

Triennial Review Team,  
Defra, Area 6D  
Nobel House, 17 Smith Square,  
London  
SW1P 3JR

9 April 2013



**Scottish  
Wildlife  
Trust**

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: Discussion paper: Triennial Review of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)**

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT)<sup>1</sup> welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Triennial Review of the JNCC.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust's central aim is to advance the conservation of Scotland's biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations. We have a 25-year vision for Scotland in which we want to see a network of healthy, resilient ecosystems supporting expanding communities of native species across large areas of Scotland's land, water and seas.

We believe the way forward to protect and enhance Scotland's biodiversity and wildlife is to adopt an ecosystem approach to nature conservation and for society to recognise that healthy ecosystems are the foundation of Scotland's prosperity. The conservation of biodiversity is key to ecosystem health; without thriving biodiversity, ecosystems begin to malfunction, are less resilient to change and lose significant value.

We have contributed to the review of JNCC in three ways: through this short response and in consultation through the responses submitted by The Wildlife Trusts and Scottish Environment LINK.

**General comments**

We believe that the JNCC fulfils a number of key functions which are listed below:

- reporting on the Aichi targets - this would not really be possible for the devolved administrations without the presence of a UK coordinating agency
- role of JNCC in helping plan and implement biodiversity strategies in the UK Overseas Territories
- JNCC's role in liaising with International Union for Conservation of Nature which plays a key role in generating and shaping much of the content of the Conventions at early and middle stages
- role of JNCC as the UK focal point for the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (mainly inputting on scientific, reporting and technical issues)
- providing evidence, information and advice in the offshore marine environment which is particularly important for the non-devolved elements of marine work.

We also believe that it is essential that JNCC maintains its independence from Government in order to carry out its critical role contributing to protecting the natural environment. Decisions made by JNCC must be science-led and the organisation must be sufficiently resourced to retain the necessary levels of scientific expertise to inform evidence-based policy.

**Question 1: Are there any functions of the JNCC which you believe are not necessary, and why do you think this?**

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Wildlife Trust's central aim is to advance the conservation of Scotland's biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations. With over 32,000 members, several hundred of whom are actively involved in conservation activities locally, we are proud to say we are now the largest voluntary body working for all the wildlife of Scotland. The Trust owns or manages 120 wildlife reserves and campaigns at local and national levels to ensure wildlife is protected and enhanced for future generations to enjoy.

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We do not believe that any of the current functions are not necessary and we think the above roles are essential in order for the UK and its overseas territories to maintain and safeguard its natural capital and the services that flow from it, to pass on to future generations.

### Question 2: What works well in the delivery of JNCC's functions and why?

As well as the key functions outlined above, we believe that the JNCC has an essential role of providing advice on environmental and other EU policies which impact on the environment to the UK as a Member State and to its devolved governments, the country conservation bodies and EU institutions. As biodiversity does not adhere to country borders, JNCC's surveillance and monitoring work across the UK to agreed standards is vital in assessing progress towards achieving biodiversity targets. By carrying out this coordinating role, JNCC provides good value for money because it streamlines the costs of European and international work, such as reporting on Aichi Targets, at a UK level on behalf of the four countries.

In the marine environment, establishing an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas in non-devolved waters is being led by the JNCC and it is fulfilling the valuable role of developing a programme of reporting and monitoring to establish marine biodiversity status and trends and the pressures that act on them.

### Question 3: What value does the scientific and technical advice provided by the JNCC have for you?

JNCC ensures there is consistency of approach to the implementation of EU directives across the UK and, by providing guidance and assistance to the four countries, it helps ensure the UK as a whole meets its obligations to conserve habitats under EU Directives.

As we stated above, it is essential that JNCC maintains the necessary levels of scientific expertise to ensure that strong science underpins Government policies that impact on the environment. As the environment is the context for all activity be it economic or otherwise, it is crucial that the UK Government and the devolved administrations continue to invest wisely in the JNCC to ensure the stock of natural capital is safeguarded.

With regard to marine nature conservation, the JNCC has a key role to play in providing advice which we believe should always be based on the best science available, particularly at a time when the offshore renewable industry begins to flourish. JNCC is also responsible, *inter alia*, for the identification of English Marine Conservation Zones and Scottish nature conservation Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in UK offshore waters.

### Question 4: Do you have any suggestions for opportunities to improve and why?

Up to now, we feel that JNCC has not adequately exploited the expertise within eNGOs which we believe has been a missed opportunity. Environmental organisations like ourselves bring an independence of thought, unconstrained by Government objectives, to the decision making process.

JNCC must be better resourced. Considering its vital role which we have outlined above, it is composed of a relatively small number of highly skilled and dedicated staff. We do feel that specialist expertise has become depleted overtime which has not been justified considering the increasing need and demand for technical skills and expertise.

A particular area where JNCC could draw more effectively on the expertise of eNGOs is with regard to the marine environment. There is a general perception among environmental organisations that the JNCC has been focusing on advising industry rather than working effectively with marine conservation stakeholders. This is exemplified by JNCC continuing to advise the UK Government that there is no scientific justification for designating MPAs for mobile species - which is contrary to increasing evidence and examples of MPAs contributing to the protection of wide-ranging species.

With regard to monitoring and ensuring consistency of approach across the four countries and statutory agencies we recommend that JNCC plays a more significant role in developing standards for monitoring the post construction impacts of renewable energy developments around the UK.

### Question 5: Does the current conservation landscape (the way the functions are split between different conservation bodies) work well and if so why do you think this is; and could the way the

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**functions are delivered be managed differently/better in order to achieve better outcomes for the environment, economy and society?**

Broadly speaking, we believe that the functions and split between the different conservation bodies does work well and it is crucial that the JNCC continues to provide the coordination role within the UK. To maintain the effectiveness of this role it is also important that the JNCC does not become part one of the country agencies. Any merger, say with one of the English agencies, would we believe make it more difficult for the JNCC to maintain its independent role and staff equipped with the right scientific and technical expertise - they would inevitably become skewed over time to providing more generalist advice. It would also make it more difficult in the future for the devolved administrations to engage with JNCC and indeed for JNCC to fulfil its duties in advising the UK Government and devolved administrations on UK-wide and international nature conservation.

It should be borne in mind that better outcomes for the environment will inevitably lead to better outcomes for the economy and society and, as we have stated above, this must mean that adequate resources are in place to ensure that the JNCC continues to coordinate, report and deliver on the UK's international commitments to protecting and safeguarding our natural capital.

**Question 6: Is the current structure the most appropriate and if yes why do you think this – are there opportunities to improve and what are they?**

For the reasons stated above we believe the current structure is appropriate.

**Question 7: Do you have any other comments which you would like the triennial review team to take into account?**

JNCC must continue to strike the right balance between working closely with the Government and the devolved administrations whilst at the same time coordinating the management of the UK's conservation objectives and obligations. It must be acknowledged that any erosion of the independent of its role or loss of scientific expertise will have a significant and detrimental effect on the UK's stock of natural capital and as a consequence will impact on the economy and society. That said, we believe that JNCC could work more effectively by drawing on the expertise of eNGOs who are not driven or constrained by Government policy or targets.

Yours faithfully,



**Dr Maggie Keegan**  
**Head of Policy**