

1. To progress towards universal membership of the Convention

1.1 International co-operative working

The UK has been a strong supporter of the Ramsar Convention and is firmly committed to the principle of wise use of wetlands. As a global Convention the UK supports and promotes relevant activities with a number of countries, including promotion of the benefits of accession and the subsequent listing of sites. These activities are further described in this section. Additionally, the UK is developing guidance on management planning and methods for monitoring the condition of sites and the effectiveness of management measures, and guidance on the wise use of wetlands. Opportunities for raising public awareness and developing the educational, scientific and technical capacity of organisations and institutes that make a contribution to the wise use of wetlands are also being explored. Guidance from these programmes, which are described more fully in other sections of this report, will be widely disseminated both in the UK and internationally.

Ireland

The UK Government promotes and maintains regular contact with the Irish Republic through a number of formal and informal mechanisms. The International Designations Group (IDG) meets twice a year to exchange information relating to nature conservation activities, particularly on designated sites. Members represent the Environment and Heritage Service (Northern Ireland), Dúchas-National Parks and Wildlife Service (Ireland), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). In addition, a sub-committee on biological recording (SCoBR) convenes biannually and reports to the IDG. Members of the IDG are exploring opportunities to increase co-operative working and to pool information to aid the production of site documentation for transboundary sites (see sections 6.7 and 7.1).

There has been a long tradition of joint UK and Ireland monitoring for some wildlife. The last national report indicated proposals for the UK and Irish Wetland Bird Surveys to work more closely together. In early 1998 a formal Protocol was agreed and signed between UK Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS). This protocol ensures that waterbird monitoring in the two countries will be undertaken on the same count dates and using identical data standards. The agreement will facilitate data sharing and joint Britain and Ireland analyses which are encouraged. In formalising current co-operative arrangements the Protocol is a major step forward (see section 7.1 and section 7.4).

Overseas Territories

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and DETR are working co-operatively to encourage the Overseas Territories to implement their obligations under the Convention and nominate new Ramsar sites. An Interdepartmental Working Group on Environmental Legislation has also been set up to encourage and assist with extending environmental Conventions to the Overseas Territories (OTs) and to help with local implementation.

Extension of the UK's ratification of the Convention to cover Guernsey, Alderney, Sark and the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) is imminent.

The Joint Working Party (JWP) acts as the National Ramsar Committee in the UK. JWP members are seeking to encourage non-Contracting Party states to join the Convention. In particular work with the UK Overseas Territories may promote wider membership by influencing neighbouring countries, such as Caribbean states. The UK is considering a suite of options to promote the benefits of joining the Convention, in particular, possible financial support for non-Party states to attend CoP7 and directing efforts into developing contacts to advocate accession. Representatives from the British Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the Cayman Islands will attend CoP7.