JNCC Support Co 39th Meeting Minutes Confirmed

Date: 20 June 2024	**Time: 9:00**
Venue: Virtually via MS Teams	

Present

Melanie Austen
Natural England member

David Collins
JNCC Director and Company Secretary

Cath Denholm
Independent Interim Chair

Colin Galbraith
NatureScot member

Gemma Harper
JNCC Chief Executive

Pete Higgins
NatureScot member

Tom Meagher
Independent Member

Julian Orford
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Steve Ormerod
Natural Resources Wales member

In attendance

Tracey Quince
JNCC

Nigel Reader
ARAC Attendee

Apologies

Lord David Blencathra
Natural England member

Rhys Jones
Natural Resources Wales member

1 Chairman's opening remarks

1.1. Cath welcomed members to the 39th meeting of JNCC Support Co.

1.2. Cath noted that members had not yet discussed the ARAC annual report nor received the update from the ARAC meeting on 18 June which had discussed the Annual Report & Accounts (ARA). However, Nigel Reader, attending the Board meeting as Interim Chair of ARAC, would summarise ARAC's view of the ARA and governance controls prior to recommending the Board to approve the ARA.

2 Declaration of interests

2.1 No new declarations were declared.

3 Amendments to the minutes of the 19 June 2023 Board meeting (BD 24 01)

3.1 The minutes of the 38th meeting held on 19 June 2023 were confirmed as a true record.

4 JNCC Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) for 2023/24 (BD 24 02)

4.1 David Collins introduced the ARA and explained that it currently recorded a £1.2m deficit on the account last year, which would rise to £1.3m once the additional £113k increase in the provision for dilapidation costs on Monkstone House from £569k to £682k had been agreed with National Audit Office (NAO). The ARA as presented was substantially complete, subject to minor technical amendments and completion of NAO testing. The NAO's Controller and Auditor General had agreed to release his audit certificate demonstrating that statutory and other reporting requirements have been met.

4.2 Members were informed that pensions information was missing from the ARA due to delays with CSPS providing the required information. This delay is not restricted to JNCC. Treasury and NAO have therefore given a direction that allows the ARA to be completed with this pension information omitted.

4.3 Nigel Reader drew members' attention to pages 71-72 where the overseas incident had been recorded in the Governance Statement. ARAC were content with the wording and the level of detail in the statement. Members noted that the report on Overseas Travel could attract external attention. Members asked that the executive prepare and share a reactive press line, should the publication of the ARA invoke queries. This would ensure the organisation was prepared to deal with any queries and challenges on the incident.

4.4 ARAC had noted that there had been some issues with the external audit this year, largely because of the relative inexperience of members of the finance team. This had led to an additional NAO fee of £7.5k, making a total fee of

£73,500 for auditing the 2023/24 JNCC accounts. This was not anticipated as a recurring fee increase. Nigel informed members that, subject to the incorporation of editorial suggestions made by ARAC members at the meeting on 18 June, ARAC had recommended that the Board approve the ARA and that Gemma Harper as Chief Executive sign the Letter of Representation.

4.5 Members noted the sustainability report for JNCC operations on pages 47-49 and travel emissions. Members noted that the figures in the report were compiled from travel providers and GPA figures and that they had not been audited by NAO. Members agreed an action for ARAC to lead a discussion in year on the presentation of sustainability reporting ahead of next year's ARA.

4.6 David informed members of a request from NAO to undertake the JNCC audit of the 2024/25 accounts later to allow them to concentrate their resources on the Defra and Environment Agency accounts. This would mean laying the JNCC ARA in September of 2025, rather than July. ARAC were aware of the request and had agreed to discuss further with the executive and NAO. If the request were agreed, it would be on the expectation that JNCC returns to pre-recess laying within one year.

4.7 Cath thanked David and the Finance Team for their work in preparing the ARA, noting the particular challenges with a new team. She also thanked the Chair of ARAC and ARAC members for their careful oversight

4.8 The Board approved the JNCC Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) for the year ending 31 March 2024, subject to the editorial changes made by ARAC and the minor technical amendments required following completion of the NAO audit. The Board agreed a delegation to the JNCC Interim Chair to sign off the final version of the ARA once complete and on the advice of the ARAC Chair and Director of Finance. The Board authorised the Chief Executive to arrange for the ARA to be laid before the Houses of Parliament and Scottish parliament in due course and authorised the Chief Executive to sign the letter of representation for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Action point(s)
AP01 David Collins to review emissions reporting in the ARA for 2024/25, agreeing with ARAC, prior to the preparation of the ARA, how the figures are presented and undertaking an independent review of the figures for accuracy. AP02 David Collins to prepare reactive lines on the overseas travel incident and to share these with Company Board members for information ahead of publication of the Annual Report & Accounts.

5 Any other business

5.1 No further business was raised.