Intersessional meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 11 May 2026 virtually

Meeting note

All available papers for the Joint Committee Intersessional Meeting held on 11 May 2026 can be found at: https://jncc.gov.uk/resources/74700389-0931-4cda-b9a0-a5b1903096dd.

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 11th May 2026 via MS Teams

The Committee members present were: David Cooper (Joint Committee Chair), Marsha Ramroop (Independent member, PCC chair), Rachael Garrett (Independent), Julia Jones (Independent member, CSG co-chair), Thomas Meagher (Independent member, deputy chair), Peter Unwin (Natural England), Colin Galbraith (NatureScot), Pete Higgins (NatureScot), Rhys Jones (Natural Resources Wales), Sara McCracken (CNCC).

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

Apologies were received from: Neil Sachdev (Natural Resources Wales), Daniel Ebanks (Independent)
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1. Opening of the meeting and declarations of interest

- David Cooper welcomed members and attendees to the meeting, acknowledging the departure of Mel Austen (Natural England), and this meeting as Peter Unwin's last (also Natural England), thanking both for their contributions to the Joint Committee. In addition, he congratulated Sara McCracken on her appointment as Interim Chair of CNCC.

- No new interests were declared

2. Minutes of the March meeting and Matters Arising

- The Committee reviewed the draft minutes of the March main meeting (JNCC26 19D) and approved them with no amendments.
- The Committee noted the matters arising paper (JNCC 26 20D) and approved the actions marked as completed.
- The Committee reviewed the final versions of the strategic risk register and risk appetite. A high-level framework of the strategic risk register was previously discussed at the March meeting. Since then, a full draft had been developed, with clearer definitions of probability, likelihood and impact; explicit inclusion of risk velocity; stronger articulation of opportunities; and enhanced coverage of science, data and cyber risks (including misinformation and evidence integrity). It also reflects a more focused near-term ambition within a longer-term trajectory to 2030 and is positioned as a living document.
- Members endorsed the overall approach and the improvements made, noting increased clarity, depth and strategic focus, with no fundamental changes required. A small number of areas for further refinement were highlighted for consideration by ARAC, including governance around capacity and people risk thresholds, mechanisms to monitor policy divergence across the UK, and greater visibility of interdependencies between risks.
- The Committee also endorsed the updated science impact strategy and supported its publication, noting that feedback from the March meeting had been incorporated. No substantive changes were required, but members suggested minor improvements, including clearer signposting to the areas of research interest and alignment with forthcoming communications plans.

3. Member Updates

Scotland

- Colin Galbraith provided an update on the post-election landscape in Scotland, noting that while the SNP remains the largest party, the composition of the Parliament had changed significantly.

England

- Peter Unwin provided an update on the position in England. Significant organisational change was noted within Natural England, with new Board appointments announced, and further recruitment expected to ensure the Board remains quorate. Major leadership transitions are also underway, with the Chief Executive stepping down later this year and a recruitment process ongoing for her successor. Since the Chair will also end his third term in April 2027, a process to recruit his successor was also expected to be lunched shortly. He noted that policy priorities include continued development of the Nature Restoration Fund, work on environmental development plans, particularly around nutrient neutrality, and anticipated reforms in water governance, which are expected to retain a meaningful nature focus.

Northern Ireland

- Sara McCracken advised members that preparations are underway for the Joint Committee meeting in June. She reported that the recruitment for the CNCC permanent Chair and Committee members had closed, with appointable candidates being put forward to Ministers. While timings and outcomes are not yet known, there is optimism that decisions will be made soon and that new members may be able to attend the dinner next month. It was also noted that there are no immediate government changes, with elections not due until next year.

Wales

- Rhys Jones updated members on the Welsh election outcome, with Plaid Cymru emerging as the largest party expected to form a minority government. It was also noted that the Environmental Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets (Wales) Act had received Royal Assent, and that the proposed Glyndŵr National Park had been referred to a public inquiry.

Independent Members

- There were no additional updates from independent members.

4. JNCC Updates

- David cooper welcomed the summary version of the 7th National Report, to the CBD which was put together by JNCC on behalf of all four countries and was available on the national CHM, accessible via the JNCC website. (The original full report was, published in February), e. International Biodiversity Day (May 22) would be a useful day to highlight key messages from the report.
- David Cooper drew attention to the annual Chair's Letter received from the Defra Secretary of State, setting out her priorities for Defra and for JNCC.
- Gemma Harper noted the forthcoming twice yearly meeting of the SNCB Chairs and Chief Executives, to be hosted by Wales on 1–2 June in North Wales. The discussions planned would cover topics such as nature recovery (including 30 by 30), delivery for nature and growth, national security, the road to COP17, and

European perspectives. JNCC will lead contributions on national security and COP17 engagement.

- Dave Stone reminded members of the Climate and Nature Moment in July last year, which led to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between JNCC and the Climate Change Committee (CCC). It was noted that JNCC and CCC have been re-engaged in preparations for this year, with JNCC asked to provide elements of the evidence base and products to support ministerial briefings in Defra and DESNZ. JNCC would also contribute to a Chief Scientist roundtable and associated communications activity. Additionally, the UK Nature Representative had requested JNCC input on global ecosystems assessment to support her international engagement, including in Cannes, and JNCC has been asked to engage with aspects of London Climate Action Week.

5. June Meeting Agenda

- David Cooper outlined the agenda and arrangements for the June Committee meeting, the main summer meeting, to be held in Belfast. The programme includes formal Committee meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, a field visit on Tuesday afternoon to support informal discussion. The main strategic focus areas for this meeting would be communications and stakeholder engagement, pollution as a direct driver of nature loss, and ongoing work on nature and national security. The Committee would also consider the draft business plan for 2026–27, alongside routine business and the annual review of Committee working objectives. Members were reminded to complete forthcoming surveys and competency forms in preparation for this session.

- Sara McCracken outlined plans for the afternoon field visit, including a coach trip with packed lunches and discussions focused on water pollution, particularly in relation to Lough Neagh. She also highlighted that a range of stakeholders will be invited to the evening dinner to help build relationships and raise awareness of JNCC's work.

6. Any other business

- There were no other items of business.

Joint Committee meeting ends

Action points:

May26_AP01. Item 2, Matters Arising: Executive to finalise strategic risk register and risk appetite statement to reflect clarifications and additional context discussed (subject to any comments from ARAC) and circulate to Committee.
May26_AP02. Item 2, Matters Arising:
JNCC to clarify where the areas of research interest can be accessed by adding clear signposting in the science strategy, including a link to the relevant government database, and explore adding a reference/link on the JNCC website alongside the science strategy page.
May26_AP03. Item 4, JNCC Updates: Executive to prepare a formal response to Defra's Secretary of State's letter, and correspondence to be sent to newly appointed ministers in Scotland and Wales once confirmed.
May26_AP04. Item 4, JNCC Updates: Committee members to complete the surveys and competency form circulated by the Executive Office in preparation for the annual review of Committee working objectives.