



Sanddallied anemone (*Actinothoe* sp.)
© Rohan Holt

We are delighted that the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act is finally here. Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link), together with our sister Link organisations - Wales Environment Link, Scottish Environment LINK and the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force - have campaigned for ten long years for comprehensive marine legislation to protect our seas and enable recovery of damaged areas.

The seas around the UK are among the most productive and wildlife-rich on Earth. They have an amazing array of habitats - from colourful reefs, to seagrass meadows and undersea cliffs and caves - which host an incredible diversity of marine wildlife.

The UK's seas support thousands of marine plants and animals, from tiny corals to massive basking sharks and whales. Our seas also support many thousands of jobs in many different industries, are an important part of our cultural heritage and bring enjoyment to millions of people each year.



Common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*),
Pembrokeshire © Caroline Weir

But our seas and their wildlife are under increasing pressure and marine biodiversity is declining.

Over the centuries they have been taken for granted, regarded as a limitless resource. Fragile habitats have been destroyed, once-common species are now on the brink of extinction, fish stocks have collapsed and marine resources have been depleted. The ocean processes that are as important as the rainforests in mitigating climate change are also threatened. Less than 0.001% of the UK's seas are currently fully protected from all damaging activities.

With the 2009 UK Marine and Coastal Access Act we have a fantastic opportunity to turn this situation around. This is a 'once in a generation' opportunity to manage our seas sustainably, to protect marine ecosystems and allow them to recover and thrive again.

Link's Vision for the future of our seas is for -

“Healthy, well-managed seas, where wildlife is flourishing and ecosystems are protected, connected and thriving”

The UK Marine and Coastal Access Act finally provides the legislative tools that the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly Government need to take real action towards our Vision. Scotland's and Northern Ireland's Marine Bills will complete the jigsaw. **Now is the time for action.**

The UK Marine and Coastal Access Act includes five key areas that will help us to achieve our marine Vision

1 A network of Marine Protected Areas

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are at the heart of marine nature conservation. We are therefore delighted that the Act requires the designation of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) as part of a UK network of MPAs. This aspect of the legislation is of paramount importance in the delivery of our Vision. It is therefore vital that:

- An ecologically coherent network of MPAs, including a sufficient number of highly protected sites, is designated by 2012
- MPAs protect examples of the whole range of common or 'typical' habitats and species found in healthy seas, as well as rare, threatened or vulnerable wildlife
- MPAs have strong, proactive conservation objectives, and are well managed and effectively enforced
- The network boosts the health of the marine environment as a whole, allowing damaged, degraded areas to recover and building resilience against current and future pressures



Corkscrew wrasse (*Crenilabrus melops*) © Paul Naylor

2 Modernised inshore fisheries management

The Act strengthens the approach to inshore fisheries management in England and Wales. A change of name for the marine fisheries management bodies is not enough. Link wants to see:

- Fisheries managers embrace their new powers and responsibilities to deliver sustainable fish stocks and healthy ecosystems
- A sustainable industry that supports long-term livelihoods and promotes and delivers conservation outcomes
- Full engagement by inshore fisheries managers with a wide range of stakeholders to deliver sustainable inshore fisheries

3 Marine Management Organisation (MMO)

Link welcomes the creation of the MMO as the centre of marine expertise. We look to it to:

- Be a leading body for the delivery of sustainable development of UK seas
- Work with the equivalent bodies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to ensure marine ecosystems are managed in an integrated way
- Engage all stakeholders and sectors equally
- Produce the new marine plans for English and adjacent offshore waters, and regulate marine activities under the reformed licensing regime to deliver sustainable development
- Be a driver for strategic marine data collection and make that data available to all
- Play a leading role in advising on decisions regarding major infrastructure projects, which are in or affect the marine environment



Basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*)
© Charles Hood

4 Marine planning

For the first time, the Act will enable marine activities to be planned in a strategic way. The new system must ensure:

- A forward looking, comprehensive UK-wide Marine Policy Statement (MPS) jointly agreed by the UK Government and devolved administrations, to guide decisions in the marine environment
- An ecosystem-based approach to marine planning that ensures space for wildlife
- Thorough appraisal of the MPS and marine plans to ensure that developments do not push the natural environment to or beyond its limits
- Plans for all UK waters not just selected areas, particularly once parallel legislation is in place for inshore waters in Scotland and Northern Ireland
- A system that works well across marine and coastal boundaries between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and that integrates land-use plans with marine plans



Jewel anemones (*Corynactis viridis*)
© Paul Naylor

5 Improved marine licensing system

The reformed licensing system that will streamline and simplify decision-making in our seas must ensure:

- A strategic approach to decision-making, in conformity with the marine planning system
- Greater transparency, clarity and openness about decisions
- Greater safeguards for the marine environment



Hermit crab (*Pagurus bernhardus*)
in eelgrass © Paul Naylor



How will we ensure our Vision is achieved?

The passing of the Act is only the first step towards achieving our Vision. Link will press hard to ensure swift and effective implementation of the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act by the UK Government. We have a wealth of experience in looking after our seas and marine wildlife. We will therefore continue to work with government and other marine stakeholders to ensure that the legislation delivers better marine management and real benefits for marine wildlife and people.

Joined-up action is needed by all four UK administrations to deliver our vision. Link's sister organisations will be pressing hard for implementation of the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act by the devolved administrations, as well as campaigning for strong marine legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland to complement the UK Act. We look to all four administrations working together to deliver our Vision for the future of our seas.

Razorbill (Alca torda), Isle of May © Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

This leaflet is supported by the following Link members



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Our Vision for the Future of our Seas

“Healthy, well-managed seas, where wildlife is flourishing and ecosystems are protected, connected and thriving”



Sunlit shallows, Wembury, Devon © Paul Naylor

Wildlife and
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