

COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

110TH MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 27TH JUNE 2007 AT MAGILLIGAN FIELD CENTRE, BELLARENA

Present:

Dr L Blakiston Houston
Mr B Murphy
Mr J Anderson
Dr B Brown
Mr J Campbell
Mr M Campbell
Mr A Gibson
Mr M Hill
Mr D Hughes
Mr J Jackson
Mr J Simpson

In Attendance:

Mr I Enlander, EHS
Dr I Neistroy, EEAC
Mr S Bannerman, DE
Ms SJupp, MOD
Mr B Hopton, MOD

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr H McBride, Mr JFurphy, Mr R Northridge, Dr A McGarel, Mr A Lonergan, Mr B Black, Mr P Warner, Mr P Cregg, Mr G Seymour, Dr H Platt and Mr I McKee.

The Chairman welcomed Dr I Neistroy, Secretary General of the EEAC.

2. MINUTES OF THE 109TH MEETING HELD ON 11TH MAY 2007

The minutes of the 109th Meeting were agreed.

3. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

3.1 REGNI

The Chairman reported that the Deputy Chairman, Mr Anderson, Mr J Jackson attended the launch of the REGNI Report on the 19th June. The Report is to be discussed by CNCC soon and a response made to government. At the Chairs Group meeting on 25th June, PEPG had advised members there would be a meeting with the SAC Chairs sometime in August to discuss the Report. This would then be followed by a workshop for the SACs around September. The Chairman suggested that if members had any queries on the Report they should send them to the Secretariat. The Chairs Group had expressed the importance of producing a timetable for taking the Report forward.

3.2 Protocols

The Chairman reported that the draft protocol for the relationship between CNCC and the Department was discussed with the Deputy Secretary at the Chairs Group meeting on 25th June. The Deputy Secretary has given an undertaking that he will

review the document and look at the question of independent advice and freedom of expression.

The Group was also informed that the Minister is to head up an NI Executive sub-group to review the proposals of the RPA. The Group was aware that with the outcome of the RPA, planning functions were to be transferred to local councils. However, members had stressed the need for planning policies and strategies to be centralised. This was vital so that there is overall control to ensure policies and strategies are implemented.

4. PRESENTATION ON THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Dr Ingeborg Niestroy, Secretary General of the EEAC gave a presentation on the network of European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils. She outlined some of the background information on the establishment of the EEAC and explained that the composition of this body included those with expertise in environmental issues and sustainable development. Dr Niestroy highlighted a number of the Council's functions and objectives and how it operated. It was noted that the Council has a number of Working Groups which consider specific issues and draw up statements in much the same way as CNCC. The one substantial benefit of the EEAC is its capacity to represent an agreement of councils across Europe. She pointed out some of the future challenges for the Council, for example, a new EEAC strategy and tackling the strategic implications of sustainable development. Dr Neistroy informed members that the EEAC was currently reviewing the framework for joint activities in order to shape its identity much more clearly.

In discussion, members clarified a number of points as follows:

- A point was raised about the case of individual members signing up to statements and at the same time their organisations may hold a different view. Dr Neistroy explained that this was handled by keeping the issues on a broad perspective so that there is no conflict with the parent bodies. She pointed out, however, that currently there are some internal integration problems, particularly in biodiversity and SD.
- It was noted that the new strategy for the EEAC was going through a consultation process. The baseline for this strategy was predicated on long term thinking rather than on a day-to-day basis.
- The countries who subscribe to the EEAC were noted and Dr Neistroy pointed out some of the newer members like Poland, Slavina and Hungry.
- The only stipulation required for any European country to join is that it must have an advisory council. However, those within the EU must have first preference.
- Members asked how the EEAC promotes its advice and measures its success. Dr Neistroy explained that the EEAC and its working groups have access to EC Commissioners and use the networking system to progress their views.

Dr Neistroy advised CNCC of the registration process for membership. She explained that the body must be independent and agree the Councils principles and

fees. A steering group makes the decision on the application. If CNCC makes application soon it is more than likely this will be processed in October with full membership being effective from January 2008. Dr Neistroy believed that CNCC was similar in structure to the councils in Holland and Austria. She also gave some details on the annual conference being held in Portugal this year. It was hoped that a representative of CNCC could attend.

The Chairman thanked Dr Neistroy for coming to Northern Ireland to explain the role of the EEAC and advised her that consideration will be given to an application for membership of this EU body.

ACTION: Consider necessary approvals for membership

Chairman

5. ASSI PROPOSALS (7)

Mr Enlander gave a presentation on the ASSI proposals for the Gobbins, Paris island Big, Tedd, Lisdoo, Drumharvey, Dromore and Lurgylea. He outlined the various features and conservation objectives of each site.

Members considered the proposals and raised a number of points as follows:

The Gobbins

- In response to a question about the impact of recreational activities on the seabird population and corresponding historical data, it was noted that in the case of the cliff top path it would be difficult to determine this because the landowners were not willing to grant access. The lower pathway was owned by local people and as far as EHS was aware there was no numerical information on birds. At the time of this ASSI proposal no EIA was available.
- Members felt that the wording in some of the specific objectives could be more robust. Mr Enlander pointed out that the more robust elements were contained in the schedule. It had to be remembered that EHS always tried to cultivate good relationships with landowners and the wording tended to reflect the Department's aspirations for the site.
- On a more general point, it was noted that there was a decline in seabirds in the north eastern coastal region. Some members took the view that this was probably the result of climate change. Mr Enlander acknowledged this point and indicated that this could have caused a decline in food resources. Council suggested that the data of the JNCC record on Seabirds 2000 should be reflected in the paper.
- Council suggested that EHS should investigate the issues of climate change in this context and include the views of other bodies in the UK and RoI, particularly JNCC.

ACTION: Consider carrying out exercise on climate change EHS

- Members made the point that a balance was needed between the provision of access and the protection of birds.

Council endorsed this proposal for the Gobbins ASSI . However, it stressed the importance of recognising the potential for future recreational activities and the scenario for seabirds.

Paris Island Big

- It was suggested that this site may be better suited to designation as a nature reserve given that landowners may not want to manage the island. However, this would mean the issue of a compulsory purchase order by the Department. Members also suggested that EHS should firstly check out if the accreted foreshore of the island has been bought by the landowner. Most of the accreted foreshore of Lough Erne is in public ownership and managed by DCAL at present.
- Members suggested that para. 2 of the schedule should read 'any change in the introduction of livestock'.
- A question was raised about the level of monitoring of sites. Mr Enlander informed members that in the case of site integrity monitoring this would only involve a check for obvious change. Feature monitoring was carried out every 6 years.

Council endorsed this proposal for the Paris Island Big ASSI.

Council endorsed the remainder of the proposals i.e Tedd, Lisdoon, Drumharvey, Dromore and Lurgylea but asked that EHS finds out the current status of the quarry sites and also report on those sites with mineral constraints and planning permissions.

ACTION: Advise Council on queries relating to quarries Mr Enlander

The Chairman asked that Council be kept up to date on the strategic position relating to sites on the priority list.

ACTION: Update members on priority list Mr Enlander

6. REPORT FROM WORKING GROUPS

6.1 Planning and Landscape Group

Mr Jackson reported that he, the Chairman and Mr Hill had carried out a site visit in relation to the boundary of the new Sperrins AONB. They agreed with the proposed changes but were concerned about the extent of the boundary for the westward extension in the Strule valley south of Newtown Stewart. It was felt that any decision on this should be left to the outcome of the public consultation.

6.2 Access and Amenity Group

Mr Hill reported that the position statement on access and amenity was being finalised. It was suggested that this paper and a covering letter to the Minister should be in the system before the Chairman and Deputy Chairman meet the Minister on the 10th July.

The Chairman thanked Mr Murphy for his outstanding contribution in drafting this paper.

6.3 SEA Group

Mr Campbell reported that he and the Chairman met representatives of the EHS on the 26th June, to discuss a range of issues about the implementation of SEA. He undertook to report on the discussion at the next CNCC meeting in September.

ACTION: Report on discussion with EHS Mr J Campbell

7. MEMBERS REPORTS

Members noted the report of Mr Jackson on the visit by the Royal Forestry Society to Northern Ireland on 17th May.

8. MATTERS ARISING REPORT FROM THE 109TH MEETING

8.1 Members noted the matters arising report including the item on the Lagan Valley Regional Park Board. It was noted that Mr H McBride and Mr J Furphy have been nominated to represent Council on this Board.

9. GENERAL INFORMATION

Members noted the contents of the events and publication lists No.98 and consultation responses.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINES

10.1 Glenarm Quarry

Mr M Campbell raised some concerns about the on-going planning application in respect of the proposed extension of the Glenarm Quarry which is likely to impact on the AONB. The Chairman pointed out that Council had already expressed its views to PS sometime ago, but the SACs are to have a further meeting to discuss the matter further. In the meantime the Secretariat is to send Mr Campbell a copy of the previous responses.

**ACTION: Meet with other reps of the SACs Chairman
Send Mr Campbell copy of responses Secretariat**

10.2 MBE

The Chairman undertook to write to Mr A Malley, former member of CNCC, to congratulate him on the award of MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

ACTION: Write to Mr Malley Chairman

10.3 Climate Change

The Chairman reported that Mr M Campbell has been nominated to represent Council on the JNCC Inter-Agency Climate Change Forum.

10.4 Magilligan Field Centre

Dr D Riley gave a brief outline of the work at the Centre. It was set up in 1970 and was supported by the Western Education and Library Board. He pointed out that a number of field centres are closing but Magilligan has survived so far because it

catered for children right up to 'A' level. The Centre has seen an educational change with a shift in emphasis from facts and processes to values and relationships. Taken together there is a change in behaviour which is manifested in more care for the environment. The main difficulty at present is the close down of the Western Board. The Centre does not fit an easily identifiable category for a new regime and it is difficult to see where it will fit in.

The Chairman thanked Dr Riley for his talk and the use of the Centre's facilities for today's meeting. She informed him that Council hopes to examine the provision of environmental education throughout Northern Ireland in due course.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of CNCC is due to take place on Thursday/ Friday, 6/7th September 2007.

12. PRESENTATION ON THE MOD MAGILLIGAN CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN AND SITE VISIT

Mr S Bannerman, Defence Estates introduced Ms S Jupp of the MOD environment support team and Mr B Hopton, Camp Commandant of Magilligan.

Ms Jupp gave an overview of the nature conservation management plans for both Magilligan and Ballykinler MOD sites. She highlighted some of the main features of the Plan for each site and how the MOD proposes to implement them.

Members welcomed the MOD conservation plans and were pleased to see the positive actions being taken to protect these designated sites. Council noted the proposed work to be carried out at each of the sites and enquired about the availability of funds to implement these measures. Mr Bannerman explained funding was proving to be a difficulty, particularly in the light of future plans for the two sites which will eventually be reduced to non-operational areas. However, funds for the work will be bid for and any progress of the work programme will be reviewed with the EHS at the usual six-monthly meeting. Members pointed out that funding for early management work frequently avoided the need for greater expenditure later on when the deterioration of habitats might have progressed much further. Mr Bannerman agreed but pointed out that it was a matter of priorities in the allocation of funds within the MOD.

Members asked about any proactive plans for the *marsh fritillary*. Ms Jupp informed members that the MOD was trying to encourage this species by developing measures to control scrub land and sowing food plants.

Following the end of Council's business meeting they were accompanied by the MOD staff on a visit to the Magilligan site to look at some of the management issues.