

UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme

Response to Struan Stevenson following a request on my behalf:

'Dear Mr Price,

I understand that you are the UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Mountain Development and cover the UK's UNESCO Biosphere reserves. As such, I was hoping that you might be able to clarify a query that I have.

Do you know how the UNESCO designation fits in with the EU's Natura 200 network? Is there any collaboration/partnership or are they completely separate entities? I am specifically interested in Scottish sites such as the Galloway and South Ayrshire region.

Any help you could provide would be most appreciated.

Best wishes,

Struan

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'Dear Struan

Thank you for your email. Indeed, you contacted the correct person, but I should answer your enquiry in my capacity as the Chair of the UK Committee for UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme, not as Chairholder of the UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Mountain Development.

I could have provided a general answer, but thought it better to get a more detailed response with regard to the new Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, which was approved by the International Coordinating Council of the MAB programme this July. Accordingly, I contacted Nigel Wallace, Coordinator of the Biosphere Partnership, and attach his reply below.

I should also note that there are two other sites in Scotland which are members of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves:

- Beinn Eighe in Wester Ross (a current National Nature Reserve)
- Loch Druidibeg on South Uist (a former National Nature Reserve)

Since these sites were designated in the late 1970s, the concept of Biosphere Reserves has undergone significant evolution: in essence, the concept has changed from one focusing on nature conservation supported by scientific research to one focusing on regional sustainable development, including nature conservation and underpinned as much as possible by research. The new Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere represents an excellent example of the implementation of the new

concept; it will be necessary to do considerable work with the stakeholders at the other two sites if they are to meet the current criteria. This process is currently underway.

I hope that this is all useful to you, and would be glad to attempt to answer any further questions.

With best regards,

Martin'

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From: Wallace, Nigel [<mailto:Nigel.Wallace@south-ayrshire.gov.uk>]
Sent: 15 December 2012 17:42
To: Martin Price
Subject: RE: UNESCO vs EU Natura 2000 network

Hello Martin,

sorry for the delay in responding but I needed a bit of time to get my head round this one!

To answer Struan Stevenson's query definitively and succinctly is difficult. The complete answer is complex, probably less than certain and beyond my current understanding without some more digging. It is I feel a very important question and one which requires further consideration. I will, however attempt to shed some light on it but my comments below should be taken in this context.

Natura 2000 is the centrepiece of EU nature & biodiversity policy. It is an EU wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 [Habitats Directive](#). The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. Natura 2000 is not a system of strict nature reserves where all human activities are excluded. The network does include nature reserves, but often the land is privately owned and the emphasis is on ensuring that future management is sustainable, both ecologically and economically. The establishment of the Natura network does relate to the UN in that it is a key contribution to the Program of Work of Protected Areas and fulfils a Community obligation under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. Although there is no direct linkage of Natura sites to UNESCO Biospheres under the Man & the Biosphere Programme there are strong synergies between them. Certainly in the case of Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, as a European Biosphere within the Worldwide Network of Biosphere

Reserves, the protection and enhancement of Natura 2000 sites and network are of primary concern.

Natura 2000 sites are defined as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), designated under the EU Habitats Directive, and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), classified under the EU Birds Directive, as transposed into GB law and known as the Habitats Regulations. Circular 6/1995 provides Scottish guidance on the Habitat Regulations as they relate specifically to SACs and SPAs. These are known in the Regulation as 'European sites' and collectively across Europe as the 'Natura 2000 Network'.

The Habitat Regulations (HR) place a number of general and specific duties and obligations on Ministers, SNH, other relevant public authorities and local authorities in relation to Natura 2000 sites themselves and to sites which support the Natura 2000 network. Guidance on site selection, designation and protection is included. The HR also apply to Section 36 and Section 37 of the Electricity Acts.

The HR states that **“over time development plans must clearly refer to European sites” “The development plan should emphasise the very strict protection which must be afforded....”**. However the HR goes beyond SACs and SPAs to sites which have other designations or which are not designated but which support **“the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network”**. The designated and other non-designated sites which support the Natura 2000 network are shown at the following website (To view the environmental mapping please follow the link –

<http://gis.south-ayrshire.gov.uk/mapsSimple/mapEnvironment.htm> here you can select the layer you require by selecting it from the right hand menu.)

These are various but would include Annex A sites; SSSIs; Scottish Wildlife Trust reserves; LBAP priority habitats.

Importantly para 24 of Circular 6/1995 reiterates Article 10 of the Habitats Directive which

“require member states to endeavour, where they consider it necessary in their land use planning and development policies to encourage the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance to the flora and fauna. These features are those which because of their linear and continuous structure or their function as stepping stones are essential for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange”

Para 25 continues “Structure plans, local plans and Indicative Forestry strategies ... should include policies that respect the need to conserve and enhance our natural heritage... In particular these policies should seek to improve the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network in accordance with the principles of Article 10”

In Ayrshire the HR and guidance in Circular 6/1995 has been incorporated into the development plans of the Ayrshire Councils through the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan (AJSP) in 1999 (Policy E9 and related text) and 2007 (para 104 and policy ENV 7) and in Local Development Plans. Although currently under preparation no new Local Development Plans have yet been adopted by the Ayrshire Councils in the area covered by the Biosphere, therefore, the AJSP 2007 is still the current strategic Development Plan for the area. AJSP 2007 includes the plan plus supporting documentation. The location of the Natura sites (SACs and SPAs) and the sites which support the Natura 2000 network are found at the above website. This approach is given support in SG planning guidance. SPP para 126 states:

126. Planning authorities should take a broader approach to landscape and natural heritage than just conserving designated or protected sites and species,

taking into account the ecosystems and natural processes in their area. A strategic approach to natural heritage in which wildlife sites and corridors, landscape features, watercourses, and areas of open space are linked together in integrated habitat networks can make an important contribution to the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and to allowing ecosystems and natural processes to adapt and respond to changes in the climate. Planning authorities should seek to prevent further fragmentation or isolation of habitats and identify opportunities to restore links which have been broken. Where possible, planning authorities should seek benefits for species and habitats from new development including the restoration of degraded habitats.

Biosphere status is recognised by UNESCO under the Man and the Biosphere Programme for “areas which innovate and demonstrate innovative approaches to sustainable development and conservation at a regional scale”. UNESCO Biosphere status, granted in July 2012, has added global recognition that a large part of south west Scotland has significance as a special place for people and nature. This has been captured in the aspiration of the Biosphere Partnership which is to help make Galloway and Southern Ayrshire a “World Class Place for People and Nature”. This is not only in recognition of the place itself but because it is an area which communities and other stakeholders value and more importantly want to care for and enhance. The Biosphere is seen as a catalyst for partnership working, encouraging sustainable development and enhanced stewardship of the natural resources, assets and skills and talents of the area to help address some deep seated social, economic and environmental challenges which the area faces.

The Biosphere imposes no additional laws or regulation. It relies on existing statute, policy, regulatory processes and guidance (operated by Councils; public agencies and government). However the extensive support for seeking Biosphere status has been founded on a commitment by communities, business, other stakeholders to work together in partnership with the public sector agencies and Councils to improve the areas economic and social performance underpinned by a flourishing and enhanced natural environment. Therefore the expectation is that everyone will ‘up their game’ to ensure that there is progress towards the aspiration of the area being a “World Class Place for People and Nature”. This approach is advocated in Scottish Governments planning policy under Para 125 of SPP,

“125. Scotland’s landscape and natural heritage are internationally renowned and important, underpinning significant industries such as the food, drink and tourism industries, and are a key component of the high environmental quality which makes Scotland an attractive place in which to live, do business and invest. Improving the natural environment and the sustainable use and enjoyment of it is one of the Government’s national outcomes. Planning authorities should therefore support opportunities for enjoyment and understanding of the natural heritage.”

The Biosphere has a large number of International designations - 3 Ramsar Sites; 18 Natura 2000 sites (ie 14 SACs; 4 SPAs); plus a large number of sites which as Annex A or other sites support the Natura 2000 network. There are 91 SSSIs. (see www.gallowayandsouthernayrshirebiosphere.org.uk) The fact that there are designated sites throughout the Biosphere, in all 3 zones, reflects the high quality of the habitat generally. The aspiration of the Biosphere Partnership is that these existing environmental assets are enhanced and built on.

The European Biodiversity Strategy has put a priority on enhancing, strengthening and completing the Natura 2000 network and it is understood that funding will be used to support actions which do this. This is something which the Biosphere partnership have identified as a

significant opportunity and which if appropriate projects can be identified should help to deliver environmental and sustainable economic benefits across a wide range of agendas -

Biosphere; EU; Natura; SG; Agency; Council and community. A project which it is hoped will be submitted for funding under the EU LIFE+ is currently under development within the Biosphere.

In summary, the Natura 2000 sites together with sites supporting the Natura 2000 network are particularly important and the strong policy backing in the planning frameworks such as the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan and planning policy guidance is helpful in protecting and enhancing the network.

It is absolutely fundamental for the future of the Biosphere, and the development of ecological networks within it and which underpin the economy, society and culture, that these strategically significant sites and the networks which support them through out the Biosphere - the core, buffer zone and transition area - are protected and enhanced. In this sense Natura 2000 and Biosphere are in my view inextricably linked and mutually beneficial.

I trust this is helpful in making a response to Struan Stevenson's enquiry. If you would like further clarification or if there is something of more specific concern to Mr Stevenson which I can help with please do not hesitate to get back.

Best wishes

Nigel

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