

NRW B B 9.15 Annex 2

NATURAL RESOURCES WALES' SSSI and international sites work streams briefing

This briefing summarises the context for Natural Resources Wales Special Sites Programme, and outlines objectives, achievements to date, and forthcoming work streams - focussing on terrestrial and freshwater sites, (i.e. excluding marine protected areas, which are overseen by the Marine Programme Board).

Section 1 - statutory

Section 2 - proactive and strategic (Special Sites Programme)

Section 3 - other cross-cutting work streams

12.3 % of land in Wales is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and a significant number of these sites are also internationally important, being designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) under the Habitats Directive, Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the Birds Directive or as Ramsar sites under the Ramsar Convention.

NATURAL RESOURCES WALES Business Plan 2014/2015

E3: We will play our part and work with others to halt biodiversity loss in order to help ensure that, by 2020, ecosystems are more resilient.

- Increase the proportion of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in recovering or favourable condition, focusing on Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar and other marine sites, prioritising those on our managed land.
- Developing mechanisms to improve the delivery of strategic management and restoration of Wales' designated sites focussing on actions which yield the best outcomes, including projects such as LIFE N2K programme.

1. Statutory

Survey and evaluation for notification/designation

Following survey and analysis of evidence, possible SSSIs are assessed by Natural Resources Wales specialists and Operational staff against the JNCC [guidelines for selection of SSSIs](#). The guidance is under review, and is likely to result in a review of the series. The Geological Conservation Review is the basis for the identification of geological sites. **Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning – Evidence Analysis Group and Biodiversity and Fisheries Group**

Site selection and notification of SSSI

Natural Resources Wales has a duty under Section 28 (1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to notify land where it is of the opinion that the land is of special interest by reason of its flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features. All owners and occupiers of any land and certain public bodies must be notified, and are thereafter subject to the requirements to seek consent to carry out any operations likely to damage the special interest. National Services maintains a list of possible/candidate sites for notification and denotification and agree an annual programme with Operations sites teams. **Lead: National Services**

Delivery: Operations

International designations consultations on behalf of Welsh Government

Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning (Coordination for terrestrial sites - Ruth Jenkins, for marine sites - Rhian Jardine)

Delivery: Operations

Operations likely to damage the special interest – SSSI consenting regime and enforcement

After notification, owners and occupiers and public bodies are subject to the requirement to seek consent/assent to carry out any operations likely to damage the special interest. Operations sites teams respond to all applications for consent or assent to carry out operations within the legislative timescales.

Delivery: Operations

Guidance and advice: National Services

Casework

Proposals for plans and projects affecting SSSI are dealt with by operational staff, supported by specialist KSP advice for Habitats Regulations Assessments, and Strategic Environmental Assessments when necessary. **Delivery: Operations**

Guidance and advice: Knowledge Strategy and Planning

Reporting

Statutory and non-statutory reporting is required to influence the development of policy and strategy. Data from the Special Sites Actions Database is one source of information, and is

used for reporting progress in achieving Water Framework Directive measures, in Habitats Directive reporting and will be used to aid further development of the Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000 sites. The first PAF for Wales was submitted to the European Commission via Welsh Government and Defra in February 2013, and will be refreshed in 2015 as part of the LIFE N2K Programme.

WFD River Basin Management Plans 2nd cycle

Integration of Natura 2000 objectives and actions (measures) into RBMP 2nd cycle. A task and finish group under the Water Implementation Group (WIG) takes this project forward.

Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning - Water Group, Biodiversity and Fisheries Group

2. Non-statutory, proactive and strategic conservation management of sites

Special Sites Programme

The Special Sites Programme was launched in 2007 in response to Outcome 21 of the Welsh Government's Environment Strategy for Wales, which sets targets to get sites into favourable condition. There can be a time lag between taking appropriate measures and the habitats and species responding and reaching favourable condition. The focus of the programme is to stimulate communication and partnership working towards action. The Programme provides an integrated way of working, and a framework to draw together relevant staff and partner organisations to provide coordination and strategic direction. Action on these targets is co-led by Natural resources Wales and Welsh Government, with partnership inputs expected from a wide range of other organisations in the public, voluntary and private sectors. The Wales Biodiversity Partnership coordinates action, and a WBP subgroup 'Outcome 21' oversees delivery. **Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning**

Delivery: Operations

Management Planning

There is an ongoing programme of review and updating of Natura 2000 Core Management Plans within 6 year monitoring cycle (Article 17 reporting). **Knowledge Strategy and Planning, Operations -Ecosystems Planning and Partnerships**

Actions database

A collaborative web-based tool has been developed and populated to enable partner organisations to understand, negotiate and plan their contribution to meeting the targets. The actions database for sites is accessible by extranet, with a secure login for partner organisations to view data on sites and the 'identified' actions required on all units

within SSSI, SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites. There are over 100 external users from 28 organisations. A team within Natural Resources, Strategy and Planning, (KSP) works closely with ICT to manage the database, data licences, logins and reporting.

Natural Resources Wales staff in Operations plan annual work programmes of action addressing conservation management issues. Identified issues must be significant – either causing unfavourable feature condition or likely to do so in the future, if not controlled. The annual work programme prioritises identified section 15 management agreements for negotiation, and is dependent on available resources. The quantity of reactive casework on SSSI has a significant influence on the number of proactive actions that can be instigated by Natural Resources Wales. Responding to applications for consent to carry out operations proposed within applications for Glastir agreements on SSSI has required significant staff time in recent years. (Natural Resources Wales is currently carrying out a review of all aspects of Natural resources Wales Glastir activity in delivering the required outcomes within time and resource constraints, to meet Welsh Government's Glastir commitments.) The database is a 'live' tool, i.e. within the year we can change and substitute actions to reflect changing circumstances. The work programme and reports we share with Welsh Government serve as bench marks demonstrating progress.

LIFE N2K Programme 'Development of a programme for the management and restoration of Natura 2000 in Wales'

This programme of work was initiated by the Special Sites Programme through a successful application for EU LIFE+ Programme, and runs until September 2015. Natura 2000 Prioritised Improvement Plans with, (where possible), costed measures will be produced. **Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning - Biodiversity and Fisheries Group**

Monitoring

The Natural Resources Wales monitoring strategy is under development; SSSI, SAC and SPAs are within its scope. **Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning - Evidence Monitoring and Reporting Group**

3. Other cross-cutting work streams for 2014-16

- Integration into Natural Resource Management Planning and the ecosystem approach
Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning - Natural Resources and Ecosystems Group
- Welsh Government Nature Recovery Plan
Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning - Biodiversity and Fisheries Group

- Natural Resources Wales transition tasks – transfer of sites data from legacy body web site to Natural Resources Wales web site, major transition from legacy systems to new Natural Resources Wales data platform
Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning - Biodiversity and Fisheries Group
- Natural Resources Wales proactive management on own land (NNRs, designated Welsh Government Woodland Estate)
Leads: Operations - Ecosystems Planning and Partnerships
- Natural Resources Wales proactive management in partnership, by Natural Resources Wales grant-aid or Memorandum of Understanding
Lead: Usually Operations, sometimes Knowledge Strategy and Planning
- Sourcing external funding (e.g. LIFE)
Lead: Knowledge Strategy and Planning - Communities, Flood Risk and Incident Management Group working with Operations