Intersessional meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 10 August 2026 virtually

Meeting note

All available papers for the Joint Committee Intersessional Meeting held on 10 August 2026 can be found at: https://jncc.gov.uk/resources/da766b43-5e3f-4416-bc39-0c1bb0013525.

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 Joint Committee Intersessional Meeting held on Monday 10th August 2026 via MS Teams

The Committee members present were: David Cooper (Joint Committee Chair), Marsha Ramroop (Independent member, PCC chair), Rachael Garrett (Independent member), Thomas Meagher (Independent member, deputy chair), Julia Jones (Independent member, CSG co-chair), Colin Galbraith (NatureScot), Pete Higgins (NatureScot), Rhys Jones (Natural Resources Wales), Sara McCracken (CNCC), Neil Sachdev (Natural Resources Wales), Kate Gibson (Natural England), Nigel Reader (ARAC chair, ex officio).

Also, in attendance were: Gemma Harper (JNCC), David Collins (JNCC), Chris Tuckett (JNCC), Dominique Boatswain (JNCC).

Apologies were received from: Daniel Ebanks (Independent member), Lynn Heeley (JNCC), Dave Stone (JNCC),

1. Opening of the meeting and declarations of interest

- David Cooper welcomed members and attendees to the meeting.
- No new interests were declared

2. Minutes of the June meeting and Matters Arising

- The Committee reviewed the draft minutes of the June main meeting (JNCC 26 37D) and approved them with no amendments.
- The Committee noted the matters arising paper (JNCC 26 38D) and approved the actions marked as completed.
- The Committee noted that the final version of the JNCC Business Plan 2026-27 would be circulated shortly after the meeting.
- The Committee discussed ongoing work to assess Committee competencies against required areas of expertise. Noting continuing challenges relating to marine expertise and capacity across the Committee, the Chair noted that the Committee would review marine work at its next full meeting. The Chair invited those Members who had not yet completed reports on their own areas of competence to do so as soon as possible.
- Members recognised existing engagement with the Environment Agency, particularly on air pollution through JNCC's evidence and science teams and highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration as JNCC's pollution work develops, including in relation to water quality issues.
- The Committee was agreed that the ARAC Chair should be involved in the development of the Delphi-based approach to inform the next annual review of risk management.

3. Member Updates

Northern Ireland

Sara McCraken reported that CNCC continued to await announcement of appointments of its Chair and additional new members.[*]

Wales

- Neil Sachdev and Rhys Jones highlighted the growing impact of wildfires across Wales, including significant damage to biodiversity, protected sites and vulnerable species. They stressed the need for a coordinated response involving government, landowners and communities, while noting the challenges posed by constrained budgets.
- Rhys welcomed the launch of Wales' new strategic approach to protecting nature and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

England

- Kate Gibson highlighted Natural England's response to recent wildfires and the increasing focus on resilience, risk management and integrated land management. She emphasised the importance of JNCC and the country nature conservation bodies working collaboratively to maximise impact despite financial pressures.
- Kate noted the appointment of Neil Hornby as Natural England's incoming CEO and two new Board members, stressing the need for continued collaboration as organisations respond to increasingly complex and interconnected challenges.

Scotland

- Pete Higgins highlighted recent positive developments for NatureScot, including the 70th anniversary of the Isle of May National Nature Reserve and the designation of Torridon as a National Nature Reserve. He noted ongoing debate in Scotland around wildfire management and wider climate impacts, including unusually high sea temperatures.
- Colin Galbraith thanked JNCC for its work on Business Biodiversity Live and provided an update on NatureScot's decision not to issue a licence for the Guga hunt this year following detailed legal, ecological and animal welfare assessments. He also emphasised the need for a coordinated and proactive response to increasing wildfire risks, noted the challenges of tightening public sector budgets, and confirmed the extension of three NatureScot Board member appointments, providing continuity in governance.

[*] Appointments were subsequently announced on August 24: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-muir-makes-new-appointments-council-nature-conservation-and-countryside-cncc

Independent Members

- There were no additional updates from independent members.

4. JNCC Updates

- Gemma Harper provided an update on recent changes in the UK Government, noting ministerial appointments and highlighting a strong policy focus on devolution, place-based delivery, resilience, security and economic growth. She noted that JNCC is well positioned to support this agenda through its UK-wide evidence base, independent scientific advice and convening role across sectors and nations. Gemma outlined the priorities of the new Defra ministerial team, including nature recovery, food security, water, stronger communities and closer UK-EU engagement, and emphasised opportunities to demonstrate how nature contributes to wider economic, social and security outcomes. She concluded that the new priorities align well with JNCC's strategic direction and presents significant opportunities for the organisation to strengthen its influence and impact.

- Chris Tuckett provided an update on JNCC's recent *Business and Biodiversity* event, delivered in partnership with the UK Business and Biodiversity Forum and NatureScot. The event brought together around 100 representatives from business, government and civil society to discuss the findings of the IPBES Business and Biodiversity Assessment and the role of business in supporting nature recovery ahead of COP17. Discussions focused on business leadership, enabling action beyond 2030 and integrating nature considerations across supply chains, alongside examples of practical action already being taken across sectors. Chris highlighted the value of the event and confirmed JNCC's intention to continue working with the Forum to maintain momentum and strengthen engagement with the business community on biodiversity issues.

- David Collins provided an update on JNCC's preparations for the forthcoming Hillsborough Law, highlighting work to align the organisation's Code of Conduct with a new organisational Ethics Policy based on JNCC values and the Nolan Principles. He noted that the framework is intended to support the new duty of candour through clear behavioural expectations, ethical decision-making and accountability. Preparations include organisation-wide training on transparency, record keeping, speaking up and learning from mistakes, alongside tailored sessions for senior leaders focused on culture, leadership and decision-making.

- Gemma Harper welcomed the proposed Hillsborough Law and confirmed that related training will be extended to JNCC Committee members as it is developed. She noted that the Bill had completed its passage through the House of Commons and was expected to proceed to the House of Lords. Gemma emphasised that the

legislation aligns closely with JNCC's commitment to transparency, accountability and safeguarding the nature record for future generations, and expressed strong support for its objectives.

Future Nature Discussion

- David Cooper introduced the proposed Future Nature initiative, bringing together previous Committee discussions on biodiversity targets, nature recovery, resilience, national security and the need for transformative change. He highlighted the importance of developing a long-term vision for nature while balancing immediate action and noted that the initiative would be explored in more detail at the September meeting.

- Chris Tuckett explained that the work builds on discussions between the SNCB Chairs and Chief Executives and seeks to develop a shared vision and stronger narrative for nature recovery across the UK. She noted that the initiative aims to help JNCC and partners work more effectively as a system, with a clearer and more strategic approach to influencing policy and decision-making.

- Rachael Garrett outlined a potential Delphi process to support the work, using a structured, consensus-building approach to explore what transformative success for nature could look like and identify practical pathways to achieve it. She emphasised the importance of creating a positive and ambitious vision for the future while recognising existing political, economic and social constraints.

- Colin Galbraith strongly supported the initiative, stressing the importance of maintaining a positive and hopeful narrative. He encouraged consideration of how the work could influence wider audiences, including industry and land managers, and suggested that broad partnerships would significantly strengthen the impact of any future recommendations.

- Peter Higgins endorsed the Delphi approach, noting that it can help build consensus by focusing discussion on ideas rather than individuals, resulting in stronger collective ownership of outcomes.

- Kate Gibson welcomed the proposal and emphasised the need to balance longer-term strategic thinking with immediate action, particularly ahead of upcoming biodiversity discussions and COP17. She suggested building on existing visions and strategies across JNCC and the country nature conservation bodies.

- Thomas Meagher encouraged ambitious thinking and engagement with external organisations that may be better placed to deliver some of the wider

transformational changes needed. He stressed the importance of remaining ambitious even where some proposals may not be immediately achievable

5. September Meeting Agenda

- David Cooper welcomed the strong level of engagement and support for the proposed Future Nature initiative, noting that discussion would continue at the September meeting. Members agreed that additional time may be needed on the September agenda to allow for a fuller discussion of the topic, and the agenda will be reviewed accordingly.
- Marsha Ramroop also highlighted the need to include sufficient time for discussion of the ARAC/PCC health and safety risk drill-down. The draft agenda was approved subject to these adjustments.

6. Any other business

- Thomas Meagher congratulated David Cooper on being made a Fellow of the British Ecological Society, with David also recognising Gemma Harper's recent fellowship.

Joint Committee meeting ends

Action points:

Aug26_AP01. Item 2, Matters Arising: Committee members to submit outstanding competency information this week to support the Committee skills assessment.
Aug26_AP02. Item 2, Matters Arising: Executive team to invite the ARAC Chair (or successor) in the development of the Delphi-based risk management approach.
Aug26_AP03. Item 3, Member Updates: Gemma Harper to explore current work on wildfires and consider how JNCC and partners can support a coordinated approach to understanding and responding to biodiversity impacts.
Aug26_AP04. Item 4, JNCC Updates: Gemma Harper to write to SNCB Chairs and Chief Executives regarding actions arising from their recent meeting.
Aug26_AP05. Item 5, JNCC Updates: Chris Tuckett, Dave Stone and Rachael Garrett to further develop proposals for a Delphi-based process and potential arrangements to oversee this work.