



4

The UK's global impacts on nature conservation

The UK's ecological 'footprint' extends well beyond its borders. JNCC is developing methods to measure and, where appropriate, mitigate that impact

The global impacts programme came into being in 2005, reflecting a key objective of JNCC's new strategy – to advise on the effect UK activities and policies have on biological and geological diversity around the world and to help develop appropriate responses.

In its initial stages the programme has focussed on creating procedures for identifying and handling relevant information and establishing links to Government departments. Priority has been given to looking at countries upon which the UK has the greatest impact through activities such as trade, tourism and development aid.

JNCC's effort to better understand the UK's environmental influence beyond our borders links in with work being undertaken by Defra to develop an evidence base for policy development in respect of the impacts of the UK's consumption of natural resources.

Good progress has been made during the reporting year in identifying the UK's impacts on the global environment and in developing a website that will provide information to decision-makers within Government on UK impacts country by country. The website is expected to go live during the summer of 2007.



Impacts on the high street

(Far left) It is increasingly important for governments, and individual consumers, to understand where the commodities we buy come from, and understand the environmental impacts of global trade. This is particularly true for agricultural, forestry and fisheries products originating in tropical countries and ecosystems which have high biodiversity value. Tracking the source of commodities to their country and ecosystem of origin, identifying environmental impacts, and finding policy options to combat further biodiversity loss in these areas are all part of JNCC's new Global Impacts Programme.

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Maize being cropped in southern Africa

(Left) The global impacts programme has focussed its efforts on a number of priority countries, including China, Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Malaysia, Indonesia and South Africa.

One of the key issues for South Africa and for its sub-Saharan neighbours is to strike a balance in land use choices between growing crops for food or for the emerging biofuel market. Maize, sugar cane and cassava are contenders as energy crops rather than as foodstuffs. Land use choices have implications for biodiversity in the region and for local people in terms of land holdings, loss of natural habitat and growing pressure on water resources.

A number of UK Government departments have an interest in policies relating to this area of work, including Defra, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform. JNCC is working with these departments to identify potential policy changes that would minimise the impact of the UK's activities.

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