

Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) Programme Scoping: identifying key issues affecting Natura 2000 sites and priorities for the IPENS project

England has a diverse range of habitats resulting in a wonderfully rich and varied wildlife. It hosts some of Europe's most threatened species and habitats which are protected as part of a Europe-wide network of nature conservation areas (known as the *Natura 2000* network). In England there are 337 *Natura 2000* sites, covering 2,077,276 hectares. Many of these sites are in favourable condition, but a number continue to face pressures such as pollution, over and under grazing, and impacts from invasive, non-native species.

The Improvement Programme for England's *Natura 2000* sites (IPENS), supported by European Union LIFE+ funding, is a new strategic approach to managing England's *Natura 2000* sites. It will enable Natural England, the Environment Agency, and other key partners to plan what, how, where and when they will target their efforts on *Natura 2000* sites and the areas surrounding them. By June 2015, it will produce:

- A Strategic framework for taking forward *Natura 2000* management in England.
- A Site Improvement Plan for each *Natura 2000* site which will identify the issues affecting the condition of the site and the priority actions required to address them.
- Theme Plans to address issues (for example, diffuse water pollution) that affect multiple *Natura 2000* sites.

This report describes the approach used to identify and prioritise the 'issues' (pressures and threats) affecting the condition of *Natura 2000* sites in England. The objectives of this scoping exercise were to:

Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) Programme Scoping: identifying key issues affecting Natura 2000 sites and priorities for the IPENS project

- Identify key pressures and threats to England's *Natura 2000* sites.
- Confirm the status of existing mechanisms (i.e. the enabling structure for the implementation of actions on *Natura 2000* sites, for example, agri-environment scheme option) to address these pressures and threats.
- Determine which risks, issues and mechanisms will be a focus for the IPENS project and the nature of the work required.

What was done

In England there is currently no single data source for *Natura 2000* sites. Information on the condition, and pressures and threats to *Natura 2000* sites was therefore collated from various sources, including:

- Natural England's site condition database for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). SSSIs underpin all terrestrial *Natura 2000* sites in England.
- Habitats Directive Article 17 2007 report, which includes a detailed list of pressures and threats affecting each *Natura 2000* interest feature in the United Kingdom.
- Academic literature and specialist knowledge.

The nature of the data available also meant that different analytical approaches were required for Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and subtidal marine sites.

The issues identified through this analysis were then grouped into 'Themes' (higher level descriptors of types of pressures and threats), for example:

Theme: disease and invasive species

Examples of issues:

- Freshwater non-native invasive species having adverse effects on our native species, such as by competition, disease or habitat modification.

Species of concern to us include *Pacifastacus leniusculus* (American signal crayfish), which spreads disease to our native crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* (white-clawed crayfish); and *Crassula helmsii* (New Zealand pygmyweed) which deoxygenates and shades waterbodies, adversely affecting a variety of species.

- Tackling plant diseases such as *Phytophthora austrocedrae*, a disease affecting Juniper which threatens some of our upland habitats.

A series of reviews and tests was then applied to this list of themes and issues in order to ensure that all the 'issues' affecting the condition of *Natura 2000* sites had been identified, and to agree which of these themes the IPENS project could add most value to existing work and should therefore focus on. This approach included:

- Discussions with Natural England specialists.
- Stakeholder consultation.
- Testing the lists against a set of criteria to identify which issues would benefit from a strategic approach and therefore should be the focus of the project's Theme Plan work.

Results and conclusions

Issues affecting the condition of England's *Natura 2000* Sites

The analysis of evidence sources identified a wide range of issues affecting the condition of England's *Natura 2000* sites ranging from diffuse water pollution, through inappropriate grazing, to the impacts of invasive species. Issues of a similar nature were grouped together into the following 29 'themes':

- Water pollution
- Other pollution
- Water Quantity
- Hydrological functioning
- Channels
- Commercial and recreational fishing and aquaculture
- Fishing: Associated impacts (ornithological and other)

Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) Programme Scoping: identifying key issues affecting Natura 2000 sites and priorities for the IPENS project

- Fishing: Other
- Grazing regime
- Agricultural management
- Forestry
- Recreation / Disturbance
- Mining & extraction
- Sediments
- Disposal of deposits
- Landscape change
- Habitat Management
- Conservation management
- Land Reclamation
- Disease
- Mortality
- Competition
- Invasives
- Climate change
- Marine / Coastal Processes
- Marine / Coastal Works
- Development
- Land Use: Other
- Natural processes

Priority issues to be addressed through the IPENS projects

Given the relatively short timeframe for IPENS, coupled with the wide range of issues identified, the need to prioritise issues, tackling those where IPENS can add most value, quickly became apparent. The list of themes was refined through discussions with stakeholders and six broad themes were agreed:

- Water and pollution
- Habitat management
- Species management
- Invasives and disease
- Recreation and disturbance
- Physical change

Within these broad themes the IPENS project has identified the following topics for the development of Theme Plans. These are topics where the issues impact on, and affect the condition of, multiple *Natura 2000* sites and which are difficult to resolve on a site-by-site

basis. They therefore require a national strategic level approach to address them:

- Freshwater invasive non-native species
- Marine invasive non-native species
- Lake restoration
- River restoration
- Diffuse Water Pollution
- Coastal Squeeze
- Coastal & Marine recreation & disturbance
- Aerial Nitrogen Deposition
- Ecological connectivity & landscape scale approaches
- Habitats management
- Species management - high risk
- High risk SPA Birds
- Water stress / hydrological management

Next Steps

In addition to the development of the Theme Plans it is important that the original list of themes and issues is not overlooked when considering the full range of pressures and threats facing England's *Natura 2000* network. The results of the scoping and prioritisation exercise (where appropriate) will therefore also feed into and/or inform the project's work to:

- Develop new and amended mechanisms and funding options.
- Develop a Site Improvement Plan for each *Natura 2000* Site.
- Identify, and where possible, plug *Natura 2000* evidence gaps.
- Develop a strategic framework (AfterLIFE Plan) for the future management of *Natura 2000* sites in England.

Whilst the aim of the IPENS scoping exercise was primarily to identify issues which require the development of new or amended mechanisms, very few issues fell into the 'mechanism development' category when the issues list was grouped by the type of work required. This may be an accurate reflection of the current position; alternatively it could reflect the methods used to gather information from specialists. To address this, a series of topic based technical workshops

Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) Programme Scoping: identifying key issues affecting Natura 2000 sites and priorities for the IPENS project

with Natural England specialists and stakeholders are planned. These will provide an opportunity to challenge the status quo and to think about new ways in which our aims for *Natura 2000* sites may be achieved.

Natural England's viewpoint

This is the first time that the key issues affecting the whole of the *Natura 2000* network in England have been assessed using a national, strategic approach. The results are important in giving an overall picture of the key issues in relation to improving the management of England's *Natura 2000* network, as well as identifying priority issues which will be taken forward by the IPENS project itself.

Selected references

BTO. WeBS Alerts. URL:

www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs/publications/webs-alerts [Accessed August 2013].

COYLE, M and WIGGINS, S. 2010. European Marine Site risk review. Natural England Research Reports, Number 038. URL: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/36006> [Accessed August 2013].

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS. 2007. European Community Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora: First report by the United Kingdom under Article 17 on implementation of the Directive from June 1994 to December 2000. URL: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-3051#download> [Accessed August 2013].

EATON, M. A., BROWN, A.F., NOBLE, D.G., MUSGROVE, A.J., HEARN, R., AEBISCHER, N.J., GIBBONS, D.W., EVANS, A and GREGORY, R.D. 2009. Birds of conservation concern 3: the population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. *British Birds* 102, 296-341. Summary document URL:

www.bto.org/sites/default/files/u12/bocc3.pdf [Accessed August 2013].

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. 2006. Section 41: Species of Principal Importance in England. URL: www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx [Accessed August 2013].

Further information

For the full details of the research covered by this information note see Natural England Research Report NERR053 – *Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) Programme Scoping: identifying key issues affecting Natura 2000 sites and priorities for the IPENS project*.

Natural England Research Reports and other technical publications are available to download from the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk.

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

Report author

Julie Erian

Keywords

Improvement Programme for England's *Natura 2000* Sites (IPENS), *Natura 2000*, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

Copyright

This note is published by Natural England under the Open Government Licence - OGLv2.0 for public sector information. You are encouraged to use, and re-use, information subject to certain conditions. For details of the licence visit

www.naturalengland.org.uk/copyright. If any other information such as maps or data cannot be used commercially this will be made clear within the note.

ISBN 978-1-78354-078-5

© Natural England 2013