



# A UK Wetlands Strategy

A proposal

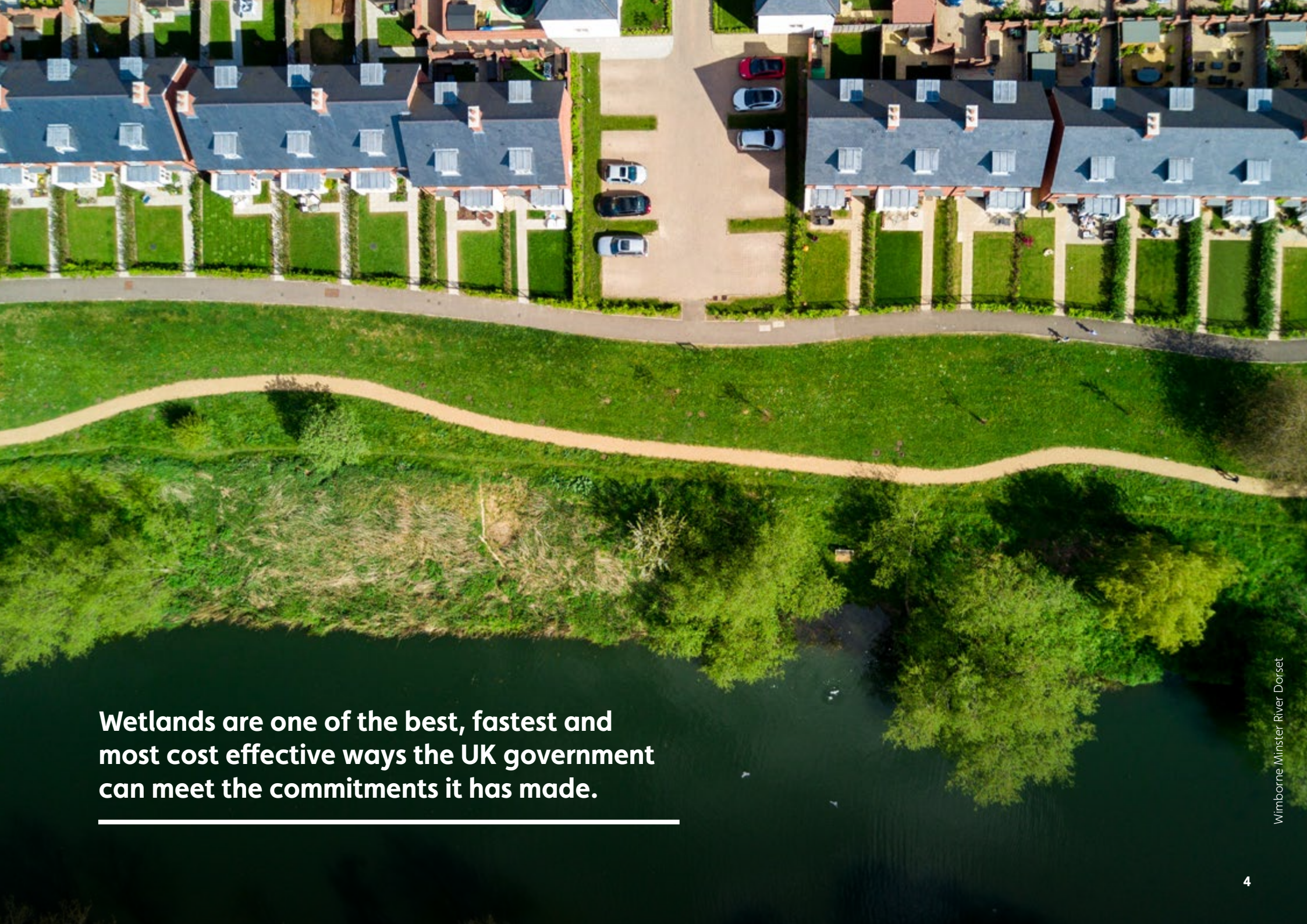


**“Humankind’s future lies not in the endless degradation of the natural world, but in its restoration, including for the vital services and benefits provided by different kinds of wetlands... They are a vital asset for society and now is the moment to plan for their protection, recovery and expansion.”**

Dr Tony Juniper CBE, Chair of Natural England

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**Wetlands are one of the best, fastest and most cost effective ways the UK government can meet the commitments it has made.**

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# Welcome to the wonderful world of wetlands

**If trees are the lungs of the Earth, wetlands are the blood. They are one of the most biodiverse habitats on Earth, with 40% of the world's plant and animal species living or breeding in wetlands. And they are critical to us humans too, providing many of the things that make our lives possible, be it drinking water, food or building materials.**

However, the UK's wetlands are in trouble. We have lost an incredible 75% since 1700<sup>1</sup>, and many of those that remain are in a bad way. Be it pollution, development or climate change, our own activities are driving this alarming decline and undermining our life-support system.

Small wonder that we are one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. It is not surprising either to see communities struggling to cope with more floods and droughts when

their natural defences have been degraded. Or that a quarter of us experience poor mental health each year when the wetlands that nourish our wellbeing are absent from our daily lives.

These interlinked climate, biodiversity and wellbeing crises can feel overwhelming - but wetlands can provide hope. Many of the communities where we live and work developed around a wetland which provided food, water and other resources. Over time we have lost many of these wetlands - but we can also restore them and look after them better.

But we need a plan of action to make this happen. In the run up to the next General Election this is what WWT are asking political parties to do: commit to producing a UK Wetlands Strategy.

The story of human life has entered an extremely dramatic act. We're finally realising that our health and survival is intimately connected to the health and survival of all

life around us. We are a part of Nature, not its Master. After being involved in many good causes for Nature, I am utterly inspired by what WWT stands for. They have a story of blue recovery that will inspire and benefit us all in these turbulent times. Their message is one of hope and action.

I hope you enjoy reading these proposals.

**Sir Mark Rylance**  
Actor & Theatre Maker



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# Wetlands – Nature's secret superpower

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## What is a wetland?

Wetlands are where land meets water. From the humblest pond to the mightiest delta, from our floodplains and water meadows to our marshes, mudflats and bogs, the term 'wetland' covers a wonderfully diverse range of habitats.

Some are artificially created, some are much wilder. Many are unique, intricate ecosystems, supporting species that are specially adapted to live there.

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# Why should I care about wetlands?

The UK boasts a variety of wetlands, from the humble urban rain garden to our sweeping saltmarshes and estuaries. 40% of species on Earth depend on them to live, breed or as vital stepping-stones on their migratory journeys<sup>2</sup>.

Wetlands are important for us too. They provide essential ecosystem services, which contribute to our wellbeing. These include:

- **Provisioning services**, providing material benefits such as food, drinking water and raw materials
- **Regulating services**, helping to control water flows and moderate extreme weather as well as store carbon and filter out pollutants
- **Supporting services**, providing habitats for wildlife and maintaining the essential diversity of life on Earth
- **Cultural services**, providing opportunities for recreation, tourism and wellbeing, inspiration for culture, art and design, and underpinning a spiritual belonging and sense of place

Together with the huge amounts of 'natural capital'<sup>3</sup> (eg water, soils) they hold, the UK's wetlands are of almost incalculable value to people, businesses and communities.



# What wetlands do we have in the UK?

**The UK has a variety of wetlands, from sweeping saltmarshes to the humble urban rain garden. 175 of these wetlands are designated as Wetlands of International Importance under the Convention on Wetlands (also known as the Ramsar Convention).**

This is more than any other country in the world. However, despite this, the UK's wetlands are now only a small fraction of their former glory. The UK has lost over 75% of its wetlands since 1700<sup>4</sup>. Those that are left face numerous pressures including unsustainable development, land use change, pollution and climate change. Similarly, the damage and destruction of our wetlands comes at a high cost – economically, socially and environmentally.





## A Blue Recovery

**In Spring 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the UK, WWT put forward proposals for a Blue Recovery<sup>5</sup>, calling on the UK Government and others to restore 100,000 hectares (ha) of wetlands<sup>6</sup>.**

These wetlands will help build the resilience of communities and businesses to the challenges posed by the climate crisis, the rapid decline of biodiversity and poor levels of human wellbeing. Creating wetlands provides many benefits, from storing carbon and reducing flooding to restoring wellbeing and improving water quality. Every single hectare created will also buzz with restored wetland wildlife.

WWT's proposals are based upon the plans that Government, businesses and wider society are already developing and delivering. Wetland creation can also provide an excellent return on investment<sup>7</sup>. There are already some ad hoc examples of good wetland restoration, however this is not happening at a scale that will unlock the full range of potential benefits. This requires a more extensive, strategic approach, combining direct conservation with capacity building and community engagement to support these wetlands into the future.

WWT are now working to make 100,000ha wetlands a reality, seeking partnerships with Governments, businesses and wider society, advocating for a supportive policy framework and building political and public support.



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# The case for a UK Wetlands Strategy

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# What is a Wetlands Strategy?

**A Wetlands Strategy will set out a strategic approach to how wetlands are protected, managed and restored. As a Contracting Party<sup>8</sup> to the Convention on Wetlands, the UK is committed to:**

- Work towards the wise use of wetlands and water resources through national plans, policies and legislation, management actions and public education<sup>9</sup>
- Designate suitable wetlands for the list of Wetlands of International Importance ('Ramsar sites') and ensure their effective management
- Cooperate internationally on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems and shared species

This Convention recommends that Contracting Parties produce a National Wetland Policy<sup>10</sup> as a key means of implementing the wise use concept. Many countries have now produced national wetland strategies<sup>11</sup>.

The UK Government has developed some important environmental strategies to help deliver its international and domestic commitments (e.g. Net Zero Strategy 2021, Environmental Improvement Plan 2023<sup>12</sup>). However it has yet to produce a National Wetlands Strategy.

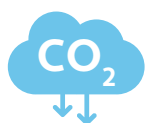
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# Why does the UK need a wetlands strategy?

Wetlands matter. From the humble garden pond to our wild sweeping estuaries, our wetlands offer essential nature-based solutions to the UK's most pressing challenges: our interlinked climate, nature and wellbeing crises.

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## Wetlands are one of the best, fastest and most cost-effective ways the UK government can meet the commitments it's made. They include:



### Mitigating climate change

The UK has a legally binding target to meet net zero carbon emissions by 2050<sup>13</sup>. In the long term saltmarshes bury carbon 40 times faster than woodland<sup>14</sup>. Restored saltmarsh buries 13 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per hectare per year (50% quicker than natural saltmarsh)<sup>15</sup>.



### Adapting to climate change

In response to increasingly extreme weather, the UK is seeking to reduce flood risk and improve drought resilience. Natural flood management techniques<sup>16</sup> can help reduce flooding and wetlands store huge volumes of water.



### Improving wellbeing

The UK Government aims to ensure everyone lives within a 15 minute walk of a green or blue space<sup>17</sup>. Blue spaces (i.e. wetlands) can be even more effective in reducing stress than green space<sup>18</sup> and could help level inequalities in mental health<sup>19</sup>.



### Restoring Biodiversity

The UK has set targets to halt the decline of nature<sup>20</sup>. Many species depend upon wetlands. They cover only 3 per cent of the UK but support 10 per cent of its species. Wetland habitats also help to sustain life by filtering out pollutants from water bodies.

## Alongside its domestic pledges and the Convention on Wetlands, the UK is committed to other clear international frameworks.

### **The Paris Agreement (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)**

A legally binding international treaty on climate change adopted by the UK at the UN climate change conference (COP21) in Paris in 2015. This set an overarching goal to keep the global average temperature to below 2°C.

### **The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity)**

A legally binding international treaty on biodiversity adopted by the UK at the UN biodiversity conference (COP 15) in Montreal in 2022. This set new goals to restore 30% of degraded inland and coastal waters<sup>21</sup> and protect 30% of land and water<sup>22</sup> for nature by 2030.



**These challenges - and the commitments made in response - provide a focus and impetus for action. To meet them the UK will need to make the very best use of nature-based solutions, including wetlands. However, these vital ecosystems face pressures of their own. These include:**

**Inadequate protection**

The system of legal protections for wetlands is insufficient and other wetlands fall outside the network of Protected Areas. Some wetlands are in poor condition and funding cuts have reduced the effectiveness of enforcement agencies<sup>23</sup>.

**Poor management**

Many wetlands are degraded due to poor practices and insufficient information. The UK also lacks sufficient skilled and knowledgeable practitioners and communities are too often disconnected and unable to care for local wetlands.

**Insufficient restoration**

Progress is undermined by the lack of national targets and knowledge gaps. Their contribution towards addressing climate change is insufficiently recognised and potential investors lack the confidence that government assurances could provide.

**Inadequate governance**

Wetlands are complex ecosystems that straddle boundaries, however there is no joined up approach across stakeholders and leadership is poor. Governance mechanisms are absent and policy responsibilities are dispersed across Government.

**Limited engagement**

Public awareness levels are too low, as is recognition of the vital role that wetlands play. This is exacerbated by inadequate communication and very limited educational opportunities.



# Where should a UK Wetlands Strategy apply?

**Given that the UK is signatory to the relevant international agreements listed above, this must be a UK-wide Wetlands Strategy. It needs to apply across all four of the UK's constituent nations, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories.**

The Strategy must recognise that environmental issues are devolved to each national government and administration, meaning this must operate as an overarching framework. Specific actions and budgets should be determined by each devolved nation, Crown Dependency and Overseas Territory via their own National Wetlands Action Plan.

The strategy must also recognise the key role that government agencies and the various tiers of local government, private landowners and third sector organisations must play, issuing appropriate guidance to support decision-making and delivery on the ground.





## The Convention on Wetlands ('Ramsar Convention')

**The Convention on Wetlands (commonly known as 'The Ramsar Convention') is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.**

The Convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975. Since then, 172 countries have acceded to become 'Contracting Parties' to the Convention.

Every three years the Parties meet at the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP), where they adopt decisions to administer the Convention and guide its implementation.

Between COPs, the Parties are represented by a Standing Committee and supported by both a Scientific and Technical Review Panel and a Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) Oversight Panel which develop technical guidance. These bodies are supported by the Convention's Secretariat and 6 International Organization Partners (including WWT) which are official partners of the Convention.

A key part of the convention is the Ramsar Site Network of internationally important wetlands, comprising almost 2,500 protected wetlands globally. These sites - and issues related to wetland conservation and wise use - are celebrated each year on 2 February on World Wetlands Day, the anniversary of the signing of the convention.

An underwater photograph of a pond. The water is clear, showing large, round, green lily pads with prominent veins. A single, unopened flower bud is visible in the center. The surface of the water reflects a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds and the silhouettes of trees. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

**What should be included  
in a UK Wetlands Strategy?**



**A UK Wetlands Strategy should be informed by resolutions and recommendations of the Convention on Wetlands and seek to meet specific goals, outcomes, objectives and actions.**

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# A UK Wetlands Strategy should set out to achieve the following goals:

- Establish guiding **principles** for the UK's approach towards wetlands and their resources
- End **practices** driving the loss and degradation of the UK's wetlands and their resources
- Restore and maintain the biological **diversity** of UK wetlands and wetland species
- Restore and maintain the **functions** and value of the UK's wetlands
- **Integrate** issues affecting wetlands into planning and decision-making processes



# A UK Wetlands Strategy should seek the following outcomes to meet these goals:

- An extensive network of **fully protected wetlands**, which are in good condition
- A healthy network of **well-managed wetlands**, fulfilling their potential
- A growing network of **restored wetlands**, which are benefitting people and wildlife





## We recommend clear objectives are set under each outcome to drive progress

These should be **SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound)** and accompanied by actions which ensure these objectives are successfully met.

Some key objectives and actions are set out below. In addition, it is important to recognise that other stakeholders will need to be involved during the development, adoption and delivery phases of strategy from initial co-design to final co-ownership.

Given the devolved nature of environmental policies in the UK, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories, national governments must be empowered to pursue actions at implementation stage.

Outcome 1:

## Protected wetlands

An extensive network of protected wetlands, which are in good condition.

Objective	Actions
<b>Legal protections</b> An effective system of legally-based protections for wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Maintain highest level of legal protections for internationally important wetlands as Protected Areas<sup>24</sup></li><li>- Expand the highest level of legal protections for nationally important wetland Protected Areas</li><li>- Use the regulatory system to protect all wetland Protected Areas from harmful activities<sup>25</sup></li></ul>
<b>Wetland network</b> Expansion of wetland-based Protected Areas and improvement of other sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Expand Protected Area status to wetland sites which qualify but do not yet receive these protections<sup>26</sup></li><li>- Improve functioning of wetland Protected Areas that may not yet qualify in their entirety<sup>27</sup></li><li>- Assess conservation proposals outside Protected Areas to ensure they effectively protect wetlands<sup>28</sup></li></ul>
<b>Site condition</b> Sustained and effective action to improve wetlands in poor condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ensure all wetland Protected Areas and OECMs<sup>29</sup> have clear ecological objectives<sup>30</sup></li><li>- Provide sufficient resources to relevant bodies to monitor and report on condition and progress<sup>31</sup></li><li>- Provide public funding and drive other financial incentives to meet management requirements<sup>32</sup></li></ul>
<b>Law enforcement</b> Effective enforcement by agencies responsible for wetland Protected Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Restore funding for enforcement agencies to address full the impacts of damage and destruction</li><li>- Guarantee future inflation-linked funding allocations for regulators and enforcement agencies</li><li>- Review enforcement agency funding in line with requirements for water quality improvements</li></ul>



Outcome 2:

## Managed wetlands

A healthy network of well-managed wetlands, which are fulfilling their potential.

Objective	Actions
<b>Management practices</b> Use of effective, outcome-focused management plans by wetland managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Host a Wetlands Advisory Service, offering information, guidance and training opportunities</li><li>- Establish and host a peer support network that facilitates best practice</li><li>- Facilitate development of regional conservation strategies to support critical activities</li></ul>
<b>Information gathering</b> Coordinated efforts to gather key information and assess national picture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Produce and publish a UK Wetlands Inventory<sup>33</sup></li><li>- Maintain the use of Common Standards Monitoring<sup>34</sup></li><li>- Update and publish Ramsar Information Sheets<sup>35</sup></li></ul>
<b>Skilled workforce</b> A new generation of skilled and knowledgeable wetland practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Offer educational opportunities to school leavers and lifelong learning programmes</li><li>- Provide training and development programmes for school leavers and graduates<sup>36</sup></li><li>- Establish and support provision of wetland apprenticeship schemes<sup>37</sup></li></ul>
<b>Supported communities</b> Motivated and capable local people looking after wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Host and provide a Wetlands Advisory Service, offering key information and practical guidance</li><li>- Provide an annual, funded wetland community support scheme</li><li>- Measure and publish research into the community value that wetlands provide</li></ul>

Outcome 3:

## Restored wetlands

A growing network of restored wetlands, which are benefitting people and wildlife.

Objective	Actions
<p><b>Legal targets</b> Clear and effective national-scale targets for wetland restoration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set a legally-based, UK-wide target that drives national efforts to restore wetlands<sup>38</sup></li> <li>- Develop opportunity maps to identify suitable sites for wetland restoration<sup>39</sup> and inform decisions</li> <li>- Integrate new data with existing data relating to local economic, social and environmental needs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Research &amp; development</b> Ongoing programmes to identify barriers and develop solutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support wetlands-focused research to investigate barriers relating to private finance</li> <li>- Support wetlands-focused research to investigate barriers related to land use change</li> <li>- Support wetlands-focused research to investigate barriers relating to long-term management</li> </ul>
<p><b>Climate adaptation</b> Adoption of wetland creation into local and business climate adaptation plans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gather, promote and provide case studies relating to wetland use in climate adaptation</li> <li>- Gather, promote and provide guidance relating to wetland use in climate adaptation</li> <li>- Gather, promote and provide advice relating to wetland use in climate adaptation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Private financing</b> Government backing to drive investor confidence in wetland investment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commission research into how financing options can be secured<sup>40</sup> to drive wetland creation</li> <li>- Support development and promotion of voluntary codes to drive wetland creation<sup>41</sup></li> <li>- Develop existing and new government-funded schemes to invest in wetland creation<sup>42</sup></li> </ul>

Cross-cutting objectives

## Governance and Engagement

Objective	Actions
<b>Governance structures</b> A joined-up approach with mechanisms to coordinate policy and action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Establish a wetlands-focused team within Defra to coordinate UK Government activity</li><li>- Designate lead agencies to coordinate action across UK, Crown Dependencies, Overseas Territories</li><li>- Create UK Wetlands Advisory Committee to engage stakeholders and inform a strategic approach</li></ul>
<b>Public engagement</b> UK Government-led programme to drive CEPA activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Establish a UK CEPA<sup>43</sup> Committee for wetlands and develop an UK CEPA Action Plan<sup>44</sup></li><li>- Identify and put forward UK candidate cities for Wetland City Accreditation<sup>45</sup></li><li>- Lead efforts to develop wetland education opportunities with relevant partners<sup>46</sup></li></ul>



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**How can a UK Wetlands Strategy be delivered?**

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# Guiding principles

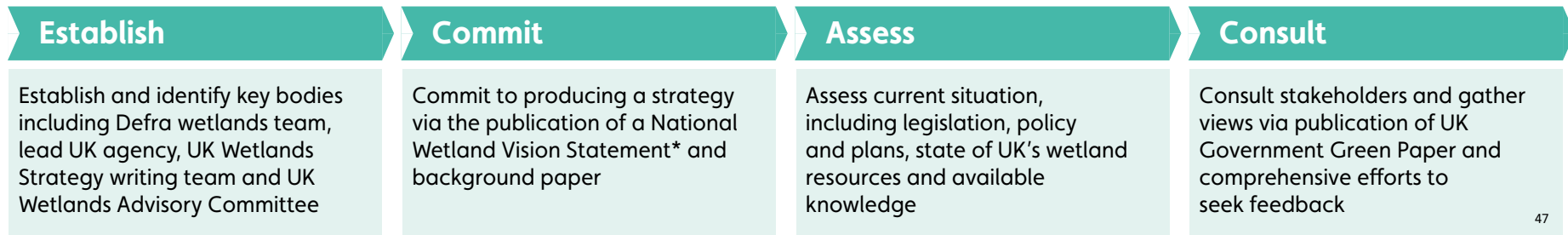
**Any approach to creating a UK Wetlands Strategy must be informed by the following five guiding principles. These are based upon the recommendations of the Convention on Wetlands, including the central concept of the 'wise use' of wetlands.**

- 1. Ecosystem services** - That wetlands provide ecosystem services which underpin the prosperity and wellbeing of communities and the UK as a whole, and that action must recognise and maximise the potential ability of wetlands to provide these services.
- 2. Sustainable development** - That wetlands and their resources are an integral part of the environment, and that planning and other decisions relating to wetlands are considered within the context of sustainable development.
- 3. Ecological character** - That wetlands support a wealth of diverse and particular habitats and species, and that action must reflect the need to maintain and restore their unique ecological character.
- 4. Community engagement** - That wetlands help define the special character of local communities, and that action is dependent upon their cooperation, collaboration and consent and reflects their particular needs.
- 5. International leadership** - That UK wetlands form part of a global network which hosts migratory species, and that decision-making honours these responsibilities through demonstrable international leadership.

# Process

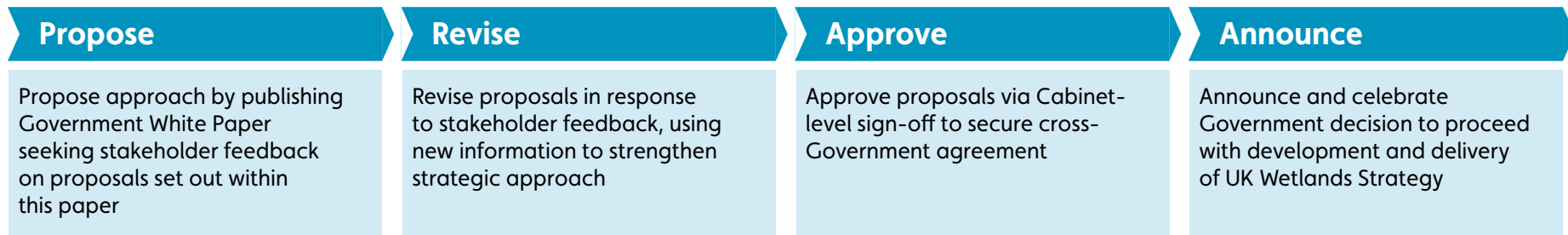
In developing a UK Wetlands Strategy, we suggest the UK Government pursues the following steps which are agreeable to Ramsar guidance.

## Stage 1 – Development

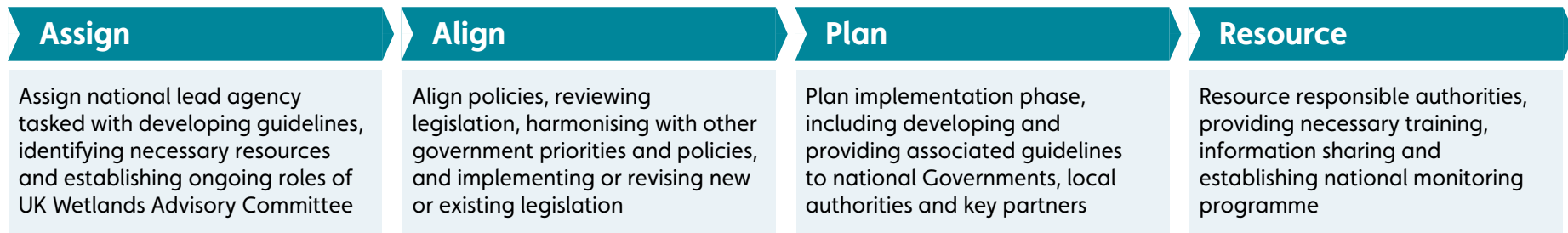


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## Stage 2 – Adoption



## Stage 3 – Delivery



# Timescales

**In order to meet both domestic and international commitments, the UK Government should plan to develop, adopt and deliver a UK Wetlands Strategy by 2030.**

During each stage of this process the responsible Minister and the appointed lead agency should be held fully accountable to the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, the Senedd and Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure progress is maintained and that procedures are being followed appropriately.

After the strategy has been delivered , the responsible UK Minister and Ministers from devolved administrations, Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories should be required to produce a statement setting out how they intend to make further progress against the original outcomes of the UK Wetlands Strategy.



# Incredible things happen when land and water meet to create wetlands.

**Creating, restoring and protecting these wonderful places is one of the best, fastest and most cost effective ways the UK Government can meet the pressing challenges we face.**

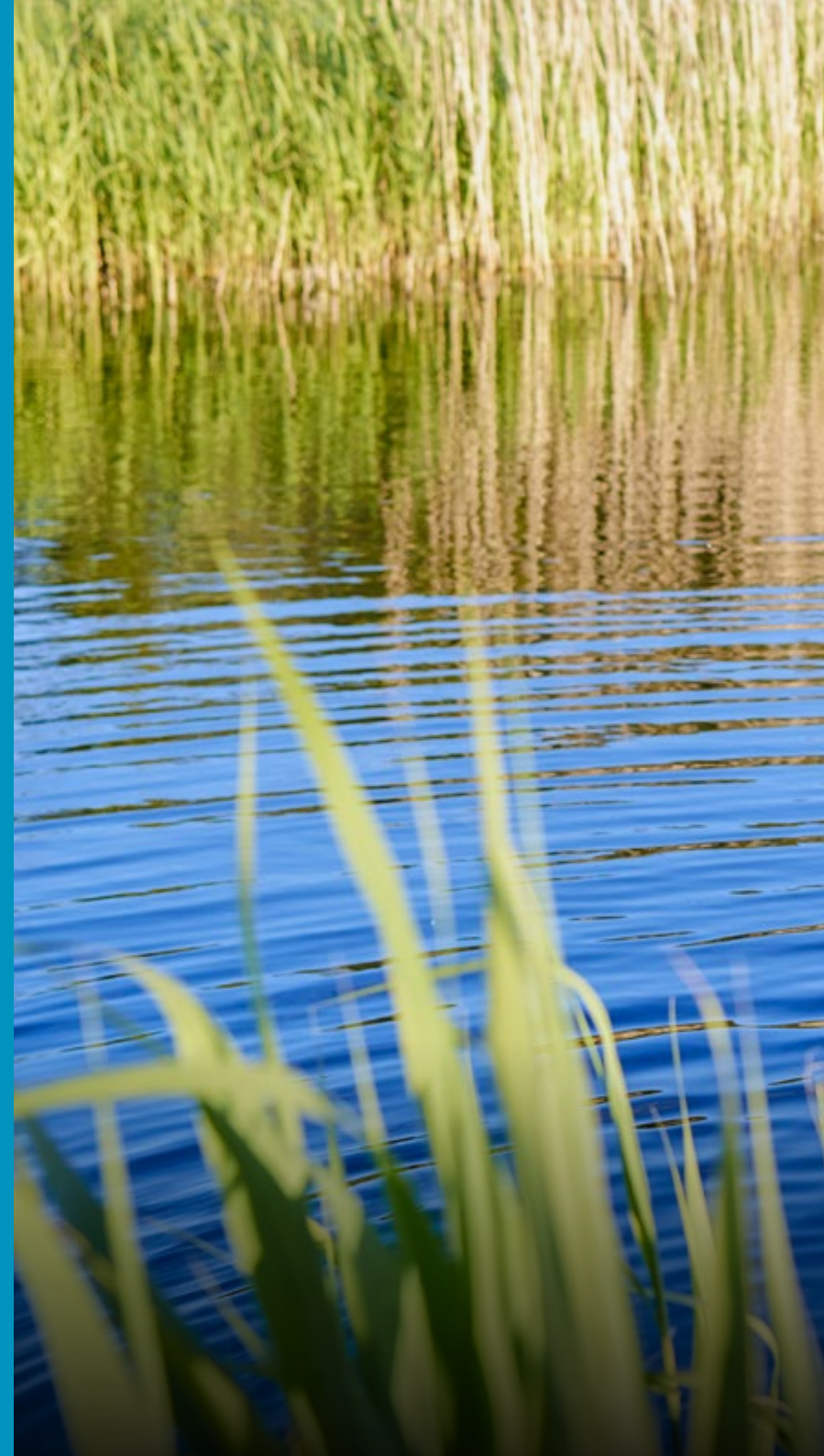
This cannot be achieved by a single organisation or even a single government department. It will require a whole of society approach delivered via an overarching plan.

This document sets out how this can be achieved through the adoption of a UK Wetlands Strategy. This is an achievable proposal which will have real and positive impacts for communities across the UK. It is low-cost and high benefit. And with high levels of public support for protecting and restoring the natural environment, and the mechanisms in place to do this, the opportunity is now.

**Please support us by joining our call  
for a UK Wetlands Strategy.**

Tom Fewins  
Head of Policy & Advocacy

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## References

- <sup>1</sup>Fluet-Chouinard, E., Stocker, B.D., Zhang, Z. et al. 2023. Extensive global wetland loss over the past three centuries. *Nature* 614: 281-286
- <sup>2</sup>Wetland Biodiversity. Why it matters, Ramsar Convention [https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/wwd2020\\_ppt\\_english\\_0.pdf](https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/wwd2020_ppt_english_0.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup>Natural capital: The stocks of natural assets (e.g. soils, water) that provide flows of ecosystem services over time. For an assessment of the critical importance of the UK's natural capital to our prosperity see 'The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review', HM Treasury 2021
- <sup>4</sup>Fluet-Chouinard, E., Stocker, B.D., Zhang, Z. et al. 2023. Extensive global wetland loss over the past three centuries. *Nature* 614: 281-286
- <sup>5</sup>A Blue Recovery: Four blue infrastructure proposals for the UK's recovery, WWT, 2020. [www.wwt.org.uk/blue-recovery](http://www.wwt.org.uk/blue-recovery)
- <sup>6</sup>A recommendation made in a report to the UK Government's Natural Capital Committee (The Economic Case for Investment in Natural Capital in England, Final Report For the Natural Capital Committee, Eftec, 2015). This found there is an economic case for creating and restoring 100,000ha of wetlands in England alone.
- <sup>7</sup>Wetland creation could deliver a return on investment of up to 9:1. The Economic Case for Investment in Natural Capital in England, Final Report For the Natural Capital Committee, Eftec, 2015
- <sup>8</sup>Contracting parties are the national governments who have signed up to the Convention on Wetlands. This includes the UK.
- <sup>9</sup>The Convention on Wetlands defines wise use as 'the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development'.
- <sup>10</sup>Resolution VII.6: Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies, COP7, San José, Costa Rica, 1999; Recommendation 4.10, Annex: Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept, COP4, Montreux, Switzerland 1990
- <sup>11</sup>65% of Contracting Parties now have a national strategy for wetland management. Report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the Convention: Global implementation, Ramsar COP 14 Wuhan, China and Geneva, Switzerland, November 2022
- <sup>12</sup>Also, the England Trees Action Plan (2021) and the England Peat Action Plan (2021).
- <sup>13</sup>[https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/978011187654/pdfs/ukdsi\\_978011187654\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/978011187654/pdfs/ukdsi_978011187654_en.pdf)
- <sup>14</sup>McLeod, E., Chmura, G. L., Bouillon, S., Salm, R., Björk, M., Duarte, C. M., Lovelock, C. E., Schlesinger, W. H., & Silliman, B. R. (2011). A blueprint for blue carbon: Toward an improved understanding of the role of vegetated coastal habitats in sequestering CO<sub>2</sub>. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 9(10), 552–560. <https://doi.org/10.1890/110004>.
- <sup>15</sup>Mason, V.G., Wood, K.A., Jupe, L.L., Burden, A., Skov, M.W. 2022. Saltmarsh Blue Carbon in UK and NW Europe – evidence synthesis for a UK Saltmarsh Carbon Code. Report to the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund. UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Bangor.
- <sup>16</sup>Natural flood management utilises various low-cost techniques that use opportunities in the landscape to reduce flooding. These increase water storage (e.g. floodplain reconnection) and infiltration (e.g. storage capacity of soil) and/or slow and disperse water flows.
- <sup>17</sup>'Everyone should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space', Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, Defra
- <sup>18</sup>White, M.P.; Elliott, L.R.; Gascon, M.; Roberts, B.; Fleming, L.E. Blue space, health and well-being: A narrative overview and synthesis of potential benefits. *Environ. Res.* 2020, 191, 110169
- <sup>19</sup>Georgiou, M., Tiegies, Z., Morison, G. et al. A population-based retrospective study of the modifying effect of urban blue space on the impact of socioeconomic deprivation on mental health, 2009–2018. *Sci Rep* 12, 13040 (2022)
- <sup>20</sup>Halt the decline in species abundance by 2030, and then increase abundance by at least 10% to exceed 2022 levels by 2042', *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup>Ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity', Target 2, UN Global Biodiversity Framework
- <sup>22</sup>Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed', Target 3, UN Global Biodiversity Framework
- <sup>23</sup>The Environment Agency's grant for "environmental protection" is currently 56 per cent lower in real terms than it was in 2009/10. <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/water-pollution-sewage-environment-agency-funding-b2154848.html>
- <sup>24</sup>A Protected Area is defined by the IUCN as 'clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values' e.g. Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation
- <sup>25</sup>This should include ensuring all wetland Protected Areas are free of all potentially damaging activities and that any new incentives or subsidies that could cause damage are rejected
- <sup>26</sup>This could be achieved through implementing the recommendations of the UK Special Protection Area review and the Review of the sufficiency of the SSSI network in England
- <sup>27</sup>For example, in the UK's National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Action could include better use of wetland restoration techniques and initiatives
- <sup>28</sup>This includes Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) which can complement wetland Protected Areas and achieve the same level of in situ or whole ecosystem biodiversity conservation as wetland Protected Areas. OECMs are not meant to be multiple-use production areas (e.g. production forests, plantations and fisheries areas) that are managed with some biodiversity considerations. While such areas are important, they should be counted toward additional sustainable use targets and not toward the '30 by 30' target.
- <sup>29</sup>OECM: other effective area-based conservation measures.
- <sup>30</sup>See footnote 5. Objectives should be accompanied by associated and documented condition indicators.
- <sup>31</sup>This should apply to every wetland Protected Area. Bodies monitoring progress should include the Office for Environmental Protection in England and Wales, and auditing bodies elsewhere. See also Information Gathering objective below.
- <sup>32</sup>Public funding must include that provided for each wetland Protected Area and OECM by agri-environment programmes. In addition, maximum use should be made of the nutrient mitigation scheme in England to ensure wetland are being restored, at scale, to improve the condition of wetland Protected Areas.
- <sup>33</sup>Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands are required to produce National Wetland Inventories containing key information about the wetlands in their territory. In 2022 the UK Government announced it would produce one; preparatory work is now underway
- <sup>34</sup>Common Standards Monitoring was developed to provide an agreed approach to the assessment of condition on statutory sites designated through UK legislation and international agreements. For further information see <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/common-standards-monitoring/>
- <sup>35</sup>Ramsar Information Sheets contain data relating to Ramsar wetland sites. In the UK they were last updated in 2016. For further information see <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/bc9b0905-fb63-4786-8e90-5f7851bb417d?page=2392>
- <sup>36</sup>Currently there are not enough engineers with the appropriate skills to create and maintain treatment wetlands. However, this presents an opportunity to create sustainable employment through training and development.
- <sup>37</sup>The expertise and experience of delivering managed realignment schemes to restore saltmarsh comes from a small professional pool. Delivering this at scale necessitates increasing the number of practitioners who have the relevant expertise and skills to design and deliver these schemes.
- <sup>38</sup>WWT recommends a target of 100,000ha wetlands (a recommendation of the UK Government's Natural Capital Committee), starting by restoring 22,000ha of saltmarsh as the first step in an ongoing programme of wetland restoration.
- <sup>39</sup>Opportunity mapping should include information identifying those wetland natural capital opportunities that are likely to be most beneficial to society, accompanied by an economic case for why they should be undertaken.
- <sup>40</sup>Research into financing options needs to include identifying how payments can be responsibly stacked or bundled, as well as how multi-benefits can be monetised to attract investment
- <sup>41</sup>Voluntary Codes to drive private sector investment must include development and adoption of a UK Saltmarsh Code. Development work is underway
- <sup>42</sup>This should include better deployment of existing government-funded schemes to drive wetland creation in target areas, complemented by a state-funded investment programme linked directly to the return on investment for the taxpayer that will de-risk investment from early adopters in the private sector. Work to drive private sector investment must include support from the UK Infrastructure Bank.
- <sup>43</sup>CEPA: Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness.
- <sup>44</sup>As a Contracting Party to the Convention on Wetlands the UK is signed up to the use of CEPA (Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness) techniques to address this however, to date it has not been embedded. The new Action Plan should include scaling up national efforts to promote and celebrate World Wetlands Day.
- <sup>45</sup>The Wetland City Accreditation scheme is managed by the Convention on Wetlands to encourage cities to promote the conservation and wise use of urban and peri-urban wetlands, as well as sustainable socio-economic benefits for local people
- <sup>46</sup>This should include offering training and capacity building opportunities. WWT are developing a Wetland Learning Hub platform which could be used to help support this.
- <sup>47</sup>The National Wetland Vision Statement will define 'wetlands' at a national level and outline the importance of wetlands to the future prosperity and wellbeing of people and nature in the UK



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