

**5th European Regional Meeting
on the implementation and effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention**

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Workshop A

Experiences with the work of the United Kingdom Ramsar Committee

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Presentation Synopsis

Recommendation 5.7 encourages Contracting Parties to establish, or recognize the establishment of, national committees according to the needs of each Contracting Party, to provide a focus at national level for implementation of the Convention; and urges that, where this is done, the opportunity be provided for an input from both governmental and relevant non-governmental organizations and/or individuals.

During the 1990s the UK discussed Ramsar issues in a Joint Working Party, which became its Ramsar National Committee, that stood alone from other protected area groups and committees.

With the passage of time and the presence of increasing synergies between the requirements of the Ramsar Convention and the EC Wild Birds and Habitats Directives it became apparent that the same or similar site identification and management issues were being discussed in two parallel forums.

In 2002 the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs combined the functions of the UK Ramsar National Committee with the groups established to steer the UK's application of the EC Directives.

Because of the sometimes legally sensitive issues that national administrations face under the EC Directives, meetings discussing protected areas are now split between a Natura 2000/Ramsar Forum at which NGOs are present along with Government representatives, and a Natura 2000/Ramsar Steering Committee where Government Departments, Administrations and Agencies are only present.

The arrangement, whereby the UK's National Committee is in effect a combination of these two fora is still in its infancy. The UK has agreed to maintain a review of the arrangement to ensure that the widened remit of the fora deliver the intended benefits to both site networks as well as the wider objectives of the Convention and the EC Directives.

The presentation will outline the UK's experiences with the new twin-track national Committee approach and venture to demonstrate the practical and legal considerations that resulted in the new arrangements and how transparency and accountability is maintained.