EEA Consultation on conservation status – EU biogeographic level (Art. 17 Habitats Directive)

NRW Response.

Summary of the ART17 public consultation guide.
The broad approach to collating the various Member State assessments to reach a high level conclusion on status seems logical and raises few significant concerns. The following represent the comments we have on the documentation and process forming the basis of this consultation.

Scope:
1. In covering the methodology for the assessment of Conservation Status it would be beneficial to include information on the quality assurance undertaken (or proposed) to assess the outcomes at both an EC and MS level. There may be value in other parties providing an independent review of the outcomes and conclusions arising from the assessments across Europe.

Technical methodology issues:
2. It is unclear how the overall assessments of Range (for habitats and species) and Area (for habitats) has been reached. The text suggests that this will follow the method used by the MS (page 8, paragraph 3). However changes in the methods or quality of the underpinning data may mean that the trend reported by a MS deviates from the apparent trend deduced from changes in reported value between 2007 and 2013 potentially leading to differing conclusions on the status of the parameter. It would therefore be good to clarify the exact method used.

3. Whilst clarification of the 'unfavourable inadequate' **(U1)** and 'unfavourable bad' **(U2)** categories (Section 2, page 6, bullet points below paragraph 1) have been provided to aid the reader and have been used previously in the Article 17 Guidelines they do not match the actual criteria (as outlined in the evaluation matrices on page 20) used in the assessment well. For example many species/habitats considered in 'unfavourable bad' status will not be in serious danger of regional extinction (i.e. their range could simply be 10% below the FRV and might even be improving). This poor match between the definition/clarification and the actual criteria used in the assessments may need to be resolved.

4. Where it has been problematic to use MS level information for EU level conclusions it would be of benefit to explain the extent of this issue e.g. in what % of features was range used instead of population?

5. The thresholds used in reaching the conclusions on Conservation Status do not make as much use of the data as possible (Figure 2, page 8) and run the risk of accusations of bias towards conclusions of 'unknown' (**XX**) rather than unfavourable.

it as either ‘bad’ or ‘inadequate’. This situation arises where less than 25% of the resource has been assigned to ‘unfavourable bad’ and more than 25% has been classed ‘unknown’, but in total more than 25% has been identified as ‘unfavourable’ (**U1** or **U2)**. In theory, as an extreme, this could create the situation where 24% of the resource = **U2** and 50% = **U1,** with the status reported as ‘unknown**’** because the remaining 26% is assigned to that category.

Including a category of ‘**unfavourable unknown’** would avoid this problem.

An alternative solution would be calling situations where:

≥25% of the resource is unfavourable (U1 or U2) and less than 25% is ‘unfavourable bad’ = ‘unfavourable inadequate’.

This later approach has the benefit that it uses the existing categories, although it would of course mean that some features which might prove to be ‘unfavourable bad’ (if the status of unknown assessments were resolved) are mislabelled ‘unfavourable inadequate’.

6. In Table 4 (page 7) some of the definitions may need greater clarity e.g. MTX.

7. The text in section 3, covering lack of detailed information at the MS level on some parameters e.g. future prospects, would benefit from greater explanation (see page 8).

8. The thresholds used in assigning qualifiers to Conservation Status can lead to some problematic outcomes (page 10, figure 4). These include the rule that where 75% or more of the resource is considered stable then the overall qualifier will be stable, irrespective of the overall trend in the remainder of the assessments. We see little need for this step and assuming that the majority of the resource was not ‘unknown’ would be happy basing the qualifier on the net balance (improving and deteriorating) applying the 10% rule to distinguish stable from positive and negative trends.

Retaining the 75% cut off gives us the situation where 76% of a resource could be stable and the remaining 24% deteriorating, leading to a conclusion of stable (sum of stable ≥ 75% therefore qualifier is (=)), while if 74% of the resource was stable, 8% improving and 18% deteriorating (<75% stable, net balance (improving – deteriorating) ≥ 10%) it would be assigned deteriorating.

9. The matrix for measuring progress under target 1 (Section 3.2, Table 5 page 11) highlights the potential for conflicts between the change in the reported conservation

status between the two reporting rounds and the trend within the most recent report. So for example there is the potential (in the matrix) for an assessment to change from ‘favourable’ to ‘unfavourable inadequate’ but improving i.e. on the one hand the reported status has deteriorated, while at the same time the reported trend has been one of improvement. As it stands this assessment would be reported based on the change in status and flagged as C(-) representing a deterioration. However the 2013 qualifier assessment represents the most recent conclusion on the trend in status and is likely to be more reliable than the change in status between the two reports which is more likely to be driven by a change in methods, data quality or FRVs.

10. With regard to section 3.2, the method for assessing progress against target 1 of the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy appears sound, but it is important to recognise that while positive trends within status categories represent progress towards that target, meeting the target requires actual improvements in the Conservation Status category. Without being clear about this distinction, there is a danger that it could be seen as a dilution of the overall target.

Individual assessments

11. The mapping function appears to be variable in functionality. It is unclear if this is a user problem or website issue.

12. Whilst the individual country level reports are available, it would assist understanding for links to be provided (if available) to the MS presentation of this data as such sites may provide additional information e.g. The JNCC website for the UK will enable a user to look at the submissions from each devolved country.