



Joint Nature Conservation Committee 119th Meeting Minutes Confirmed

Date: 6 June 2019

Time: 08.45

Venue: The Park Avenue Hotel, 158 Holywood Road, Belfast, BT4 1PB

Present

Professor Mel Austen
Independent member

Mr Charles Banner
Independent member

Professor Ian Bateman
Independent member

Ms Cath Denholm
Scottish Natural Heritage

Professor Colin Galbraith
Independent member

Professor Chris Gilligan
Independent Chair

Dr Hilary Kirkpatrick
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Professor Stephen Ormerod
Natural Resources Wales

Professor Howard Platt (items 2 –11)
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Professor Marian Scott
Independent member

Professor Michael Winter
Natural England

In attendance

Mr Colin Armstrong
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Chris Brooks
JNCC

Mr Mike Evans
Natural Resources Wales

Dr John Goold
JNCC

Dr Tim Hill
Natural England

Professor Christine Maggs
JNCC

Mr Bev Nichols (Items 12-22)
JNCC

Mrs Tracey Quince
JNCC

Mr Paul Rose
JNCC

Mrs Sally Thomas
Scottish Natural Heritage

Mr Henk van Rein (Items 5 and 7)
JNCC

Dr Steve Wilkinson (Item 16)
JNCC

Dr James Williams (item 17)
JNCC

Mr Marcus Yeo
JNCC

Apologies

Members

Lord Blencathra
Natural England

Dr Mike Cantlay
Scottish Natural Heritage

Sir David Henshaw
Natural Resources Wales

Attendees

Ms Helen Anderson
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Ms Ceri Davies
Natural Resources Wales

Dr Sara McGuckin
Northern Ireland Environment Agency

1. Closed session

- 1.1 There are no minutes for this item.

2. Chairman's opening remarks

- 2.1 Professor Gilligan welcomed everyone to the 119th meeting and reflected on the engagement event the previous day, noting the high-quality of the presentations.
- 2.2 Since the last meeting in March, Professor Gilligan had written to the Defra minister Thérèse Coffey regarding the proposed cuts to JNCC's budget for 2019/20 and the unintended consequences for the devolved administrations. A positive reply had been received from the minister, with the eventual cut being less than originally proposed.
- 2.3 Dr Goold informed members that he had provided advice to the Defra Secretary of State on the environmental implications of deep-sea mineral extraction.
- 2.4 Members were informed that Dr Diana Mortimer (JNCC) and Dr Ruth Waters (Natural England) had been appointed to work on the Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity.
- 2.5 Professor Gilligan informed members that a member of JNCC staff, Dora Iantosca, had recently attended a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in recognition of 25 years exemplary service.

3. Declaration of interests

- 3.1 No new declarations were made. Professor Gilligan declared receipt of funding from the Department for International Development in relation to work undertaken at Cambridge University.

4. Confidential minutes of the March 2019 meeting (JNCC 19 16)

- 4.1 The minutes of the March meeting were confirmed.

5 Matters arising (JNCC 19 17)

- 5.1 One matter arising relating to the science audit was discussed. Professor Maggs had identified the Marine Monitoring and Evidence Team (MME) to pilot a follow-through of strategic issues raised in the science audit with a member of the Joint Committee as a 'critical friend'. Professor Scott had met and responded to a request by the MME team for advice on a specific technical issue concerning statistics and data management. In discussion, the Committee agreed on the need to develop and implement a strategic programme to address common themes emerging from the science audit and to pre-empt problems by identifying future science needs. Professor Galbraith agreed to provide assistance, with additional help from other members welcomed.
- 5.2 The Committee noted the report of outstanding actions in Annex 1. Members were informed that the research questions (AP01) of the June 2018 meeting would be finalised and presented to the Committee in September.

Action point(s)
AP01 Professor Maggs to develop a strategic programme to address common themes emerging from the science audit, in consultation with Committee members
AP02 Professor Maggs to present the final list of JNCC research questions to the September Joint Committee meeting.

6 Chief Executive's report on topical issues (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 18)

- 6.1 This item was taken in confidence.

7 Report from Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Sub-Group (Official) (Oral report)

- 7.1 Professor Austen, Chair of the MPA Sub-Group, gave an update on recent activity.
- 7.2 The Sub-Group had not met since the last Joint Committee meeting in March. Professor Austen noted the recent designation by Defra of an additional tranche of 41 Marine Conservation Zones which substantially completed the MPA network in English waters. The designation was the culmination of ten years work. Members congratulated the staff involved.

8. Report from ARAC (oral)

- 8.1. In summarising the key issues discussed at the ARAC meeting on 5 June, Professor Galbraith informed the Committee that:

- i. best practice from JNCC's ARAC had been shared with Natural England. Links with other country body ARACs would be established shortly;
- ii. a Defra-wide GDPR implementation audit had been discussed with a moderate assurance rating achieved;
- iii. findings from a recent follow-up of audit recommendation implementation had been disappointing. Directors will be held accountable for implementation;
- iv. the opinion for 2018/19 of the head of internal audit was moderate assurance, meaning that there is a sound system of internal control, but some improvements are required to enhance the effectiveness of control;
- v. the internal audit plan for 2019/20 would cover risk management, assurance framework and corporate governance. ARAC welcomed a three-year rolling plan going forward;
- vi. management had agreed to consider the risk appetite in the data security area to ensure it had been set at an appropriate level;
- vii. implementation of a new time recording system was on hold. ARAC had agreed to keep a watching brief;
- viii. the Annual Report and Accounts had received an unqualified opinion. Four audit recommendations had been made by NAO and accepted by management. ARAC recommended the Company Board approve the accounts, subject to Ministerial clearance;
- ix. ARAC nominated Nigel Reader to drill down into the detail behind the top two risks with management, and report back to the next meeting;
- x. ARAC was pleased that JNCC had recently become a disability confident employer and that the greening groups in Aberdeen and Peterborough continued to adopt new initiatives; and
- xi. ARAC had agreed to seek a second external member with business and/or IT skills.

8.2 Professor Galbraith concluded the item by asking members to email him with any suggestions for the second external member position.

9. Annual report from ARAC (Official) (JNCC 19 19)

9.1. The report was introduced by Professor Galbraith who explained that it focuses on key outputs from ARAC over the past 12 months. Professor Galbraith welcomed members' input into the work of ARAC going forward.

9.2 The Committee noted the report and in discussion made the following comments:

- i. the report provided a clear overview of the status of internal controls and governance in the organisation, and presented the constructive challenge ARAC undertakes; and
- ii. the list of matters considered by ARAC showed the breadth of its remit.

9.3 In conclusion the Committee **discussed** and **noted** an excellent report with a user-friendly format. Professor Galbraith thanked Mrs Quince for production of the report and thanked ARAC members for their continued support and assistance.

Action point(s)

AP05 Mrs Quince to add a contents list to the ARAC annual report for 2019/20.

10 Report from Chief Scientists Group (Official-Sensitive) JNCC 19 20

10.1 This item was taken in confidence.

11 External factors affecting JNCC (Official) (JNCC 19 21)

11.1 Mr Yeo introduced the item and invited comments.

11.2 Ms Denholm reported that the Scottish First Minister had declared a climate emergency in April. Francesca Osowska, SNH Chief Executive, had given the Peter Wilson lecture at the Royal Society Edinburgh where she had set out the challenges and opportunities on how nature should be at the heart of decision making in Scotland. SNH had recently launched a two-year Biodiversity Challenge Fund; funding of up to £2 million has been made available to support large-scale projects that increase the health and resilience of the natural environment. Scotland will host a sustainability conference for national and regional governments next March/April which will contribute to preparations for the 2020 Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in China.

11.3 Dr Kirkpatrick reported that there was still no government in Northern Ireland following the collapse of the power-sharing agreement.

11.4 Professor Winter informed members that Natural England (NE) and JNCC were working together on communications around the MCZ designation referred to in Professor Austen's report on the work of the MPA sub-group. Following the legal challenge from Wild Justice, general licences for the control of wild birds had been revoked; new licenses will shortly be issued. SNH and NRW were keeping a watching brief over developments in England and had sought legal advice on their own positions.

11.5 Professor Ormerod informed members that the Welsh Government had also declared a climate change emergency at the end of April. Natural Resources Wales had written to the Cabinet Secretary, Lesley Griffiths, specifying the help NRW can offer to address climate change. There is an opportunity to move environmental issues up the agenda, including peatland restoration, de-carbonisation and deforestation. Following the consultation 'Brexit and our Land', a new sustainable farming scheme will be announced by Lesley Griffiths. A recruitment exercise to appoint a new Chair of NRW is underway with interviews taking place in early July. Professor Ormerod had recently been appointed Deputy Chair of NRW.

11.6 In conclusion, the Committee **noted** the reports from around the table and acknowledged the value of being kept well briefed.

12 JNCC Business Plan for 2019/20 (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 22)

12.1 This item was taken in confidence.

13 Performance report for year ending 31 March 2019 (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 23)

13.1 This item was taken in confidence.

14 Update on JNCC's EU exit activities (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 24)

14.1 This item was taken in confidence.

15 Developing a new JNCC strategy (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 25)

15.1 This item was taken in confidence.

16 A strategic approach to income generation in JNCC (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 26)

16.1 This item was taken in confidence.

17 International reporting (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 27)

17.1 This item was taken in confidence.

18 Article 12 Birds Directive report (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 28)

18.1 This item was taken in confidence.

19 Joint Committee working objectives for 2019/20 (Official) (JNCC 19 29)

19.1 Mrs Quince introduced the item explaining that the paper presented the draft working objectives for 2019/20. The objectives included tasks identified at the Joint Committee meeting in March to further increase the Committee's effectiveness.

19.2 The Committee **discussed** and **agreed** the working objectives for 2019/20 without amendment.

20 Joint Committee forward programme (Official) (JNCC 19 30)

20.1 Members noted the forward programme.

21 Any other business

21.1 No further business was discussed. The next meeting of the Joint Committee would be in JNCC's offices in Aberdeen on 12 September.