PRIORITY HABITATS IN SCOTLAND

Article 1 of the Habitats Directive sets out the purpose of the Directive. It identifies at 1(d) priority natural habitat types as those "in danger of disappearance ... and for the conservation of which the Community has particular responsibility". Priority species are also defined in Article 1(h) as endangered species for the conservation of which the Community has particular responsibility. It should be noted that there are no priority species in any SAC in Scotland; species such as otter, wild cat, and bottlenose dolphin are all non-priority. No bird species, including those listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive, has priority status in the context of the Habitats Directive.

For a plan or project where it cannot be ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of a European site, Article 6.4 of the Habitats Directive and regulation 49 of the Habitats Regulations set out the circumstances whereby the proposal may be carried out, in the absence of alternative solutions and for imperative reasons of over-riding public interest. Where a priority habitat or species is affected, the only such reasons that may be considered relate to human health or public safety; beneficial consequences to the environment; or other imperative reasons agreed with the European Commission.

For the avoidance of doubt priority habitats which are qualifying interests on sites in Scotland are:

- Active blanket bogs
- Active raised bogs
- Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Pandion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae*)
- Alpine pioneer formations of *Caricion bicoloris-atrofuscacae*
- Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (*Calluno-Ulicetea*)
- Bog woodland
- Caledonian forest
- Coastal dunes with *Juniperus* spp.
- Coastal lagoons
- Decalcified fixed dunes with *Empetrum nigrum*
- Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)
- Limestone pavements
- Petrifying springs with tufa formation (*Cratoneurion*)
- Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands on siliceous substrates in mountain areas
- *Tilio-Acerion* forests of slopes, screes and ravines

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1 The term ‘priority’ is of course used in other contexts, for example with reference to particular habitats or species that are prioritised in Biodiversity Action Plans, or in relation to bird species that have been identified by the ORNIS Committee as a priority for LIFE-Nature funding. These are not priority habitats or species within the meaning of the Habitats Directive or the Habitats Regulations.