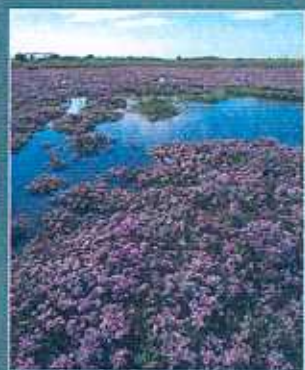


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**RAMSAR CONVENTION**

UK National Report to the  
7th Meeting of the Conference  
of the Contracting Parties

**SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA, 1999**

CONVENTION ON Wetlands  
OF International Importance  
ESPECIALLY AS Waterfowl Habitat

**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**

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## **Foreword by the Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP, Minister for the Environment**

The UK has been a member of the Ramsar family for over 20 years and remains deeply committed to its principles. We have signalled this through the designation of Ramsar sites for inclusion on the list of wetlands of international importance, and have now listed over 120 sites. But we also recognise the need to ensure that commitment to wise use of wetlands underpins all of the actions we take. In 1998 we published actions and targets for the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan in the United Kingdom. We will monitor progress carefully.

The next Ramsar Conference will address particularly relevant and important issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. In the UK we are in the process of taking forward and developing a comprehensive sustainable development strategy. We have consulted widely and received a huge number of responses, from individuals as well as organisations. I have been encouraged by the degree of interest shown by local communities, and by their enthusiasm.

We have lost too many of our precious places, and the wetland resource is still to some extent undervalued. I have recently visited one of our few remaining expanses of lowland bog and experienced its extraordinary beauty and the wealth of wildlife it supports. I also saw at first hand some of the positive restoration which is being undertaken. But there is a lot more to learn.

In reporting on the activities we have undertaken in the UK in respect of conservation and wise use of wetlands, I hope we can contribute to the sum of knowledge, and learn further from others, through the exchange of information. With increasing pressure on wetlands, and on water resources more generally, Ramsar will have an important role to play in the next century. The United Kingdom will continue to demonstrate its support for the Convention and for its activities and programmes. We look forward to playing a full part, in Costa Rica in 1999 and in the future.

Michael Meacher  
Minister for the Environment  
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

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## Executive summary

This document is the United Kingdom's National Report to the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance to be held in Costa Rica in May 1999. It contains information about the UK's efforts to implement the Convention for the period since the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Contracting Parties in Brisbane in 1996 to 31 August 1998. It also summarises UK actions under each of the eight General Objectives of the Ramsar Strategic Plan as adopted at the COP6 in 1996.

This report focuses on the General Objectives, emphasising key themes of: application of the Wise Use Guidelines for wetlands; restoration of wetland habitats; raising public awareness and promoting environmental education; ensuring co-operation between sectors; status of management planning and supporting international assistance.

The report is based on information drawn from a wide range of organisations: territorial Government Departments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; statutory agencies, and non-governmental organisations. It provides information about UK initiatives and best practice in relation to the conservation and wise use of wetlands, in the context of the General Objectives of the Strategic Plan.

A number of important developments have occurred in the UK since the last Conference of the Contracting Parties. These include:

Establishment of a formal protocol between the UK and the Republic of Ireland ensuring common monitoring standards for waterbirds in the two countries.

Publication on World Wetlands Day (February 1998) of the UK targets for the Ramsar Strategic Plan, 1997-2002. The document sets out specific targets to implement each of the General Objectives. In the UK progress towards the targets will be monitored through the UK Ramsar Committee, known as the Joint Working Party.

Publication of a ten point plan to secure a water efficient, environmentally sustainable water industry, including a full review of the abstraction licensing system.

Production of a wealth of best practice materials to promote wetlands conservation and the application of the Wise Use Guidelines from a broad cross section of organisations involved in conservation.

Further action to take forward publication of the UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report published in 1995 which adopted a target-based approach for focusing action on priority habitats and species. To date over 172 Species Action Plans and 14 Habitat Action Plans have been published. A further 200 Species Action Plans and 17 Habitat Action Plans will be published in 1998 and early 1999. The Habitat Action Plans are particularly relevant to the Operational Objective of the Strategic Plan "to restore wetland habitats" since they establish targets for habitat maintenance, restoration or recreation.

- Development of strategies to raise public awareness of wetlands. The Joint Working Party intends also to establish an Education and Public Awareness subgroup to identify programmes for promoting public participation in the UK.
- Establishment of a UK target to complete management plans for all listed Ramsar sites by the end of 2001. These plans will be reviewed every five years to consider how objectives are being achieved and to ensure participation of all partners in plan implementation.

- Listing of 36 Ramsar sites since June 1995, bringing the UK total of listed sites to 125 covering 517,340 hectares. The UK expects to list further sites, particularly in the Overseas Territories in the near future.

Continued funding by the UK Government of projects through the Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species. Currently two wetland projects are in receipt of funding, in Malaysia and Madagascar, to promote sustainable management and raise local awareness.