



Joint Nature Conservation Committee 118th Meeting Minutes Confirmed

Date: 14 March 2019	Time: 08.45
Venue: Natural Resources Wales, Maes y Ffynnon, Penrhosgarnedd, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 2DW	

Present

Professor Mel Austen
Independent member

Professor Ian Bateman
Independent member

Lord Blencathra
Natural England

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 Michael Winter
Natural England

In attendance

Chris Brooks
JNCC

Ms Ceri Davies
Natural Resources Wales

Mr Mike Evans
Natural Resources Wales

Dr John Goold
JNCC

Dr Tim Hill
Natural England

Professor Christine Maggs
JNCC

Mrs Tracey Quince
JNCC

Mr Paul Rose
JNCC

Mrs Sally Thomas
Scottish Natural Heritage

Mr Marcus Yeo
JNCC

Apologies

Members

Mr Charles Banner
Independent member

Dr Mike Cantlay
Scottish Natural Heritage

Professor Howard Platt
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Professor Marian Scott
Independent member

Attendees

Colin Armstrong
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Dr Steve Gibson
JNCC

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 meeting. Members were informed that Dr Goold had recently been awarded an honorary senior lectureship at the University of Aberdeen in recognition of strengthening links between the University and JNCC.
- 2.2 The Committee were informed that to mark International Women's Day, Professor Maggs had been named in an ENDS report as one of the top 10 women in the environment sector.
- 2.3 Professor Gilligan had recently attended a staff open meeting in the Peterborough office and had reflected on the changes since his 100-day statement in 2014. He has also met with the Permanent Secretary in Wales and had written to The Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Minister of State for International Development, with a view to exploring opportunities for JNCC and the Department for International Development.
- 2.4 Members were informed of the recent publication of Nature News, the JNCC science bulletin and a paper co-authored by James Williams for the *Science* journal on *Understanding the rich social lives of animals benefits international conservation efforts*
<http://science.sciencemag.org/lookup/doi/10.1126/science.aaw3557>.

3. Declaration of interests

- 3.1 No new declarations were made. Members were reminded of the need to keep their interests up to date.

4. Confidential minutes of the November 2018 meeting (JNCC 19 02)

- 4.1 The minutes of the November meeting were confirmed.

5 Matters arising (JNCC 19 03)

- 5.1 There were no matters arising.
- 5.2 The Committee noted the report of outstanding actions in Annex 1 and their attention was drawn to Annex 2 which contained the final version of the principles endorsed by the Wider Markets Sub-Group.

6 Chief Executive's report on topical issues (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 04)

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 assessed scientific advice on two Scottish deep-sea marine reserves to be considered for designation in 2020, specifically: the Faroe-Shetland Channel possible marine protected area (pMPA) located in the deep waters to the north of Scotland, and the Rockall Trough pMPA located in the deep waters to the west of Scotland. The Sub-Group considered:

- i. Data Confidence Assessments and Ecological Overview Documents prepared for each of the two pMPAs;
- ii. a methods document which had been produced, outlining how JNCC short-listed the proposed protected features under consideration for designation within the pMPAs; and
- iii. a proposed boundary amendment concerning the North-east Faroe-Shetland Channel MPA, which JNCC recommends takes place should the Faroe-Shetland Channel pMPA be taken forward by Scottish Government for designation.

7.3 The Sub-Group were content that the evidence presented had been reviewed appropriately. Confidence levels had been applied in a defensible manner and the ecological importance of the sites had been identified. The Committee gave their consent for Professor Gilligan to sign-off the advice.

8. Report from ARAC (oral)

8.1. In summarising the key issues discussed at the ARAC meeting on 13 March, Professor Galbraith informed the Committee that:

- i. an external member with business skills would be sought, subject to further discussion with the executive;
- ii. further opportunities for sharing information and experience with ARACs in the devolved administrations would be pursued;
- iii. an internal audit plan for 2019/20 had been proposed by the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA). Development of a plan for the next three years was ongoing;

- iv. a new Head of Internal Audit (HIA) would be appointed shortly, to be mentored by Nathan Paget (interim JNCC HIA) for one year. The planned 14% increase in the cost of internal audit services would now be absorbed by GIAA for the next three years;
 - v. four audit reports had been discussed. An advisory report on the transformation programme and a follow-up report on the evidence quality assurance area were not subject to an audit opinion. A report on income generation had received substantial assurance and a report on key financial controls had received limited assurance. The audit focus of the latter had been on new system enhancements so there was no additional risk to current systems;
 - vi. there was strong support for JNCC's approach to risk. ARAC had asked that risks relating to health and safety and staff welfare be reflected in the risk appetite matrix separate to culture. ARAC agreed to include a discussion on holistic risk management at their June meeting;
 - vii. the first draft of the Governance Statement and a paper on information risk had been discussed. ARAC were content with both, and considered that the level of assurance provided on information risk and cyber security was appropriate; and
 - viii. mitigation measures to address staff internal churn and external turnover were agreed with reporting on the effects of the measures to be presented at an ARAC meeting later in the year.
- 8.2 Committee was informed that evidence quality assurance was now part of the overall governance framework with support for monitoring and reporting provided by the Governance Manager.
- 8.3 The Committee welcomed the report and in discussion made the following comments:
- i. the executive should ensure appropriate due diligence is undertaken on contractors and partners, especially as JNCC seeks to work with new partners; and
 - ii. The role of ARAC was evolving in the support it provided to the Joint Committee, so there were opportunities for the Joint Committee to choose areas for ARAC to look at in more detail.

9. Report from Chief Scientists Group (CSG) (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 05)

- 9.1. This item was taken in confidence.

9 External factors affecting JNCC (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 06)

10.1 This item was taken in confidence.

10 Update on JNCC's EU exit activities (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 07)

11.1 This item was taken in confidence.

12 Quarter 3 performance report 2018/19 (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 08)

12.1 This item was taken in confidence.

13 Business plan for 2019/20 (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 09)

13.1 This item was taken in confidence.

14 Risk management in JNCC (Official) (JNCC 19 10)

14.1 Mrs Quince introduced the item explaining that the paper is the Committee's annual consideration of how risk is managed in the organisation. ARAC had discussed the paper the previous day and had no further comments to add. The paper contained the draft significant risks register for 2019/20 which members had helped to build back in February at Committee teleconferences. The version presented was the executive's interpretation of those discussions. The corporate risk register was provided for information.

14.2 Mrs Quince explained that in discussions at recent meetings, the Committee had been keen to further engage ARAC in an advisory capacity. The paper suggests how ARAC might add value in relation to the effectiveness of the risk mitigation measures identified by management (paragraph 2.6 of the paper). The risk appetite had been amended to reflect a lower appetite for innovation and a higher appetite for people and culture, reflecting an ambition to make changes to organisational culture.

14.3 The Committee made the following comments in discussion:

- i. ARAC should consider the combined consequences of two or more risks interacting simultaneously;
- ii. alongside risks, there were also opportunities;
- iii. staff application of the risk appetite was critical. A one-page summary of the risk appetite for staff would enhance their understanding and aid application;

- iv. the willingness to take risk in the science quality area should be revisited to confirm that the appetite range was correct; and
- v. following the discussion on resources for future years, the risk of reducing monitoring effort should be highlighted.

14.4 The Committee welcomed an excellent paper and agreed the risks in the draft significant risks register for 2019/20 without amendment. The Committee was supportive of the new advisory role for ARAC. The Committee approved the risk appetite matrix with the amendments described in 14.2 above.

15 Science audit (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 11)

15.1 This item was taken in confidence.

16 JNCC Strategy (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 12)

16.1 This item was taken in confidence.

17 Habitats Directive Article 17 report 2013-2018 (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 19 13)

12.1 This item was taken in confidence.

18 Joint Committee assessment of effectiveness 2019 (Official) (JNCC 19 14)

13.1 Mrs Quince introduced the item, explaining that the paper provides a report on the findings of the self-assessment of the Joint Committee undertaken in January 2019. A report of the results was contained in Annex 1, with the questions and synthesis of comments in Annex 2. The results indicate that the Committee is effective, but action could be taken in targeted areas to enhance effectiveness further, including taking a more planned approach to stakeholder engagement, strengthening the approach to monitoring performance and resources and devoting additional time to meetings.

13.2 The Committee made the following comments in discussion:

- i. the outcome of the survey was favourable. The areas identified for action were those the Committee agreed to focus on in the coming months;
- ii. it had been difficult in the recent past to engage with Governments, but it was important to continue to facilitate communication with sponsoring ministers and their special advisers;

- iii. CNCB members should be more actively involved in Joint Committee events, suggesting guests for engagement activities and for Joint Committee dinners.

13.3 In conclusion, the Committee agreed that Mrs Quince should draw up a plan with tasks to address action areas incorporated into the work objectives for 2019/20. This should be presented to the Committee in June for discussion.

Action point(s)
AP07 Mrs Quince to draw up a plan with tasks incorporated into the work objectives for 2019/20 and present to the Committee for discussion in June.

19 Joint Committee forward programme (Official) (JNCC 19 15)

14.1 Members confirmed that they were content with the forward plan as presented, noting the discussion on JNCC 19 12 to undertake a phased programme of developing the new strategic themes in the coming months to define a future direction for JNCC.

20 Any other business

20.1 No business was discussed. The next meeting of the Joint Committee would be in Belfast on 6 June.