



**The one hundred and forty-fifth meeting of the
Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 3 December 2025
online via Teams**

**Paper JNCC 25 M04: Minutes of the 145th meeting of
the Joint Nature Conservation Committee**

All available papers for the one hundred and forty-fifth meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee can be found at: <https://jncc.gov.uk/resources/a49a5da4-1507-4b77-8a8d-332b8373120b>.

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/>.



Turning science into action for nature, people and the planet.

Minutes of the 145th meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee

The Committee members present were: David Cooper (Joint Committee Chair), Marsha Ramroop (Independent PCC Chair), Rachael Garrett (morning only) (Independent), Julia Jones (Independent), Tom Meagher (Independent), Peter Unwin (Natural England), Mel Austen (morning only) (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), Dave Stone (JNCC), Beth Stoker (Items 8,9) (JNCC), Natalie Askew (Items 8,9) (JNCC), Steve Wilkinson (Items 8,9, 11) (JNCC), Tracey Quince (JNCC), Tracey Elliott (JNCC), Rebecca Ashcroft (JNCC), Emily Songer (JNCC), Gwawr Jones (JNCC), Natasha Chetina (JNCC), Ian Mitchell (Items 8,9) (JNCC), Chiara Cooper (Item 11) (JNCC), Sallie Bailey (morning only) (Natural England), Peter Brotherton (afternoon only) (Natural England), Sara McGuckin (DAERA), Emma Peake (Defra), Stuart MacQuarrie (NatureScot)

Apologies were received from: Dan Ebanks (Independent) and Lynn Heeley (JNCC)

3rd December, 9.30, Virtual via Microsoft teams

The meeting was preceded by a closed session, attended by Committee members, the CEO and Chief Scientist, in which confidential matters were discussed.

1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1 David noted the publication of the [UK biodiversity Indicators](#) the previous day, and the launch and publication of the [UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy](#) the previous week, which both underlined the important impact of

JNCC's work, as well as the recent launch of [England's Environment Improvement Plan](#).

- 1.2 Committee agreed to hear a report from the Chief Scientists Group and so this matter was added to the agenda as a new item following item 6. (Subsequent agenda items have been renumbered accordingly).

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1. No new interests were declared.

3. Minutes of the September and November 2025 intersessional meeting

- 3.1. The Committee reviewed the draft minutes of the September main meeting and the November intersessional meeting (JNCC 25 54D) and approved them.

4. Matters arising

- 4.1. The Committee noted the paper (JNCC 25 55D) including actions that had been completed.
- 4.2. Regarding AP04 (August 2025), it was agreed that Chris Tuckett would share additional information on CDEL with Mel Austen. This action should be marked as complete.

5. Chief Executive Officer's Report

- 5.1. Gemma Harper introduced her report (JNCC 25 56P, Official-Sensitive) which contained updates on the Autumn Gathering of the Chairs and CEOs of Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs), the recent Ministerial Performance Review (MPR) with Minister Creagh, the development of an innovative prototype tool to address land use challenges, Black History Month celebrations, the Natural History Museum COP30 event, COP-15 of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the key role JNCC played in bridging science and policy at a landmark Business Innovation Forum at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), opening the UK Business and Biodiversity Forum Summit, JNCC's co-hosting of the 'Just Don't Waste' event at the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and representing the UK Government at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in October in the United Arab Emirates.
- 5.2. Committee agreed that following the proposal from the SNCBs Autumn Gathering, the Chairs should write directly to the Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in preparation for their meeting expected in early 2026. The letter would note the recent publication of the UK Biodiversity Indicators and the imminent publication of the 7th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and highlight issues that could be considered

across the four countries in the lead up to COP17. The letter would be sent as early as possible in the New Year as elections in Scotland and Wales were planned to take place in May, with the pre-election period beginning at the end of March. It would not be published. In the absence of a chair of the Council for Nature Conservation & the Countryside, Sara McCracken would sign the letter on behalf CNCC. Gemma to inform Sara of the discussion at the Autumn Gathering ahead of signing the letter as Sara had not attended the meeting. A second, public, letter to ministers could be considered after the 7th National Report and before COP17.

- 5.3. Committee **agreed** to the SNCBs' Chairs and CEOs proposal for a joint event with the UK Business and Biodiversity Forum (UKBBF) following IPBES-12, which is due to approve the IPBES Business and Biodiversity Assessment, and ahead of COP17 of the Convention on Biological Diversity in October. Committee supported working more closely with business as well as youth organisations and environmental NGOs, to build influence and credibility. It was suggested that the event could be held in conjunction with another meeting to maximise attendance. A joint SNCB/UKBBF statement ahead of COP17 could be prepared by the event. Noting that the new Natural Resources Wales (NRW) chair Neil Sachdev had a business background, Steve Ormerod offered to facilitate an in-person meeting between Neil, Gemma, David Cooper and himself ahead of the next Joint Committee meeting in Cardiff in March 2026.
- 5.4. The recent Ministerial Performance Review was discussed. Committee noted the clear message from Minister Creagh regarding the need to raise JNCC's profile and voice through a new narrative. Committee agreed that the new Nature Narrative, would help JNCC to increase its reach. Committee noted that the need for stronger work on communications should be balanced with capacity.
- 5.5. Relevant teams in JNCC, NatureScot and Natural England were to engage on JNCC's development of the innovative prototype tool to address land use challenges.
- 5.6. The presentation by Sarah Scott Marshall on IPBES Nexus had been well received and Committee suggested that Sarah could present this work at a future meeting of the Committee.
- 5.7. Committee **discussed** transparency and publishing Joint Committee papers on the JNCC website. Committee **agreed** that where possible papers should be made available publicly and written for a public audience, but this should not compromise good governance.

Action point(s)
AP01 Secretariat to invite Sarah Scott Marshall to host an item on Nexus assessment to a future Joint Committee meeting [5.6]

6. Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and People and Culture Committee reports

- 6.1. Pete Higgins introduced the report from ARAC (JNCC 25 66P Official-Sensitive), noting it presented a mostly positive analysis with limited issues and concerns raised. Mel Austen asked for a copy of the risk drill down into science skills and capability. Committee noted the projected underspend, the increasing costs of the external audit which would need to be addressed. It was noted that the Annual Report & Accounts would be laid before Parliament the following day (4 December).
- 6.2. Marsha Ramroop presented the People & Culture Committee (PCC) report (circulated to members shortly after the meeting). Committee noted that: the recruitment of a temporary appointment in the HR Team to update HR policies; the need for a resourced secretariat for the committee; the good progress being made with the programme of change and development of the target operating model; the importance of health and wellbeing, and the planned join up with ARAC on this topic in the new year; and the planned PCC effectiveness review. A new Director of People and Infrastructure, Liz Amartei had recently been appointed.
- 6.3. Committee **noted** both reports.

7. Chief Scientists Group (CSG) update

- 7.1. Julia Jones gave an oral update on the last meeting of CSG in October 2025.
 - A full day workshop, with all 5 SNCBs, and the Defra Chief Scientist as well as independent experts and advisors, would be held to initiate CSG discussions on the key risks and opportunities in the use of AI, including the use of the open-source Geospatial Foundation Model TESSERA. These discussions will take place as part of a workshop hosted by the Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy and the Conservation Evidence Group in the first week of January 2026.
 - The CSG has engaged with the Research and Innovation in a Dynamic Environment (RIDE) Forum in November and suggested that a follow-up would be required.
 - There had been a brief discussion about ongoing work on a possible UK-wide People and Nature Survey (PANS) module, noting a new ESRC-funded 'use of secondary data' project led by Edinburgh University which is working to draw together existing surveys.

- The need for a UK Bird Monitoring Framework was discussed to ensure the forward look programme for bird surveys is fed into SNCB business planning.
- Andy Clements from the England Species Reintroduction Taskforce (ESRT) had given CSG a presentation. CSG acknowledged the value in remaining engaged with ESRT as independent advisors with reputational integrity.
- CSG discussed the remit and focus of the GB Red List Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG). CSG commissioned the IAWG to revise its terms of reference to reflect its new strategic purpose and country needs for red list data and share with CSG for review intersessionally.
- There had been a presentation from the ESRC-funded ACCESS centre. CSG to have a strategic discussion on interdisciplinary sciences in the environmental sector with an initial focus on incorporating social sciences in early 2026.

7.2. Joint Committee noted that the terms of reference for CSG were being finalised and would be circulated shortly

8. Q2 Performance Report and update on programme of change

8.1. David Collins presented this item and introduced paper JNCC 25 57P (Official-sensitive) and informed Committee that there had been no significant changes since members review the earlier version of the report at the intersessional meeting in November. The organisation continues to deliver its objectives at a good pace. The Committee noted the projected underspend which had largely resulted from restrictions on total headcount as well as lack of flexibility to reallocate funds due to ring-fenced funding. The Committee considered that the reserves could be increased in line with applicable guidelines, and the balance would be returned to Defra. Committee members expressed concern about staff morale which had been impacted by the combination of high workload and constrained recruitment. A staff-wellbeing survey would be launched shortly to inform future direction.

8.2. Committee were informed that the Programme of Change was now moving forward with a G7 Programme Manager in place. The programme would be based on a target operating model and would help deliver on strategic priorities and provide clarity and certainty in a challenging external environment. Staff would continue to be engaged in the further implementation of the programme.

8.3. Committee **noted** the report.

9. UK Biodiversity Indicators, Interministerial Group and 7th National Report update

- 9.1. Chris Tuckett introduced this item and presented the paper (JNCC 25 65P). Ian Mitchell gave an update on the 7th National Report.
- 9.2. Committee thanked Ian for an insightful presentation. Committee agreed that there was not always a perfect match between UK and global targets, so adding a UK domestic perspective to the indicators would be helpful in providing clarity about the indicators most important to driving UK policy. Steve Wilkinson confirmed that in Q4, the indicator suite would be reviewed internally.
- 9.3. Committee noted that a key priority area was working and partnering with businesses to unlock finance, particularly for businesses keen to raise their level of sustainability in their supply chains.
- 9.4. Committee advised the Executive to consider how best to collate stakeholder views into a UK view ahead of the next national report. Embracing stakeholder views to develop a more robust consultation next time would make this a more participatory process and would leverage more concerted action to achieve the targets.
- 9.5. Committee noted the importance of messaging and creating an understanding for the public and ministers of the state of the environment.
- 9.6. Committee suggested JNCC explore holding a side event at COP17, noting that the process for securing such an event was a competitive one. This would help to utilise JNCC's convening power on the international stage. The Executive agreed and noted other vehicles for sharing experiences would also be explored, including technical meetings and bilaterals with other countries ahead of COP17.
- 9.7. Committee **noted** the update and **agreed** to discuss indicators further at a future meeting.

Action point(s)
AP02 Following the internal review in Q4 of the indicator suite, Joint Committee to discuss indicators at a future meeting [9.2 & 9.7].

10. Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES): engagement with IPBES-12 and IPBES assessment reports

10.1. Beth Stoker and Natalie Askew introduced this item and the paper JNCC 25 64P.

10.2. Committee **noted** the paper and the need to register for the IPBES event in February 2026. Natalie agreed to send members a link to the registration platform

Action point(s)
AP03. Natalie Askew to send Committee members a link to the registration platform for the IPBES event in Manchester 3-8 February 2026 [10.2]

11. Nature Narrative

11.1. Gemma Harper introduced this item and the paper JNCC 25 62P.

11.2. Committee **discussed** the revised draft of the narrative. Discussion centred on the links between nature and economic growth. Subject to a few agreed revisions, Committee were **content** with the narrative, and it was agreed that the Executive would finalise the document accordingly.

Action point(s)
AP04. Gemma Harper to circulate the final version of the Nature Narrative to Committee members [11.2]

12. Sign-off process for JNCC's statutory advice on the designation of new Special Areas of Conservation in Scotland

12.1. Steve Wilkinson introduced this item and the paper JNCC 25 63D.

12.2. Committee **noted** the short timescale for JNCC to complete its role and **agreed** that sign off be delegated to the JNCC Chair. Committee **agreed** that where

areas were close to borders, all countries would be consulted before a final decision was made.

13. Joint Committee six monthly risk appetite review

13.1. Tracey Quince introduced this item and the paper JNCC 25 58D.

13.2. Committee **discussed** the risk appetite and **agreed** that it reflected the current risk exposure and therefore no revisions were necessary at this time. Working collaboratively, stronger networking and placing reliance on expertise in the CNCB's were all key issues to consider in a risk context. However, Committee agreed that to restore nature at scale and for JNCC to operate at scale, a higher risk appetite should be considered going forward.

13.3. Committee **agreed** to consider the process ahead of the next review in June 2026 and to consider whether the appropriate review frequency should be annual or six-monthly.

14. Progress towards meeting Joint Committee working objectives 2025/26

14.1. Tracey Quince introduced this item and the paper JNCC 25 60P.

14.2. Committee **discussed** the objectives and key tasks and **agreed** that progress so far was good. The Chair would undertake further consultations with sub-group chairs regarding the future of these sub-groups, considering the recently agreed enhancement of the Chief Scientists Group.

14.3. Committee discussed the need to review the timings of meetings with regard to the review of the quarterly performance reports, to avoid the necessity of considering these at both the intersessional and main meetings. The committee also discussed the value of cross-country communications to share ideas and best practice and develop a more consistent approach to key messages across the UK would be considered. Committee noted that Sara McCracken was working with the Executive on communications and stakeholder engagement plan.

- 14.4. Committee noted that Nigel Reader had organised an SNCB ARAC chairs meeting for January 2026.

15. Joint Committee Forward programme scheduling and oral discussion on the role of intersessional meetings

- 15.1. David Cooper introduced this item and the paper JNCC 25 611.
- 15.2. The forward programme was **discussed**. The next meeting in Cardiff in March would focus on land, inland waters and seas.
- 15.3. Members requested a more structured horizon scanning in March, either within the meetings or as a separate session.
- 15.4. David Cooper informed members that as noted under the previous agenda item, the timings of intersessional and main meetings in the third quarter 2026/27 and beyond were under review.

16. Meeting review

- 16.1. Committee noted the broad agenda, quality of papers and the productive discussion. The collegiate approach to agreeing a position, particularly in relation to the nature narrative, exemplified the ability of the Committee to work together to deliver solutions.

17. Any Other Business

- 17.1. Pete Higgins informed members that at the October meeting of the IUCN Committee, they had agreed that Nature-based Education has now become an integral part of the IUCN 2026-2029 Programme of Work and 20-Year Vision, so one of its 26 programmes.
- 17.2. Steve Ormerod asked that NRW officers responsible for briefing him are added to the circulation list for papers. Tracey Elliott agreed to follow this up and add relevant NRW staff to the list.