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## Appeal to put wetland on international map

By JAMIE ALLEN

THE Government should not delay in declaring the Mai Po marshes a wetland of international importance, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Hongkong said yesterday.

For the past two years, the WWF has been pressing the Government to have Deep Bay and its marshes registered on a United Nations' convention protecting wetlands around the world.

To date Mai Po is only recognised as a "site of special scientific interest" by the Hongkong Government. Full international recognition is required if the marshes are to be protected against possible future development.

It is understood that major conservation groups in Britain are also keen to see

Mai Po recognised under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

The Governor, Sir David Wilson, yesterday said there were technical reasons for the delay.

"If you register under that convention, and if for any reason you have to use that piece of land (later), you have to produce a duplicate," he said.

This would create a problem for Hongkong because it has no other wetland area.

Sir David was speaking after opening the Peter Scott Field Studies Centre, the WWF's new educational centre at Mai Po. The centre will educate researchers and reserve staff from Hongkong, China and Southeast Asia on environmental management.

However, the WWF said it had already consulted the

Ramsar Secretariat in the United Kingdom and was assured that the Hongkong Government's worries were not necessarily relevant.

Conservation officer Mr David Melville said Hongkong would not have to produce a duplicate piece of land because it only has one area of wetland.

Under the convention, each of the 42 signatories has to produce at least one site for listing.

But a second reason Hongkong's lack of a duplicate site was not an obstacle was that Hongkong was a party to the convention through Britain and Mai Po would be just one of several British listed sites, Mr Melville said.

Some local conservationists believe the Government is delaying recognition for Mai Po because it may want to develop it in future.

But Sir David ruled this out by saying the Government had "no intention of using the Mai Po marshes for anything else".

There is also speculation that the Government is hesitating because it does not want to embarrass China, which is not a signatory to the convention, and cause complications after 1997.

Lady Scott, the wife of the late Sir Peter Scott, a world renowned conservationist and founder of WWF International, said conservation groups in Britain would "certainly" like to see Deep Bay and the Mai Po marshes recognised at international level.