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Sir Angus Stirling
Chairman
JNCC

8 June 2001

Dear Sir Angus

QQR OF THE JNCC

My Council considered the report of Stage 1 of the JNCC Review at its March meeting. I have deferred replying formally until now so that we could have the benefit of the Reviewer's analysis of other extant funding models in the UK which may or may not be analogous to that of the JNCC/Agencies. We have now had time to digest this further information.

CCW welcomes the review as an opportunity to re-iterate our support for the need to retain a UK-wide and international wildlife conservation focus together with a standard setting role across the Country Agencies. We also acknowledge the thorough analysis provided by the reviewer for this first stage, which we had always envisaged would be the most problematic.

We have long been of the view that the JNCC needed more stability to allow it to plan ahead together with a funding regime that reflected such needs. At present it can be argued that the JNCC's programme goes ahead at the speed of the lowest common denominator of the Country Agencies, that is the one with the poorest budgetary settlement. We do not believe that this is a sound way in which to deliver such important functions.

We feel that it is important to remove the uncertainty of the JNCC's current funding regime which will lead to better staff morale and their ability to plan ahead.

Our main concern is that JNCC should be enabled to guide the National Agencies in the application of common standards across the UK, eg in relation to SSSI selection guidelines, monitoring requirements, and the selection of sites to satisfy UK Government need under international Conventions/EU Directives. We see it as extremely important, if not vital, to have such UK-wide standards in order to guarantee to the UK Government, in particular, that it is able to meet its international obligations, and especially its responsibilities as an EU Member State, in a uniform way across the UK.

The proposals by the Reviewer which would create a new DETR funded NDPB is one way of dealing with the deficiencies of the present system although we are not

convinced that the legislative mechanism exists, post devolution to allow such an NDPB to be given a statutory duty to set such standards UK-wide (in consultation with the Country Agencies). We are aware that no analogous arrangement between statutory bodies at UK and Country levels has been created post devolution. So, although the BTA/National Tourist Boards model seems very close, and is one that appears to work, this arrangement was, obviously, created prior to devolution of Government in the UK.

However, there may be other and more immediate ways of dealing with the problems which would not involve new legislation and could be effected within the existing statutory framework. The key, in our view, is to have involvement by, and understanding of the JNCC /Agency interface, by DETR and the devolved Administrations in the work programme of JNCC and its consequent funding needs. These can then be reflected in 3 year rolling Corporate Plan settlements analogous to those of the National Agencies which in turn will lead to a firmer planning base for the JNCC, thereby allowing the Committee to plan ahead, providing stability and improved staff morale.

There remains the existing anomalous situation where JNCC Support Unit staff have to be employed by one or other Country Agency. This gives rise to awkwardness and inefficiency and I think we need to look again at whether there are ways in which this problem might be overcome, such as by creating, without legislation, a company funded wholly by the Joint Committee which can employ its own staff or some other status to allow it to do so.

In the unlikely event that the UK Government is prepared to find the necessary legislative time, or able to do so in order to deal with the problems identified by the Reviewer, it is probably better and more practical to seek solutions to the issues identified by the Reviewer which can be implemented within the existing framework.

I understand that the JNCC QQR Steering Group also asked the reviewer to determine whether the funding arrangements for the JNCC can be altered by agreement with the Country Agencies and Government without recourse to legislative change. We are not aware of the outcome of his investigation on this point but I suggest that this and other options to improve the status, financing and forward planning of the JNCC are considered by the Reviewer in the second stage of his review.

Yours sincerely

John Lloyd Jones
Chairman