



Joint Nature Conservation Committee 124th Meeting Minutes Confirmed

Date: 24 September 2020

Time: 08.50

Venue: Virtually via MS Teams

Present

Professor Mel Austen
Independent member

Mr Charles Banner
Independent member

Professor Ian Bateman
Independent member

Lord Blencathra
Natural England

Ms Cath Denholm
NatureScot

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 Marian Scott
Independent member

Professor Michael Winter
Natural England

In attendance

Dr Helen Baker (item 15)
JNCC

Mr Chris Brooks
JNCC

Dr John Goold
JNCC

Ms Karen Hall (item 15)
JNCC

Dr Tim Hill
Natural England

Professor Christine Maggs
JNCC

Professor Kathryn Monk
Natural Resources Wales

Dr Sara McGuckin
Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Dr Sue O'Brien (item 15)
JNCC

Mrs Tracey Quince
JNCC

Mrs Sally Thomas
NatureScot

Dr Clare Whitfield (item 19)
JNCC

Ms Helen Wilkinson
Natural Resources Wales

Dr Steve Wilkinson
JNCC

Mr Marcus Yeo
JNCC

Apologies

Members

Dr Mike Cantlay
Scottish Natural Heritage

Sir David Henshaw
Natural Resources Wales

Attendees

Ms Helen Anderson
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Colin Armstrong
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Ms Ceri Davies
Natural Resources Wales

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 124th meeting, which was taking place as a virtual meeting in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Members approved recording the meeting for minuting purposes.

2.2 Professor Gilligan welcomed Ms Helen Wilkinson, Interim Head of Knowledge and Evidence in Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to her first meeting. Ms Wilkinson gave a brief résumé of her career to date.

2.3 Professor Gilligan noted the exceptionally good engagement event the previous day and thanked Dr Gould and the team for an informative useful and well-run session. Professor Gilligan noted that staff across the organisation were doing a remarkable job, under challenging circumstances, delivering JNCC's objectives. The Committee noted their appreciation of the staff's efforts keeping the organisation running well during the pandemic. Professor Gilligan also thanked Professor Galbraith for his support and advice as part of a small team the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Joint Committee, the Chief Executive and Finance Director in reviewing and advising on short, medium and longer term arrangements necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.4 The Committee was informed that Mr Yeo would be leaving the organisation after 22 years at the end of March 2021. Mr Yeo had been the Chief Executive for the last 11 years. Professor Gilligan informed members that there would be an opportunity for members to register their appreciation of Mr Yeo's time with JNCC in the new year. Members were informed that plans were in progress to appoint an interim Chief Executive. Recruitment of a permanent Chief Executive would take place once the new Chair was in place.

2.5 Professor Gilligan and Mr Yeo had met the Defra Minister Rebecca Pow the previous week. The meeting had gone well, with the Minister now well informed about JNCC. It was hoped that this would set the pattern for more frequent meetings with ministers in Defra and the devolved administrations. Professor Gilligan informed members that he had requested a meeting with the Defra Minister Lord Goldsmith to discuss international issues.

3. Declaration of interests

3.1 No new declarations were declared. Professor Gilligan emphasised the importance of keeping declarations up to date.

3.2 Members were reminded to advise Mrs Elliott of any new declarations.

4. Confidential minutes of the June 2020 meeting (JNCC 20 31)

4.1 The minutes of the June meeting were confirmed with no further amendments.

5. Matters arising (Official) (JNCC 20 32)

5.1 There were no matters arising for this meeting. The Committee **noted** the report of outstanding actions in Annex 1.

6. Chief Executive's report on topical issues (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 33)

6.1 This item was taken in confidence.

7. Report from the MPA sub-group (Official-sensitive) (Oral)

7.1 This item was taken in confidence.

8. Report from the International Reporting sub-group (Official-sensitive) (Oral)

8.1 This item was taken in confidence.

9. Report from ARAC on 23 September (Official) (Oral)

9.1 In summarising the key issues discussed at the ARAC meeting on 23 September, Professor Galbraith made the following points.

- i. An audit of the risk management area had been completed in June. A 'strong moderate' opinion had been given. Implementation of audit recommendations was on track. An audit of Joint Committee effectiveness would take place shortly and members would be contacted for their views as part of the audit fieldwork.

- ii. The payroll contract would be managed by Defra Group Shared Services from 1 November but would continue to be delivered by SSCL. Historic issues with delivery of the contract had been shared and the executive were optimistic these would be addressed. ARAC would receive a report in March 2021 on progress on addressing payroll errors.
- iii. Defra's Data Protection Officer (DPO) had completed a Data Protection review of JNCC's GDPR compliance in March. The review had found much good practice, and some improvements had also been identified. An action plan had been agreed.
- iv. ARAC had reviewed the significant risk register (SRR) and had agreed to add a risk around "rapid change" to the SRR. ARAC had emphasised the need to assess the cumulative impacts of risks.
- v. A risk drill-down into change management had been undertaken by Ms Denholm in August. Her report had noted that change was no longer identified and reported on separately but was now part of day to day business. It was agreed that a quarterly report on change would provide the assurance ARAC needed.
- vi. ARAC had reviewed the Covid-19 risk register, noting that two of the risks had increased. A drill down of the Covid-19 risk register would take place in October, led by Nigel Reader. ARAC had noted that the updated guidance from Governments in the last few days had not affected the JNCC's working arrangements. Staff were currently accessing the Peterborough office where necessary. The Aberdeen office would be closed until April 2021.
- vii. ARAC had been informed that assurance across the organisation was reasonable but had decreased slightly from quarter 4 of 2019/20. The drop in assurance was not a matter of concern but was reflective of the establishment of two new teams who were putting measures in place to achieve their desired assurance levels, coupled with team leaders using reporting effectively rather than a tick box exercise.
- viii. ARAC had discussed the Peterborough office move to Fletton Quays. JNCC's IT provision could not currently be accommodated in the new building. This was an issue for concern. There was currently no timeline of key decision points and accurate costings had not been provided, but based on the Birmingham hub, JNCC could see costs rise by an additional £200k per annum. ARAC agreed that concerns should be escalated to Defra as soon as possible, noting that a clear articulation of user requirements was needed urgently.
- ix. ARAC had been pleased to see that there had been no breaches of legislation in the previous 12-month reporting period. One breach which fell into the next reporting period relating to the issuing of statements of employment had been highlighted, but was currently being addressed by the HR team;
- x. ARAC had reviewed its effectiveness in August and the survey results had indicated that ARAC was an effective committee. Going forward, effectiveness surveys would be undertaken every two years rather than annually.
- xi. ARAC had been informed that the Counter Fraud and Anti-corruption policy had been reviewed to ensure compliance with the recently published Government Functional Standard. ARAC was content that the policy met the requirements of this standard.
- xii. Four areas of non-compliance in the Health and Safety area had been identified by the new Office Services Manager and were being dealt with.

ARAC was pleased to note that good progress had been made towards gaining ISO14001 accreditation in environmental reporting. Training for three additional Mental Health First Aiders would take place in September and an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion group had been formed, chaired by Christine Maggs.

- 9.2 The Committee thanked Professor Galbraith for a comprehensive report. Members noted the concerns in relation to the Fletton Quays project and supported escalation of the issues to senior officials in Defra. Mr Brooks informed members that he could not say at this point whether the move to Fletton Quays was an appropriate move for JNCC given the issues and unknown costs.

10. Report from the Chief Scientists Group (CSG) (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 34)

- 10.1 This item was taken in confidence.

11. External factors affecting JNCC (Official) (JNCC 20 35)

- 11.1 Mr Yeo introduced the item and invited comments.
- 11.2 Ms Denholm reported that SNH had recently rebranded to NatureScot. The re-branding had been well received, including by staff. The re-branding was a useful marker to do things in a different way and raise the organisation's profile on social media. Mr Banner noted the exemplary communications around the rebranding and asked if good practice could be shared with JNCC. Ms Denholm agreed to facilitate a discussion between the Communications Teams in JNCC and NatureScot.
- 11.3 Ms Denholm reported that the Scottish Programme for Government had been published at the beginning of September, with priorities including green recovery and the challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change. The [Edinburgh Declaration](#) had been published in August. Parliamentary elections in Scotland were due to take place in the spring of next year, with some politicians stepping down, notably Roseanna Cunningham. Ms Denholm concluded her report informing members that Mrs Thomas would be retiring from NatureScot in November. Mr Robbie Kernaghan would be her replacement. Professor Gilligan thanked Mrs Thomas for her contributions to the Joint Committee and wished her well in retirement.
- 11.4 Professor Ormerod reported that the budget in Natural Resources Wales (NRW) was in a better position than in June. The green recovery agenda was a key priority with Sir David Henshaw chairing a multi-agency task force gathering ideas on possible actions. NRW had recently received funding to help stabilise the environmental NGO sector. The Environment Platform had had a successful meeting on an uplands theme. Next year's meeting would focus on freshwater.

NRW will be producing another *State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR)* in two phases with early release towards the end of 2020 and expanded reporting in 2021. All chapters are in advanced draft and have been externally reviewed. Professor Ormerod informed members that elections would take place in Wales in the spring of next year, with Mark Drakeford standing down as First Minister.

- 11.5 Professor Winter reported that in England there was still a lively debate about environmental land management following EU exit. The Glover review on protected landscapes may lead to a new national landscape service. Through the Spending Review, Natural England had bid for additional resources for nature recovery, and was collaborating with JNCC, Defra and others on the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment bid. Lord Blencathra reported that there were strong signals from Government of the need to be ambitious on green recovery and climate change and Natural England would be considering how to frame these issues.
- 11.6 Dr Kirkpatrick reported that in Northern Ireland much work was being undertaken on green recovery and green growth. The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside was now able to appoint new members, with interviews due to take place in January 2021 including for a new Deputy Chair.
- 11.7 The Committee noted that JNCC would need to establish relationships with the new environmental protection bodies in each of the countries in the UK. Members agreed to schedule time for the Committee to discuss this.

Action point(s)
<p>AP05 Ms Denholm to facilitate a discussion between the Communications teams in NatureScot and JNCC to share best practice.</p> <p>AP06 Mrs Quince to add an item on JNCC's interactions with environmental protection bodies to the Joint Committee forward programme for March 2021.</p>

12. Performance report for Q1 2020/21 (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 36)

12.1 This item was taken in confidence.

13. Update on JNCC's response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 37)

13.1 This item was taken in confidence.

14. Implementing JNCC’s strategy: development priorities (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 38)

14.1 This item was taken in confidence.

15 Offshore wind power and JNCC (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 40)

15.1 This item was taken in confidence.

16 Analysis of JNCC’s income and report from the Wider Markets sub-group (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 42)

16.1 This item was taken in confidence.

17 Update on progress with the pay flexibilities business case (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 39)

17.1 This item was taken in confidence.

18 Joint Committee forward programme (Official) (JNCC 20 43)

18.1 Committee **noted** the forward programme and the excellent strategic papers for this meeting.

19 Update on JNCC’s readiness for the end of the EU Transition Period (Official-sensitive) (JNCC 20 41)

19.1 This item was taken in confidence.

20 Any other business

20.1 No business was discussed.