

1. One of the six principal objectives of the TDS is to "conserve and enhance significant landscape and ecological attributes, and important heritage features". These aspects were covered, in detail, by the Planning Evaluation of the Initial Options, the sectoral studies on landscape, conservation, rural land and recreation and during the generation of the Hybrid Options. A broadbrush overview of ecological baseline study was carried out when the TDS Review was initiated and a broad conservation strategy was considered. Although these have not been updated as the study has progressed, they do provide a foundation for the evaluation of options for defining a Medium-Term Strategy.
2. Many landuse plans offer protection to sites of special conservation interest, such as zoning of "conservation area" or "SSSI". Although these are valuable planning mechanisms, they protect relatively confined areas and do not consider the conservation role in strategic or regional terms. It is apparent that, with all of the development proposals, both private and through Government initiatives, there exists the need to consider natural resource conservation on a broader scale in terms of, for example, a comprehensive conservation strategy to reinforce the protection of "unique areas" and "significant areas" identified in the broad conservation strategy including the existing protected areas. If developed in a rational manner this could provide mutual benefits to the natural environment as well as to economic development.
3. The protected areas considered in the broad conservation strategy include Special Areas, Country Parks, proposed Marine Parks, proposed Marine Reserves, and SSSIs. In NWNT, particularly important areas with respect to the protection of wetlands and birdlife are the Ramsar Site and other SSSIs. Although the NWNT is relatively impoverished in terms of areal extent of Country Park land it is a particularly important area with respect to the protection of Deep Bay and the SSSI's which are designated therein. Extensive development in the NT Biased Option would need a commensurate commitment in terms of infrastructure which could impinge on these areas. Therefore, it is necessary to plan development carefully in NWNT in order not to cause adverse effects to wetland habitats.
4. One of the key issues to be considered in connection with the development proposals was the extent of wetlands which could be lost through reclamation or other development proposals which could adversely affect the regime, particularly in Deep Bay. The proposed transport link across Deep Bay, the port back up land in San Tin/Lok Ma Chau as well as intensified residential development in rural NWNT has the potential to adversely affect the fragile ecosystem within this area both during and following construction. The extent of the impacts relates to the methods of construction proposed, the extent of the disturbance to the natural habitats and the changes in the tidal regime and flushing capacity of both the inner and outer Deep Bays.