

9. Participation of non-governmental organisations in the implementation of the Convention

9.1 Assessment of cross-sectoral involvement at international, national and regional level

RSPB is largest wildlife conservation organisation in Europe with over one million members. The RSPB actively promote bird conservation by: carrying out biological and economic research; informing and encouraging participation of its members; supporting and developing community education; influencing policy and working with a wide range of organisations and the public to achieve conservation; managing nature reserves, and providing advice on wildlife law enforcement. In addition RSPB is a member of BirdLife International.

WWT is a registered charity working 'to save wetlands for wildlife and people'. It operates at an international, national and regional level promoting wetland issues and is supported by a strong UK membership (68,000 individuals). Underpinning their mission statement WWT are active in education, aviculture and research e.g. raising public awareness, care of collection birds and sites and species monitoring. WWT currently manage eight Centres with one under construction in London, of which five are listed as Ramsar sites (Caerlaverock [Upper Solway Flats and Marshes], Llanelli [Burry Inlet], Martin Mere, Slimbridge [Upper Severn Estuary] and Welney [Ouse Washes]).

BASC is the national representative body for sporting shooting in the United Kingdom. It has over 120,000 members. Waterfowl hunting (wildfowling) in the United Kingdom is predominantly undertaken on the coast through the auspices of some 200 wildfowling clubs affiliated to the BASC. Collectively these clubs own or lease hunting or management rights over some 30,000 hectares of coastland of which 98% is of designated conservation important (SSSI/ASSSI). This includes land within many Ramsar sites and designated or proposed Natura 2000 sites. The hunting club system has proved to be a rapid, inexpensive, effective and long lasting mechanism for regulating hunting and an important conduit for integrated management.

The Wildlife Trusts are a network of 47 regional Wildlife Trusts and 50 Urban Wildlife Groups. The Trusts have been campaigning for wildlife since 1912 and are particularly active in raising public awareness of conservation issues. TWT manage 2,000 nature reserves covering over 60,000 hectares in the UK, many of which are open to the public.

WWF is formally recognised as a partner organisation to the Ramsar Convention and in the UK, WWF UK represents the NGO consortium Wildlife & Countryside Link on the JWP. WWF UK is active in funding a number of wetland initiatives including the Wetland Centre at Barn Elms, conservation of peatlands, reduction of pollution affecting wetlands, coastal zone management and conservation of wetland species such as otter *Lutra lutra* and water vole *Arvicola terrestris*. WWF UK also has a large education component which has generated a number of teaching materials encompassing water and wetlands.

9.2 Progress in ensuring cross-sectoral discussions about wetlands

The UK Government strongly supports a constructive and open relationship with the voluntary sector. In developing general principles for co-operation, as well as in addressing individual cases, it will have regard to the principles underpinning the relationship between Government, volunteering and community sectors in England, which will be set out in a formal compact for the first time in Autumn 1998.

The main mechanism in the UK for formal cross-sectoral co-operation for wetland conservation and implementation of the Ramsar Convention is the JWP. See sections 2.1.b, 2.3 and 4.1 for detailed information about its remit.

EHS has established local committees to advise and assist in the management of two key wetland areas in Northern Ireland: Strangford Lough and Lough Neagh. These groups comprise individuals representing local committees, user groups and conservation organisations. During 1997/98 the Lough Neagh co-ordinating and Advisory Committees commissioned and published a tourism and recreation strategy for Lough Neagh. The Strangford Lough Management Committee is currently involved in the formulation of a sustainable development strategy for the Lough and the surrounding countryside.

The Department of Agriculture (Northern Ireland) has established a similar structure for Lough Erne in Fermanagh. In 1996 DANI published on behalf of the executive bodies represented on the Lough Erne Liaison Group a statement of management objectives and priorities.

The Wash Forum is a well established mechanism for cross sectoral discussion about wetland issues. The Forum represents users of The Wash and conservation organisations presents an effective opportunity for regular discussion. In England and Wales similar fora exist for Morecambe Bay, the Exe Estuary and Burry Inlet.

9.3 Voluntary sector involvement at CoP

The voluntary sector are not represented at the UK delegation to CoP. However, prior to each CoP, cross-sectoral meetings are convened to ensure that the UK delegation are fully briefed about UK activities contributing to the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan and specifically in relation to the main themes of the CoP.

9.4 Voluntary sector programmes for education and raising public awareness

The voluntary sector are strongly committed to local, regional, national and international programmes to promote environmental education and raise public awareness of wetlands issues. Each of the NGOs operate their own educational, publicity and awareness programmes and are contributing to the UK target to develop a national strategy for education and public awareness on wetlands (see sections 3.1 and 3.2).

BASC and the nature conservation agencies have adopted Joint Statements of Common Interest and Co-operation aimed at developing partnerships between conservationists and hunters. These include promoting best hunting practice, capitalising on hunting as an incentive to realise additional management resources and ensuring local community involvement in realising BAP targets. Various communication methods are used including a series of wildfowling conferences organised on a UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland basis at which the nature conservation agencies and the voluntary sector are regular contributors. In 1997 BASC launched a specialist *Wildfowling News* newsletter covering topical wildfowling and wetland conservation issues which is circulated twice a year to all BASC club members in addition to BASC's quarterly magazine.

Voluntary sector representation at Ramsar Committees

See sections 2.1.b, 2.3, 4.1 and 9.1 for information about JWP membership.

Themes of the Convention where Voluntary sector are most active

See sections 2.1, 2.7, 2.11, 2.12, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1 and 9.1 for information about voluntary sector initiatives and efforts.