

**Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in general
and of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 1997- 2002 in particular
during the period since the National Report prepared in 1995
for Ramsar COP6 and 30 June 1998**

Contracting Party: Ireland

Designated Ramsar Administrative Authority

Full name of the institution:

**National Parks & Wildlife,
Dúchas The Heritage Service.**

Name and title of the head of the institution:

Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht & Islands.

Mailing address for the head of the institution:

**Dún Aimirgin.
43 -49 Mespil Road, Dublin 4, Ireland.**

Telephone: **353 1 6670788** Fax: **353 1 6670825**

Email: **eolas@ealga.irlgov.ie**

Name and title of the designated contact officer for Ramsar Convention matters:

**Mr. James Ryan.
National Parks & Wildlife Service,
51 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.**

Telephone: **353 1 6616111** Fax; **353 1 6620283**

Email: **duchas@indigo.ie**

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 1
To progress towards universal membership of the Convention.

- 1.1 Ireland, to date has not taken any actions to encourage others to join the Convention.

Ramsar Strategic Plan – General Objective 2
To achieve the wise use of wetlands by implementing and further developing the Ramsar Wise Use Guidelines.

- 2.1(a) There has been is no specific wetland policy developed in Ireland. However Ireland aims to be actively involved in the development and implementation of the EU Commission's strategic framework for a policy of wise use and conservation of wetland. It is envisaged that wise use will be achieved within the context of the National Sustainable Development Strategy published by the Irish Government in 1997. Environmental policy in Ireland is now based on the internationally recognised principles of sustainability, the precautionary principle the integration of environmental considerations into all policy area, the polluter-pays principle and the principle of shared responsibility for environmental protection by public bodies, private enterprises and the general public. A priority for the strategy is to maintain the quality, quantity and diversity of our natural endowments which include wetlands.
- (b.) The National Sustainable Development Strategy is a government initiative with the Department of Environment as the lead Department. The nature conservation elements of that strategy, including wetland conservation are the responsibility of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (D.A.H.G.I.) which is thus responsible for Ramsar matters.
- (c.) D.A.H.G.I. is the lead Department in the production of the National Biodiversity Plan which will deal specifically with wetland conservation issues including those requiring cross-sector initiatives. It is also producing a National Heritage Plan which will focus more on the contribution to be made by the Dúchas, The Heritage Service to conservation of the natural and man made heritage. The implementation of these plans in relation to wetlands conservation will initially be via national regulations associated with the Birds and Habitat Directives for internationally important sites and the amended Wildlife Act for all other sites.

Progress towards implementation.

Implementation of those aspects of the national sustainable development strategy to wetland protection are as follows;

(a) Climate Change.

It is considered that climate change could have major implications for Ireland's wetlands because of its effect on hydrology and on carbon storage in peatlands, our most extensive terrestrial wetland type. There are some indications already that rainfall amounts and intensity are increasing, possibly due to global climate change, leading to increased flooding and consequently to increased pressure for drainage to alleviate those impacts. Ireland has now signed the Kyoto Protocol and, as part of the overall EU commitment, has agreed to limit its growth in greenhouse gas emissions to 13% above 1990 levels in comparison to a conservative business as usual projection for 2010 of a 25-28.35% rise. The Department of Public Enterprise published a study on the ' Limitation and Reduction of CO2 ' and other Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Ireland, in June, 1998 to assist in the preparation of a comprehensive national strategy to meet our commitments. Following submissions from the public and a Discussion Forum in October 1998 the Minister for Environment and Local Government is developing the national Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy for Government approval.

It is considered that the current very high rates of economic growth will present significant challenges to the achievement of Ireland objectives for greenhouses gas emission control.

(b) Water Quality.

Between 1971 and 1994 there has been an decrease in the length of seriously polluted rivers, however, there has also been a significant decrease of unpolluted river length and an major increase in the slight to moderately polluted length. Levels in 1994 are 71.2% unpolluted. 28.2% slight to moderate pollution and 0.67% seriously polluted. Equivalent figures for a sample of 135 lakes show 23% now showing eutrophication problems. The underlying trend of deterioration has continued into this reporting period. It is thought that this pattern is due to the improved water treatment of point source discharges of sewage and industrial wastes reducing the area affected by serious pollution being offset by eutrophication due to small point source and diffuse discharges.

To counteract this trend a major catchment based initiative the detailed aims of which was set out in 'Managing Ireland Rivers and Lakes' was launched by the Department of Environment and Local Government in 1997. This initiative is being co-funded through the EU Cohesion fund and now involves 5 water catchments in addition to the Shannon Catchment, which is by far the largest catchment in Ireland. These schemes will cost in the region of £120 million primarily on investment on wastewater infrastructure including phosphorous removal.

The minimum aims of the initiative are briefly within 10 years.

- (a) To avoid any further disimprovement in surface water quality.
- (b) To improve all seriously polluted river stretches to at least moderately polluted status.
- (c) To improve rivers channels suffering from slight or moderate pollution by one increment on the Biological Quality Rating Index.
- (d) To improve all eutrophic or hypertrophic lakes to mesotrophic or eutrophic status respectively.

The long term objective is to return all lakes and rivers to a non-polluted status i.e. at least mesotrophic status or to oligotrophic status if that was their original condition.

The main indicators for assessing achievement of there objections are the Biological Quality Rating Index (based on invertebrates) for rivers, Trophic Status Index for lakes and associated specified phosphorus concentrations. The target levels for both lakes and rivers have been formally adapted under Regulation (S.I. No. 258 of 1998 Local Government (Water Pollution)) Act 1997 (Water Quality Standards for Phosphorus) (Regulations 1998). In general unless local conditions dictate otherwise the fishery objective use category adopted will be at for salmonid water quality. A discussion document on the establishment of environmental quality objectives for the aquatic environment has been published by the EPA and they are also carrying out work on environmental indicators.

Acidification of waters due to air pollution is generally not a problem in Ireland except in some upland areas on the east coast. However, there is concern that conifer afforestation on poorly buffered soils and peats can give rise to lowered pH. and increase aluminium levels which impact adversely on fish and invertebrate populations. In addition inappropriate

or poorly planned afforestation, associated drainage and clear felling can give rise to increased erosion and sedimentation. These problems have led to the production of guidelines on forestry in relation to fisheries and landscape and the identification of acid sensitive areas for fisheries. These guidelines are currently being reviewed. Grant aid for private afforestation is contingent on adherence to the guidelines.

The EPA has established a working group to review research on the impact of afforestation on water quality and the effectiveness of existing guidelines in protecting sensitive surface waters against acidification and enrichment. This work will be considered in revised guidelines for afforestation. The protection of water quality is an important consideration in the development of "Codes of Best Forest Practice" associated with the proposed national sustainable forestry plan which is now being developed.

In estuarine, and coastal and marine areas of Ireland pollution and eutrophication are usually localised and often of short duration. These problems usually arise from land based discharges, mainly of sewage or industrial origin, dumping from ships or, on a very localised basis, from aquacultural activities. Ireland ratified the convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (the OSPAR convention) in 1998. This requires contracting parties to take all possible steps to prevent and eliminate pollution of the marine environment. As required under the Convention a Quality Status Report for the Irish and Celtic seas and the seas west of Scotland and Ireland is being prepared in co-operation with the U.K.. The Dumping at Sea Act 1996 is now regulating all dumping at sea and sewage sludge disposal at sea is being discontinued. Under the Harbours Act 1996 all port companies for the major commercial ports will be required to have regard for the environment and as part of this requirement are improving waste reception facilities at ports. To provide better regulation of aquaculture the Fisheries amendment Act, 1997 makes provision for a new licensing system for fish farming. This will allow the amendment or revocation of licence where conditions are breached and an aquaculture Licence Appeals Board has been established to which applicants or third parties can take their case.

Land based pollution impacts are coming under increasing control in inland waters as outlined above. However the sea is still popularly seen as useful disposal receptacle for wastes. An integrated coastal zone management system would help to provide a suitable context within which water quality requirements could be identified, implemented and monitored. The Government commissioned a published consultancy report on coastal zone management and based on that report produced a discussion document in 1997. Following public consultations in 1998 a national strategy is being developed and legislation may be introduced in 1999.

(c.) Direct habitat protection

The conservation of wetlands in Ireland has been greatly strengthened by the transposition into Irish law of the EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EC) by the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997. The Directive requires member states to take measures to maintain or restore natural habitats and certain species at a favourable conservation status in the European Community by, inter alia, the designation of special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The SACs, together with Special Protection Areas, designated under the Birds Directive (Council Directive 79/409 EEC) will form Irelands contribution to EU NATURA 2000 ecological network of protected areas.

To date 112 SPA covering 230,000 ha. have been officially designated while 207 proposed SAC have been publically notified for consultation purpose. It is estimated that the final total of SACs proposed will be in the region of 370 to 400 and cover an area of approximately 650,000 ha. excluding lakes and marine area. The final total in the Natura 2,000 network will only slightly higher than the SAC figure due to the extent of overlap likely between the SPA and SAC designations.

It is expected that all potential sites will have been formally notified to the EU by the end of 1999. Under the Regulations protective provisions apply to the site from the date of its public notification as a potential SAC and specified potentially damaging actions cannot be undertaken without the Minister's consent. Assessment must be undertaken of all activities which could adversely affect the site. Permission for damaging developments can only be given for imperative reasons of overriding public interest and must be compensated for by designation of alternative sites. Sites illegally damaged must be restored. Management agreements may be made with landowners and landowners will be compensated for loss of income arising from the designation. Similar protection can be provided to SPAs under the Habitat Regulations.

Considerable controversy surrounded the introduction of the Regulations mainly because of the stringent controls applied to farming and turf cutting which up to then had been largely outside the planning and development system. Intensive negotiations took place with the main farming organisations especially with regard to compensation and the provision of a system to deal with objections, appeals, arbitration and consultations concerning conservation plans for the sites. A package has been negotiated in relation to peat extraction on raised bogs which will rapidly phase out commercial cutting and provide a longer phase out period for domestic cutting but with incentive to cease cutting this year.

At this stage the SAC programme is firmly established and where necessary court actions have been taken to enforce its provisions. In general the Minister of Arts, Heritage Gaeltacht and the Islands is responsible for controlling all damaging activities with the exception of those which are regulated through the planning process or e.g. by licence by other Ministers. In the latter cases the relevant authorities must ensure that the ecological interest of the SAC is protected. Information meetings have been held with local authorities to inform and advise them of their obligations in respect of SACs.

Other than Nature Reserves and National Park the other main nature conservation designation in Ireland is Natural Heritage Areas (NHA). This is the most extensive system involving over 1,100 sites covering over 750,00 ha. and including all SACs and SPAs. Until the Wildlife Act is amended, possibly later this year, this system has no statutory bases. Their importance is widely recognised however and many are listed for protection in the local development plans. Existing protective measures include the use of planning legislation to prevent certain damaging activities, the refusal of State/EU grant aid for damaging activities and compensation payments for environmentally sound farming as part of the REPS Scheme. These latter payments also apply to SACs and SPA and are estimated to cost in the region of £20 million/ annum.

If passed by parliament the proposed amendment to the Wildlife Act, in addition to protecting NHAs would allow for the protection of geological sites, such as karst systems, as well as habitats and species and will enhance species protection measures. It would also allow the ratification of the CITES Convention and the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement.

In the wider countryside however there is very little protection for wetlands especially from activities such as agriculture, forestry and turf cutting which, except for large scale developments, are not in general covered by the planning and development control system. There are proposals that the forthcoming Planning and Development Bill will place greater emphasis on sustainable development including increased provision for the protection of the natural heritage. This may provide some protection for small undesignated wetland areas.

The EIA Directive was transposed into Irish Law via the EC (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulation and subsequently amended several times. These Regulations have already proven to be of some benefit for wetland conservation and this benefit should be greatly increased when the amending EIA Directive (Council Directive 97/11/EC) is transposed into Irish law as this requires consideration as to whether EIAs should be undertaken when wetlands and coastal zones are involved. Current thresholds for activities affecting wetlands however are at 50 ha. for water

management, drainage projects and peat extraction, and 70 ha. for afforestation.

In conclusion very significant progress has been made in wetland conservation during this reporting period especially in terms of improved mechanisms for preventing pollution and eutrophication and for protecting important sites. However, a lack of appreciation of all the goods and services wetlands provide coupled with increasing intensification of farming have lead to ongoing loss and degradation of wetland in this reporting period. The rate of loss has probably slowed significantly in recent years and with a more integrated approach to wetland use developing the future for wetlands in Ireland looks more hopeful.

2.3 As noted above the National Sustainable Development Strategy is a Government initiative with the Department of Environment and Local Government taking the lead role. It is accepted however that the achievement of sustainable development requires ;

(a.) Support of all levels of Government.

(b.) The active involvement of all economic sectors and society.

To achieve broadly based parliamentary support a Sub-committee on Sustainable Development has been set up within the Joint Committee on Environment and Local Government. This Subcommittee oversees relevant policy development and implementation of the Stately and will discharge a supervisory and monitoring role. It has considerable investigative powers and can draft proposals for legislative change.

To involve all the economic sectors and society, Comhar, (the National Sustainable Development Partnership), has recently been established. Its terms of reference are to advance the national agenda for sustainable development, to evaluate progress, to assist in developing suitable effective mechanisms (for inter-alia environmental management and protection) and to contribute to the formation of a national concensus. It can undertake consideration of sustainable development issues on its own initiative or at the request of a Minister of the Government. It has also considerable investigative powers and may set up subsidiary consultative fora to assist in its work. Its membership is drawn from the following 5 broad groups.

1. State / Public Sector.

2. Economic Sector.

3. **Environment NGO's.**
4. **Social / Community NGO's.**
5. **Professional / Academic Sector.**

Comhar will thus represent a partnership on interests concerned with the environment and sustainable development bringing together those whose actions impact on the environment and those concerned with its protection.

The Green Network of Government Departments has been relaunched and its membership broadened. As well as providing a forum to enhance cross-Department awareness of the environmental agenda it is investigating the development of Strategic Environmental Assessment of policies and has designated Department / Agency Task Managers to lead the implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy in the different sectors. Their reports and Comhar's comments on them will provide the basis for a periodic review of the Strategy by Government

2.4 Not Applicable.

2.5 Review of legislation and practise.

As part of the preparation for the Biodiversity Action Plan a review of all major legislation which could have positive or negative imprints on biodiversity is being undertaken. The objective of this review is to ensure that where these conflict with, or inadequate support, the conservation of biodiversity these problems will be highlighted and suggestions for appropriate modifications or detailed reviews will be made. This work is still underway at present and has not yet resulted in major changes in legislation.

Of major significance to the wise use of wetlands are the changes made in relation to the protection of water quality listed under Section 2.2. Water Quality above. The main legislation changes resulting in direct protection of wetland areas are discussed under Section 2.2. Direct Protection of Habitat. They are in brief the transposition into Irish Law of the EU Habitats Directive. If proposed amendments are adopted this will be supported by changes to the Wildlife Act 1976, The European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1989 and the forthcoming Planning and Development Bill.

2.6 Wetlands and integrated land / water and coastal zone planning.

Integrated land / water and coastal zones planning systems are still at a early stage of development as detailed in Section 2.2. Water Quality. The most developed approach is the catchment management initiative which essentially seeks to protect water quality during the terrestrial and freshwater phases of the hydrological cycle. To achieve this objective involves collecting information on the physical, biological, land use and other aspects of the catchment (including protected areas) and will relate these factors to current water quality. It is hoped that from this work will emerge a practical appreciation of the functions and values of wetlands, in relation to water quality at least. Such plans will cover both local and regional aspects because of the large size of some of the catchments. The Shannon catchment for example covers approximately 15% of the country and involves 9 local authorities. The results of these local/regional plans will feed back into the national initiatives for such integrated plans and result in the identification of any required modification to improve their effectiveness.

2.7 Publication/practices documented

The most useful publication in a general context is "Managing Rivers and Lakes." Dept. of Environment and Local Government, 1997.

The final report on the Irish/Dutch Raised Bog Study will be produced by September, 1999 and should be useful to Western European countries trying to protect this habitat type.

2.8 Actions taken to remedy and prevent pollution (Toxic Chemicals) impacts affecting Ramsar sites and other wetlands.

The Environmental Protection Agency is undertaking a comprehensive review of discharges to waters to assess the imputes of nutrients and toxic/substances. Under the Waste Management Act the EPA will also establish a Toxic Release Inventory. Both these actions should allow greater targeting of resources to tackle these problems, at least for point sources. Greater controls on the use of farm chemicals and improved education of users through the development of codes of practice for pesticide use in agriculture and forestry should reduce the impact from more diffuse sources. The use of toxicchemicals is a notifiable action within SACs.

In relation to Ramsar sites in particular the main cause for concern has been the possible impacts of leachate from a major dump on Rogerstown Estuary. Regular bird counts have not shown any diminution in use of the site due to the dump or any apparent effects on bird health. A water chemistry monitoring program has been put in place by the Local

Authority who manage the dump. Regular liaison is being maintained with the planning authority on the issue.

2.9 Incorporation of wetland economic valuation techniques.

We are not aware of any cases where wetland economic valuation techniques were used in Ireland.

2.10 Is EIA for actions potentially impacting on wetlands required ?

EIA is required under for many activities which could impact on wetlands under the European Communities (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations, 1989 and subsequent amendments. Specific thresholds for which EIA is mandatory are

- (a) 50 ha of wetland - water management and peat extraction.**
- (b) 70 ha (any land type) - afforestation.**
- (c) 30 ha (any land type) - dams (new or extended area of water impounded).**
- (d) 20 ha - reclamation from the sea.**

Community Directive 97/11/EC (Amending Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment) now requires that particular attention is paid to effects on wetlands and protected areas. This Directive will shortly be transposed into Irish law and should improve the protection of wetlands especially non protected areas. (See also section 2.2 Direct Protection of Habitats).

2.11 Is wetland restoration and rehabilitation considered a priority ?

In general the priority is to ensure the best protection possible for reasonably intact sites. However, in the case of raised bogs where all sites are damaged and where Ireland has a major part of the remaining Western European resource of this habitat special measures have been taken to rehabilitate some sites. Work began on two Ramsar Sites Clara Bog and Raheenmore Bog which were partly in state ownership. Detailed surveys of 44 other sites identified serious drying out problems at most sites. Follow up works were confined to State owned land or areas with management agreements which were likely to be proposed as SACs. To date 235 km of

drains have been blocked and 1.3 km of large dams build to protect 10 sites. Funding of £2.2 million was obtained for this work from EU Cohesion Funds. The methods used to identify sites requiring restoration were based on a co-operative Irish / Dutch research program on raised bogs. The restoration methods used were developed with the technical assistance from the Dutch Forest Service Staatsbosbeheer.

Work is also underway on wetlands restoration / creation by Bord na Mona, the Irish Turf Development Board, on large machine cutaway raised bogs. It is estimated that somewhere between 12-20,000 ha.of cutaway will be eventually rehabilitated to woodland or wetland of various types. This work is partly being funded by the European Commission.

2.12 Encourage active and informed participation of local communities.

It is Government policy that conservation strategies should include mechanisms for consultation and dialogue with, and ensuring the participation of the general public, local people, conservation interests and especially interested parties such as landowners and others likely to be affected. In this regard the Special Area of Conservation program has involved ,

(a.) Extensive consultation and negotiation prior to the introduction of the Habitat Regulations,

(b.) A major information campaign to accompany the notification of sites including the implication of the designation.

(c.) An ongoing effort to provide information and advice,

(d.) Ongoing efforts to provide consultation with and participation by the general public, local people and affected interests.

With regard to the latter point this includes

(1.) Public meeting and one to one contact with land and turbary owners.

(2.) Incorporating objection and appeals procedures into legislation as well as facilitating informal appeals

(3.) Establishment of an independent Appeals Advisory Board for formal appeals.

(4.) Establishment of Local Liaison Committees for each SAC which will be involved in the development and implementation of conservation plans for the sites.

(5.) Involvement of all relevant interests in drawing up conservation plans, habitat guidelines, commonage plans and prototype form plans.

It is expected that this process will lead to a much more positive attitude to wetland conservation as communities become more aware of the importance of their local sites.

2.13 Encourage involvement of private sector in the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

No major initiative have occurred in this area and no review of fiscal measures have been undertaken in relation to wetland conservation and wise use.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 3

To raise awareness of wetland values and functions throughout the world and at all levels.

3.1 Is there a Government run national program for Education and Public awareness which focuses on or includes wetlands ?

There are no truly national education and public awareness programs which deal with wetlands. This whole area will be addressed in the National Biodiversity Action Plan now being developed.

There are however several initiatives which deal with aspects of this issue. Enfo (The Government Environmental Information Service) established in 1990 provides a wide variety of relevant information to schools, collages and the general public. It presents lectures and exhibitions on environmental issues. Many public libraries can now gain computer access to its extensive database. It supplies a liaison and support service to Environmental Information Officers working in the local authorities.

The Educational and Visitors Service, of Heritage Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and Islands is responsible for interpretation and education on Irelands national heritage. One of its aims to deepen the appreciation of our heritage among the public and especially young people

by undertaking public awareness projects, co-ordinating an educational programme aimed mainly at first and second level students, focusing attention on teacher training, and co-ordinating on-site informative education programs. Its targets up to 2001 includes, the preparation of an educational program for Primary and Secondary school children. It will also produce a series of leaflets on the Special Protection Area for Bird approximately half of which are Ramsar Sites.

3.2 Inclusion of wetlands issues and wise use principles in the education system.

Coverage of environmental issues including those relevant to wetlands is presently very uneven especially at primary and secondary levels. A liaison committee has been set up between the Department of Environment and Local Government and the Department of Education and Science to review the role of the education system in environmental awareness. Consideration will be given to curriculum development, teacher training and provision of appropriate resources.

A Green School award system was introduced in 1990 by An Taisce (The National Trust) as part of a European wide program co-ordinated by the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe. School performance will be judged on the basis of their commitment to environmental education and sustainable living.

4.1 Mechanisms in place / being introduced to increase co-operation between various institutions responsible for actions which will have an impact on the conservation and use of wetlands.

It is Government policy that responsibility for environmental protection should be shared by public bodies, private enterprise and the general public. To make this a reality emphasis has so far been placed on arrangements which are necessary to deepen cross-sectoral understanding of sustainable development issues at a national level. The role of the subcommittees on Sustainable Development, Comhar (The National Sustainable Development Partnership), the Green Network of Government Departments and the Task Managers in relation to the implementation of sustainable developments been outlined in Section 2.3 above.

Of more specific relevance to the protection of the nature conservation values of wetlands is the development and subsequent implementation of the Natural Biodiversity Action Plan. This plan is being drafted by the

Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands in conjunction with an independent Steering Committee on Biodiversity. The main function of this Group is, to secure the involvement of the main Departments who are responsible for biodiversity, to provide a point of direct contact between them on this issue and to co-ordinate the response to, and the implementation of, the Convention in Ireland. A public consultation process has also been undertaken and the responses are being considered in the second draft of the Plan

At the local and regional level the most dynamic of recent initiatives with respect to wetlands are the catchment management planning groups which bring together organisations whose activities impact either positively or negatively on water quality. The acceptance that each sector has a role to play in the investigation, analysis and solution of water quality problems has allowed good local working relations to develop which will hopefully lead to the reversal of the increasing trends toward eutrophication.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 4

To reinforce the capacity of institutions in each Contracting Party to achieve conservation and wise use of wetlands.

4.2 Training

No overall review of training needs is being undertaken at this stage relevant to wetlands. The development of the National Biodiversity Action Plan with its many specific actions will serve as a good starting point for a systematic analysis of training needs.

A review of training needs for Conservation Rangers in National Parks and Wildlife - Dúchas has begun and will seek to identify training opportunities both within Ireland and elsewhere. Some field management staff have attended four site management courses in Ireland and one Eurosite meeting in France in the last three years which dealt with wetland management issues.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 5

To ensure the conservation of all sites included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar List).

5.1 Formal Management Plans.

Of the 45 Ramsar sites in Ireland 31 have management plans in an advanced state of preparation, a further 6 have aquaculture zoning plans, which restrict themselves to aquaculture related issues, and 8 have neither.

5.2 Of the 31 sites with a management plan only one, Pollardstown Fen has a detailed monitoring system. All the sites of ornithological importance i.e. are regularly censused for waterfowl as part of the IWEBS (Irish Wetland Birds Scheme). It is the intention to develop monitoring programs to complement the management plans as soon as possible.

5.3 Change of Ecological Character.

(1.) Domestic peat cutting and drainage has continued to damage Morgan bog, the same applies to Clara but in that case the problem is worse due to the pressure of commercial peatcutting which is advancing more rapidly into the bog. Raheenmore Bog is affected by very deep marginal drainage. All three are Nature Reserves but in all cases the reserve boundaries do not include the whole wetland area. The damaging activities occur outside the Reserve but inside the wetland area. All three raised bogs have benefited from drain blocking programs within the reserved boundaries, funded by EU Cohesion funds. Raheenmore has also has 3 large dams built on its margins to help to maintain water levels in the bog. All three sites are now proposed SACs and it is hoped that it will be possible to phase out peat cutting relatively rapidly. It is thought that all 3 sites will continue to dry out to some extent while marginal drainage remains in place.

(11) Overgrazing has effected some of the blanket bogs especially Lough Barra, Owenduff and Easkey Bog. Now that they are proposed SACs it should be possible to deal with this problem.

(111) Loughs Derravarragh, Ennell and Oughter have all suffered from eutrophication problems. Lough Derravannagh and Ennell have improved to some degree and it is hoped that as they lie within the Shannon Catchment Management Plan area this improvement will continue. Lough Oughter is eutrophic but this has not apparently adversely effected the waterfowl for which it was designated.

(1V) The ground water supply to Pollardstown Fen may be affected by a road which as planned will cut deeply into the aquifer supplying the site. Discussions and research are ongoing in an attempt to avoid or mitigate damage to the site.

(V) Concern exists that leachate from a landfill at Rogerstown to present a threat to the Ramsar site. Bird counts and observation have not shown

any obvious acute effect yet on numbers or the health of the waterfowl. Monitoring of waterquality has not indicated any major problem with heavy metals to-date. The local authority who are responsible for the operation of the landfill are now seeking a licence for the landfill from the EPA under the Waste Management Act.

5.4 Not Applicable.

5.5 Not Applicable.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 6

To designate for the Ramsar List those wetlands which meet the Convention's criteria, especially wetland types still under-represented in the List and transfrontier wetlands.

6.1 Has a National Wetlands Inventory been prepared for your country ?

During this reporting period inventory and survey work has concentrated on Habitat Directive species and habitats, to contribute to the SAC designation process. The main habitats surveyed were machair, estuarine intertidal sediments biotopes and lagoons. The latter survey in particular demonstrates that Ireland had an important resource of lagoons and as a consequence over 35 lagoon sites will be proposed as SACs. Significant progress was also made in the identifying sites for 3 out of the 5 Habitats Directive plant species, and, 10 out of 15 wetland associated Directive Animal species. The information on wetland animals in particular was very important for the designation of rivers as SACs.

While reasonably good inventories of some habitat types exist i.e. raised bogs, blanket bogs and turloughs significant gaps still exist in relation to fens, wet grasslands lakes and rivers. It is expected that these gaps will be gradually filled in over the coming years. As the inventory information was collected in different ways and for different purposes over the years it does not have a standard format. It is housed in National Parks and Wildlife, Dúchas, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands.

6.2 The directory of " important" wetlands.

In 1993 the JNCC produced a contract report on the sites important for waterfowl in the island of Ireland. The selection was based on Ramsar criteria and aimed to produce a list of candidate Special Protection Area for Birds. Almost all those sites have now been designated and they provide

the main group of sites for Ramsar List. When the SAC designation process is completed it will be possible to produce a new and greatly expanded directory.

6.3 Estimate area and rates of wetland loss.

The estimated area of wetlands in Ireland is approximately 600,000 ha based on the Ramsar definition but excluding shallow marine areas. No reliable information exists for rates of loss for most habitats. It has been estimated that in the last decade the area of raised bog declined from approximately 23,000 ha to less than 19,000 ha.

6.4 Have any actions been taken ?

Ireland is considering listing a further 18 Wetlands which meet the criteria for waterbird populations. These have already been designated as SPAs under the Birds Directive. It will also consider, following SAC designation, listing a number of sites for fish, peatlands and seagrass beds. Site selection for geological sites is about to begin in Ireland and should this study identify outstanding karst systems these will also be considered for listing.

6.5 Listing Specific sites

Reference was made to 4 Nature Reserves and 26 SPA in this previous national report which it was proposed to list as Ramsar sites in future. 24 of the 26 SPAs have been listed, it is still produced to list the nature reserves and this will be implemented during the next triennium. The number of sites listed during the last triennium increased from 21 to 45 .

6.6 Transfrontier Wetlands.

None of the listed sites are transfrontier wetlands.

6.7 Plans for Transfrontier sites.

Consideration will be given in conjunction with the U.K. to the listing of Carlingford Lough, Lough Foyle, Cuilcagh Mountain and cross border lake sites during the next triennium .

To mobilise international cooperation and financial assistance for wetland conservation and wise use in collaboration with other conventions and agencies, both governmental and non-governmental.

7.1 Multilateral activities for the management of transfrontier wetlands or their catchments

Water Quality Management Strategy Plans were developed for the Erne and Foyle cross border catchments in association with the Northern Ireland authorities under the EU INTERREG Programme. Both catchments contain wetlands of major conservation importance. A key objective was to ensure that the waters of the catchments are of sufficiently high quality to support a wide range of uses and aquatic ecosystems. These plans require the systematic identification of water quality requirements, problems and solutions and demonstrate the potential of this approach for achieving wise use of aquatic systems.

7.2 Twinning

Clara and Raheenmore Bogs has been twinned with Bargerveen, The Netherlands as part of the European Natural Sites Twining Programme

(Eurosite). The current agreement from 1998 - 2001 is a continuation of a previous twinning programme from 1992 - 1995. All sites are raised bogs and the co-operation programme includes;

- 1. Technical co-operation in relation to hydrological issues.**
- 2. Scientific co-operation on ecohydrological monitoring and on mathematical hydrological**
- 3. Management planning and quality auditing.**
- 4. Information and education programmes, recreational provision and management and public relations.**

The twinning program has proved very useful, for example dam design techniques developed at Raheenmore are now being applied at Bargerveen. The results of this work at Bargerveen may then be used to further improved dam design in Ireland and elsewhere.

7.3 Conventions.

Ireland is a signatory to all the Conventions mentioned. The Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands is the responsible authority for the Conventions on Biological Diversity, Migratory Species and World Heritage as well as Ramsar. This insures co-operation between the implementation of these Conventions. Climate change is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment and Combat Desertification the Department of Foreign Affairs. Dialogue in relation to these Conventions is maintained through normal Civil Service channels.

7.4 Bi-or Multilateral activities directed at the conservation of migratory wetland species.

As part of the E.U. funded INTERREG initiative a joint program to protect breeding population of the Roseate Tern has been developed between Ireland and Wales.

Ireland is a signatory of the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement and is still pursuing the finalisation of the International Conservation Plan for the Greenland Whitefronted Goose.

7.5 Multilateral / bilateral donors.

The E.U. is the major donor contributing to projects supporting the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Ireland. Examples outlined elsewhere in the report are its support for wastewater treatment program, catchment management programmes to combat eutrophication and agri-environment measures such as the Rural Environment Protection scheme. It has also supported through the LIFE programme and its predecessors a series of projects aimed at the identification, protection and management of ecological important sites especially those requiring designation under the Habitat Directive, specifically it contributed to (a.) Biomar program which inter alia surveyed marine habitat and provided the basis for the selection marin of SAC sites (b.) £7 million cost of management planning initiative which is providing 272 management plans for SACs and SPA and (c.) the £2.2 million cost of the Raised Bog Restoration Program which identified restoration requirements for 46 raised bogs and undertook aquisition and restoration works on 10 sites.

7.6 Annual Budgetary allocation to support conservation and wise use of wetlands.

There is no specific allocation to a wetlands programme. All the money spent on wetlands or wetlands related activities are part of larger budgets mainly in the Dept. of Environment and Local Government e.g. the wastewater treatment programme, the Department of Agriculture and Food e.g. the REPS programme and the Dept. of Arts, Heritage and the Island, e.g. the nature conservation program of Dúchas - The Heritage Service. In relation to the last the current annual nature conservation Budget of the National parks and Wildlife is £23 million. £17 million of this will go on land acquisition or on compensation payments to landowners for managing their land in ways compatible with nature conservation objectives. These activities will contribute in various degrees to wetland protection but it is not possible to give an exact breakdown. The only figures related solely to wetlands it is possible to isolate are those spent on land acquisition. In the 3 years 1996-1998 £5.044 million was spent on the acquisition of 3,097 ha. of blanket bog 2,292 ha. of raised bog and 67 ha. of marsh.

7.7. Development assistance program.

Ireland has a development assistance program but does not have funds specifically earmarked for wetland conservation and wide use. It does however subject its development aid to a project appraisal and evaluation process which includes an assessment of sustainability . One particularly interesting project from a wetlands conservation is the Tanga Coastal Zone Conservation and Development Programme. This project is being undertaken by the Government of Tanzania supported by the Irish Aid and involving IUCN and the local Tanga Region. It will run from 1997 to 2000. The overall objective is to safeguard the resources of the Tanga Region coastal environment for the benefit of present and future generation of residents through a series of integrated activities aimed at protection, sustainable use and the management of coastal zone resources. This is to be achieved through integrated management of the coastal zone by regional, district and village institutions. It involves implementing effective management of coral reefs, mangroves, coastal forests and wildlife and the restoration of degraded environments. The project will actively encourage the participation of local people, including women, in the identification and resolution of priority environmental problems related to sustainable use of coastal resources. This program thus seems to be in full accord with the Ramsar principles of wise use of wetlands.

7.8 Consultation between Ramsar authority and development assistance programme.

There is as yet no formal process for consultation on development assistance between the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands and the Department of Foreign Affairs who are responsible for the development assistance program. To date informal direct contact has been

undertaken as necessary. During the next triennium the necessity for formal consultation structures between the two Departments on this issue will be investigated.

Ramsar Strategic Plan - General Objective 8

To provide the Convention with the required institutional mechanisms and resources.

8.1 No.

8.2 No.