

Dear Colleagues

### **Invitation to comment on the revision of the Guidelines for the Selection of Biological SSSIs**

The Guidelines for the Selection of Biological SSSIs were originally published in 1989. Significant changes have occurred since publication, including the devolution of NCC and subsequent formation of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Country Agencies, and the introduction of new European and UK legislation. Consequently, there is a strong need for the Guidelines to reflect a GB approach in the context of devolved governance.

An inter-agency group was formed last year to undertake an update to Parts A and B of the Guidelines (the 'Rationale, Operational Approach and Criteria for Site Selection'). The group was asked by the Chief Scientists' Group<sup>1</sup> (CSG) to update the Guidelines, edit them into current technical English and remove repetition, with a strong emphasis on light touch. Consequently, major changes to the rationale have been resisted.

Parts A and B of the guidelines have been merged into a single Part 1. Part C is now renamed Part 2. No revision of Part 2 has yet taken place. It has been recognised that there is a need to assess the scale of required changes to individual chapters, but only where there is clear, demonstrable evidence of a need to support such revisions. JNCC and the Country Agencies will be reviewing Part 2 on this basis in due course.

**We are now offering interested parties an opportunity to comment on the revised Guidelines Part 1.**

#### **Part 1**

Parts A and B have been combined into a single Part 1, with a 20% reduction in text, without altering the meaning of the document. It should be reiterated that this has been a "light touch" review. However, attention should be drawn to the following areas where more substantive changes have been made:

- Additional references to marine and intertidal habitats have been made, and the circumstances surrounding their selection and designation have been added. Reference has been made to Areas of Search (AoS) for intertidal habitats (4.15)
- Throughout the document, attention has been given to the concept of *near-natural* habitats as well as *semi-natural* habitats.
- The criteria 'Position in an ecological Network' and 'Potential value' have been given added emphasis, and the sections on both have been developed and emphasised (5.11 and 5.12).
- *Intrinsic appeal* has been removed as a secondary criterion.

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<sup>1</sup> The Chief Scientists' Group (CSG) comprises senior scientists from each of the UK conservation bodies (Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, Countryside Council for Wales and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency) and the JNCC's Science Director. The remit of the CSG includes the identification and provision of advice on strategic issues requiring the consideration of the Joint Committee, and retaining an overview of common UK standards for surveillance, conservation management and international reporting

- A small section on *recorded history* as a secondary criterion has been added, by culling text from elsewhere.(5.13).
- The section on non-native species has been moved into 'Naturalness – species' (5.9) from the tail of section 8, where it sat uncomfortably.
- A distinction has been made between compound sites (sites with several parcels of land of the same habitat – sometimes termed archipelago sites) and composite sites (sites with several habitats within the same parcel - as defined by Ratcliffe).
- Reference has been made to the availability of data on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) (section 5).
- References have been updated and expanded.

Stakeholders are invited to comment on the revised Part 1, with particular reference to the changes outlined above. Please ensure that all comments can be clearly linked to the relevant section in Part 1 using the numbering used in the document.

Please note that the deadline for responses is **Monday 16 April 2012 17:00 hrs**

Please send responses to: [sssiguidelines@jncc.gov.uk](mailto:sssiguidelines@jncc.gov.uk)

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*On behalf of the Inter-Agency SSSI Guidelines Review Group*