

IUCN protected area management categories

Statement of Compliance for UK's national nature reserves

Introduction to Statements of Compliance

Statements of Compliance are an innovation of the IUCN National Committee for the United Kingdom's ***Putting Nature on the Map*** project. The project has developed guidance on the use of the IUCN definition of a protected area and the assignment of the associated management categories and governance types (1). The guidance suggests that short but authoritative Statements of Compliance are produced for a conservation site or group of sites.

1 Dudley, N (Editor) (2008) Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. X + 86pp. <http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAPS-016.pdf>
and
IUCN NCUK (2012); *Putting nature on the map - identifying protected areas in the UK: A handbook to help identify protected areas in the UK and assign the IUCN management categories and governance types to them*, IUCN National Committee for the United Kingdom, UK <http://www.iucn-uk.org/Portals/0/PNOTM%20handbook%20small.pdf>

For groups of sites designated for conservation under one overriding piece of legislation or public policy the statements should concentrate on whether the sites meets the IUCN definition of a protected area.

For statutory designations the Statements of Compliance should review all relevant legislation, focussing on the priority given to nature conservation in the long-term. For sites not covered by legislation the statements should review the significance for nature conservation of all relevant public policy positions that specifically affect the area.

In addition to reviewing legislation or policy in relation to the IUCN definition of a protected area, individual sites can also review in their Statement of Compliance which IUCN management category and governance type should be assigned to the site. In this case the statements should also provide an overview of current management objectives in particular in relation to prioritising nature conservation and summarize examples of current management practice that demonstrate the priority given to nature conservation and the ambition and vision for nature conservation in the future.

Note Statements of Compliance should be prepared with full reference to the 2008 Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories (see footnote for details).

The Statement of Compliance below has been prepared for a group of sites defined in legislation.

Background

The legal and policy arrangements for National nature reserves (NNRs) vary but the use of the designation has much in common across the United Kingdom.

NNRs are declared by Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in their respective countries. In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency also uses the designation under current legislation but earlier legislation under which most sites were designated provided only for statutory 'nature reserves' (NRs). In practice NNRs and NRs in Northern Ireland receive the same level of protection.

All NNRs are owned, leased or held under formal agreement by their managing organisations, or bodies approved by them for the purpose of managing NNR.

The nature of the NNR designation has changed since it was first applied in 1951. Then it was the primary means by which to protect high value nature conservation land from inappropriate development. This regulatory role has been replaced by SSSI, following strengthening of the legislation from 1981, and Natura designations along with other environmental legislation. The NNR remains a management-facilitating designation and a high level, national accolade.

The original purpose of NNRs as stated in legislation is as follows -

The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 specified NNRs were for *"preserving flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features of special interest in the area and/or for providing opportunities for the study of, and research into, those features"*.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 re-emphasised the use of nature reserves in any strategy towards protecting and managing scarce wildlife resources. This Act also contains provisions to designate as an NNR, land held by an approved body.

The Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006, applying to England, extended the role of NNRs to include the provision of opportunities for public enjoyment of nature and/or open-air recreation.

NNRs in Scotland

There are 46 NNRs in Scotland extending to c.100,000ha. 90% (by area) are SSSI and/or Natura sites.

Scotland's NNR policy, when reviewed in 2003 established that all NNRs must be for one or more of three purposes

- Raising national awareness
- Providing specialised management
- Encouraging research & demonstration

... and must have the following four attributes

- Primacy of nature
- National importance
- Best practice management
- Continuity of management

Scotland's National Nature Reserves – A policy statement. Scottish Natural Heritage (2003).

NNR policy was further reviewed in 2012. The main change concerned the broadened governance of the NNR designation which is now overseen by the NNR Partnership Group. This group comprises representatives of NNR-managing organisations (NTS, SWT, RSPB, North Lanarkshire Council, FCS, SNH) and community and land-owning groups (North Harris Trust, Woodland Trust, Scottish Land and Estates). The Group defines the criteria and standards required of land and land managers to be bestowed with the NNR accolade.

The relevant SNH Board paper reads –

“The national accolade of National Nature Reserve will be applied to land and water of acknowledged significance for nature that is being managed to agreed high standards for nature and the enjoyment of nature. Nature on these reserves will be of national importance and the sites will be managed primarily for nature in the long term and for people to enjoy nature.

National Nature Reserves will be run by a range of public, private, community and voluntary organisations; and the accolade will be managed by a partnership representing these organisations. This partnership will agree selection and review criteria, and set high and demanding management standards expected of a national accolade. The legal power to confer the accolade will remain with SNH based on the recommendations of the partnership.

Taken together, NNRs will be the best of Scotland’s nature reserves.”

* SNH Board Paper (09 August 2012) SNH/12/8/B1113300 - National Nature Reserves -A National Accolade for Scotland’s Best Nature Reserves <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B1119431.pdf>

NNRs in Wales

There are 76 NNRs and 1 Marine Nature Reserve in Wales. NRW manages 41 of these entirely, and 17 through partnerships eg with The National Trust. Third-parties manage 18 NNRs.

Approximately 98% by area are also SSSI; and 58 NNRs are wholly or partly within one or more international designations (SAC, SPA, Ramsar, Biogenetic reserve, Biosphere reserve) and collectively they account for approximately 20% (by area) of these designations

In 2004, at the behest of the Welsh Assembly Government, the (then) Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) undertook a strategic review of the NNRs in Wales. The primary purpose was to consider CCW’s wider remit for landscape, recreation/access and public understanding. The 2004 review formed the basis of CCW’s ‘Strategy for National Nature Reserves’ - agreed by CCW’s Council in February 2006. The cornerstone of this strategy is CCW’s Corporate Vision for NNRs, which reads as follows:

The suite of Welsh NNRs as a whole will be managed in an exemplary way to:

- 1. Conserve wildlife features and to contribute to Biodiversity Action Plans (Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans).*
- 2. Conserve earth science features and the physical and cultural landscape.*
- 3. Develop and maintain strategic partnerships with other organisations.*
- 4. Manage access, recreation and health.*
- 5. Provide interpretation, and opportunities for education and learning for all.*
- 6. Promote long-term public appreciation of the value of the environment.*
- 7. Enhance local economies and social justice.*
- 8. Involve stakeholders and communities.*
- 9. Support policy and research, and demonstrate innovative good practice.*
- 10. Manage environmental data sets, including monitoring environmental change.*
- 11. Achieve sustainable resource management.*

In **2012** CCW's Council endorsed its commitment to the 'Common Core Principles for National Nature Reserves in the United Kingdom' document in respect of the NNR series in Wales. (Council Paper April 2012). This reads as follows:

- 1. NNRs must be of NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.*
- 2. The primary land use of NNRs is for NATURE CONSERVATION.*
- 3. NNRs will be managed to the highest standards, they will be EXEMPLARS OF 'GOOD PRACTICE' IN CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT.*
- 4. NNRs will be areas where the necessary management can be assured over a long period, they will have LONG TERM SURETY.*
- 5. NNRs will provide opportunities for STUDY and RESEARCH.*
- 6. NNRs will be used to provide opportunities for PUBLIC ACCESS, and to encourage appreciation and enjoyment of the countryside for people of all abilities.*
- 7. NNRs will be used to provide opportunities for the delivery of INTERPRETATION, EDUCATION and learning for all and DEMONSTRATION of good conservation management practice.*
- 8. NNRs will act as a locus for encouraging STAKEHOLDER & LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT in conservation land management, so fostering a sense of value and shared ownership.*
- 9. NNRs will be managed by the most appropriate bodies, which may involve STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS.*
- 10. NNRs will contribute to LOCAL ECONOMIES and deliver SOCIAL JUSTICE.*

In Wales these core principles have been aspired to and delivered through the legacy body's (CCW) NNR strategy (Strategy for National Nature Reserves – 2006 – see earlier).

NNRs in England

There are 224 NNRs in England covering 94,364 ha. Natural England manages 143 on its own or jointly with others, and the remainder are managed by Approved Bodies. 97.5% (by area) of England's NNRs are SSSI, and 82.2% are Natura sites.

Natural England may declare as NNR land which meets the following principles, as set out in 2013:

1. Qualification

The main nature conservation interest feature(s) of the proposed site, as categorised by JNCC in the SSSI selection guidelines, is/are within land notified as SSSI or within land likely to be eligible for selection as such.

2. Primary attributes (National Importance)

The site is in the top 10% in England, by number, for a particular feature (habitats, species or earth science), using JNCC's SSSI selection criteria to validate its quality, *or* is of national iconic significance from a nature conservation perspective.

3. Additional attributes

The site offers excellent opportunity for study and research in nature conservation *or, in addition*, offers excellent opportunities for the enjoyment of nature or for open-air recreation where this does not conflict with the conservation purpose.

4. Achievability

The primary land use will be nature conservation; it can be managed in an exemplary manner; and it will be declared NNR for the long-term or in perpetuity.

NNRs and NRs in Northern Ireland

There are 12 NNRs and 36 other statutory NRs in Northern Ireland. Of these 48 reserves, 40 are managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), 19 in partnership (15 with Forest Service, two with the Ministry of Defence and two with private land-owners). Eight are managed directly by Approved Bodies (environmental NGOs and a local authority). The total area protected by designation is around 4,891 ha, of which 97.7% (by area) is ASSI and 83.1% (by area) lies within Natura sites. [It is likely that around 10 more of the NRs will, in due course, be designated as NNR. In addition NIEA manages another 17 sites as NR pending their formal designation as NR or NNR.]

Under its enabling legislation, where the Department of the Environment *is satisfied that any land which -*

- (a) is being managed as a nature reserve under an agreement entered into with the Department;*
 - (b) is held by the Department and is being managed by it as a nature reserve; or*
 - (c) is held by an approved body and is managed by that body as a nature reserve,*
- is of national importance, the Department may declare that land to be a national nature reserve.*

The current policy on selection of NNR adopts the same Common Core Principles as those adopted in Wales, but with several provisos, as follows:

i. NNRs must be of NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

Note: Northern Ireland only: 'National Importance' implies importance at a Northern Ireland level as opposed to UK or all-Ireland level.

ii. The primary land use of NNRs is for NATURE CONSERVATION.

iii. NNRs will be managed to the highest standards, they will be EXEMPLARS OF 'GOOD PRACTICE' IN CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT.

Note: Northern Ireland only: where resources for management are limited, NNRs will be prioritised over NRs.

iv. NNRs will be areas where the necessary management can be assured over a long period; they will have LONG TERM SURETY.

Note: Northern Ireland only: while essential for NNRs, lack of such long-term surety will not necessarily preclude NR declaration where, for example, only a shorter-term management agreement can be secured.

v. *NNRs will provide opportunities for STUDY and RESEARCH.*

Note: Individual proposals for study or research will be subjected to appropriate assessment and any deemed likely to cause damage, deterioration or disturbance to the conservation of the designation features will be disallowed.

While the primary function of NNRs is to provide special places reserved for nature, many NNRs can also contribute to other agendas. The remaining Core Principles (6-10) address this so most are prefixed 'where appropriate'. Such additional uses must not adversely impact upon Core Principles 1-5; for example, visitor access would not necessarily be encouraged where it is likely to cause disturbance to a breeding bird population of national importance.

vi. *Where appropriate - NNRs will provide opportunities for PUBLIC ACCESS, appreciation and enjoyment of the countryside for people of all abilities.*

vii. *Where appropriate - NNRs will provide opportunities for INTERPRETATION, EDUCATION and learning for all and DEMONSTRATION of good conservation management practice.*

viii. *Where appropriate - NNRs will act as a focus for encouraging STAKEHOLDER & LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT in conservation land management, so fostering a sense of value and shared ownership.*

ix. *NNRs will be managed by the most appropriate bodies, which may involve STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS.*

Note: It is likely that a number of different organisations will be involved in management across the full suite of NNRs. In selecting the best management option for individual NNRs, consideration will be given to criteria such as value for money, expertise, management capacity, proximity to a management base, and community or stakeholder involvement. To ensure that high management standards are maintained, approval will be accorded only to bodies meeting strict competence criteria.

x. *So far as is reasonably possible - NNRs will contribute to LOCAL ECONOMIES and deliver SOCIAL JUSTICE.*

NNR and the IUCN definition of a protected area

The table uses the main key in the Putting Nature on the Map Handbook for identifying if a site meets the IUCN definition of a protected area².

| Main elements of IUCN definition <small>² See page 26 of the <i>Putting Nature on the Map Handbook</i></small> | Discussion of element in relation to NNRs |
|--|--|
| <p>Is the site a clearly defined geographical area?</p> | <p>Yes. Each NNR has a legally declared boundary and these are mapped digitally and available from the relevant country agency –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scottish Natural Heritage (http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/snhi-information-service/). • Natural Resources Wales • Natural England (http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/maps/default.aspx). • Northern Ireland Environment Agency (http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/places_to_visit_home/nature_resintro.htm). |
| <p>Is it recognised, dedicated and managed to achieve the long-term conservation of nature? NB 'nature' includes all levels of biodiversity as well as geodiversity, landforms and broader natural values.</p> | <p>Yes. NNRs (and NRs in Northern Ireland) must be secured for the long term management of nature. Their aims, normally expressed in regularly reviewed management plans, may be many and diverse, and include biodiversity and/or geodiversity conservation and to demonstrate best management practice. NNRs support the (sustainable) realisation of many natural values (ecosystem services).</p> |
| <p>Is the main management objective nature conservation? Other objectives of equal standing may be present but they do not cause conflict, i.e. nature conservation is the priority</p> | <p>Yes. Nature must be given priority in decisions over conflicting land management.</p> |
| <p>Does the designation, of the site, prevent or eliminate where necessary, any exploitation or management practice that will be harmful to the objectives of designation?</p> | <p>Yes. Through tenure arrangements and control of land management, in addition to any overlapping regulatory designations, NNRs (and NRs in Northern Ireland) are amongst the most secure nature conservation lands.</p> |
| <p>Does the designation of the site aim to maintain, or ideally, increase the degree of naturalness of the ecosystem being protected?</p> | <p>Yes. Site specific management plans set out the aims of individual NNRs and describe the actions needed to maintain and where appropriate enhance the reserve's nature. This includes achieving and maintaining natural features (of overlapping SSSI and Natura sites) in 'favourable condition' as defined by JNCC's Common Standards protocols (http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-2217).</p> |