Intersessional meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 17 November 2025 online via Teams

Meeting note

All available papers from the Intersessional Meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 17 November 2025 can be found at: https://jncc.gov.uk/resources/1e04641d-3b43-40f6-9534-3494d71cb0d1.

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/.

Note of Joint Committee Intersessional Meeting held on Monday 17th November 2025 via MS Teams

Joint Committee Members

Mel Austen
David Cooper
Daniel Ebanks
Colin Galbraith
Rachael Garrett (items 1-4)
Peter Higgins
Julia Jones
Rhys Jones
Steve Ormerod
Sara McCracken
Thomas Meagher
Marsha Ramroop
Peter Unwin

In attendance

Claire Callaghan
Tracey Elliott
Gemma Harper
Lynn Heeley
Chris Tuckett
Tracey Quince
Dave Stone

Apologies

Nigel Reader

1. Introduction from the Chair

- David Cooper welcomed members and attendees to the meeting.

2. Declarations of interest

- David Cooper reported that he had been appointed by the Multi-disciplinary Expert panel of IPBES as an author for the second global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

3. Q2 summary dashboard and financial position

- Chris Tuckett and Claire Callaghan introduced the item and accompanying paper (**JNCC 25 53P**).
- 15 of the 20 key milestones for the science programmes for the year are reported as green, and 5 are reported as amber. The challenge of delivering large programmes with limited staff resources and the consequent pressure on staff was noted. Members shared the concern regarding the pressure on staff.
- The Air Pollution Assessment Service (APAS) funding has been secured for this financial year and the next two financial years. Further details on this service will be provided at the December meeting.

- At the end of Q2, a circa £1.4m full-year underspend is forecast. The finance team are reviewing this and assessing potential spend against this in the current financial year. The executive team would determine the level of any unutilised funds that should be returned to Defra in good time before the end of the year. Money retained at year end would be added to reserves.
- Gemma Harper noted that re-balancing of the budget, which has been requested from Defra, would help to reduce underspend in future years. Chris Tuckett confirmed that a spending review is currently coming to an end which will set budgets for the next 3 years. It was agreed that the rationale for any decision made in relation to the underspend should be recorded.

4. Chief Scientists Group Terms of Reference

- Dave Stone and Julia Jones introduced the draft terms of references (**JNCC 25 51D**). They confirmed that members of the CSG from the CNCBs had been involved in creating them.
- The following comments/suggestions were received:
    - 1. Amend purpose of CSG to 'advance nature conservation and recovery through better coordination and generation of use of science and evidence'.
    - 3.1.b Remove last 3 words.
    - 3. include 'ensuring it feeds into management decisions.'
    - 6.1 amend Chair from JNCC to CSG Co-Chairs.
    - 6.4 Amend to show responsibility for items will sit with the CSG member leading on that item, rather than the relevant 'Chief Scientist'.
    - 6.6 replace 'regulated'.
    - 8.1 change wording to show that the Joint Committee have a role in reviewing the effectiveness of CSG.
    - Ensure that the line regarding joined-up approaches to the twin challenges of tackling climate change and biodiversity loss, does not imply that other pressures on biodiversity, such as pollution, are not important.
    - Add in a definition of 'science', encompassing that the full range of disciplines, and interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches.
    - Allow for participation and co-opting of experts from the Science Advisory Committees of the CNCBs, and other relevant expertise, as well as Joint Committee members.
    - Quorum should include 1 member from each CNCB to ensure country voice is heard.
- The Joint Committee agreed with the broad direction of the Terms of Reference for the Chief Scientist Group. It was agreed that a final version taking into account the comments above would be circulated to members once finalised

5. Hillsborough Law (Public Office Accountability Bill) JNCC 25 52I

- Tracey Quince introduced the item and confirmed that three of the provisions in the bill are relevant to JNCC: Legal Duty of Candour; Professional Duty of Candour and Offense of Misleading the Public.
- An 'Ethical Behaviour Policy would need to be created, and the staff Code of Conduct would need to be updated over the next few months. The Governance team will lead on this work.
- Nigel Reader provided comments ahead of the meeting relating to the impact for procurement and the behaviour of contractors which should be looked at as part of the policy preparation.

- Gemma noted that making JNCC's data, evidence and advice part of the public record would be an important part of the organization's response.
- Mel Austen raised the potential for collaboration among the SNCBs in implementation of these provisions. Tracey Quince offered to share details of the Defra team who will assist with implementation.

6. Country and independent member updates

Scotland

- NatureScot Corporate Plan discussions are underway with an aim to get this to the Cabinet Secretary in December.
- Work is underway for 30x30.
- The Climate Change plan and the Environment Bill are currently being debated.
- Nick Halfhide has been confirmed as CEO of NatureScot.
- The Land Reform Bill was passed on 5th November.
- Scotland recently hosted International summit meetings on beavers and on gull management.

England

- Launch of the Natural England Strategy 'Nature for growth, health and security' has taken place.
- Positive early meetings have taken place with the new Secretary of State.
- Budget pressures remain and the core budget has decreased.
- The Natural England Science Conference is taking place on 4th December in Leeds.

Northern Ireland

- The Independent Review of Environmental Governance has been published – CNCC have not been mentioned. Gemma Harper and David Cooper requested a discussion with CNCC regarding this.
- CNCC has not met so far this year, but 3 extensions have been made to existing member appointments.
- Discussions regarding the June 2026 Joint Committee meeting in Northern Ireland have started. David Cooper and Gemma Harper had a useful meeting with Minister Muir.

Wales

- A new Chair, Neil Sachdev, has been appointed.
- A new CEO is being recruited.
- The Environmental Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets Bill has passed to the next stage. This is now moving into a phase of amendments.
- An Audit Wales report on the notification of SSSI sites has been published.

Independent Members

- Dan Ebanks confirmed he had reviewed the Digital Strategy with Millie Beach and Dave Stone.

7. JNCC Update

- QQR7
    - Likely to be published this week. Duty on JNCC to coordinate list and publish every 5 years. The results will be published on the JNCC website. It is expected that no changes will be made to schedules.

8. December meeting and agenda

- David Cooper introduced the item.
- Members made the following comments:
    - Mel Austen queried the agenda timings and the ability of members to request changes. David Cooper agreed to review the agenda timings with a view to accommodating Mel's request as far as possible.
    - Pete Higgins requested consideration of travel timings when setting meeting dates/times.
    - Sara McCracken requested clarity over the purpose and requested actions from members.

Action points:

AP01 Dave Stone/Julia Jones to incorporate member comments into a revised Terms of Reference for the Chief Scientists Group and circulate this to members once it has been signed off by David Cooper.

AP02 Gemma Harper, David Cooper and Sara McCracken to meet to discuss the potential implications for JNCC of the Independent Review of Environmental Governance.

AP03 Tracey Quince to review the December meeting agenda and accommodate Mel Austen's request for changes where possible.

AP04 Paper authors to ensure purpose of papers and requested action from members is clear in papers for Joint Committee meetings.