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JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

THE UK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN AND COUNTRY BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES

Paper by Ant Maddock

1. Background

1.1 In response to the 1992 Convention of Biological Diversity, the UK launched *Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan* in 1994 outlining how the UK would deal with biodiversity conservation implementation; its conclusions were summarised by the '59 Steps'. In 1995, the UK Biodiversity Steering Group published *Biodiversity: the UK Steering Group Report - meeting the Rio challenge* which established the framework and criteria for identifying species and habitat types of conservation concern. Action plans for 116 species and 14 habitats (Tranche 1) were published in this document.

2. The UK BAP tasks

2.1 The *UK Steering Group Report - meeting the Rio challenge* focused on four tasks contained in the UK Action Plan. These were to:

- i. develop costed targets for the most threatened and declining species and habitats;
- ii. improve accessibility and co-ordination of biological datasets and consider future information management requirements which include monitoring agreed targets;
- iii. increase public awareness and involvement by targeting key sectors; and
- iv. recognise the importance of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) which complement national action plans and use a top down and bottom up approach.

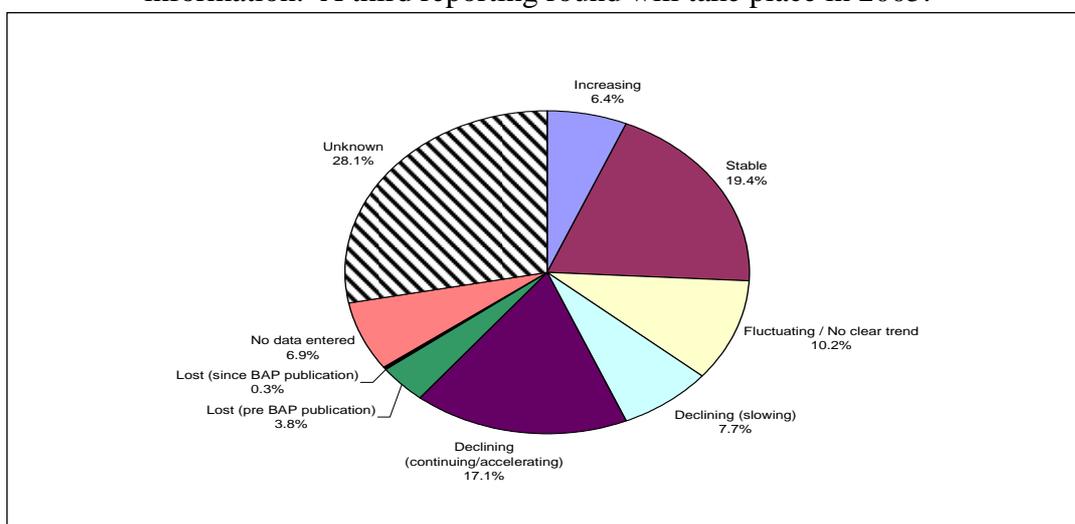
3. Progress with the UK BAP tasks

Action Plans

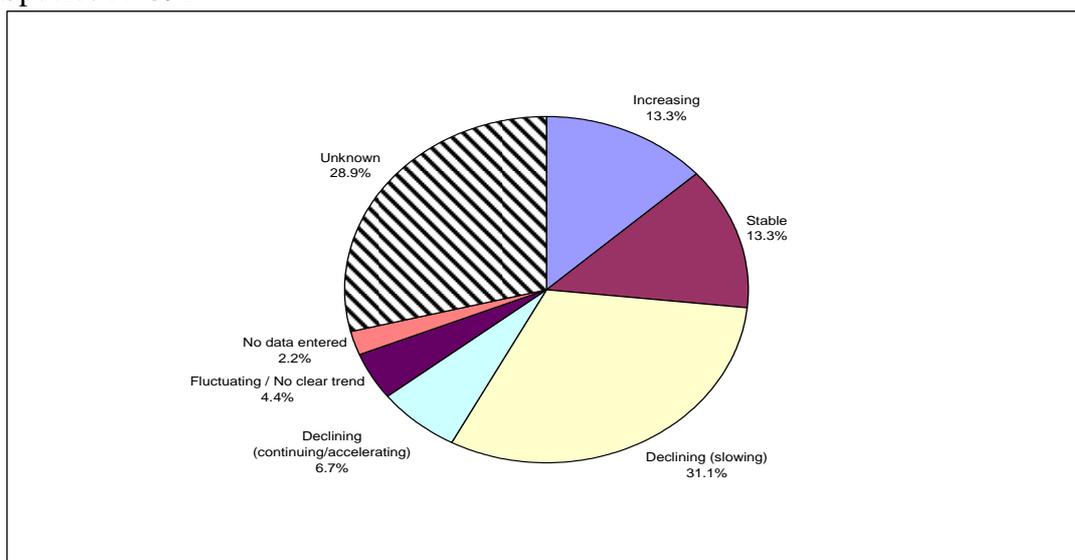
3.1 Between 1995 and 1999, Action Plans had been costed and published (Tranche 1 and Tranche 2; six volumes) for 391 species and 45 habitat plans.

Reporting on the Action Plan targets was conducted in 1999 and 2002, with the 2002 report including the work done by LBAPs. The 2001 report *Sustaining the variety of life; 5 years of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan*, also called the Millennium Biodiversity Report, provided an assessment of the UK BAP, reported on progress of the Species and Habitat Action Plans and made recommendations to government about changes to the UK BAP structure. These changes were subsequently implemented (see below under Section 4).

3.2 A summary of the trend results from the 2002 Reporting Round are presented in Figure 1. More information was available in 2002 compared to 1999, enabling clearer judgements to be made about trends and more detailed assessments about the rates of decline. Five species showed a more positive trend in 2002 than in 1999 but thirteen species showed a worse trend than in 1999. In 2002, 28% of the species and 29% of the habitats did not have trend information. A third reporting round will take place in 2005.



Species N=391



Habitat N=45

Figure 1. Trends of UK BAP priority species (top) and habitats (bottom) as revealed in the 2002 reporting round.

UK Biodiversity Database

- 3.3 The initial proposal for a UK Biodiversity Database has grown into the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), independent but still complementary to the UK BAP process, and administered by the NBN Trust. Most of the planning has been completed, and the structure, database procedures and software have been developed. More than 70 new Local Records Centres are being established, exceeding the target of 50 new centres set in the 1995 UK Steering Group Report, and all are being encouraged to join the NBN. The NBN is now moving to a stage of service and application of its 16 million species records and has huge potential for the future. For example, NBN data, linked to the UK BAP website, can be seen in relation to LBAP areas and the distribution of priority species can be plotted with GIS overlays. However, NBN does not include in its brief the monitoring of UK BAP targets as required by the 1995 report although the new Biodiversity Action Reporting System (see paragraphs 4.5-4.7 below) may fulfil this role.

Public awareness

- 3.4 Achievements in the field of Public awareness are difficult to assess. Government has made some progress in getting biodiversity considered in all relevant policy issues and at local council level, in key sectors and in education and training. In England, Scotland and Wales public body duties with respect to biodiversity are now enshrined in legislation. Local Biodiversity Action Plans have played an important role in publicising information about local wildlife and giving opportunities for people to become involved in recording schemes. The ecosystem approach links biodiversity, the economy and people and plays an important awareness-raising role. 'Champions' for priority habitats and species continue to be identified. Moreover, public awareness-raising is highly placed in the new country strategies (see Section 5 below). At a UK level, the annual UK BAP Partnership meetings, the recently redesigned UK BAP website and the work done by the LBAPs, contribute to awareness-raising.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans

- 3.5 Guidelines set up in 1995 resulted in the development of 162 Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) in England, Scotland and Wales, with LBAPs currently being set up also in Northern Ireland. National LBAP coordinators have also been established in England, Scotland and Wales. Links between national and local targets got off to a slow start and were not reported in the first 1999 Reporting Round. However, these links were considered in the 2002 Reporting Round and form a fundamental part of the new Biodiversity Action Reporting System (see paragraphs 4.5-4.7 below).

4. **UK BAP management and administration**

The UK Biodiversity Partnership

- 4.1 The recommendations from the Millennium Biodiversity Report were accepted by government and a new UK BAP structure was implemented in late 2002. The UK Biodiversity Partnership, comprising stakeholders involved in the UK BAP process, replaced the UK Biodiversity Group. The UK Biodiversity Standing Committee manages the business of the UK Biodiversity Partnership and is assisted by the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG) and the Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG). Four Country Groups are also active in the UK BAP process and promote public awareness of biodiversity, co-ordinate progress reports to the UK Partnership and promote action on the Species, Habitat and Local Action Plans.
- 4.2 BRIG provides technical and scientific advice to the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee (and Country Groups where appropriate) on the biodiversity information, processes and standards needed to implement the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and report biodiversity information on behalf of the UK Biodiversity Partnership. Currently, BRIG is planning the third (2005) Reporting Round, revising the UK BAP Targets and updating the UK BAP species and habitat priorities and has a deadline to complete all reviews by the end of 2006.
- 4.3 BRAG provides advice about biodiversity research priorities and co-ordination in the UK. Its aims are to promote and facilitate research that supports the delivery of UK BAP objectives, and hence implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and to enable effective and efficient UK engagement with European and international biodiversity research initiatives and hence fulfil the role of a national biodiversity research platform.
- 4.4 The administration of this partnership is cumbersome. Technical work is done by subgroups (four in BRAG, five in BRIG and one for the Biodiversity Action and Reporting System (BARS) (see below) and their work is referred to BRIG or BRAG for consideration. The work is then forwarded to the Standing Committee who refer it back to specialist advisers in the individual countries before giving final approval.

Reporting

- 4.5 The first Reporting Round in 1999 used paper (hard copy) reports from Lead Partners which were difficult and time consuming to analyse. In 2002, these problems were partly resolved by an online Reporting Round. However, the data still needed to be entered onto the computer, so the 2005 Reporting Round will be based on an online database Biodiversity Action and Reporting System (BARS) in which previously entered data will be used to answer the reporting questions. Early impressions are that BARS will perform well in this role.

4.6 In BARS, which is being developed by English Nature, the Scottish Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Wales Biodiversity Partnership, each action is stored once, reducing the risk posed by several organisations reporting the same activity several times and creating a high risk of double counting.

4.7 BARS was released in late 2004 and will be evaluated by JNCC and English Nature.

5. Country Biodiversity Strategies

5.1 In 1998, schemes of devolution were introduced to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland making these administrations responsible for environmental regulation. Since 2002, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland have developed separate Biodiversity Strategies, and Wales is in the process of agreeing an Environmental Strategy. These strategies guide the direction each country will take in conserving its biodiversity and environment, and are summarised below.

England

5.2 The England Biodiversity Strategy, *Working with the grain of nature*, was published in 2002 and sets out a five year programme to ensure the integration of biodiversity into policy making and practice.

5.3 The strategy sets out five key policy areas where integration needs to be achieved: Agriculture, Water and Wetlands, Woodland and Forestry, Marine/coastal management and Urban. It also includes four areas where cross-cutting improvement is needed: driving Local and Regional Action; the Economics and Funding of Biodiversity; the Engagement of Business, and Promoting Education and Public Understanding.

5.4 Progress in achieving the strategy will be measured using eight headline indicators:

1. population of wild birds
2. condition of Sites of Special Scientific Interest
3. progress with biodiversity action plans
4. area of land under agri-environment agreement
5. biological quality of rivers
6. fish stocks around the UK fished within safe limits
7. progress with local biodiversity action plans
8. public attitudes to biodiversity

plus 38 more detailed indicators for individual workstreams.

5.5 All measures of progress will have an evidence base, for example species monitoring through the British Bird Survey, the National Biodiversity Network and the Countryside Survey.

- 5.6 The strategy will focus on developing and maintaining strong partnerships. Existing and potential partners will be drawn from the statutory, voluntary, private, NGOs academic and business sectors. They include interest groups with large public memberships, the local biodiversity action partnerships who lead on activity at a local level, and partners in Government with statutory responsibilities. These partnerships will provide policy advice, will engage with habitat and species action plans, and will work at local level.
- 5.7 The England Biodiversity Strategy is increasingly being delivered on programme and project management principles, though it is a much broader programme with a wider range of lead bodies for different policy areas. Implementation of the biodiversity strategy and achievement of the PSA target require contributions from many policy areas within Defra and across Government, including NDPBs such as English Nature, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Environment Agency. It also involves significant action and engagement from partners outside Government. The first full report on the strategy is due in 2006.

Northern Ireland

- 5.8 The Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland outlines action to protect and conserve landscape, wildlife habitats and species in Northern Ireland up to 2016 using the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group's (NIBG) 76 measures. Generally:
- i. sustainable development is a key theme running through the work and priorities;
 - ii. sustainable development means social progress for all, high and stable levels of economic growth and employment, effective protection of the environment and prudent use of natural resources;
 - iii. conservation of biological diversity will be fully integrated into policy making;
 - iv. a chief goal is to arrest biodiversity decline and measure the extent to which this is achieved.
- 5.9 Two mechanisms ensure the success of this strategy. The first is a Steering Group which will be the successor to NIBG; the second involves an interdepartmental approach to taking forward the implementation work within Government departments.

- 5.10 The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group will have representation from certain sectors including business, education and the fishing industry. Its role will be to:
- i. co-ordinate and monitor implementation of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy including progress towards agreed species and habitats targets;
 - ii. co-ordinate and monitor development and implementation of Northern Ireland Action Plans;
 - iii. participate in any UK biodiversity partnership and the development of UK Action Plans which relate to Northern Ireland;
 - iv. promote public and business awareness and involvement in biodiversity conservation;
 - v. promote biodiversity conservation on an all-Ireland basis;
 - vi. submit reports to the Executive every three years on progress with implementation of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy.
- 5.11 An inter-departmental approach coordinates the actions of the Executive in the strategy's implementation. The purpose is to examine the impact of departments' policies on biodiversity, and to ensure that departments achieve increased co-ordination, extend the application of the ecosystem approach to environmental management and promote biodiversity on their land and water through their activities. Another important function is to oversee the implementation of those NIBG recommendations which relate to knowledge, understanding and participation. An important part of the Steering Group's role will be to develop a plan to achieve a broad measure of public understanding and participation. In particular, responsibilities have been drawn up for DOE and its agencies, The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.
- 5.12 The private sector also has a part to play in contributing to biodiversity and there is a need to integrate biodiversity into Environmental Management Systems and to get the message across to business that biodiversity is wider than saving species and habitats and includes issues like genetic resources, value for recreation and tourism and sustainable harvests of wild species.
- 5.13 Work will link to actions taken at European and international levels to protect the environment including the Habitats and Birds Directives, the Water Framework Directive and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. Other policy issues include climate change and the conservation of marine landscapes. However, ultimately, success will depend on the involvement of all sectors of our society and action at local community levels.

Scotland

- 5.14 The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, '*Scotland's Biodiversity: It's In Your Hands*' was launched by the Scottish Biodiversity Forum on 25 May 2004. It was developed by the Scottish Executive in partnership with the Scottish Biodiversity Forum, a working partnership of government, its agencies and sponsored bodies, NGOs, business and private organisations. The Strategy lays down a 25-year vision for biodiversity in Scotland and sets out an integrated strategic direction for action. It puts people at its heart, and a key theme of the strategy is to raise public consciousness and reinforce the link between people and biodiversity. It has five strategic objectives:
- i. Species & Habitats: To halt the loss of biodiversity and continue to reverse previous losses through targeted action for species and habitats;
 - ii. People: To increase awareness, understanding and enjoyment of biodiversity, and engage many more people in conservation and enhancement;
 - iii. Landscapes & Ecosystems: To restore and enhance biodiversity in all our urban, rural and marine environments through better planning, design and practice;
 - iv. Integration & Co-ordination: To develop an effective management framework that ensures biodiversity is taken into account in all decision making;
 - v. Knowledge: To ensure that the best new and existing knowledge on biodiversity is available to all policy makers and practitioners.
- 5.15 The Strategy recognises the importance of targeted action for species and habitats through the UK BAP and LBAP process, but also specifies the need to build upon and strengthen this approach through bringing biodiversity into the mainstream, encouraging better management at the landscape and ecosystem scale, ensuring more effective integration and coordination of existing policies and initiatives and promoting increased awareness and engagement.
- 5.16 The Strategy is backed in legislation by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 which places a statutory duty on all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity in exercising their functions. On 29 November, the Deputy Scottish Minister for the Environment and Rural Development, speaking at the launch of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, enthusiastically endorsed the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, and confirmed that he would adopt it as the Strategy which Scottish Ministers are required to designate under the Act.
- 5.17 The Act also requires Ministers, within a year, to publish a list of species of flora and fauna and habitats which Ministers regard to be of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in Scotland. The Scottish

Biodiversity Forum is currently working on this list. It will be largely drawn from the UK BAP list, but may not correspond with it exactly (new Scottish priorities may be identified, and some UK priorities regarded as less important in the Scottish context).

- 5.18 The Strategy is supported by three year Implementation Plans developed by the Scottish Biodiversity Forum. The Implementation Plans provide a mechanism to prioritise action to deliver the strategy aims and objectives. Actions within the plans are categorised under the Urban, Rural and Marine sectoral headings. In addition, the plans address issues which are common to all sectors, including Interpretation, Communication and Education (ICE), Local Delivery.
- 5.19 The plans were put out to consultation last summer and final versions have now been agreed and will be published on the web in searchable format. They will be reported on, updated, revised and further developed for each subsequent three year cycle of implementation.

Wales

- 5.20 The *State of the Environment Report* published in 2003, highlighted the need for an overarching Environment Strategy to provide a co-ordinated approach to the Welsh environment. As a healthy environment is important for the economy and quality of life, the purpose of the Environment Strategy is to develop a coherent, long-term framework and vision for the environment.
- 5.21 The Strategy will form a key part of the Welsh Assembly Government's programme for delivering sustainable development and help address global issues like climate change, flood defence, waste, air quality, pollution, countryside access, nature conservation and biodiversity. It will ensure that the contribution a diverse and beautiful environment makes to Wales' economic well-being and the quality of life of the people in Wales is recognised and enhanced.
- 5.22 The Strategy will provide direction for existing strategies and plans and develop a specific framework for action by the Assembly, statutory sector and others. The aim is to get people involved in the strategy. LBAPs are a critical delivery mechanism but integration of biodiversity into other sectors to ensure that development proceeds within the capacity of the environment is also vital.
- 5.23 Staff from the Assembly, Environment Agency Wales, Countryside Council for Wales and the Forestry Commission came together in April 2004 to form an Environment Strategy Team to develop the strategy. Public consultation on draft Strategy is scheduled for the summer of 2005 and final publication for autumn 2005.

6. The UK BAP in the light of country biodiversity strategies

- 6.1 The devolved administrations and country agencies are well represented on the UK BAP groups described in section 4. However, with the recent rise to prominence of the country strategies there is a need to reassess the UK focussed approach. It is apparent that the countries want to set their own direction without disengaging from the UK, but the exact nature of this relationship needs to be determined.
- 6.2 A country strategy focus makes it increasingly time consuming for the countries to engage with the demanding UK process. NGOs, most of whom are structured at a UK level, face the opposite problem and have to find additional resources to engage directly and equally with all countries. That said, considerable efforts are being made to resolve this, recognising that all agencies and organisations have to operate in the current policy environment. Nonetheless, strains are beginning to show and are likely to become problematic unless action to resolve them is taken. For example, there needs to be greater clarity and agreement between the sorts of action which need to be undertaken at a UK level and which at a country level, for example in target setting.

Review of the Action Plans

- 6.4 The UK BAP priority *Species and Habitat Action Plans* are under review. The first review is of the targets, many of which are out of date, to facilitate meeting the 2010 target. The second is a review of the Species and Habitat Action Plans themselves using a three stage process. Stage 1 considers scientific criteria for the identification of priority features, Stage 2 looks at what can be done to conserve the species and habitats, and Stage 3 looks at the best way to achieve this. The Species and Habitat review is being conducted at a UK level but countries have requested this information be used by them to generate their own priorities. While these reviews need to be carried out objectively, regard should also be given to the work already in progress on many of the Action Plans and to the need to avoid undermining this. Commonsense accommodations will need to be made.
- 6.5 Although the Species and Habitat Review appears to be highly valued by the devolved administrations, the reviews are rapidly being overtaken by devolution. For example, the relationship between the implementation of country-specific styles of delivery may well impact on the existing plans and their targets; and the relationship between UK and country targets is unknown, as is the ability of some countries to measure these targets at a country level.
- 6.6 The Review of Marine Nature Conservation (RMNC) report recommends the combination of the RMNC priority features work with the UK BAP, using the identification criteria and methods tested and refined during the Irish Sea Pilot. This work will list marine priority features that can be fed into the current UK BAP review.

National Biodiversity Network

- 6.7 Great progress is being made with the NBN and this resource has huge potential to form the basis of independent biological assessments, UK BAP trends, and the provision of advice. This project will continue by focusing on service delivery in the immediate future. However, NBN does not monitor UK BAP targets and neither is BRIG doing this work. This is despite co-ordination of monitoring and surveillance to meet country biodiversity strategies being seen as a high priority by Wildlife and Countryside Link among others. Fortunately, BRAG is starting to address research needs in this area and JNCC is developing a project using NBN data to determine species status and trends; work that fits well with the new JNCC strategy.

Public awareness

- 6.8 Increasing public awareness of biodiversity is fundamental and forms an important part of the country strategies. However, there is a need for UK government departments to integrate their work with consideration for biodiversity and promote biodiversity to the UK public.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans

- 6.9 The country strategies place much importance on developing Local Biodiversity Action Plans and should continue to use LBAPs both to complement national action plans and to deliver non-HAP and SAP work. The ability of the countries to measure how well national and local plans integrate is unknown, but it is hoped that BARS will facilitate this.

7. Conclusions on current situation

- 7.1 The UK BAP, as envisaged in the UK Biodiversity Steering Group report, was not intended to provide a holistic strategy for the delivery of the 'conservation of biological diversity' objective of the Convention of Biological Diversity. It was intended to develop additional effort in relation to the four tasks summarised in Section 2 above. In this, it has been successful to a considerable degree, although the benefits achieved for wildlife as a result remain somewhat uncertain because of inadequacies in the monitoring and reporting processes. Currently, reporting progress against targets is the responsibility of the Action Plan Lead Partner and there is a need for this to be underpinned by adequate surveillance of the habitats and species concerned. This could be assisted by the work now underway summarised in paragraph 6.7 above.
- 7.2 The country biodiversity strategies do take a more holistic approach, setting the objectives of the UK BAP within a wider strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of the land and inshore marine areas of these countries. The strategies retain important elements of the UK BAP, while adapting them to local circumstances.

- 7.3 The multiplicity of the processes now in play is causing a number of problems. Country agencies are having to endeavour to contribute fully to UK as well as country processes. JNCC, and some NGOs, currently only have resources to contribute effectively to the UK BAP and not to individual country strategies.
- 7.4 As it is at the present, the UK BAP can be considered as a core component of each country's biodiversity strategy which has additional components to meet each country's individual needs. JNCC has an obligation to support the 2005 UK BAP Review which peaks during the second half of 2005, ending in late 2006 with a continuing obligation to conduct UK BAP reporting every three years thereafter.
- 7.5 However, the relationship as between JNCC's UK role, the UK BAP and the country strategies needs to be reconsidered in the light of devolution. The timetable to do this is critical and planning should start in 2005 - the peak period of the current UK BAP review - building up through 2006 so that implementation of any new roles can begin in 2007.
- 7.6 Strategically, however, the UK BAP itself needs to be reviewed, as its limited scope is at odds with the more holistic country biodiversity strategies; moreover it is not capable of delivering the range of obligations facing the UK in relation to the conservation of biodiversity e.g. arising from the CBD, WSSD, the 2010 target, the Birds and Habitats Directives, OSPAR and so on. At the moment there is no clear indication as to the extent to which JNCC should work in a strategic UK role and/or directly support the country agencies in their implementation of country strategies. There is a danger that the work of UK BAP will be seen as becoming marginal to, rather than a component of, the wider international obligations. This does not mean that the excellent work undertaken under UK BAP over 10 years should be lost; rather it means that there is a need for an over-arching biodiversity framework within which the role of the UK BAP can be identified clearly, and can develop. JNCC's work to develop its 'Strategic Vision' could prove invaluable in helping to develop this framework.

8. **Way forward**

- 8.1 Section 7, summarised in paragraph 7.6, lists the issues raised in the paper which need to be resolved in conjunction with the UK BAP Partnership, and particularly with Defra, the devolved administrations and the country agencies. The challenge for JNCC is to adapt its role so as to fit in better with the future needs of the UK and the implementation of individual country strategies.
- 8.2 As a first step in resolving this problem, an overview of the type of work that JNCC considers useful to the UK BAP is suggested. The focus is on International Obligations, Information Provision, Independent Advice and the provision of strategic mechanisms and recommendations. The aim is to provide effective delivery at the UK level, and also to provide information, advice and practical tools to the countries to help them develop and implement their strategies.

8.3 *International Obligations*

The JNCC should;

- i. place the UK BAP in the context of the range of international biodiversity obligations (including the WSSD and Gothenburg 2010 targets), facilitate discussion between the partners on whether the UK BAP requires modification to take account of these, and identify how the work on UK BAP can contribute to the delivery of these international obligations;
- ii. in the context of UK BAP, formulate strategies for the delivery of international obligations in a cost-effective manner, maximising effectiveness through international policies (e.g. the Common Agricultural Policy, Common Fisheries Policy, Water Framework Directive and Integrated Coastal Zone Management etc.);
- iii. as a specific example of i) and ii) above, commence an improvement in the coherence of conservation action by better integrating work on the UK BAP and with that on the Habitats Directive. Urgent tasks are to develop a common habitat terminology and to incorporate the understanding of Favourable Conservation Status into UK BAP targets.

8.4 *Information Provision and Management*

The JNCC should:

- i. agree an overall biodiversity survey and monitoring framework with partners;
- ii. track and report on biodiversity trends, including UK BAP species and habitats, using information from both (i) above and local information;
- iii. ensure that information collated with respect to the UK BAP features is utilised in reporting against the WSSD and Gothenburg 2010 targets;
- iv. at a generic level, develop techniques and methods for the analysis of biological data that can be used by each country for their own purposes and make these widely available;
- v. use the work undertaken through BRAG to enhance the provision of knowledge to support action taken under UK BAP.

8.5 *Independent Advice*

The JNCC should:

- i. advise government on UK biodiversity issues, if necessary independently of the consensus of UK BAP partners;
- ii. provide recommendations to the UK BAP partnership based on the data gathered as outlined in section 8.4;
- iii. ensure there are good lines of communication between and among JNCC, Defra, the country agencies and administrations, and that the responsibilities of those contributing to the implementation of UK BAP, and how these fit together, are clearly defined and understood.

8.6 The Joint Committee is invited to **discuss** the paper and **comment** on the proposals set out in Section 8.