

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP MEETING

12 November 2013

10:30 – 13:50, JNCC Offices, Peterborough

Final minutes

Present:

Ant Maddock, JNCC (Stand in Chair)
Sarah Anthony, NE
Nigel Buxton, SNH
Richard Hearn, WWT
Ian Enlander, NIEA
David Stroud, JNCC
Kate Jennings, RSPB
Jason Hubert, FC
Jessamy Battersby, JNCC
Cherry-Ann Vickery, JNCC (minutes)

By video:

Steven Dora, Scottish Government
Ian Bainbridge, SNH
Sian Whitehead, NRW

By teleconference:

Andy Tully, Defra
Miranda Cooper, NWL
Jeremy Wilson, RSPB
Matt Parsons, JNCC

Introduction and general matters

1. Welcome and apologies; matters for AOB; membership changes and temporary chair

A.M welcomed attendees to the meeting and announced that he would be temporarily standing in as Chair for this meeting as IB had only recently returned from sick leave. The group members introduced themselves and Jason Hubert (F.C.) was welcomed as a new member. Apologies were received from Louise Leighton (Defra).

2. Minutes of last meeting; amendments & approval (paper)

A.M asked the group if there were any changes to the minutes of the last meeting (23 May 2013). No changes were expressed. It was thus agreed that these would be taken as the final record of that meeting.

Action 1: CAV to upload the minutes (23 May 2013) to the JNCC website.

SPA Review

3. Progress with species accounts (information update)

DAS gave an information update on the progress of the 149 species accounts the format of which had previously been agreed by the SWG. DAS explained that the text regarding monitoring priorities (see item 6 below) would be included in each species account once it had been agreed, together with maps. This would minimise the number of species account edits to be subsequently made.

The aim was to send out -the remaining 44 species accounts in November. The second batch of all 149 species accounts, including issues raised through the consultation process, would be ready by the end of January 2014¹.

Action 2: DAS requested that any comments on the earlier four tranches be sent to him as soon as possible.

4. Progress with Phase 1 report write up

A.M. explained that progress on completing the Phase 1 final report, which had involved taking the data from the Phase 1 Review summary document and merging into the final report, had now been completed. It was agreed that the report could now be handed over to I.B for editing.

Action 3: A.M. I.B and DAS to develop a process for editing the final Phase 1 report.

5. Progress with country agency 'sign off' of the conclusions of Phase 1 of the SPA review

A.M explained that the recommendations from Phase 1 of the review had been sent to the country agencies on 16 September following circulation to the inter-agency Chief Scientist's Group in late July. The group was advised that:

- senior management of NRW had already signed off the recommendations;
- DoENI would finalise their discussions of the recommendations at a meeting on 29 November 2013;
- the Scientific Advisory Committee of SNH had considered them in early September, with a view to then subsequently consulting their Management Team; and
- NE's Chief Scientist would endorse the recommendations subject to the publication of the Site Provision Index methodology.

In advance of formal submission to JNCC, the ESG would be asked to confirm that the terms of reference for the review had been met.

A.M gave a brief progress report on the timetable and the group agreed that the sign off by the Chief Scientists would be regarded as final approval of the recommendations of Phase 1 of the SPA Review following the completion of the work in February 2014.

¹ Note that this timetable is not feasible as a consequence of Action 6 below. - DAS

Action 4: A.M to produce a flow diagram of the sign off process and circulate to the group.

The group concluded on prioritisation and next steps.

6. Monitoring recommendations (paper)

DAS briefly explained the content and the sub-group's development of the SPA monitoring recommendations (v5), and added that they now included additional comments from J.W. DAS also explained that once text had been agreed by SWG, the species-specific recommendations would be included in the species accounts. The monitoring recommendations are primarily aimed at other stakeholders, and the detail would ultimately help provide a future agenda. M.P suggested that any recommendations applying to the marine monitoring programme could be discussed at the next SWG meeting.

Action 5: DAS to redistribute v5 to the group requesting comments and any details that may have been omitted, by the end of the week. Following any additional inclusions DAS would circulate the final v6.

7. Next steps and timetable for the review (paper)

A.M briefly covered aspects of the timetable and explained there was still more work to do such as getting the species accounts completed and getting the wording in the final report correct.

DAS expressed the opinion that the timetable as it stood was unrealistic given the work that needed to be undertaken prior to submission to the Chief Scientists Group in February 2014 (deadline for papers in January) – necessary before submission to the Joint Committee in March 2014.

DAS suggested either:

- presenting the summary conclusions paper (that is being currently circulated around country agencies) to Joint Committee in March 2014 and submitting the final report of Phase 1 of the Review to them at a later date; or
- submitting an enhanced sign off document, (as above but also including the monitoring recommendations as a further annex).
- The group discussed the options. K.J. asked how long it would take to complete the manuscript describing the Site Provision Index to a form ready for journal submission. DAS indicated that, given his allocation of one day a week for SPA-related work, this would take him about six calendar weeks to complete, depending on other workload priorities.

Action 6: DAS to give priority to work on completing the SPI manuscript in conjunction with a working group in and around other work commitments.

The group discussed timescales and whether Phase 1 report could/should be submitted to the Joint Committee intersessionally. DAS felt that given the multiple editing issues still needed to be completed (above) it would be more realistic to send the final Phase 1 SPA Review report to the Joint Committee later in summer 2014. Given current Chief Scientist and agency senior management sign off of the conclusions of Phase 1, work could continue in the interim on Phase 2-related

issues anyway. This was agreed as the best way forward and would be recommended to ESG at their December 2013 meeting.

8. Future SPA Reviews (paper)

DAS presented a discussion paper and asked the group to consider how periodic SPA Reviews could be managed in future – in particular linking to other national review processes (principally Article 12 reporting under the EU Wild Birds Directive) in the most cost-effective manner. The group agreed that aligning the various review process systems would be of huge benefit and discussed whether one timetable for all the reporting rounds would be feasible (noting that this was likely to provide a 12 year review cycle given that detailed Article 12 reports are provided every 6 years and ‘light touch’ interim reports every 3).

Action 7: DAS to further develop a timetable (with indication of costs) for the 2019 Article 12 report and present to SWG for further discussion in about a year’s time.

Action 8: I.B to present the current discussion paper to ESG in December.

Other items

9. Publication of the CHAINSPAN report (paper)

DAS noted the recent publication of in the journal *Nature Climate Change*² of the results of the review that DEFRA commissioned a few years ago exploring the implications of climate change for the UK SPA Network. This had originally been produced as a Defra report³. DAS explained that this paper was the first review of the implications of climate change on the abundance of species within a whole national protected area network, and he encouraged members of the group to circulate the paper to interested colleagues.

10. Article 12 reporting (information item)

DAS explained that the UK’s draft report under Article 12 of the Birds Directive had gone out to public consultation in October. The data collation part of the process had now been concluded, and formal sign-off by Defra and the devolved agencies was pending in late November/early December. The final UK Article 12 report (which includes summary outputs from the current SPA Review) would be uploaded to the JNCC website in 2014.

11. New WEBS online reporting

DAS gave a demonstration of the soon to be published online WeBS reporting system, currently under development. He explained that it is a new form of annual reporting with two elements:

1. an A4 paper with enhanced thematic and other content; and
2. data delivery via WeBS online facility.

² <http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nclimate2035.html>

³ <http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Completed=2&ProjectID=16731>

DAS showed the group some of the facilities available on the new data portal and explained that the report for 2011/12 would be officially launched in January 2014.

12. Progress with other matters, review of Action Points from the last meeting

A.M asked the group whether there were any outstanding actions from the last meeting and it was agreed that they had all had been carried out or superceded.

13. Progress from bilateral discussions – brief updates

- Northern Ireland
- Wales
- Scotland
- England

Progress from bilateral discussions was briefly discussed and SNH mentioned their involvement in Phase II discussions on Merlin. NE advised the group that consultation over addition of the Lesser Black-backed Gull as a qualifying feature on Bowland Fell was underway and due to end on 11 December 2013.

14. Any other business

The status of Goosanders in the UK, by Richard Hearn (paper)

Action 20: May 2013

R.H presented his paper and the group discussed it. J.H asked R.H if genetics had been used as a way of assessing population size as opposed to biometrics and R.H explained that it had not been considered due to cost. The group was asked to submit any comments on the paper to R.H after which the paper would be finalised and made publically available via the SWG's web-page.

Action 9: SWG to send any comments on the paper to R.H by the end of 2013.

Action 10: CAV to upload the report to the SWG website in 2014 following finalisation by RH.

Peer review of the Decision Framework

DAS explained that Prof. Colin Galbraith had been commissioned by Defra to undertake an independent review of the Decision Framework. He had provided positive comments overall, and a range of detailed comments which had been incorporated into a revision of the Framework submitted to the country agencies in late summer. He had particularly stressed the value of reviewing national SPA networks, noting that the UK was very much ahead in this area, and thus that there would be great value for other countries to learn from UK experience. He urged the publication and dissemination of the methodology. ESG had approved Prof. Galbraith's conclusions and recommendations.

Review of SSSI guidelines

K.J asked about progress on the review of the Part 1 of the SSSI Guidelines. A.M explained that there had been delays in receiving comments, but the guidelines would be updated as soon as possible. Chief Scientists had been advised of the process.

A.M also explained that as far as Part 2 of the SSSI guidelines were concerned, the Chief Scientists had been given a paper outlining a process for prioritisation of the species and habitat chapters. This involved first selecting those chapters that were currently limiting casework or high priority conservation work. The agency that identified a chapter for revision would revise that chapter, send to the other agencies for comment and send to expert(s) for peer review. Natural England was leading the process with respect to the ornithological chapter.

15. Date and venue for next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 27 February, 2014 at JNCC, Monkstone House.