

ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 26 February 2003

Time: 9.15 am to 12.15 pm

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

THE JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE (JNCC)

1. The constitution and remit of the JNCC

1. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) was established by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as a committee of the three country nature conservation agencies (English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)). It is an integral part of the three agencies.
2. The Committee comprises 13 members: a chairman and three other independent members; the chairman and one other member from each of the three country agencies; the chairman of the Countryside Agency; and two (non-voting) members appointed by the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland).
3. The JNCC is the forum through which the three country agencies act jointly to deliver their statutory responsibilities for Great Britain as a whole and internationally. These responsibilities (known as the special functions) contribute to sustaining and enriching biological diversity, enhancing geological diversity, and sustaining natural systems.
4. The special functions are:
 - i. to provide advice to Ministers on the development and implementation of policies for or affecting nature conservation at the GB level or internationally;
 - ii. to provide advice and disseminate information on nature conservation at the GB level or internationally;
 - iii. to establish common standards for the monitoring of, and research into, nature conservation and the analysis of resultant information;
 - iv. to commission or support research relevant to any of the above;

- v. to provide advice or information to any of the country agencies on any nature conservation matter which is judged to be of GB or international significance (even if it arises in only one country) or which raises issues common to all three countries;
- vi. to provide advice to Ministers on amendments to the species protection Schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

1.5 Since devolution, many of these special functions, including the provision of advice and information to Ministers, have related to the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government, as well as to the UK Government. The involvement of the Environment and Heritage Service, an agency of the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), allows the JNCC to adopt a consistent approach across the United Kingdom, wherever this is appropriate.

1.6 The JNCC delivers its work through:

- i. the combined knowledge and expertise of its Committee members;
- ii. a central Support Unit comprised of approximately 100 staff assigned from the three country agencies;
- iii. a wide variety of inter-agency groups;
- iv. one country agency acting as a lead agency on particular topics; or
- v. work commissioned from outside bodies or individuals.

1.7 The JNCC receives most of its funding as grant in aid via the country conservation agencies. Each year, JNCC's grant in aid is set by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in agreement with the devolved administrations, and the appropriate level of funding is ring-fenced in the country agencies' grant in aid settlements. In 2002/03 the JNCC's grant in aid was £5.3 million. The JNCC also receives some income directly from UK Government departments and other bodies to undertake specific work.

1.8 The JNCC has recently been subject to a quinquennial review. The review made a number of recommendations intended to improve the delivery of the JNCC's services, including giving the organisation corporate body status and the power to enter into contracts and employ its own staff. The recommendations will be implemented by using the Regulatory Reform Act to remove restrictions in the Environmental Protection Act and setting up a company limited by guarantee to discharge the JNCC's functions.

1. The range of work undertaken by the JNCC

1. The JNCC's work comprises seven strategic themes. These are described below.

Providing advice on international nature conservation issues

2. One of the JNCC's key roles is to provide scientific advice to Government on the implementation of international multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Migratory Species and the World Heritage Convention. This includes participating in UK delegations to international meetings and co-ordinating UK reporting arrangements. The JNCC's critical mass of expertise means that we are well placed to enhance synergy between agreements.
3. The JNCC also provides specialist advice to support nature conservation initiatives in the UK's Overseas Territories. More generally, we have a role in collecting intelligence on international problems, proposals and conservation initiatives, and sharing this with Government and the country agencies.

Furthering nature conservation in a European context

4. The JNCC advises Government and country agencies on the application of various European directives, strategies and programmes in the UK. For example, in relation to the EC Habitats and Birds Directives, we co-ordinate certain aspects of implementation in the UK, maintain common standards (e.g. selection criteria for Natura 2000 sites), and provide UK scientific representatives on EC committees and working groups.
5. We also contribute to the development and interpretation of European directives and policies with nature conservation implications by horizon scanning, providing intelligence and scientific advice to Government and agencies, and liaising with European partners. The recently established UK Nature and Landscape Office in Brussels facilitates this work.

Providing scientific advice on the sustainable use of resources

6. Many organisations contribute to the development of policies for the sustainable use of resources, and the JNCC's contribution is relatively modest. One of our main roles is to use monitoring and surveillance data to assess the effects of wide-scale environmental change on biodiversity in the UK (e.g. in relation to air pollution and climate change). Such data may be used to provide information and advice on the wildlife implications of resource use policies, such as agriculture, fisheries, transport and energy, and to identify

priority issues that require research to identify the causes of change and potential ameliorative actions.

7. The JNCC also acts as a forum for the country agencies to share information and experience, and to deliver co-ordinated advice where this adds value. We have a central role in providing UK advice on resource uses, notably fisheries, renewable energy sources, and oil and gas extraction, which lie outside territorial waters.

Developing common standards for nature conservation and co-ordinating UK approaches

8. The JNCC supports nature conservation by developing common standards, co-ordinating UK-wide activities where these deliver increased efficiency or effectiveness, and disseminating knowledge about good practice. Work on common standards includes the development and maintenance of habitat classifications (e.g. the National Vegetation Classification), systems for assessing species status (e.g. Red Data books), and standards for the selection of statutory sites (e.g. SSSI selection guidelines). JNCC is also publishing the Geological Conservation Review which provides the full scientific justification for every geological/geomorphological SSSI.
9. In support of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), we co-ordinate various initiatives in the UK, including promoting and enabling biodiversity research (in partnership with Defra) and chairing UK-wide groups such as the Biodiversity Action and Information Group and some Habitat and Species Action Plan steering groups.

Assessing the status of UK biodiversity and earth heritage

10. The JNCC's advisory work is underpinned by information on the state of the UK biodiversity and earth heritage resource and how this resource has changed over time. This information is derived from a wide range of monitoring and surveillance programmes across the terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine environments of the UK, both within protected sites and in the wider environment. We undertake some of this work ourselves (e.g. seabird and cetacean survey), but more frequently work in partnership with other organisations and provide funding for them to deliver monitoring and surveillance schemes (e.g. for breeding and wetland birds, mammals and butterflies). We also work closely with the country agencies and others to develop guidance on monitoring techniques and approaches (e.g. common standards monitoring for protected sites).
11. In the future, more effort is likely to be required to establish and maintain long-term surveillance schemes for the marine environment, terrestrial habitats and selected species groups. Where appropriate, we will participate in the development of European

surveillance and monitoring programmes so that the status of UK biodiversity and earth heritage can be assessed within the context of wider international trends

Making nature conservation information accessible

12. The JNCC has developed a key strength in the collation and management of nature conservation information. Our work in this area is supported by the development of systems for collecting and collating data (e.g. Recorder 2000), and for disseminating and sharing data and information (e.g. through the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and various websites. In addition to managing and disseminating information, we use our expertise to synthesise available data with the aim of influencing the development of indicators, informing habitat and species status assessments, and meeting environmental reporting requirements (e.g. under UK BAP and European directives).

Supporting the JNCC's business by providing high-quality services

13. To deliver the work areas described above, it is essential to provide support services covering office accommodation, financial management and procurement, personnel management, corporate governance, and IT support. The way in which these services are provided is kept under continual review to ensure that they continue to support the JNCC's business as efficiently and effectively as possible, and to take account of the Government's agenda for public sector reform.

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3. Working with the National Assembly for Wales and the Countryside Council for Wales

1. Because of its UK remit and its constitution as a committee of the country conservation agencies, the JNCC has developed strengths in co-operative working and information sharing. Relationships with the country agencies, UK Government and the devolved administrations are especially strong.
2. The JNCC's remit, skills, experience and work programme provide substantial benefits for the National Assembly for Wales and CCW. These include:
 - i. placing Welsh conservation issues in a UK and international context (e.g. to enable work to be focussed on priority issues and to provide trends in biodiversity status);
 - ii. providing a mechanism for Welsh priorities to be communicated to an international audience and to inform the development of international nature conservation policies and initiatives;
 - iii. identifying and tracking emerging international issues and communicating these to the Assembly

and CCW;

iv. formulating and maintaining site selection guidelines (for biological SSSIs, SACs and SPAs), and publishing the full scientific justification for every geological and geomorphological SSSI in the planned 40 volume GCR series (of which 26 volumes are already published, including the pre-Cambrian, Cambrian/Ordovician, Silurian and Welsh Quaternary).

v. providing a forum for CCW to work with SNH, English Nature and the Environment Heritage Service to develop a co-ordinated UK position on key nature conservation issues. An important example of this in practice is our work on marine nature conservation, which includes developing a holistic framework for marine nature conservation through the Irish Sea Pilot, our work on the Marine Natura 2000 site series, our work to achieve reform to the Common Fisheries Policy and our surveillance programmes for seabirds and cetaceans. Joint working to achieve improvements on air pollution issues is also proving influential;

vi. undertaking, on behalf of the country agencies and administrations, the drawing together of information for the preparation of UK reports under the global wildlife Conventions, EU wildlife Directives and UKBAP;

vii. contributing to the collation and dissemination of data in Wales, and elsewhere in the UK, through our work on standards for the management of, and access to, biological information, and through our support of the National Biodiversity Network.

viii enabling the Assembly and CCW to implement cost-effective work programmes by providing the opportunity for collaboration between organisations (with associated economies of scale).

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

14 February 2003