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Workshop F

The UK Ramsar site review – its approach and objectives

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Texts of the presentation slides:

UK Ramsar site series

The UK has 144 designated Ramsar sites, covering 758,812 ha. A further 12 are currently proposed. The first were designated in January 1976. Almost all of the existing sites were designated primarily for their bird interest. Only 29 (20%) Ramsar sites are not 'double-badged' SPAs under the Birds Directive.

Gaps in UK Ramsar series

Despite the large number of sites, the current Ramsar series does not fully represent wetland features in the UK: threatened wetland habitats, non-bird wetland species, certain birds, including seabirds and sedentary wetland birds.

Review of Ramsar sites

Review coverage of wetland habitats and species on existing and proposed Ramsar sites, and make recommendations to address any shortfall. Priority is given to under-represented wetland habitats, including karst, seagrass beds, salt marshes, tidal flats, peatlands, wet grasslands, temporary pools, and mountain wetlands, and globally-threatened wetland species.

Aims of Review

The objective was to achieve a coherent and comprehensive UK Ramsar List within existing the Ramsar network → potential for additional interest features/criteria. Outwit existing network → potential for new sites and/or boundary extensions.

Strands to review

Two strands to review: avian, and non-avian. The UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies are subject to a separate review.

Terms of Reference

Review to consider: relationship between Natura 2000 sites and Ramsar sites, ongoing work on SPA and SAC selection, extent to which site designation is appropriate for certain wetland features (e.g. riverine features), datasets to use, and the balance between expert judgment and more formal analytical procedures.

Steering Group membership

Government departments: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and devolved administrations.

Statutory nature conservation agencies: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature, Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland, and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Non-governmental organizations: Wildlife and Countryside Link

The EC Habitats Directive

Annex I lists 41 wetland habitats that occur within the UK. Annex II lists 33 wetland species that are resident in, and native to, the UK. There are 616 candidate or possible SACs in the UK. 446 (72.4%), covering approximately 2,688,434 ha, support one or more Annex I/II wetland features at global grade A or B.

Gaps in Ramsar documentation

Approx. 24% of the UK's SACs are at least partly 'double-badged' as Ramsar sites. Approx. 20% of all SAC Annex I grade A/B wetland habitats are within Ramsar sites. But 24 of these Ramsar sites do not specify Criterion 1 at all. A further 41 do not specifically mention the habitat features in the site documentation.

Gaps in representation

A small number of under-represented wetland habitats are not included on Annex I of the Habitats Directive. A larger number of internationally-threatened wetland species are not included on Annex II

Identifying gaps

The UK has excellent data on the distribution and status of many species groups. This information is published in atlases, Red Data Books, the NBN Gateway and other sources.

Difficulties in identifying sites

Using the data to identify wetlands supporting these features is not always straightforward. Local knowledge is needed to validate the data at site level.

Threatened wetland species

The review has provisionally identified as internationally-threatened (non-Annex II):

- 11 marine fish species
- 4 freshwater fish species
- 2 amphibian species
- 2 mammal species
- 10 vascular plant species
- 16 charophyte (stonewort) species

Further analysis required

Distribution of non-Annex I wetland habitats, identification of threatened wetland invertebrates, identification of threatened wetland non-vascular plants (except charophytes).

Avian Review conclusions

Additional sites should be considered for designation for: internationally/ nationally important populations of seabirds or assemblages, nationally important populations of wetland birds that are listed as globally threatened by IUCN, in Appendix 1 of the Bonn Convention, or are rare wetland species listed in the UK Birds of Conservation Concern Red List, internationally important populations of sedentary wetland birds, either individually or as part of an assemblage.

Overall conclusions

The Natura network (SACs + SPAs) provides a high level of protection for habitats and species listed on the annexes. There are habitats and species *not* listed on the annexes for which Ramsar designation may be appropriate. Not all of these are adequately represented within the current UK Ramsar site series.