



**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 M03: Minutes of the 144th meeting of
the Joint Nature Conservation Committee**

All available papers for the one hundred and forty-fourth meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee can be found at:

<https://jncc.gov.uk/resources/1773a5f6-b6be-42fa-a224-9b697d434846>.

To view other information about the Joint Committee, including papers and minutes from other meetings, go to: <https://jncc.gov.uk/about-jncc/who-we-are/joint-committee/>.

To find out more about JNCC, go to: <https://jncc.gov.uk/about-jncc/who-we-are/>.



Minutes of the 144th meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee

The Committee members present were: David Cooper (Joint Committee Chair), Peter Unwin (Natural England), Mel Austen (Natural England), Colin Galbraith (NatureScot, online), Pete Higgins (NatureScot), Sara McCracken (CNCC), Steve Ormerod (Natural Resources Wales), Rachael Garrett (Independent), Marsha Ramroop (Independent, PCC Chair), Julia Jones (Independent), Dan Ebanks (Independent, online) and Tom Meagher (Independent).

Also in attendance were: Gemma Harper (JNCC), David Collins (JNCC), Chris Tuckett (JNCC), Beth Stoker (JNCC), Natalie Askew (JNCC), Lynn Heeley (JNCC), Tracey Quince (JNCC, 9 September only), Tracey Elliott (JNCC), Pip Day (JNCC), Rebecca Ashcroft (JNCC), Emily Songer (JNCC, 10 September only), Theresa Robinson (JNCC), Clare Whitfield (JNCC, 10 September only), Ian Mitchell (JNCC, 10 September only), Louisa Fennelly (JNCC, 10 September only), Nigel Reader, ARAC Chair), David MacLennan (NatureScot, online), Stuart MacQuarrie (NatureScot, 10 September only), Joseph Hillier (Natural England, online), Sara McGuckin (CNCC, online), Laura Bellingham (DEFRA, 10 September only, online), Marie Touchon (GYBN-UK) and Safia Salas Lopez (GYBNUK).

Apologies were received from: Rhys Jones (Natural Resources Wales), Committee member, as well as from Sallie Bailey (Natural England), Mary Lewis (Natural Resources Wales), Dave Stone (JNCC).

Day 1, 9th September, 14.00, held at The Village, Orton Longueville, Peterborough

The meeting was preceded by a closed session, attended by Committee members and the CEO only, in which confidential matters were discussed.

1. Chair's opening remarks

- 1.1 David Cooper welcomed members and attendees to the 144th meeting. He introduced Sofia Salas Lopez and Marie Touchon from the UK chapter of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN-UK).
- 1.2 David Cooper reiterated the desire to limit the use of Official-Sensitive classifications on Joint Committee papers where possible.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1 Steve Ormerod declared that he is Chairing the Welsh Government Strategic Implementation Group.

3. Minutes of previous meetings

- 3.1 No amendments were received for the draft minutes of the June meeting or for the August intersessional meetings (JNCC 25 36D, official sensitive).
- 3.2 The Committee **approved** the minutes for the June and August meetings.

4. Matters arising

- 4.1 The Committee **noted** the paper (JNCC 25 37P) and agreed that actions from the August Intersessional meeting be added to the action table. It was confirmed that all actions from the August Intersessional had been completed with the exception of those concerning provision of a Chairs briefing on Synergy and a meeting to discuss CDEL funding between Mel Austen and David Collins (AP01 and AP04).
- 4.2 Members requested that the Executive review outstanding actions from the effectiveness review and recommend whether these should now be integrated into business as usual and closed as outstanding items.
- 4.3 Chris confirmed that a review of stakeholders would take place once strategic planning has indicated the key areas of focus.
- 4.4 The Committee **agreed with** the closure of completed actions.

Action point(s)
AP01. ExCo to review the outstanding actions from the Joint Committee effectiveness review and agree whether these are now part of business as usual and can be closed.

5. CEO Report

- 5.1 Gemma Harper introduced this item and presented the paper JNCC 25 38P. She highlighted the Nature and Climate Moment, rebalancing JNCC's funding and successes in relation to JNCC's work on diversity and inclusion. Chris Tuckett provided updates on the Planning and Infrastructure bill and the Air Pollution Assessment Service (APAS).
- 5.2 The Committee **noted** the report.

6. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and People & Culture Committee (PCC) updates

- 6.1 Nigel Reader introduced the summary report (Official sensitive) from the ARAC meeting held on 2 September (online). He noted overall good progress in addressing previously identified weaknesses in financial management and other governance areas. The ARAC and Company Board meetings to approve the Annual Report and Accounts would be rescheduled because of the delays in the external audit. The National Audit Office had indicated that similar delays may occur for the 2025/26 Annual Report and Accounts meaning that they would again be laid before Parliament post-recess.
- 6.2 Julia Jones and Dan Ebanks offered their assistance to the Executive to explore opportunities to increase the value derived from data produced through JNCC work.
- 6.3 Nigel Reader's suggestion to convene a meeting of the ARAC chairs from the SNCBs was welcomed by the Committee.
- 6.4 Members **noted** the report and **confirmed** they were content to retain the new format of alert, assure and advice reporting to the Joint Committee for these meetings.

Action point(s)
AP02. Julia Jones, Dan Ebanks and Dave Stone to discuss enhancement of IT change management, patch deployment procedures and explore opportunities to increase the value derived from the data produced through JNCC work.
AP03. Nigel Reader to convene a meeting of the ARAC chairs from the SNCBs.

- 6.5 Marsha Ramroop introduced the summary report (official sensitive) from the PCC meeting held on 2 September (online) highlighting several alert points and their potential impacts. The latest People Survey showed a high participation rate but a small drop in staff's perception of overall engagement (from 68% to 64%). Key areas identified for improvement include leadership and future vision, career development and reward, and managing change while preserving organisational culture.
- 6.6 Marsha Ramroop offered to provide Committee members with Cultural Intelligence training.
- 6.7 The Committee congratulated the Executive for the Silver standard award from the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion's (ENEI) Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE).

- 6.8 Members **noted** the report and **confirmed** they were content to retain the new format.

Action point(s)
AP04. Marsha Ramroop to provide Cultural Intelligence training to Joint Committee members.
AP05. Secretariat to share People Survey results with Joint Committee.

7. Q1 Performance Report

- 7.1 The item and corresponding paper (JNCC 25 39P, Official-sensitive) were introduced by David Collins who provided a summary of the report and an update on the future direction of the Programme of Change.
- 7.2 In relation to the Programme of Change, the Committee noted the importance of staff engagement in the process and the potential for time conflicts for additional tasks.
- 7.3 The Committee **noted** the financial position and update on the Programme of Change.

8. CBD 7th National Report

- 8.1. The item and paper (JNCC 25 40I) were introduced by Ian Mitchell and Beth Stoker who provided an overview of the process for production of the Seventh national report of the UK to the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was noted that the final report should be used both to provide the UK's official input to the "stocktake" of implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to be undertaken at COP-17 and to inform further action towards the 2030 targets in the UK and across the four countries, and by relevant overseas territories and crown dependencies.
- 8.2. Members of the committee enquired about the criteria for consultation and noted the limited inclusion of academic institutions and civil society in the process. Some suggested that the process should be open for inputs from any interested party and that the draft report should be available for peer review. At the same time, resource constraints were also noted.
- 8.3. The Committee **requested** an update on the progress of the report at the December Joint Committee meeting and **advocated** that future processes should be more inclusive of stakeholders to ensure wider engagement in the preparation of the report.

Action point(s)

AP06. Beth Stoker and Natalie Askew to return to the December Joint Committee meeting with an oral update on the CBD 7th National Report.

AP07 The Committee and Executive to consider options to improve the engagement of relevant stakeholders in the preparation of future CBD reports, in light of experience with the seventh report.

9. Reports from the thematic sub-groups)

9.1. The international sub-group report (JNCC 25 21I, Official-Sensitive) was provided for information.

9.2. Committee **noted** the report.

10. Report from the Chief Scientists Group

10.1 The report (JNCC 25 42I, Official-Sensitive) was provided for information.

10.2 Committee **noted** the report.

11 Annual Report on Sustainability

11.1 The report (JNCC 25 43I) was provided for information.

11.2 Committee **noted** the report.

12 Annual Report on Health and Safety

12.1 The report (JNCC 25 44I, Official-Sensitive) was provided for information.

12.2 Committee **noted** the report.

13 Joint Committee forward programme

13.1 This paper (JNCC 25 45I) was provided for information.

13.2 Committee **noted** the forward programme.

14 Meeting review

14.1 The Committee agreed that the papers were produced to a high standard, had been well received and that adequate time was provided for discussing agenda

items. It was suggested that discussions and decisions from Joint Committee meetings be shared with staff.

14.2 The Board Observer, Theresa Robinson, provided some reflections on the meeting, noting that it is important to staff to understand the role of the Joint Committee.

14.3 GYBN-UK attendees thanked the Joint Committee for the opportunity to participate in the meeting.

15 AOB

15.1 No items were raised.

Day 2, 10 September, 9.30, held at Quay House, 2 East Station Road, Fletton Quays, Peterborough

1. Chair's opening remarks

- 1.1 David Cooper welcomed members and attendees to day 2 of the meeting introducing Laura Bellingham, Deputy Director for Trees and Landscapes at Defra.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1. No additional interests were registered.

3. Nature Narrative

- 3.1. David Cooper and Gemma Harper introduced the item and paper (JNCC 25 46P) thanking the task and finish group for their work reviewing the draft Nature Narrative.
- 3.2. The Committee discussed the updated Nature Narrative. It was noted that the primary purpose of the narrative was to support discussions with ministers, noting that the narrative would also be useful in engaging with staff and in supporting public messaging. It could provide a starting point for wider consultations in future. Members noted the importance of consistent messaging among the SNCBs.
- 3.3. Members generally welcomed the narrative relating nature to food security, water security, Climate mitigation and energy security, Climate adaptation and resilience, Culture and livelihoods and Health and well-being. Some members noted the need to connect these with impacts related to the priorities of Defra and the devolved governments such as economic growth, national security and people's wellbeing. Members also discussed the need for clarity over the term "nature" and underlined the importance of recognizing multiple dimensions of nature's value.
- 3.4. Chris Tuckett and Gemma Harper indicated that the substantive suggestions would be incorporated into the next iteration and emphasised the importance of starting to use it in communications urgently.
- 3.5. Members agreed that the Executive and the Task and Finish Group and the Executive to incorporate the comments raised in the meeting.

Action point(s)
AP08. Gemma Harper to work with Task and Finish Group to finalise Nature Narrative following input from Joint Committee members.

4. The Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) landscape: Shifting priorities

- 4.1. Beth Stoker and Natalie Askew introduced the item and paper (JNCC 25 47P).
- 4.2. The Committee **noted** that JNCC provides a vital role in supporting the UK Government in relation to the multilateral environmental agreements and other multilateral organizations and processes. While recognizing that prioritization of effort among the MEAs was necessary, this should remain a core function of JNCC. Members noted that in addition to the biodiversity-related conventions, JNCC would need to consider expanding work related to the United Nations Climate Change Committee (UNFCCC), the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), and biodiversity aspects of the negotiations towards a treaty on plastics. Members also noted the importance of working with neighbouring countries in the European region, and to consider rejoining the European Environment Agency, noting that its mandate extends beyond the European Union.

5. JNCC's Implementation programmes and projects to support the overseas territories and crown dependencies and other countries beyond the UK

- 5.1. Beth Stoker and Natalie Askew introduced this item and paper (JNCC 25 48P).
- 5.2. The Committee **commended** the work in support of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, noting that this constitutes a key part of JNCC's mandate. It welcomed the development of the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy and **noted** with regret the delay in launching the Strategy.
- 5.3. The Committee **congratulated** JNCC on the quality of its work in support of countries beyond the UK, noting that future engagement should take into account, among other things, the potential for partner organizations to also fulfil this role, the changing priorities of ODA (including by FCDO and DEFRA), the effort required to secure funding, contributions to implementation of MEAs, and the strategic value of projects for JNCC's mandate and vision.
- 5.4. The Committee highlighted the value of facilitating mutual learning among countries, including the UK and its nations, through technical cooperation.

6. UK Strategic learning discussion

- 6.1. David Cooper introduced the item and paper (JNCC 25 49P, Official-sensitive).
- 6.2. Members representing the CNCBs noted the following points during the discussion:
 - 6.2.1. Steve Ormerod highlighted that, for Wales, the greatest areas of work are aligned with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and in particular Target 3 of the GBF (“the 30x30 target”). They recognised the importance of engaging land managers and landowners in delivering the target and highlighted that assistance is required in identifying areas, and developing models, for land, freshwater, and marine environments. It was also recognised that there is a shared learning opportunity through JNCC.
 - 6.2.2. Peter Unwin and Mel Austen explained that whilst the main focus of discussion at NE Board meetings was usually national progress in England, international targets are very relevant to these discussions. It was noted that JNCC can support country nature conservation bodies (SNCBs) by raising awareness of these targets and assisting with monitoring.
 - 6.2.3. Colin Galbraith and Pete Higgins, representing Scotland, explained that whilst Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) offer a strategic framework and direction, JNCC contributes by providing data, UK context, and connections to the international agenda.
 - 6.2.4. Sara McCracken and Sara McGuckin, representing Northern Ireland, suggested that JNCC can support by offering advice on areas like the Convention on Long Range Transboundary Pollution, reinforcing the link between nature and climate, and ensuring that while target 3 was important, attention to other international targets is not overlooked.

7. AOB

- 7.1. No items were raised.

Meeting ends