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http://www.bou.org.uk/bouproc-net/avian-demography/lawton.pdf

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Making Space for Nature: the science–policy interface

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Making Space for Nature (the 'Lawton Review'), published in September 2009, made 24 recommendations to government about improving the performance of England's protected area network of terrestrial and freshwater habitats. In the report's own words what is needed are: *More* protected sites, *Bigger* sites, *Better* managed sites and more *Joined* up sites. Recommendation 3, that there should be a national competition to establish 12 Ecological Restoration Zones, or ERZs – very large-scale habitat restoration and re-creation projects – has attracted the most attention. Government responded to *Making Space* in June 2011 in the Natural Environment White Paper (*The Natural Choice*), where it accepted some (but not all) of its recommendations. But it did accept the idea of a national competition to establish 12 ERZs, but called them *Nature Improvement Areas* (NIAs) instead, and made £7m available to pump-prime their establishment. I will briefly review this history, and current progress with establishing the NIAs, and then go on to consider why governments of all political shades sometimes rapidly embrace the recommendations of expert committees (e.g. the NIAs), but all too often ignore or reject other recommendations (including several others in *Making Space*). Many scientists hold the view that the problem lies in government not really understanding the issue (the so-called 'deficit model'). Sometimes this is indeed the case, but usually it is not. Politics is not science, and there are all kinds of reasons (some legitimate, others less so) why governments wilfully ignore or contradict what 'the evidence' says.

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