of their work would be available.
  - iii. The Significant Risks Register for 2022/23 had been revised following an ARAC risk workshop in August. Additional mitigations following the risk workshop had been added, alongside a risk narrative to explain the residual rating. ARAC noted the commitment by the CEO to enhance the presentation of risks to ARAC and the Joint Committee.
  - iv. There were no known breaches of legislation in 2021/22. ARAC noted the forthcoming Data Protection and Digital Information Bill and the implications this might have for JNCC. ARAC agreed they were content with the CEO's and ARAC Chair's declarations on compliance.
  - v. The dilapidations provision for Monkstone House had been increased to £569k following a survey by Gleeds. ARAC was reassured that the Gleeds

provision was conservative and the expectation was that the £569k would not be exceeded.

- vi. ARAC noted a draft report on a risk drilldown into devolution and divergent approaches across the UK. The majority of individuals interviewed for the drill down felt that JNCC should be more visible in the individual component parts of the UK, in particular, JNCC could make more of its 'convening' or 'orchestrating' role. A final report, post ELT discussion would be provided for discussion at the November ARAC and Joint Committee meetings.
- vii. ARAC noted a new report on financial resilience and the aim to address high levels of surplus in this financial year through a greater focus on taut and realistic business plans. At the end of July forecasts indicated JNCC was currently over planned by approximately £0.6m (2.8% of forecast income). An initial draft of the medium-term plan (fiscal strategy) alongside initial business planning work would be developed from October as new Finance team leaders joined. Refreshing the capability of the finance team, developing financial management skills across the organisation and the integration of the Business Development Team within the Finance and Planning Team were all features of the evolving plan.
- viii. ARAC were pleased to see that assurance across the organisation at Q1 was good. Fruitless payments had increased but this was expected given the increase in staff travelling and rail strikes causing last minute changes to travel.
- ix. ARAC were informed that a new executive EDI champion would be appointed when Professor Maggs leaves JNCC at the end of November.
- x. ARAC noted the report on single tenders for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, with a total of 15 single tender cases exceeding £7,500 in value approved, compared to 11 in the previous year. This represented 21% of all contracts let and a cost of £314k. The procurement audit had raised issues to be addressed in the approval and documentation of single tenders. A more robust process to challenge cases was being implemented, which included intervention by the Governance Team and ARAC members as required.
- xi. ARAC agreed to postpone the drill down on fiscal strategy with Mr Reader providing peer review and advice on the developing strategy. ARAC agreed to bring forward the drill down into environmental performance to Q3. The learning and development drill down will now take place in Q4, to be completed jointly by Professor Austen and Ms Balmer. ARAC agreed to undertake a risk drill down into the communications area in Q1 2023/24, focussing on recommendations from the recent internal audit.
- xii. ARAC noted the excellent relationship between JNCC and NAO. The 2021/22 Annual Report and Accounts was prepared in line with the required deadlines and was laid before parliament on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022.

- 4.2 Committee thanked Mr Banner for an informative presentation. Members **noted** the update regarding the risk drill downs, the financial position and the increasing level of staff turnover. Members noted the need to consolidate current staffing levels to deliver programmes of work, following a period of increasing staffing levels. The civil service FTE challenge and the expected fiscal event would impact on JNCC's budget and headcount, so a tight rein on recruitments and using fixed term appointments judiciously was required. Members asked that the



Executive make effective use of batch recruitments, making use of centres for doctoral training for filling the pipeline of staff we can recruit in the future.

- 4.3 Members discussed the cost-of-living crisis, noting that this would fall under the agenda of the new People Committee. Members noted the cost of heating JNCC's offices was ring-fenced in the partnership agreement with the Government Property Agency, but this was an annual agreement that would be subject to increases in the future. Members noted the Executive's package of measures to help staff with the cost of living. These included: -
- i. Pay remit up to the maximum of the Cabinet Office's pay constraints.
  - ii. Amended bonus scheme so payments can be made before Christmas.
  - iii. Financial advice for staff.
  - iv. Teams channel for sharing saving ideas.
  - v. Free tea and coffee in JNCC offices.
  - vi. Sanitary protection products in JNCC toilets.
  - vii. Flexible working.

## 5. Reports from thematic sub-groups (Official) (Oral)

- 5.1 *Marine sub-group*: Professor Austen confirmed that the group has met twice since the last Joint Committee meeting. The group has seen the draft of the roadmap.
- 5.2 *International sub-group*: Professor Ormerod confirmed the group has met three times and meetings have focussed on strategic business.
- 5.3 *UK Coordination sub-group*: The group has met twice. Another meeting to catch-up with members unable to attend the last meeting will be added to diaries. The group has focussed on the strategy document.
- 5.4 The People Committee will report to the Joint Committee from November 2022. Work to integrate the Remuneration Committee into the People Committee is currently underway. The People Committee will report to the Joint Committee at each meeting.

## 6. Performance report for Q1 2022/23 (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 22 37I)

6.1 This item was taken in confidence.

## 7 Half year review of Joint Committee working objectives (Official) (JNCC 22 38P)

7.1 Mrs Quince introduced the item. The working objectives had been agreed at an intersessional meeting in April where a request to have a mid-year check in was raised. Mid-year comments will be captured, and an updated document will be circulated to members after the meeting.

7.2 Members provided the following review of the working objectives for 2022/23:

- i. Objective 1: *Monitor, advise and support the organisation during and after the Covid-19 pandemic*
  - Members agreed they were content with the progress made on this objective. Issues relating to the cost-of-living crises will be monitored throughout the winter months. Members noted that work to ensure a successful transition to Quay House was ongoing.
- ii. Objective 2: *Strategic planning and delivery*
  - Work on this objective was ongoing but good progress had been made. The intertwining of climate change and nature needed to be embraced. The need to further engage Defra and the Devolved Administrations was discussed. It was agreed that Professor Galbraith, Professor Orford, Dr Harper, and Dr Kirkpatrick should meet to discuss engagement with ministers when the Committee meets in Northern Ireland in June 2023.
- iii. Objective 3: *Risk management*
  - This area had significantly improved, with the Committee owning risk. Volunteers were requested to assist with risk drill downs.
  - Updates on ongoing work to exit Monkstone House and move into Quay House will be provided as available.
  - Members discussed the need to acknowledge when risks are superseded or change in nature.
  - It was confirmed that Defra approval to purchase a new corporate system had been received.
- iv. Objective 4: *Delivery management*
  - The need to reflect on how this related across governments was raised.
- v. Objective 5: *External relations*
  - Further work is required to more fully engage with the NGO sector.
  - Working relationships between statutory bodies are productive.

- vi. Objective 6: *Providing scientific direction and quality assurance*
  - Work towards this objective is being completed through the strategy update and the Chair's overview of SSSI sign off.
- vii. Objective 7: *Financial resilience*
  - Members agreed the work of ARAC is contributing to this objective.
- viii. Objective 8: *Advice and CEO direction*
  - Dr Harper confirmed the Committee is providing appropriate support and guidance.
- ix. Objective 9: *Governance*
  - Good feedback had been received regarding JNCC's governance from ARAC members and the Defra Relationship Team.
  - The need to implement the Committee Engagement programme was raised.
- x. Objective 10: *Committee cohesion*
  - Members agreed the Committee is cohesive and new members commented on the effectiveness of the support provided by the Governance Team.

7.3 Committee **discussed** input to the working objectives at the mid-year point and agreed they were content with progress so far.

Action point(s)
AP08 Professor Galbraith, Dr Harper, Dr Kirkpatrick, and Professor Orford to consider wider engagement with colleagues in Northern Ireland.

## 8 Joint Committee forward programme (Official) (JNCC 22 39D)

- 8.1 Committee **confirmed** they were content with the proposed forward programme.
- 8.2 The intersessional meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> October will focus on the strategy. The strategy launch is expected to take place next year in Quay House with stakeholders.
- 8.3 Details about the launch of the Nature Positive 2030 statement in November will be provided to members as they become available.
- 8.4 Committee **discussed** the forward programme and noted the list of engagement event themes and dates and locations of future meetings.

## 9 Any Other Business (Official) (Oral)

- 9.1 Professor Orford raised the involvement of JNCC in discussions around environmental concerns such as climate change and the need for JNCC to be

involved with these conversations. It was agreed that a substantive discussion on this should be scheduled for a future meeting and Professor Galbraith agreed to discuss this with Professor Orford.

- 9.2 A request to change the name of Quay House to make it a national building rather than city specific has been given to Peterborough City Council. An update will be provided when a response is received.

Action point(s)
AP09 Professor Galbraith and Professor Orford to discuss Joint Committee involvement in discussions around environmental concerns such as climate change.