



March 2009

Parliamentary Briefing Marine and Coastal Access Bill

Coastal Access (Part 9)

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is a coalition of the UK's major environmental voluntary organisations working together for the conservation and protection of wildlife, landscape and the marine environment, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the natural and historic environment.

Link was delighted at the publication of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill and supports many of the proposals it contains. Link members have been closely engaged in the development of the marine and access aspects of the Bill, seeking to improve the provisions to ensure that the Bill delivers for marine nature conservation and public access. We are very keen to ensure that all sections of the Bill are carried forward and receive Royal Assent at the earliest opportunity.

The coastal access duty

Public benefit

We believe that the combination of a long distance coastal walking route with open access "spreading room" along side is an effective method of establishing improved access around the English coast and is one which works with coastal change. In particular, we welcome recognition of the role that the natural environment plays in contributing to the quality of experience enjoyed by the user.

Link believes that improved public access will not only allow a greater understanding of the natural and historic environment but will also bring benefits to the rural economy and coastal areas. Walking for recreation is enormously popular in the UK, with walkers in the countryside making a significant contribution to the rural economy. Coastal walking and sustainable tourism plays a key part in maintaining and improving coastal communities. The South West Coastal Path is a good example of what a well planned and maintained coastal path can do for the rural economy - the path generates an estimated £300 million a year for the region's economy and plays a major role in promoting the region to tourists, both nationally and internationally.

Public access alongside wildlife and habitats

At the same time as supporting the Government's vision, we call on them to seek improvements to the landscape and wildlife quality on the coast. We recognise that some

habitats and species found in coastal locations are sensitive to disturbance or interference from human related activity and will need restrictions and exclusion from the right of access. Of main concern to Link are estuaries, flats and saltmarsh, which in many cases unrestricted open access will be inappropriate.

A greater control on dogs

Link did have significant concerns in relation to the Government's proposals with respect to dogs, and that the CRoW requirement to keep dogs on a short lead during the bird breeding season and in the vicinity of livestock would be removed in favour of a general understanding that dogs would have to be kept under close control.

Link is very supportive of recent undertakings given by Defra, that a new requirement will be made to require a keeper of a dog to have it under effective control. That is, to keep the dog on access land, and on a lead; or, if not on a lead, to keep the dog in sight, remain aware of its actions, and to have reason to be confident that the dog will return to him reliably and on command. Where it is important for the dog to be kept in close proximity to its keeper, such as in the vicinity of colonies of ground-nesting birds, then we would expect temporary restrictions or exclusions to be made, limiting access to the area of the colony, and requiring that dogs be kept on leads in its vicinity.

It is proposed that these requirements be introduced as part of the Section 3A Order, to be made under CRoW that would have the effect of introducing a statutory right of access to the coastal margin.

The coastal access scheme

Improved Access alongside Environmental and habitat benefits

Alongside improved access, we wish to see the delivery of the wider environmental benefits implied in the Government's original vision. In particular, we would like to see steps taken to deliver environmental enhancement and habitat restoration programmes as part of Natural England's implementation scheme. With many highlighting that the current level of funding proposed may not be sufficient, we would like to see extra funding being provided for both long term management and to allow Natural England to deliver such enhancement and habitat restoration programmes.

Localised consultation and implementation via reports

We welcome the localised nature of delivery and believe this will give the flexibility needed. However, we believe that other interested parties from a user, conservation and land use perspective should have a fuller role in the early stages of the process to enable a more balanced approach to the setting of the route and spreading room.

Erosion and Coastal Line Change

Coastlines are subject to erosion and change and, as a result, public rights of way can disappear or become unsafe over time. We believe that this legislation and the approach being proposed in the coastal access scheme takes this into account at the same time as taking steps to identify the likelihood of change when determining the alignment of the route and its associated spreading room.

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