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## **JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

### **EC HABITATS DIRECTIVE: UPDATE OF PROGRESS ON THE UK LIST OF SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION**

**Information paper by Wyn Jones, Head of Habitats Advice**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on progress since the June 2002 Committee paper on the UK list of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).
- 1.2 Subsequent to that paper, the UK submitted further SAC tranches to the European Commission, comprising new candidate SACs, extensions to existing candidate SACs, and data amendments including additional qualifying features on existing candidate SACs.
- 1.3 Annex 1 provides the numbers and where possible area, of candidate and proposed sites by country. Annex 2 provides a detailed account by habitats and species, of candidate and proposed sites and of progress made since the 2002 Biogeographical Region meeting.

#### **2. Hague Biogeographical Region meeting**

- 2.1 In June 2002 a meeting of the Atlantic Biogeographical Region was held in the Hague. The meeting assessed the sufficiency of national lists following action taken by Member States after the 1999 Paris and Kilkee meetings.
- 2.2 The conclusions of the meeting were that
  - i. **Marine features that occur beyond 12 nautical miles** were subject to a marine review, a general scientific reserve applicable throughout the Atlantic Biogeographical Region. This affected the following habitats and species which occur in UK territorial waters:
    - a. Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time;
    - b. Reefs;
    - c. Submerged or partially submerged sea caves
    - d. *Tursiops truncatus* Bottlenose dolphin
    - e. *Phocoena phocoena* Harbour porpoise
    - f. *Halichoerus grypus* Grey seal
    - g. *Phoca vitulina* Common seal

ii **Habitats**

- a. 52 were considered to be sufficiently represented;
- b. 9 were subject to scientific reserve (including the 3 marine review habitats);
- c. 11 were considered to have moderate insufficiency in the geographical range;
- d. 3 were considered to have moderate insufficiency in terms of proportion and/or ecological variation of the habitat represented.

iii **Species**

- a. 27 were considered to be sufficiently represented;
- b. 1 was sufficient subject to data form correction;
- c. 8 were subject to scientific reserve (including the 4 marine review species);
- d. 5 were considered to have moderate insufficiency in the geographical range and / or proportion of the population represented.

**3. Progress since the Hague meeting**

3.1 In addressing the above:

- a. 8 additional sites have been submitted;
- b. 27 additional proposed sites have been identified bringing the total number of proposed sites to 35;
- c. 7 significant extensions to existing cSACs are also proposed;
- d. 5 additional features on existing cSACs have been submitted;
- e. 10 proposed additional features identified bringing the total number of proposed additional features on existing cSACs to 12

3.2 Decisions regarding some of the proposed additional sites are pending but agreement on most has been secured. In some instances, for example for great crested newt and also for Barbastelle and Bechstein's bats, the conclusions of survey work are awaited to inform decisions. At other proposed sites, SSSI notification (and confirmation) has and will be undertaken in conjunction with SAC consultation, which will delay submission to the Commission.

- 3.3 Currently, further tranches to the commission are planned for 5 March, 30 April and also for early July. It is hoped that most of the outstanding action from 3.1 above will be completed by July.
- 3.4 Government and the agencies held a meeting with non-government organisations in January to discuss progress made and proposed action. The NGO's responded favourably to the information provided. Subsequently, WWF stated that they would write a letter to the Commission supporting the UK proposed SAC series.
- 3.5 Government have been pressing the Commission for a bilateral meeting, seeking an indication of the adequacy of the proposed UK SAC series. However, due to work generated by other Biogeographical meetings, a meeting with them has proved difficult to arrange.
- 3.6 The EC Habitats Directive Committee meets on 14 October at which it is expected that moderation will be the main issue for discussion. The UK will not have submitted all the proposed sites by this date and therefore a number of insufficiencies will still be concluded. However, it is envisaged that as sites have been identified to address the insufficiencies and that progress can be demonstrated, that the Commission will be able to approve the UK list subject to reservations.
- 3.7 The Commission hope that the list of Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) for the Atlantic Biogeographical Region will be agreed at this meeting. However, it would appear that a number of Member States are unlikely to have secured agreement on their national lists from their governments by October and therefore I am of the opinion that SCIs will not be agreed before 2004. This will give the UK more time within which to submit the remaining sites.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 The UK has made considerable progress since the moderation meetings at Kilkee, Paris and the Hague. I am of the view that should all the actions proposed be progressed as planned, that agreement with the Commission will be secured. The current list of candidate and proposed sites should therefore be listed as SCIs and eventually designed as SACs.
- 4.2 Although there is still much to be done, staff in the Support Unit and the agencies are to be thanked for the progress that has been made.

## EC HABITATS DIRECTIVE: UPDATE OF PROGRESS ON THE UK LIST OF SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION

Habitats Directive features in the UK: summary of progress since June 2002 Atlantic Biogeographical Region meeting

| <b>Country</b>     | <b>cSACs</b> | <b>cSAC area (ha)</b> | <b>% land cover</b> | <b>pSACs<sup>1</sup></b> |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| England            | 212          | 796,180.8             | 5.77                | 16                       |
| England/Scotland   | 3            | 111,620.5             |                     |                          |
| England/Wales      | 5            | 5,582.4               |                     | 2                        |
| Northern Ireland   | 43           | 64,608.6              | 3.83                | 9                        |
| Scotland           | 227          | 837,486.1             | 7.56                | 7                        |
| Wales              | 85           | 589,000.8             | 10.95               |                          |
| UK offshore waters |              |                       |                     | 1                        |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>575</b>   | <b>2,404,479.2</b>    | <b>7.24</b>         | <b>35</b>                |

<sup>1</sup> 'pSACs' in this context includes both possible SACs that have been formally advised to UK Government and proposed additional sites not yet formally advised.