

Statement from Joan Ruddock, Minister for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Waste

I am delighted to see the launch of the Wetland Vision. This is a great milestone and a testament to the considerable amount of work that has gone into its preparation by the five members of the partnership – the Environment Agency, English Heritage, Natural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wildlife Trusts.

The Vision is a key output of the England Biodiversity Strategy for 2008. Many of our rare birds, fish, plants and insects rely upon wetlands for their survival, so it is important that we have as much information as possible about the state of our current wetlands, and possible opportunities for their future.

But this Vision is not just about biodiversity. Wetlands provide many economic and social benefits, so I am pleased to see that there is a strong theme running through it recognising the services that wetlands can provide to society and for our quality of life.

For example flooding has caused considerable difficulties for people in different parts of the country, yet wetlands can act as a natural defence by storing or absorbing floodwaters. Many of us also take a great deal of pleasure from leisure activities associated with wetlands, be that fishing, walking along footpaths, bird-watching or boating, and wetlands can often be used for agriculture activities such as grazing.

The next stage for the Vision is to consider how best to take it forward. Collaboration is key to this and the five partners involved make a very strong team with a great network of contacts to help deliver the Vision. I am pleased to see that these partners have set out how they plan to use it and to take it forward both jointly and as individual organisations.

In Government we will draw upon this Vision to help inform our policies on wetlands. For example, under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan we have a target to create eight new landscape-scale wetlands by 2020 and the maps of potential wetlands sites will prove a particularly valuable tool for helping to identify where they might best be located. Local partnerships which take into account local circumstances will be key to ensuring support for such initiatives.

Other parts of government will also find the Vision helpful, particularly those involved in land use planning and our natural heritage. But it will need engagement from a range of sectors outside government as well, and I trust that the discussions at the launch will help identify how others can also play an active part. I must emphasise that Government and its delivery partners will not make any decisions on the basis of this Vision alone. However, I very much welcome the contribution that it will make to work on the management and planning of our future wetlands as we adapt to the pressures of climate change.

My best wishes for the launch, and I hope that it proves to be a very successful day.