



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
FOR THE SOUTH EAST

Matter 6A / Biodiversity

Government Office for the South East of England (7447)

Draft RSS for The South East of England -The South East Plan
Examination in Public - November 2006 to March 2007
Written Statement on behalf of HM Government - December 2006

1. The Plan would benefit from reference to the Regional Rural Delivery Framework as a key supporting document, with cross reference in several places not least section 2.1 where there is no mention of rural policies.
2. The Regional Rural Delivery Framework is a regional document which seeks to ensure that real benefits are developed and delivered to the rural community and 10 themes have been identified as priorities. These priorities have been agreed with key partners within the region including the South East England Regional Assembly and the most relevant priority to this sub matter is;

Biodiversity

3. Biological diversity is a vital social and economic asset to the region. It contributes directly to the region by providing functional environmental systems that support a range of production industries, as well as providing a beautiful and attractive natural environment. This underpins vital service industries and helps to provide a good quality of life for those who live and work in the region. The quality of the region's environment is a major influence in many people's choice to live in the South East. Biodiversity also helps to reduce the impacts on essential natural resources. Some elements of our regional biodiversity are in decline or under threat from a range of pressures including development and historic changes in land management and immediate action is required.
4. The other priorities are:
 - Economic Development and Enterprise
 - Exclusion
 - Food and Farming
 - Forestry
 - Green Space
 - Heritage
 - Housing
 - Landscape
 - Water and Waste

General Biodiversity Policy Background

5. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) was published in 1994 as part of the UK response to the Convention on Biological Diversity signed at Rio in 1992. The UK BAP helps coordinate and drive conservation work at national and local levels through identifying priorities for action and setting biological targets for the recovery of species and habitats. Under the plan there are 436 costed and targeted national action plans for our most threatened habitats and species (priority species and habitats) in the UK, and these are supported by approximately 150 Local biodiversity action plans, often at County level. Please note the list of priority species and habitats is currently under review. The UK Biodiversity Partnership has also set new targets for the current list which are due to be published before the end of the year. The regional biodiversity partnership will have had access to these targets in draft and have been encouraged to use them to inform their regional targets.
6. Following devolution from 1998 onwards, responsibility of implementing measures for biodiversity conservation is devolved, and individual strategies for biodiversity and environment in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, seek to improve the wider environment to achieve gains for biodiversity across the board. These changes will benefit those widespread species and habitats for which targeted site-specific action is not sufficient. For example, the England Biodiversity Strategy, "Working with the Grain of Nature", published in 2002, represents the bringing together of England's key contributions to achieving the target to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The Strategy sets out a programme of activity to ensure the integration of biodiversity into policy making and practice.

Regional Biodiversity Partnerships

7. Regional Biodiversity Partnerships, or Fora, are comprised of public, private and voluntary organisations committed to supporting biodiversity in their regions. In 2005, Defra allocated £2.35M to English Nature (now Natural England) to support coordination of local and regional biodiversity services. Part of this funding was used to employ regional co-ordinators who help support the work of the Partnerships.

6A.1 Have the needs of all the areas of international significance for nature conservation been adequately reflected in the draft RSS? What are the implications of the Appropriate Assessment undertaken since the draft Plan's submission?

1. The need to take account of designated sites has been recognised, provided it is understood that international sites refer to Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites and that nationally important sites refer to Sites of Special Scientific Interest. (Defra can comment on the detail of representation of actual sites within the region).
2. The Regional Assembly have submitted proposed changes to the SEPlan in light of the Appropriate Assessment, as agreed at their Regional Planning Committee, 20 November 2006. The Assembly consider that these proposed changes would ensure that the South East Plan is compliant with the Habitats Regulations. These proposals are in response to their Consultant's report on the Appropriate Assessment of the Draft South East Plan, Scott Wilson, Levett Therivel, September 2006.
3. The incorporation of the recommendations of the Appropriate Assessment report is critical. Although we welcome the thorough and detailed report, and

the response of the Assembly, we have some reservations about the approach recommended which involves similar wording amendments to multiple policies. Our interim position is that a single policy amendment, referring to the various policies and proposals identified in the Appropriate Assessment. This is an emerging and developing area of policy coverage for regional spatial strategy and we will be providing further advice for the Examination in advance of the discussion of Matter 6A.

6A.2 Does Policy NRM4 provide appropriate guidance on the protection and enhancement of biodiversity?

1. We consider that this policy provides appropriate guidance on the protection and enhancement of biodiversity

6A.3 a) Are the Regional Biodiversity Targets summarised in Figure NRM2 appropriate and achievable?

1. At the time of writing the targets in NRM2 were those set out in the Action for Biodiversity in the South East (1999) – produced by the South East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF) - which reflected the UK Biodiversity Action Plan targets for 2010 and 2026. However, these national targets are currently being reviewed and in line with this review SEEBF are reviewing the regional targets. The review of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan will not report until approximately April 2007 therefore there should be reference to the review and the need to reflect its results in the Plan.

b) Are the Areas of Strategic Opportunity for Biodiversity Improvement adequately expressed (Map NRM4) and how will they be implemented?

1. This approach is supported in principle and implementation should include the South East Regional Biodiversity Forum and Natural England.

c) Overall, are the targets and areas of strategic opportunity fully integrated with the rest of the Plan?

1. Unable to comment