



NEW ENVIRONMENT STRATEGIES IN THE UK

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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

NEW ENVIRONMENT STRATEGIES IN THE UK

Paper by Diana Mortimer, Richard Ferris and Paul Rose

1. Background

- 1.1 New approaches to environmental protection and management are currently being developed in England, Scotland and Wales. Consultations are underway, or have recently closed, on the following documents:
 - i. *An invitation to shape the nature of England* (a discussion document, that will contribute to the preparation of a Natural Environment White Paper);
 - ii. *A living Wales – a new framework for our environment, our countryside and our seas* (a consultation document that will contribute to the preparation of a Welsh Natural Environment Framework);
 - iii. *Getting the best from our land* (a draft land use strategy for Scotland).
- 1.2 In addition, *Making space for nature* (the ‘Lawton Review’), was published in September. This was a separate exercise, set up to review England’s wildlife sites and ecological network and its recommendations will be considered as part of the Natural Environment White Paper.
- 1.3 The key features of these documents are summarised in sections 2-5 of this paper. Section 6 summarises the themes and issues common to all of the documents. The potential role for JNCC in supporting implementation of the country strategies is discussed in sections 7-10.

2. *An invitation to shape the nature of England*¹

- 2.1 Protecting the environment and enhancing biodiversity is one of Defra’s top three priorities, as outlined in the Department’s Business Plan. A key commitment under this priority is the publication of a Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) on the natural environment by spring 2011. This will be a bold and ambitious statement outlining the government’s vision for the natural environment, and how it will be implemented.
- 2.2 At its core, the discussion document stresses the role of the natural environment in underpinning economic prosperity, health and well-being, and notes that the natural environment needs to be better valued across government if it is not to be continually degraded and it is to enable us to meet dramatic changes ahead. The paper emphasises the need to devolve responsibility for protecting and enhancing the natural environment to the local level, especially to local authorities and the role of communities.

¹ <http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper>. Consultation closed 30 October 2010.

However, it also notes that central government has a role in providing an enabling framework on mandatory requirements such as European air and habitat quality and to assist local working.

- 2.3 New policy areas expected in the NEWP include the use of conservation credits to offset the impact of new development, and the establishment of Ecological Restoration Zones (ERZs), as proposed by the Lawton Review.
- 2.4 The eventual NEWP will consider policies on biodiversity and habitats, the marine environment, water quality and availability, air quality, soils, trees, woodlands, forests, landscapes and recreation. It will assess the contributions of farming, food, waste, land use and the planning system to the goals identified. A key overarching theme will be climate change mitigation and adaptation. At an international level, the NEWP will seek to address the impact of England's footprint on the natural environment overseas, promote better environmental management in other countries to benefit England's and the global economy, and consider the role of the UK in global conservation.
- 2.5 An England Biodiversity Strategy is being developed in parallel with the NEWP, and is also due to be published in spring 2011.

3. *A living Wales*²

- 3.1 The Welsh National Environment Framework aims to deliver sustainable development. The consultation notes that since the 2006 strategy the Welsh Assembly Government has not been able to take 'a truly integrated approach to the management of our environment which reflects the complexity of the way in which environmental systems interact, the value of the services they provide to society, the pressures posed by our changing climate, and the limits of natural capacity.' The lack of joined-up decision making has hampered Wales' ability to meet its sustainable development indicators, especially in their mixed progress in meeting stated biodiversity goals.
- 3.2 The consultation document proposes that a new approach is needed, to achieve:
 - i. sustainable development which considers all three pillars equally and ensures they are not in conflict with each other;
 - ii. adaptation to climate change;
 - iii. capturing the value of the environment for society and rewarding those who manage it positively;
 - iv. securing sustainable and integrated natural resource management by making the long-term health of ecosystems and their services central to decision making.
- 3.3 The Welsh consultation is alone in explicitly asking whether there would be value in developing a formal accounting method for natural capital. However, it is hinted at in the English consultation and was a key element of the recently agreed Convention on Biological Diversity's 2020 strategic plan.

² <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/environmentandcountryside/eshlivingwalescons/?lang=en>. The consultation closes on 31 December 2010.

- 3.4 This document is the starting point for a series of consultations and workshops which will develop each of the five work streams (building the evidence base; valuing ecosystems; refreshing regulatory and management approaches; refreshing partnership mechanisms; refreshing institutional arrangements) over 2011-2012. The final outcome of the consultations will be a clear set of national priorities, backed up by institutional and regulatory changes, and integrated local delivery mechanisms.

4. *Getting the best from our land*³

- 4.1 This will be Scotland's first national strategy for land use, and the consultation recognises that there are roles for Government, other bodies and the people of Scotland to work together to develop a national framework of key principles to inform decisions taken locally about the land.
- 4.2 The consultation notes that the overall aim is to increase sustainable economic growth. It sets out a vision for a 'prosperous and sustainable low-carbon economy, underpinned by successful land-based businesses, flourishing natural environments and vibrant communities'. This includes a strategic direction towards 'better consideration of the natural environment'.
- 4.3 The consultation is wide-ranging and includes an objective on vibrant sustainable communities in urban and rural areas, with people connected to the land, enjoying it and taking an interest in its future. This includes management of Scotland's landscapes for the wide range of benefits they supply and recognises the potential threats to them including climate change. It emphasises the potential for Scotland to become a major producer of renewable energy and that there are many opportunities to create a low-carbon economy. It seeks views on optimising land use, including an aim for sustainable land use which enables attainment of social and economic objectives without depleting the value of Scotland's natural assets.

5. *Making space for nature*⁴

- 5.1 The Lawton Review is England focused. It was commissioned in September 2009 and delivered in September 2010. It examined the extent to which the current collection of sites⁵ represents a coherent and resilient ecological network, capable of adapting to climate change and other pressures; whether a more inter-connected network would be more effective; and made costed and prioritised recommendations on how Government and other organisations could deliver the recommended model.
- 5.2 The big messages to come out of the Lawton Review are:
- i. there is an ongoing need to manage existing wildlife sites to the highest standards;

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/09/23100015/1>. The consultation closes on 30 November 2010.

⁴ <http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/news/2010/09/24/nature-news>

⁵ Sites are in three tiers: Tier 1 SSSIs, Tier 2 those designated for their high biodiversity, but do not receive full protection (e.g. local wildlife sites), Tier 3 landscape designations with wildlife conservation as part of their statutory purpose (e.g. National Parks and AONBs).

- ii. properly planned ecological networks are needed, including restoration areas – Ecological Restoration Zones (ERZs) should be the gold-standard, where efforts should be focused;
 - iii. many surviving patches of wildlife habitat fall outside of the SSSI series, with poor protection and management – these have the potential to make an important contribution to an enhanced ecological network;
 - iv. more should be made of win-wins, including ecosystem service provision to deliver societal benefits and a more effective ecological network;
 - v. the required step-change in nature conservation in England will not be achieved without society accepting that it is necessary, desirable and achievable – strong leadership from government and collaboration across all sectors and levels of society are required;
 - vi. the total annual cost of establishing a coherent and resilient network is estimated to be in the range of £600 million to £1.1 billion.
- 5.3 Unsurprisingly, the SSSI series does not in itself comprise a coherent and resilient ecological network, since SSSIs were not designated with this aim. Tier 2 sites and Tier 3 landscapes have considerable potential to make a greater contribution towards England’s ecological network, if the habitats within them were better managed and more secure.
- 5.4 There are some areas within which both the scale of what can be delivered and the scale of the benefits will be very high, and the report proposes that these should be formally recognised as ERZs, the characteristics of which will vary across the country. It is recommended that resources be provided to implement 12 ERZs in the next three years.

6. Common themes and issues

- 6.1 The three consultations each include the following key themes:
- i. the environment and natural resources contribute to national prosperity, health and well-being;
 - ii. ecosystem services underpin life, provide social benefits and need to be mainstreamed;
 - iii. there is an urgent need to learn how to incorporate the value of ecosystem services in the way all sectors work, and to understand them better;
 - iv. decision making should be devolved from central to local levels;
 - v. public participation must play an important role in making decisions and taking action;
 - vi. new approaches to planning are needed, including taking the full complexity of land use into account;

- vii. the ecosystem(s) approach⁶ has a key role in meeting the stated objectives;
 - viii. the environment is a complex system and there is urgent need to better understand how it works and how it is influenced, e.g. how to deal with food, planning, flood risk, water and biodiversity together at appropriate scales;
 - ix. climate change mitigation and adaptation;
 - x. developing a low carbon (green) economy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, carbon storage in soils.
- 6.2 The English and Welsh consultation documents are perhaps more closely aligned because their focus is on the natural environment, including marine. The Scottish strategy is concerned with sustainable land use in its widest context and includes, for example, discussion on sustainable communities in urban areas and the role of land-based businesses.
- 6.3 The impacts of European frameworks and legislation and international multilateral agreements are dealt differently by each document. The Scottish paper notes that it is produced in the context of several existing commitments, including European legislation. The Welsh document considers how the Welsh strategy should respond to existing European and international legislation, e.g. asking a question as to whether the current European framework constrains the ability to use a sustainable ecosystems approach. The English consultation suggests the Government should press for smarter regulation to review old or ineffective measures, e.g. reviews of the Common Agricultural and Fisheries policies should ensure in future they are targeted at environmental challenges.
- 6.4 The English consultation also seeks to address what should be happening at a UK level, noting that the UK Government and the devolved administrations work together for a strong UK position in EU negotiations over environmental policy. It goes on to ask what should be the priorities for the UK's role in EU and international action, to protect and enhance the natural environment at home and abroad.

7. Evidence requirements

- 7.1 The new demands for evidence based on mainstreaming ecosystem services and biodiversity to support evidence-based decision making at all scales will require a shift in its provision. The Welsh consultation notes 'there is a need to develop a stronger evidence base for our ecosystems so that we have a better basis for decisions that fully reflect risks, opportunities and limits'. The National Ecosystem Assessment notes much of the current evidence and monitoring is based on individual species and habitats rather than the underlying relationships between them. Our understanding of the linkages between habitat types, species and groups of species and the wide range of services they provide is relatively underdeveloped. There is also little knowledge of the role of biodiversity in resilience and adaptation.

⁶ The Welsh and Scottish consultations both use the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) ecosystem approach whereas the NEWP uses the term 'ecosystems approach' and has adopted a modified version of the CBD's.

- 7.2 Emerging evidence needs include:
- i. information and evidence required to focus on ecosystems and their services, e.g. new indicators are required for ecosystem services assessment and therefore monitoring and surveillance;
 - ii. new and existing customer requirements will change, e.g.
 - what new data might be required, e.g. by local authorities and developers, to make assessments, decisions and set priorities?
 - how can we make data applicable at a range of scales, e.g. from UK and international reporting to local schemes?
 - understanding complex systems rather than individual species and habitats;
 -
 - iii. application of the precautionary approach so as to address risk and uncertainty;
 - iv. information on environmental limits and thresholds;
 - v. green infrastructure – setting standards and best practice.
- 7.3 Evidence collection is costly, and benefits can be found from UK collation and processing which allows for assessment locally. For example, on-line recording reduces collation and validation costs. This data can then be packaged to meet the needs of local authorities and the third sector. JNCC is well placed to assist with the development of new evidence needs through its experience of delivering the gateway function of the National Biodiversity Network.
- 7.4 Existing indicators are underpinned by long-term surveillance and monitoring schemes. New indicator requirements are necessary to assess the delivery of healthy ecosystem services. JNCC is again well placed to assist with the development of the new indicators given its previous experience in this area and its delivery of long-term reporting.
- 7.5 The development of evidence needs must also work with improvements to the concepts and methods supporting the new strategies. In particular this includes:
- i. increasing knowledge of ecosystem services, including their links to biodiversity, habitat condition in relation to ecological processes and function, and resilience;
 - ii. economic valuation of ecosystem services;
 - iii. developing green accounting systems, particularly the links to biodiversity and natural resources

8. Marine nature conservation

- 8.1 A UK Marine Policy Statement is currently being developed which will be the first part of new systems of marine planning being introduced around the UK. It will provide the high-level policy context within which marine plans will be

developed, and set the direction for marine licensing and other relevant authorisation systems. The Marine Policy Statement will be the overarching policy framework for the UK marine area aimed at achieving the UK Government's and devolved administrations' collective vision for clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

- 8.2 The marine environment falls within the scope of the English and Welsh consultation documents. The English White Paper consultation notes that marine plans are being developed after consultation earlier this year. The new Welsh Natural Environment Framework will have a stronger focus on sustainable marine management and will adopt an ecosystems approach.
- 8.3 The Scottish land use strategy obviously excludes marine territory but marine issues are being actively addressed by Scotland in other ways. The Marine Scotland Act 2010 is complementary to the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, and provides a framework which will help balance competing demands on Scotland's territorial seas. Marine Scotland is charged with leading delivery of the Scottish Government's marine vision.
- 8.4 It will be important for subsequent stages of the development of the English and Welsh environment frameworks to give more clarity with regard to how the marine environment will be dealt with. JNCC has an important contribution to make to the marine component of environmental frameworks through its offshore marine role and because of the importance of international agreements in addressing many pressures on the marine environment.

9. The European and international context

- 9.1 Multilateral environmental agreements (e.g. the Convention on Biological Diversity) and EU instruments (e.g. Habitats Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Common Agricultural Policy) continue to provide the basis for much national and local natural resource management. Engagement with these processes is therefore important for conservation efforts in the UK.
- 9.2 The new strategies will be important in a global context. For example, the adoption of an ecosystems approach to natural resource management and the undertaking of the National Ecosystem Assessment, put the UK and its individual countries in the vanguard internationally. This means the countries will each be taking actions, developing new tools and seeking to evaluate natural resource use in new and sustainable ways. It is important the lessons learnt from these new approaches to the environment are shared globally, e.g. through the International Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and there is a potential role for JNCC here. This will not only benefit wildlife and natural resource use in other countries but also potentially reduce the impact of the UK's footprint overseas.
- 9.3 The UK's footprint has a direct impact on wildlife overseas. The UK and the European Community are significant importers of the world's biodiversity, not only in fish and timber but also in other products derived from wildlife. Most of this trade comes from the developing world. Where this trade is sustainable it provides economic benefits to exporting countries, supports sustainable development and may provide incentives for the conservation of the ecosystems from which the products are derived. When unsustainable, such trade may drive the loss of biodiversity and detrimentally affect the lives of those who depend upon it; typically, these include some of the world's

poorest people. JNCC's expertise in modelling and assessing the global impacts of UK activities could help to improve the UK's ecological footprint. Additionally, JNCC's new work on forests and in particular REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) will also contribute to better global natural resource use.

- 9.4 In Europe stronger efforts are being made to mainstream environmental and biodiversity concerns into other sectoral policies such as trade, development aid, transport, energy and economic policies. Examples include application of green GDP and addressing environmental pressures such as direct and indirect land use change (at home and abroad), unsustainable production and consumption, and invasive alien species. JNCC's European expertise means we are well placed to collate and provide advice on EU developments to UK Government and, through the country conservation bodies, to the devolved administrations.

10. Added value of a UK strategy

- 10.1 The UK is committed to new EU and global biodiversity targets. At present, how these targets will be used and reported on in the UK has yet to be decided. Consequently, there is need to develop an international natural environment strategy (which would include the UK's Overseas Territories). This would complement the strategies developed in individual countries of the UK and address international issues, such as how the UK uses global natural resources and how it engages with biodiversity conservation internationally.
- 10.2 A key priority for such an international strategy, in addition to the points raised above, would be the conservation and sustainable use of forests globally (especially in light of their role in carbon sequestration and storage, in regulating global and regional climate and weather, their value for biodiversity, and their role in sustaining the livelihoods of many of the world's poor), and an agreement on REDD+ that incorporates strong biodiversity safeguards and can be monitored using robust indicators.
- 10.3 Another international priority is biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, especially through the continued implementation of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories biodiversity strategy. JNCC's Overseas Territories programme has made a significant contribution to development and implementation of the strategy.