

17.63 INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF SCOTTISH PEATLANDS, UNITED KINGDOM

AWARE of the international importance of the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland, and in particular the peatlands of the flow country of northern Scotland, as an important part of an area identified in the World Conservation Strategy as a priority biogeographic province for the establishment of protected areas;

AWARE that blanket bog is an extremely rare global habitat type, restricted to a few areas where cool oceanic conditions prevail;

AWARE that the blanket bogs of Caithness and Sutherland, Scotland, form the largest remaining example of this habitat type in the world;

INFORMED THAT "The Conservation and Development Programme for the United Kingdom: A Response to the World Conservation Strategy" states that the results of upland bird surveys show that "forestry operations should be planned with great care" ;

NOTING that peatland ecologists from nine countries at a conference of the International Mire Conservation Group (held in September 1986) expressed their dismay at the extent to which afforestation was found to be destroying this internationally important habitat, and viewed the speed of destruction with particular alarm;

NOTING the reports produced by the Nature Conservancy Council, the United Kingdom Government's own advisers on nature conservation, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, documenting the loss of these blanket bogs to commercial forestry;

RECALLING the commitment of all Parties to the Ramsar Convention including the United Kingdom to promote wise use of wetlands and in particular wetlands of international importance;

AWARE of the United Kingdom Government's recent decision to protect a very substantial area of the Caithness and Sutherland peatlands, but at the same time to allow new afforestation of about 40,000 ha;

The General Assembly of IUCN, at its 17th Session in San Jose, Costa Rica, 1-10 February 1988 :

1. CONGRATULATES the Government of the United Kingdom on its recognition that much of Caithness and Sutherland is of national and international importance for conservation and that a very substantial area (amounting to approximately half of the presently unafforested area of peatlands in these counties) is to be safeguarded.
2. CALLS ON the Government of the United Kingdom to exercise extreme caution in the authorization of any further planting proposals within the Caithness and Sutherland peatlands until it is clear where such planting may take place without detriment to nature conservation.
3. CALLS ON the Government of the United Kingdom to ensure that the 40,000 ha of land that it is envisaged may be afforested falls outside important areas for nature conservation within the Caithness and Sutherland peatlands.
4. CALLS ON the Government of the United Kingdom to support, in areas not protected or afforested, farming practices that are compatible with conservation interests.
5. CALLS ON the Government of the United Kingdom to designate appropriate areas within the Caithness and Sutherland peatlands as a Ramsar site or sites and to consider nominating them for listing under the World Heritage Convention.