

UK Special Protection Area & Ramsar Scientific Working Group (SPAR SWG)

Terms of Reference

Aims

The UK Special Protection Area & Ramsar Scientific Working Group (SPAR SWG) is a consultative group established by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to assist government administrations and the statutory conservation agencies in taking forward the further development of the SPA and Ramsar networks within the UK, in particular looking forward to the coherent management of these networks and monitoring of sites.

The Group will consider UK-scale scientific and technical issues regarding the SPA network in both the terrestrial and marine environment. In particular, it will consider a range of issues raised in the context of the third (2016) SPA review, *inter alia*:

- issues in respect of those species where the third SPA review has indicated that there may be future cases for either additional SPA provision or other issues related to the integrity of the SPA network;
- those issues which the third SPA review has indicated as outstanding (including unimplemented recommendations from the second (2001) SPA review);
- the development of understanding of broader European and international contexts as relevant to informing the evolution of the SPA network within the UK;
- the implications of revisions of estimates of the sizes of bird populations, both nationally and internationally;
- the development of understanding of data needs for SPA classification and site management, especially in the context of climate change mitigation requirements; and
- the further development of processes to monitor SPAs, both individually and collectively, and promote the ready public availability of such data and information about SPAs and Ramsar Sites in the UK.

The Group will also consider and advise on scientific and technical issues regarding the UK Ramsar Site network. In addition, it will, if requested by the UK government administrations, provide advice on Ramsar Site issues in the UK Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories.

There is a significant number of potential issues to be addressed by the UK Special Protection Area & Ramsar Scientific Working Group. The attached Annex seeks to outline the principal activities regarding SPAs and Ramsar Sites and orders these into short and medium-term priorities. The Group will develop a more detailed work programme, with key 'milestones', based on this Annex during 2017.

The activities of the Working Group in assisting government to meet the scientific and technical requirements of the EU Birds Directive and other related international commitments including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the African-Eurasian Waterbirds Agreement, will be complemented by discussions taking place within each of the countries. It will work closely with the UK government administrations, who will consult with other stakeholders as appropriate.

Composition

The Group will be representative of the government departments/devolved administrations and their statutory agencies across the UK, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and representation from the voluntary conservation sector as well as other stakeholder groups. The Group will thus comprise representatives of: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Scottish Government; Welsh Government; Natural England; Scottish Natural Heritage; Natural Resources Wales; Northern Ireland

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; JNCC; and a representative selection of voluntary conservation agencies plus other stakeholder groups, such as those representing land-owning, land management, water industry, marine and business sectors, with the necessary scientific expertise.

On occasion, representatives from other organisations may be asked to attend where there is the need for information of a specific nature to be discussed by the Group.

Method of operation

It is anticipated that the Group will hold about three meetings per year (as dictated by workload), with actions between these periods being taken forward by electronic communications. The Group's Terms of Reference will be reviewed by the end of 2019.

Chair and Secretariat

The Chair will be appointed by government. The Secretariat will be provided by JNCC who will convene and support the Group including maintaining the Group's web-page (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1770>).

Sub-groups

It may, from time-to-time, be desirable to establish smaller sub-groups to resolve certain issues. These will be time-limited and will focus on concluding specific tasks on behalf of the Working Group as a whole.

Reporting

The Scientific Working Group will provide regular updates of its activity to the UK government administrations primarily via an annual report, which will be published on the Group's web-page together with approved minutes of meetings and other relevant papers as agreed by the Group.

Issues for attention

The Scientific Working Group will develop a two year work programme for the period 2017 - 2019 with priority given to the following issues:

1. Provide scientific advice on issues arising from the implementation of the third network review including strategic needs for relevant data and information.
2. Provide scientific advice on issues related to the development and classification of SPAs in the marine environment and the marine SPA sufficiency review.
3. Consider and promote more strategic approaches to the collection, interpretation, and public availability of relevant new data relevant to Ramsar Sites and SPAs both individually and collectively.
4. Advise and promote effective measures to report internationally on the status of UK Ramsar Sites, making resource-effective use of existing sources of data and information.
5. Develop understanding of data needs for site management, especially in the context of climate change mitigation requirements.
6. Provide advice (as necessary) on implications of changed international contexts for Ramsar Sites and SPAs both individually and collectively.

ANNEX

Framework for future update of UK SPA network

	Bilateral contact at country level	UK SPA & Ramsar Scientific Working Group	UK government administrations
Lead organisation	<i>Country agencies</i>	<i>JNCC</i>	<i>Defra</i>
Geographic scope	<i>Country</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>UK</i>
Objective	Detailed consideration of site-related issues within countries.	Consideration of UK-scale scientific issues related to the SPA network (note, not policy issues).	Government to consider and decide upon policy and management issues, including those raised that the Scientific Working Group.
Issues for resolution and timescale			
Immediate (by end 2017) Issues for attention = 1 & 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consideration, with government, of country responses to the third network Review and development of forward plans to implement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop and finalise work plan for 2017-2019 based on items listed below. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Advice on which races of Common Eider should be considered in marine SPA assessment. ➤ Draft and submit report on SWG activities for period 2012-2017 to UK government administrations, and publish. 	

	Bilateral contact at country level	UK SPA & Ramsar Scientific Working Group	UK government administrations
<p>Short-term (by end of 2018)</p> <p>Issues for attention = 1, 2, 3 & 6</p> <p>Commence 4, 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implementation, with government, of country responses to the third network Review, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ reviews of management and/or monitoring of 19 species as recommended by third review; ➤ review of boundaries for some or all SPAs for 17 species as recommended by third review; and ➤ commencement of (re)classifications arising from third SPA review. 	<p>Spring meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider SPA provision for species where major new national surveys have become available since third SPA review (Hen Harrier). [High priority – discussion paper for spring meeting on relevant species] ○ Consider methodological approaches for the monitoring of data deficient species, especially raptors in the non-breeding season. [High priority – initiated by discussion paper for spring meeting] ○ Assess potential to harmonise lists of qualifying species on coincident Ramsar Sites and SPAs through application of relevant criteria. [Discussion paper for spring meeting] ○ In the context of the third network review, further review issues related to classification of SPAs for re-establishing and colonising species and provide advice to the government administrations. [Initial discussion paper for spring meeting] ○ Provide scientific advice on issues arising from the development and classification of SPAs in the marine environment. [High priority - spring meeting] <p>Autumn meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a plan as to how SWG can advise and promote effective measures to report internationally on the status of UK Ramsar Sites making resource-effective use of existing sources of data and information. [Lower priority – possibly autumn meeting] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider the views of the scientific working group and offer it and the Liaison Group opinions and reactions.

	Bilateral contact at country level	UK SPA & Ramsar Scientific Working Group	UK government administrations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Draft and submit report on SWG activities for 2018 to UK government administrations, and publish. [High priority - draft for autumn meeting] ○ Advise on SPA-related aspects of 2019 report under Article 12 of the Birds Directive. [Autumn meeting] ○ Consider implications of revised bird population sizes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ biogeographical estimates for waterbirds as agreed at Ramsar COP 13; ➤ revised national estimates collated through the 2019 Article 12 process; and ➤ promotion of means to address data deficiency in the context of deriving estimates at national scales. [Autumn meeting] ○ Draft a scoping paper on the development of a decision-making process, at a UK network level, where a decline in the site interest feature(s) is attributed solely to the effects of climate change (i.e. not an effect of proximal anthropogenic influence). ○ Further review issues of range provision in the context of sufficiency assessments for the UK SPA network. [Autumn meeting as resources allow] 	
<p>Medium-term (2019 to end 2021)</p> <p>Issues for attention = all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ongoing implementation, with government, of country responses to the third network review, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ progress and complete (re)classifications arising from third SPA review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Draft and submit annual reports on SWG activities to UK government administrations, and publish. [High priority] ○ Provide scientific advice on issues arising from the development and classification of SPAs in the marine environment ○ Consider SPA provision for species where major new national surveys have become available since third SPA Review (likely: Whimbrel, Marsh Harrier, Dartford Warbler). ○ Consideration of implications of fourth national seabird census results for seabird colonies when available. Overall priorities to be discussed and agreed. ○ Review Terms of Reference by end of 2019. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consideration of respective roles of site-based as contrasted with wider-countryside measures for conserving UK wildlife and habitats in relation to obligations under the Birds Directive.

	Bilateral contact at country level	UK SPA & Ramsar Scientific Working Group	UK government administrations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop understanding of data needs for site management, especially in the context of climate change mitigation requirements. <li>○ Review needs for longer term research requirements to determine movements of birds between component parts of composite sites. 	