



**The one hundred and forty-fourth meeting of the
Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 9 and 10 September
2025 in Peterborough**

**Paper JNCC 25 47P: The MEA landscape: shifting priorities
for JNCC?**

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

The MEA landscape: shifting priorities for JNCC?

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1. Overview

1.1 This paper is a high-level overview of JNCC's work on Multilateral Agreements (MEAs), and with Multilateral Environmental Organisations (MEOs) and other fora. It sets out our current role, the increasing demand from UK Government for this work, and the decreasing funding provided. Given these circumstances, JNCC must prioritise its work on MEAs and MEOs to ensure that government funds are being spent in the most efficient way possible, and that JNCC is aligning our efforts to maximise impact and deliver our strategy. The Joint Committee is asked to consider the various pressures and the direction of the organisation, and to provide comment on the approach JNCC is taking to this prioritisation exercise. Committee is asked to review the paper with the following 4 questions in mind:

- i. Are we considering the right strategic priorities in diversifying the portfolio?
- ii. Who are the critical stakeholders to involve, and what are the best ways to engage them in this process that elicits maximum value while creating the least burden to stakeholders?
- iii. Are these the right criteria for prioritisation? Are there any missing, or any that we can disregard to simplify the process?
- iv. What is Committee's view on how should we engage with the EU/Europe?

2. Background

2.1 JNCC's International Directorate provides expert advice on a wide range of MEAs, MEOs, and other fora. This includes real-time advice towards negotiations at Conferences of Parties (COPs) and other meetings, with JNCC staff embedded within the UK Government negotiation teams. JNCC also advises the UK and devolved governments and the governments of the Overseas Territories (OTs), and Crown Dependencies (CDs) on their collective and individual implementation of the commitments agreed to at international meetings.

- 2.2 Currently, JNCC is supporting approximately 25 agreements and other processes to varying degrees. Please see Annex 1 for further detail. Our engagement in these is central to the achievement of nearly all of JNCC's strategic priorities as set out in 'Together for Nature', especially 'Respond to the Global Biodiversity Crisis', 'Advise on Policy to Progress Nature Recovery', and 'Integrate Nature into Decisions'.
- 2.3 Our work covers MEAs and other multilateral environmental fora:
- 2.3.1 MEAs are international treaties among a number of countries focused on addressing shared environmental challenges, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity or the Paris Agreement. They include agreements of global scope, regional scope, as well as agreements between smaller numbers of countries, such as agreements among range states.
- 2.3.2 Examples of other multilateral environmental organisations and other fora are the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which conducts scientific and policy research on issues of biodiversity and ecosystem services, or the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which is a multilateral environmental fund that provides grants and blended finance for environmental projects in low-income countries.
- 2.4 The functions of JNCC in supporting multilateral environmental agreements, organisations and other fora are:
- Support to negotiations – expert advice to support the development of the UK's negotiating positions in multilateral environmental fora.
 - Representation – we represent the UK on expert groups, committees and working groups.
 - Engagement – we support the UK's devolved governments and the governments of the OTs and CDs to engage with MEIs, including in contributing to the UK's MEI negotiating positions.
 - Report – we provide expert advice to support implementation and reporting by the UK countries, OTs, and CDs, and elsewhere as appropriate.
 - Evidence – we produce transboundary evidence products to support the development & implementation of MEIs.
 - Implementation – we deliver and agree common products and standards to conserve and manage the environment.
 - Coordination – we collaborate with other countries to develop a coordinated approach to common challenges.

3. A Diversifying and Growing Portfolio

- 3.1 In recent years, JNCC's portfolio of multilateral work has been growing in response to increasing asks from sponsors, the widening scope of JNCC's expertise and interest, and a growing suite of agreements and other fora. There are several multilateral environmental agreements, organisations and other fora where JNCC invests a significant amount of staff time, raising questions about the relative proportion of time spent on the various fora in relation to impact.

- 3.2 Taking a strategic approach to our multilateral work enables us to make informed decisions regarding new work we take on, how we prioritise the time of our employees, and what pieces of work deliver the best value for money.
- 3.3 There are several areas where JNCC could add value, but where we currently are not engaged. This is particularly true given the cross-sectoral nature of the Global Biodiversity Framework and the increasing acknowledgement of biodiversity in other multilateral activities.
- 3.4 As JNCC's strategic scope has expanded, there are opportunities for JNCC to provide science-based advice to create impact across a wider range of multilateral environmental agreements, organisations and other fora. Please see Annex 2 for a non-comprehensive list. These may include:
 - 3.4.1 UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement: JNCC is well placed to support the UK delegation through provision of evidence and advice on the role nature can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change.
 - 3.4.2 SDGs: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development set global targets for ending poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality, spurring economic growth, and tackling climate and nature loss. The SDGs and their component targets are set for 2030, and they may be extended to or renegotiated for 2045. JNCC could advise UK negotiators on the relevance of nature and biodiversity to every goal by emphasising the value they provide to human health and well-being, food and water security, and more.
 - 3.4.3 Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution: There is currently a legally-binding instrument on plastic pollution in development, though the recent meeting in Geneva failed to reach agreement. The negotiations are expected to continue. Given the impact of plastic pollution on biodiversity, JNCC could advise on UK negotiating positions regarding these matters, and on subsequent implementation in the 4 countries, UK OTs and CDs, and Official Development Assistance countries through our expertise on the pollution-climate-biodiversity-health nexus.
 - 3.4.4 Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ): Also known as the High Seas Treaty, BBNJ is an international agreement on conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, covering more than 60% of the planet. JNCC could advise on UK negotiating positions, expanding JNCC's impact beyond UK and UK OT and CD waters.
- 3.5 In recent months, the UK has signalled a shift in its stance towards Europe. Greater emphasis is being placed on shared interests, mutual benefit, and the importance of strengthening collaboration and alignment with neighbouring countries. This is a chance to reassess our current approach and shift towards stronger, more strategic relationships.

3.5.1 European Environment Agency (EEA): JNCC previously represented the UK in engagements with the EEA but halted that activity after Brexit. The EEA are an EU Commission agency that collects evidence and provides advice on Europe's environment and climate. There is a case for rejoining.

3.5.2 'OSPAR' Regional Seas Convention for the North East Atlantic: Since leaving the European Union, coordination with neighbouring countries on marine issues has declined. OSPAR now serves as the primary mechanism for regional collaboration in adjacent marine waters.

3.5.3 Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI): The GNSBI is a regional cooperation platform launched in 2023 by nine countries bordering the Greater North Sea. JNCC is the correct body to represent the UK in this partnership but does not currently have capacity for this work.

4. A proposed approach to prioritisation of our work on multilateral agreements, organisations and other fora

4.1 In recent years, core funding for multilateral support has remained flat, in effect a real terms decrease. At the same time, requests for support have been increasing. To balance budgets, protect staff health and wellbeing, and ensure that JNCC's advice remains high quality, we must prioritise our efforts across the wide range of multilateral activities we support; we can no longer afford to deliver the same intensity of comprehensive, high-quality advice across a growing portfolio with static funding.

4.2 Initial attempts to prioritise assessed key multilateral activities against the following criteria:

- JNCC's current level of engagement.
- Relevance to 'Together for Nature' & International Roadmap.
- Impact of MEI and JNCC's contributions.
- Risks of deprioritising or disengaging.

4.3 In the time since this approach was taken, it has been recognised that these decisions are more complex than these 4 criteria are able to inform. We propose the following expanded criteria:

- Relevance to organisational goals, including government priorities, 'Together for Nature', Programme for Change, and other strategic drivers.
- Environmental/Conservation impact.
- Political and legal considerations, e.g. JNCC's statutory duties (i.e. CITES) or high-profile reporting requirements.
- Operational and resource feasibility.
- Stakeholder interest and engagement.
- Geographical relevance.
- Financial considerations.
- Synergies across JNCC's work, including other multilaterals.
- Timeframe.
- Risks of engagement and non-engagement.

4.4 Risks of Engagement or Disengagement

- 4.4.1 JNCC's multilateral work gives us the opportunity for visibility as science leaders, as well as the opportunity to have wide-reaching global impact. Disengaging from this work risks JNCC losing relevance and profile for our scientific work, reducing the impact we can have at a global scale.
- 4.4.2 Our multilateral work has made us an essential partner to Defra's International Biodiversity and Climate Directorate. Our can-do attitude and high-quality science have made us a trusted partner to whom Defra often turn for advice and support. Withdrawing support from our multilateral work may fracture our relationship with Defra, resulting in funding loss and questions about our role in international processes.
- 4.4.3 We play an essential role as convener of the four devolved governments and the UK OTs and CDs in their responses to the multilateral agreements, organisations and other fora, typically through collective goal setting and progress reporting. This is a statutory role of JNCC and should be scaled down with extreme caution.
- 4.5 The exercise should also consider ways of enhancing efficiency, for example by considering issues relevant to multiple Conventions or other multilateral bodies. For example, since the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted as a framework for action on biodiversity relevant across the United Nations and other conventions, it could provide a common starting point and organising framework for action on biodiversity.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Following agreement of an approach and the above criteria, the International Advice Team will continue assessing the range of MEAs on which we currently work and potential MEAs JNCC could support in future. Conclusions will be brought to Joint Committee.
- 5.2 Following presentation of the findings to Joint Committee, JNCC will seek to engage Defra and the devolved governments in discussions regarding funding. We will more explicitly detail the capacity under current funding and how we would prioritise that capacity, as well as the cost of additional work.

Annex 1. List of the MEAs and International Organisations on which JNCC currently advises

Common Name	Full Name
ACAP	Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels
AC-CAFF	Arctic Council - Conservation of Arctic Flora & Fauna
AEMLAP	African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan
AEWA	Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds
ASCOBANS	Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish, and North Seas
BBNJ	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (legally binding instrument under UNCLOS)
Bern	Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCAMLR	Convention on the conservation of Antarctic marine living resources
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS (Bonn)	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention)
Eurobats	Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats
G7	Group of Seven
ICES	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea
IMO	International Maritime Organisation
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IWC	International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling
OneHealth	One Health High-Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP)
OSPAR	Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
Ramsar	Convention on Wetlands of International Importance
Raptors MoU	Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (specifically the work of the International Seabed Authority)
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEP)
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
WHC	Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

Annex 2. List of the MEAs and International Organisations on which JNCC could potentially advise

Common Name	Full Name
Aarhus	Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
AC-ACAP	Arctic Council - Arctic Contaminants Action Programme
AC-PAME	Arctic Council - Protecting Arctic Marine Environment
AC-SDWG	Arctic Council - Sustainable Development Working Group
Basel	Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal
ELC	European Landscape Convention
FAO	Food and Agriculture Association
GEF	Global Environment Facility (World Bank)
INC	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on the Global Plastics Treaty
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPCWP	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution
London	Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter
LRTAP	Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution
Marpol	International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships
Pandemic Accord	WHO Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response Agreement
Rotterdam	Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals (The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs)
Stockholm	Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change