

UK SPA & RAMSAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

22 June 2016

11:00 – 15:30, JNCC Offices, Peterborough

Approved Minutes

Attending in person

Ian Bainbridge, independent (Chair)
David Stroud, JNCC
Richard Hearn, WWT
Dave Chambers, JNCC
Nigel Buxton, SNH
Kate Jennings, RSPB
James Williams, JNCC –item 7 only

Telephone conferencing

Andy Tully, Defra
Sian Whitehead, NRW
Matt Parsons, JNCC (minutes)
Steven Dora, SG
Miranda Cooper Water Companies

Apologies

Jeremy Wilson, RSPB
Philip Eckersley, NE
Jessa Battersby, JNCC

1. Introduction and general matters

Welcome and apologies; matters for AOB; membership changes

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies were received from Jeremy Wilson (RSPB), Philip Eckersley (NE), Jessa Battersby (JNCC).

2. Minutes of last meeting; amendments & approval

The draft Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2016 were agreed subject to one change (Ian Bainbridge was incorrectly identified as SNH when in fact he chaired the group as an independent).

Third SPA network Review - progress reports of Phase 1 and Phase 2

3. Phase 1 – update

3.1 Events since last meeting

3.1.1 *Bird Study* SPI paper

David Stroud relayed the good news that, following resubmission after the February meeting and consideration by a second set of referees, the manuscript had been “accepted subject to minor revisions”. These minor revisions were submitted recently. Thanks were expressed to David Stroud, Jerry Wilson and the other authors for this achievement.

Action 1: David Stroud to circulate final manuscript of the *Bird Study* paper to the SPARSWG, for information.

3.1.2 Finalisation and sign-off of Phase I report

The inter-agency Chief Scientists’ Group (CSG) considered the report at its May 2016 meeting, in advance of what was expected to be Joint Committee sign-off at its June 2016 meeting.

However, CSG had some concerns that they wanted more time to consider before clearing the report from the SNCB perspective. Consequently, Joint Committee did not consider the Phase I report; a timetable for sign-off is at present unclear. CSG were content with method and assessments in the report but were concerned especially about the resource and operational implications to SNCB.

Ian Bainbridge expressed the disappointment of the group at this unwelcome delay; the conclusion of a lengthy discussion was that the advice contained in the report discharged but did not exceed the terms of reference of SPAR. Furthermore, SPARSWG agreed that such advice could be variously heeded or ignored by government and that the key role for SPARSWG in relation to Phase I was to advise on science and resultant scientific priorities, not on operational considerations; those could be a matter for subsequent Phases.

David Stroud drafted a circulated Memo (*How the UK SPA network is monitored*) on the context surrounding the monitoring section in the Phase I report. The group reviewed this memo and were content that it would represent an appropriate clarification that would hopefully satisfy CSG’s concerns. However, they were agreed that this amendment should not set a precedent for “opening up” the whole report. There was agreement that the “good news” elements of the state of bird monitoring in the UK should be emphasised in the report; for example identifying that a good part of Common Standards Monitoring would be delivered by the ongoing monitoring already undertaken; also conveying the improvements that could be achieved with relatively little additional resource.

Action 2: David Stroud to revise the monitoring memo, circulate to SPARSWG for comment and incorporate into a revised final draft of the Phase 1 report.

Action 3: David Stroud to include relevant information from the memo in a briefing note to CSG in response to their comments.

Action 4: Ian Bainbridge to write to CSG on behalf of SPARSWG to clarify the role of SPARSWG according to its ToR and communicate the conclusions reached by SPARSWG.

4. Phase 2: update

Dave Chambers updated the group with reference to the paper and spreadsheet circulated. Since the last meeting progress had been made in developing work for batches including non-breeding gulls, non-breeding waterbirds, breeding seabirds, and various single species accounts. Eight species accounts had been signed off by Executive Steering Group. It was noted some species that were the subject of the marine sufficiency assessment need to be identified as such in the Phase II outputs.

Dave stressed the importance for UK coordination of developing a “data exchange format” so that individual country’s site list can efficiently be input into a UK database.

There was a point of clarification raised under item 4 in the Phase II summary report related to which species to consider first: in an email David Stroud identified some points that could be part of such a prioritisation process but it was not (yet) a “report” or formally agreed.

It was recognised, given his retirement this July, that there was a need for JNCC to provide staff resource to continue the kind of role that Dave Chambers had undertaken over the last few years. Kate Jennings and the group thanked Dave for his valuable contribution over the last few years.

Action 5: JNCC to decide how it will provide project management staffing to oversee Phase II work and report to next meeting.

Matt Parsons asked if, in the consideration of possible areas to “make good” insufficiencies identified in Phase I, the suite of possible marine sites in the pipeline had been considered. They had not.

Kate Jennings asked if/how site management issues –as opposed to new sites- were being addressed as potential solutions to insufficiencies. Ian Bainbridge thought that the Phase II Working Group should look into this at a forthcoming meeting.

Action 6: Nigel Buxton to collate a summary of the marine sites and likely constituent features “in the pipeline” across all UK countries and make available to Phase II working group.

Action 7: Dave Chambers and Kate Jennings to canvass dates for the next Phase II working group meeting.

Action 8: David Stroud to provide a collation of issues that the Phase II working group will need to address in coming months.

Other issues

5. Marine SPA sufficiency assessment; update

Matt Parsons outline the expected process and timetable for consultation with the SPAR SWG. It was expected that this would happen late August through September 2016, later than anticipated. Defra and the devolved administrations were expecting a consultation with the constituent organisations represented on the SPARSWG rather than asking for a collective view from the group. Consultation would be on the

underpinning scientific aspects of methods, draft results and conclusions reached, as well as input of expert opinion to the site provision index calculations.

Kate Jennings expressed her frustration at the continued delay SPARSWG had experienced in achieving significant engagement with the marine sufficiency assessment.

Ian Bainbridge offered a collective SPARSWG discussion and view on the marine sufficiency assessment, as part of the consultation, including tailoring (putting forward to mid-late September) their next meeting date to align with the consultation.

Action 9: MP to canvass SPARSWG with possible dates for next meeting, if helpful to align with consultation on marine sufficiency.

6. Future chairing of SPAR SWG

Andy Tully introduced the discussion, noting that Ian Bainbridge's tenure as Chair would end with the completion of Phase I of the Review, which had, in effect, been discharged. He said that while there had been some discussion at earlier meetings, no firm conclusions had been reached about the process to find a new chair, other than that Defra selects the chair.

No firm decision was sought at the meeting, rather Defra wanted to seek views. This led to a discussion about the future role of the group. Ian Bainbridge canvassed opinion on what should be the future role of the group. Kate Jennings thought there was indeed a role, including Phase II, input into marine work, and other issues. Nigel Buxton added that range sufficiency is an additional task for the group to discuss. Ian Bainbridge thought that a greater integration of "terrestrial" and "marine" work was necessary, a role which the group could perform.

There was discussion of the original criteria for chairing when the group was started. Ian Bainbridge noted that a Government or independent chair was specified, not one from SNCB, though a person in a non-executive role in SNCB could be possible. Kate Jennings thought that RSPB would not be appropriate in this role, though perhaps a board or council member would be.

Nigel Buxton noted that a key strength of the group was its diverse membership, including for example the water companies and Forestry Commission alongside those who have taken a leading role on sub-groups. He noted an action from the November 2015 meeting to review membership of the group.

Andy Tully noted that the Executive Steering Group could potentially be dissolved on completion of Phase I and future governance resumed through a reinvigorated UK Natura 2000/Ramsar Steering Group.

Andy Tully extended his thanks, echoed by the whole group, to Ian Bainbridge for his chairing of the group over 15 years, comprising some 40 meetings.

Action 10: Andy Tully to further consider plans for a new chair for SPARSWG and to email the group with his proposals, possible for discussion at the next meeting.

7. Starting to plan for next round of Article 12 reporting

David Stroud informed the group that there was increasing clarity emerging from the Commission regarding the nature and timing of the 2013-18 round of reporting. The final timetable would be agreed this October for an expected report in October 2019. However, a six month period of consultation and sign-off was anticipated to be necessary, meaning the report would need to be ready by March 2019. A “lessons learned” paper to the interagency Chief Scientist’s Group would be delivered very soon; it was expected that an advisory group would be initiated to take forward the work.

Steven Dora asked whether plans were being taken forward (for JNCC) to deliver and country breakdown for the next report. David Stroud said while this could be a very valuable addition, it would require significant additional resources which currently are not available. However, were resources available from agencies to contract such work, JNCC could help facilitate such country reports.

James Williams gave a presentation on provisional plans for the next cycle of reporting, including Convention on Migratory Species, Ramsar and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

8. Any Other Business

Regarding country developments, Nigel Buxton summarised progress from Scotland on Phase II, primarily to do with terrestrial species, explaining that the group will see outputs from this work in due course. Sian Whitehead had been inputting into Phase II work and noted that a paper would be soon put to Welsh Government on the potential implications of Phase II.

Kate Jennings noted that an Annual Report of SPARSWG work was due. Ian Bainbridge agreed, suggesting that a report detailing progress up to the end of 2016 would be appropriate.

Action 11: David Stroud to draft the 2016 Annual Report and circulate for comment.

Richard Hearn asked what sort of publicity was being planned around the publication of the Phase I report, when the time comes? David Stroud replied that this was still being worked out. Nigel Buxton noted that, given the importance, implications and resources devoted to the work, that SNH would wish to see appropriate publicity.

9. Date and venue of next meeting

Previously identified as 22nd November 2016, though this would be reviewed and possibly brought forward to September once Matt Parsons has canvassed the group for dates to try to align with timing of consultation on marine sufficiency.