Intersessional meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 9 February 2026 virtually

Meeting note

All available papers for the Joint Committee Intersessional Meeting held on 9 February 2026 can be found at: https://jncc.gov.uk/resources/7491aab5-2b5b-48bc-9741-c42d52d6095b.

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 9th February 2026 via MS Teams

The Committee members present were: David Cooper (Joint Committee Chair), Marsha Ramroop (Independent PCC Chair), Rachael Garrett (Independent), Julia Jones (Independent), Thomas Meagher (Independent), Daniel Ebanks (Independent), Peter Unwin (Natural England), Colin Galbraith (NatureScot), Pete Higgins (NatureScot), Steve Ormerod (Natural Resources Wales), Rhys Jones (Natural Resources Wales), Sara McCracken (CNCC).

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

Apologies were received from: Dave Stone (JNCC), Mel Austen (Natural England).

1. Opening of the meeting and declarations of interest

- David Cooper welcomed members and attendees to the meeting, congratulating Mel Austen, Rachael Garrett and Steve Ormerod on their appointment as Fellows of the British Ecological Society, recognising their significant contributions to ecology. David also congratulated Sara McCracken on being selected for the f:Entrepreneur #iAlso100 2026 list, a national recognition celebrating 100 inspiring female entrepreneurs across the UK and Julia Jones on being awarded an MBE for her services to the environment.

- No new interests were declared.

2. Minutes of the December meeting and matters arising

- The Committee reviewed the draft minutes of the December main meeting (JNCC26 01D) and approved them with no amendments.

- The Committee noted the matters arising paper (JNCC 26 02D) and approved the actions proposed for completion. Marsha Ramroop suggested it would be helpful to improve the information about the status of actions in progress.
- Regarding AP04 (September 2025), the Cultural Intelligence training kindly offered by Marsha Ramroop, it was agreed that a 30-minute item at an upcoming meeting be scheduled.
- Colin Galbraith asked about the Marine Sub-Group and offered the participation of James Harrison (NatureScot Board member). It was confirmed that the Committee would be reviewing all sub-groups at its March meeting. The Chair indicated that he would follow up on the offer, noting it would be very valuable. He also indicated that his intention for a future session of the Committee to consider an overview of JNCC's marine work to allow it to fulfil its oversight function.

3. Member Updates

Scotland

- Colin Galbraith reported that NatureScot's new corporate plan to 2030 had been approved by the Cabinet Secretary. The plan had been launched to staff, and Members were invited to join the upcoming online briefing. He noted that the plan was broadly similar to the previous version but placed greater emphasis on climate, people and delivery rather than process.
  NatureScot's Corporate Plan | NatureScot
- It was noted that preparations were underway for the elections on 7 May, with pre-election restrictions due to commence on 26 March.
- NatureScot reported continued progress on 30x30, with strong landowner participation as well as recent work on sensitive species management issues such as beavers, gulls and raptors.
- It was noted that the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill was passed into law on January 29th. Together with other legislation related to land holding there is a substantial amount of change.
- He shared that Des Thompson was awarded an MBE in the Christmas honours.

England

- Peter Unwin reported that Natural England was focusing on implementing the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which received Royal Assent before Christmas, including the Nature Restoration Fund established by the Act.
- He confirmed that, following the launch of the new Natural England strategy, efforts were now focused on embedding it across the organisation. This included ensuring staff alignment and redirecting effort towards larger-scale environmental improvements rather than smaller site-based developments.
- Natural England is establishing 25 new King's Series National Nature Reserves over a five-year period. These are designed to be larger and more connected than existing reserves. Twelve had been publicly designated to date, with the thirteenth due shortly with publicity planned over the summer.
- David Cooper mentioned the Environmental Improvement Plan that was launched before Christmas which was well received.
- Gemma congratulated Natural England on their pay award for staff. It was noted that a few steps are still to be completed and the offer has come with some changes to non-pay terms and conditions.

Northern Ireland

- Sara McCracken reported that CNCC had scheduled a meeting for early March and that planning had begun for the Committee's visit to Northern Ireland in June.
- It was noted that DAERA had set out new regulations on climate change and just transition, and CNCC would consider these before exploring how JNCC could support this work.
- In response to Gemma's query about progress on establishing an independent environmental protection agency, no update was available.

Wales

- Steve Ormerod reported that this year marks 30 years since the Sea Empress incident off Skomer and Skokholm, during which 72,000 tonnes of fuel oil were spilled, causing major impacts on offshore seabirds (particularly common scoter) though the effects were mitigated to some extent by offshore winds. NRW have publicity planned this week. He noted people updates: Ceri Davies would continue in post; Gareth O'Shea had retired; Prys Davies had been

appointed Director of Strategy, Policy and Evidence; and Mary Lewis as Head of Natural Resource Management, will report to Prys.

- He confirmed the launch of Bridges to the Future: the second part of the State of Natural Resources Report (SONARR), a statutory five-year assessment of the resilience, management and condition of natural resources in Wales. The report acknowledges the challenging trajectory for nature and highlights the systemic drivers that need to be addressed, which align with recent IPBES messages on recognising nature as critical infrastructure for business.
- It was noted that work was progressing on the designation order for the Glyndŵr National Park, with the next stages now with Welsh Government. The proposed area met the statutory tests for natural beauty and recreational opportunity, though several statutory consultees had lodged formal objections.
- Also noted was the recent meeting of the strategic implementation group for 30x30 to review the first tranche of OECN pilots, with several expected to come online shortly.
- It was noted that the last day of the current Senedd would be 8 April ahead of the May election.
- David Cooper thanked Steve Ormerod for his support during the recent meeting with the Deputy First Minister.

Independent Members

- Marsha Ramroop and David Cooper reported excellent meetings with the new Director of People and Infrastructure at JNCC, Elizabeth Amartey.
- Julia Jones reported that the Chief Scientists Group (CSG) had several substantial items scheduled for discussion. February deep-dive sessions would examine whether SSSI and ASSI citations act as a constraint on ecosystem-based approaches to nature recovery. She also noted a planned July session on the People and Nature Survey, an ESLC-funded project designed to bring together previously separate surveys into a more joined-up approach. Members with relevant expertise or interest were invited to contribute.

4. JNCC Updates

- David Cooper welcomed the publication of the UK Government's report on biodiversity-related national security risks, which has been widely referenced nationally and internationally, and highlighted JNCC's contribution through Chief Scientist, Dave Stone, and noted that related work at UK and European levels is continuing.
- He confirmed that the UK's 7th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is essentially complete, has ministerial support, and is expected to be published before the deadline of the end of February 2026.
- He noted that the treaty on biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction had recently entered into force and the Bill for UK ratification had completed its parliamentary stages.
- David thanked all the SNCB Chairs for their contributions in developing the joint letter to the Inter-Ministerial Group. Although the 5 February meeting was postponed, the jointly developed letter and supporting paper remain valuable. Gemma Harper confirmed that the meeting is expected to be rescheduled for 19 March and noted that the work provides a clear strategic foundation for a UK-wide nature proposition covering collaboration across the four countries, shared learning, and links to indicators and modelling.

- Gemma Harper reported on recent international biodiversity developments. She highlighted the adoption of the Business and Biodiversity Assessment, which

sets the pace for a significant year leading up to Climate Treaty COP31. JNCC will continue its involvement through a business-and-biodiversity event in March and the SNCB-sponsored event in Edinburgh in June, ahead of a sequence of major conferences: the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in August, CBD COP17 and the Climate COP.

- She thanked the JNCC delegation for their strong contribution to negotiations, events and stakeholder engagement and noted that JNCC is increasingly present in new forums (e.g. engaging with academic and financial-sector partners), while ensuring appropriate distance from individual private-sector organisations.

- Chris Tuckett reported that JNCC's evidence on global ecosystem collapse had informed the recently published national security report. Current work includes developing case studies to identify critical ecosystem services at risk, geographical tipping points, and associated national security implications. Elements of this analysis align with JNCC's wider work on climate impacts on ecosystems and will be built into next year's planning to ensure appropriate resourcing. The Committee recognised the strategic importance of JNCC's growing role in this area and will receive further updates as the work progresses. Work on Part 2 of the assessment is underway and will report in the autumn, with JNCC contributing evidence on risks of ecosystem collapse at UK and EU levels.

- Gemma reported that engagement with business stakeholders is progressing, including collaboration with the UK Business and Biodiversity Forum and exploratory discussions with the Taskforce on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures. Public engagement remains a priority, and it is hoped that ministers will reconvene before year-end to discuss the work.
- Marsha Ramroop raised a question about whether private water ownership (in England and Wales) had been considered as part of the national security assessment. Gemma Harper advised that she did not recall this issue being included in the assessment but confirmed that the team would verify this and report back.

5. March Meeting Agenda

- David Cooper outlined the agenda for the March meeting in Cardiff, which would include discussions on the management of sub-groups, risk appetite and risk management. The Deputy First Minister and Helen Nelson, Director of Strategic Planning and Climate & Nature Mission from the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner have been scheduled to speak at the evening dinner. It was noted that the meeting would also be Steve Ormerod's final one as a Member.
- Rachael Garrett asked about the March discussion on science strategy. She proposed that Committee should consider what "taking the national security report seriously" would entail, including broader societal perspectives on nature.
- Colin Galbraith raised a forward-looking question about what 2030 should look like for the environment and nature across the UK. He proposed a workshop framed around the upcoming Seventh National Report, noting that the Committee discussions could support this work and that CSG might also consider it.
- Marsha Ramroop questioned whether 30 minutes was sufficient for the risk management item.
- The Chair agreed to follow up on the points made in preparation for the March Committee meeting

6. Any other business

- There were no other items of business.

Joint Committee meeting ends

Action points:

Feb26_AP01. **Item 3, Member updates**: Secretariat to improve the clarity on *in progress* actions.
Feb26_AP02. Item 2, Matters Arising: Secretariat to arrange a date for a Cultural Intelligence session with Marsha Ramroop for all Committee members.
Feb26_AP03. Item 3, Member updates: John Goold to update James Harrison of Nature Scot on the current remit of the Marine sub-group and next steps.
Feb26_AP04. Item 4, JNCC Updates: Executive to share the SNCBs Chairs letter.