

Alison Burtenshaw
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
Zone 1/06
Temple Quay House
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Bristol BS1 6BE

25 June 2001

Dear Ms Burtenshaw

**REVIEW OF THE JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE 2001 – STAGE 1
REPORT: COLLECTIVE RESPONSE FROM THE STAFF OF JNCC**

1. Thank you for providing the opportunity for us to comment on the Stage 1 report of the review of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).
2. The views and opinions expressed in this letter are those identified by the staff of the Support Unit to the JNCC. This is the first time that staff views have been fed collectively into this review process, either in the consultative phase or following the stage 1 report. These views have been collated through a round of internal consultation followed by discussion in an open meeting on 22 June 2001. As such, the views represent those of members of the IPMS and CPS unions and those of non-union members alike. The absence of a union response is symptomatic of many of the problems that confront JNCC staff in their day to day functioning. Collective views of staff who are union members can, ordinarily, only be presented through the concerted action of 6 union branches in the 3 country agencies. Regrettably, this happens rarely.
3. Rather than respond to the recommendations of the report in detail, we prefer to highlight the issues which are important to staff and which, we feel, must be addressed regardless of which options are adopted for the future role of the JNCC. Many of these issues will need to be properly addressed in Phase II of the review, we flag them now so that they are not overlooked. These are grouped into 3 main areas.

Role and structure of the new organisation.

4. Whilst staff have mixed views on the recommendations made in the report regarding whether we should be established as an independent NDPB or remain a Committee of the agencies, staff are clearly of the view that to continue with the *status quo* is untenable. To do so would be to perpetuate a system that works only through the goodwill of staff but which leaves those same staff feeling under-valued by the agencies and de-moralised by differing conditions of employment.
5. Specifically, it is vital that role and purpose of JNCC be set out explicitly with a clear strategic direction for the organisation. This requires significant engagement by Government Departments in addition to the continued involvement of the country agencies.

6. We also welcome the recommended amendments to the Committee structure such that there will be greater representation of independent members and full membership for Northern Ireland, the latter enabling us to properly represent a UK, rather than GB, role.
7. JNCC, and the staff working for it, need to be able to present our own UK and international view. Current working arrangements often leave JNCC attempting to find a consensus view between the agencies and / or departments and we thus end up being restricted to the lowest common position. The complexities and tensions generated by these processes reduce staff morale and effectiveness.
8. The organisation needs to be adequately resourced and staffed to enable us to deliver our role and function. Such resourcing should be projected and guaranteed over longer periods than the present, year to year, funding arrangements and formula permit. Direct funding from **all** of our main customers whether in central government, devolved administrations or the country agencies is necessary.
9. Any transitional arrangements from the present organisation to any new or revised structure, organisation or terms & conditions should also be adequately resourced and managed. Any changes should be initiated as soon as possible to reduce uncertainty to staff and to remove rapidly the current inequalities of employment outlined below.
10. Although we understand that these are not planned, it is important to establish that any new body should not result in compulsory redundancies, If required, however, a suitable package for voluntary redundancies should be negotiated with staff.

Terms and conditions of JNCC staff

11. Currently, all JNCC 'staff' are employed by either English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales or Scottish Natural Heritage. Thus, staff doing the same or similar jobs, but employed by different parent agencies, have different terms and conditions which include: different salaries, different pay scales, different pensions, different leave entitlements, different staff reporting systems and different levels of performance related pay. This is **the** single major source of dis-satisfaction to staff.
12. Accordingly, it is the staff view that there should be a single set of terms and conditions for staff working at JNCC. By implication, therefore, JNCC must be established as a body corporate, able to employ staff directly and to negotiate terms and conditions with them and with a Managing Director with full accounting responsibilities. Such a change would also enable us to commission work ourselves (we currently have to do so via English Nature).
13. It is also our view that any change to a single set of terms and conditions should not disadvantage any member of staff in either the short or long term. In other words, any new terms should reflect the highest common denominator, not the lowest, of the three sets of agency terms. However, there should also be a right of return to the parent agency (at a level compatible with the person's grade, skills and experience), at the point of transition, if staff so wish.
14. Any transition to a body corporate with common terms and conditions and the ability to employ staff directly, would also provide JNCC with an opportunity to address other staffing

issues which severely constrain our ability to function more effectively. Notable amongst these are difficulties of recruitment and a high staff turnover.

15. However, we also feel that it is valuable to maintain our links with the country agencies and to retain elements of common citizenship. In other words, JNCC staff should be able to apply for trawls within the country agencies (including, if recommended changes to the Committee are implemented, the Environment and Heritage Service) and *vice versa* to encourage the inter-change of staff between us.

Location of JNCC offices

16. The majority of staff who expressed an opinion do not wish to re-locate, either from Peterborough or Aberdeen. Any such re-location would be costly and disruptive. In the staff view, the potential benefits, if any, are minor compared to the substantial costs and risks (including the likelihood of losing significant numbers of staff).

Phase II of the review of JNCC

17. We welcome the fact that the Stage 1 report noted '*the undoubted expertise of the JNCC staff*' and that '*there are currently no other organisations than JNCC to carry out any of these services*' (referring to our functions). JNCC recently celebrated its 10th anniversary yet over this period, staff have had to deliver our functions set against a background of diverging conditions of employment and reduced resources in real terms. We hope that in considering the recommendations of the review, the opportunity will be taken to enable JNCC to enhance its support to the UK Government, devolved administrations and the country agencies in delivering its nature conservation functions. We, as staff, are certainly committed to doing so.
18. However, there are a significant number of areas (outlined above) which we, as employees, feel are fundamental issues to address if we are to enable JNCC to function more effectively in the future. Accordingly, we feel it is vital that staff are able to be fully involved in Phase II of the review of JNCC. A representative group of staff, including union and non-union members, is being formed to engage with this process.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

L V Fleming
(on behalf of JNCC staff)

cc Sir Angus Stirling
Deryck Steer
Mike Baldwin