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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

EC HABITATS DIRECTIVE: FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Paper by Wyn Jones

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper provides an update to the Joint Committee papers JNCC 02 D07 and JNCC 06 D09 on the assessment and reporting of conservation status under the EC Habitats Directive.

2. Progress to date

- 2.1 Under Article 17 of the EC Habitats Directive Member States are required to report on their implementation of measures taken under the Directive, including the assessment of conservation status for the habitats and species listed in the Annexes to the Directive. The report is to be produced every 6 years and submitted to the European Commission who are required to produce a composite report. The drafting of the report for period 2001-2006 is currently being coordinated by the JNCC on behalf of the agencies.
- 2.2 The report is to be undertaken by means of an IT tool developed by the European Environment Agency on behalf of the European Commission. This is to facilitate more effective aggregation and analysis for the production of the composite reports. Note that the 25 Member States participating in the 2007 reporting round are required to report at bio-geographical region level.
- 2.3 Since last September's Joint Committee paper there has been some slippage in preparing draft assessments of conservation status. This is not surprising given the complexities involved in making judgments. A revised time table has been agreed with government and is attached at Annex 1.
- 2.4 Some 160 assessments of UK Annex I habitats and Annex II, IV and V species are required. The Chief Scientists Group (CSG) will quality assure draft assessments on behalf of the agencies prior to public consultation. The first batch of assessments will be considered at a specially convened meeting of CSG later this month. Following the public consultation exercise the final draft report will be considered again by CSG and approved by the JNCC chairman on behalf of the Joint Committee prior to submission to government.

3. Assessments of conservation status

- 3.1 The framework document setting out the definition of the parameters used to determine conservation status together with the standards for reporting, are set out in DocHab -04-03/03 rev. 3 approved by the EC Habitats Committee. This is supported by supplementary explanatory notes and guidelines produced by the European Topic Centre for Biodiversity on behalf of the Commission.
- 3.2 Reporting is required on the conservation status of habitats based upon range; extent; structure and function, and future prospects; and for species on range; population; habitat for the species, and future prospects. Assessments on the status of each of these parameters is required using the definitions set out in the reporting document. The status must be determined as being either favourable; unfavourable (inadequate); unfavourable (bad) or unknown. The overall conclusion is reached on following basis:
- i. Favourable - all parameters favourable or with one unknown;
 - ii. Unfavourable (inadequate) - one or more parameter unfavourable (inadequate) but no unfavourable (bad);
 - iii. Unfavourable (bad) - one or more unfavourable (bad);
 - iv. Unknown - all unknown or unknown combined with one favourable.
- 3.3 Using the standards and guidance provided by the Commission and worked UK examples, the JNCC have held workshops with and given presentations to, the relevant agency specialists. JNCC staff have also attended European Commission arranged workshops and through informal contacts with other Member State specialists have a good knowledge of the standards being adopted in some of the other EU countries. The standard being applied in the UK is consistent with these countries.
- 3.4 JNCC staff working with agency specialists through the relevant lead co-ordination networks (LCNs) and inter-agency networks (IAWG) have mostly completed the initial assessments. These are currently the subject of quality control by JNCC and further iteration with the relevant specialists. Information from Common Standards Monitoring is key to determining the structure and function and future prospects parameters. Information from 2006 has been received in the main and the relevant data is being used to inform assessments.
- 3.5 As expected the exercise is proving difficult and complex, much dependent upon the availability of reliable and relevant information. Generic and specific information on the impacts of climate change and air pollution is also being used to inform judgments, especially in the context of long term viability.

- 3.6 The provisional conclusions of the initial assessments of conservation status are not unexpected with most of the habitats and species being assessed as being unfavourable. This is not surprising given that they are listed in the Annexes to the Habitats Directive because they are rare and endangered. The summary conclusions set out in Annex 2 show that 94% of habitat types are assessed as being unfavourable (77% bad and 17% inadequate) with only 3% being assessed as favourable. For species the position is slightly better with 84% being unfavourable (33% bad and 41% inadequate) and 14% favourable. It is to be expected that the final conclusions will differ to some extent from these provisional figures as the remaining assessments are completed and all the assessments fully quality assured.
- 3.7 Judgments made on conservation status will inform decisions on species derogations, surveillance priorities, SAC conservation objectives and the threshold for biodiversity damage under the EC Environmental Liability Directive. The report will also be key in informing the EU 2010 target to reverse biodiversity loss. It is therefore essential that there is audit trail to demonstrate how judgments were reached. The JNCC established an audit process which the Commission now recommend that all Member States adopt. Details of the implications and application of judgments are set out JNCC 06 D09 and are represented diagrammatically at Annex 3.

4. Post reporting issues

- 4.1 The Commission are required to produce composite reports from the 25 countries and their bio-geographical regions. The reports will be produced at bio-geographical region and at EU level. This will be a challenge even with the IT reporting tool to aggregate assessments to provide conclusions with any measure of confidence. Much of the burden for this work will fall on the European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity to which the JNCC is a partner organization. The JNCC has already been approached for support.
- 4.2 Judgments on conservation status will be used to inform casework, particularly on species derogations i.e. licensing decisions made by government and the statutory nature conservation agencies. The relevance of UK judgments on local casework will be an interesting challenge which may result in pressure for national or regional assessments. Some Member States are already planning regional assessments to inform local decisions.
- 4.3 Article 17 reports are required to be produced every 6 years with the next due in 2013. There is no requirement to produce assessments of conservation status in the intervening years. However, information from Common Standards Monitoring and other sources from 2007 should be considered to ensure that judgments maintain their relevance. The challenge will be how to accommodate such information without creating an industry.

ANNEX 1: REVISED PROGRAMME FOR THE PRODUCTION OF THE UK ARTICLE 17 REPORT

The recommended revised timetable and stages are as follows:

30 April 2007 [10 weeks]	Consultation exercise to commence. All detailed assessments and audit trail to be placed on the JNCC website. Relevant stakeholders including NGOs, to be contacted
w/c 4 June 2007	Host the first of two workshops with stakeholders to present the results and open discussion
w/c 11 June 2007	Host second workshop
6 July 2007	End of consultation exercise
9 July 2007 [5 weeks]	Commencement of editing and QA exercise
13 August 2007 [2 weeks]	Submission of final draft to the inter agency Chief Scientists Group for their consideration and approval (including some time for iteration) before signing off by JNCC chairman on behalf of the Committee
27 August 2007	Submission to government
3 September 2007	Final draft checks and iteration
17 September 2007	Ministerial clearance
1 October 2007	Submission to the Commission

ANNEX 2: SUMMARY OF THE PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS REACHED ON THE CONSERVATION STATUS

Annex I habitats (as at 9 Feb 2007)

(a) Number of habitats in each category

	Conclusion - habitat range	Conclusion - habitat area	Conclusion - structure & function	Conclusion - future prospects	Overall conclusion
Favourable	34	15	3	5	2
Unfavourable - inadequate	21	23	7	27	11
Unfavourable - bad	8	24	50	30	49
Unknown	1	2	4	2	2

(b) Percentage of habitats in each category

	Conclusion - habitat range	Conclusion - habitat area	Conclusion - structure & function	Conclusion - future prospects	Overall conclusion
Favourable	53%	23%	5%	8%	3%
Unfavourable - inadequate	33%	36%	11%	42%	17%
Unfavourable - bad	13%	38%	78%	47%	77%
Unknown	2%	3%	6%	3%	3%

Annex II species (as at 9th February)

(a) Number of species in each category

	Conclusion - species range	Conclusion - population	Conclusion - habitat for species	Conclusion - future prospects	Overall conclusion
Favourable	34	19	10	23	10
Unfavourable - inadequate	16	26	32	30	29
Unfavourable - bad	17	15	10	8	23
Unknown	3	10	4	9	8

(b) Percentage of species in each category

	Conclusion - species range	Conclusion - population	Conclusion - habitat for species	Conclusion - future prospects	Overall conclusion
Favourable	49%	19%	10%	23%	14%
Unfavourable - inadequate	23%	26%	32%	30%	41%
Unfavourable - bad	24%	15%	10%	8%	11%
Unknown	3%	10%	18%	9%	13%

