

Parliamentary Briefing

Wildlife and Countryside Link's views on the Ministerial Statement on the creation of a Network of Marine Protected Areas

16 March 2010

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) welcomes the publication of the Ministerial Statement laid in the House on the 11 March 2010.

This Statement forms an important part of the suite of documents that set out the principles that Government expects the four English regional stakeholder projects to follow in selecting sites to be designated to create an ecologically coherent network of MCZs.

Link believes that the MCZ network must be ecologically coherent, must include highly protected sites, and must be designated based on sound science.

Link welcomes:

- The inclusion of the seven principles which underpin the design of the network which are based on the **principles of ecological coherence** discussed within OSPAR. However, it is very important that all of these principles are adhered to in the designation of the network.
- Reiteration of Government's commitment to **including some sites (or parts of sites) in the MCZ network that will be "highly protected"** where "no extractive, depositional or other damaging activities are allowed".
- The imperative for **coordination across the UK** to ensure that the resulting network is ecologically coherent across all devolved countries.

Link has outstanding concerns regarding:

- A **lack of clarity regarding the primacy of scientific considerations in the MCZ designation process**. The clear commitment that **socio-economic information should only be taken into account as a secondary consideration for MCZ identification and selection, and only when doing so will not compromise the ability to achieve an ecologically coherent network**, is missing from this document. This commitment was made very clearly in the debates during the passage of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill and in the Minister's letter to MPs (of 22 October 2009) that was laid in the House Library. Such ambiguity on this matter is misleading for stakeholders. In particular, it is vital that the relative priority of scientific and socio-economic considerations is made clear to the regional MCZ selection projects and their stakeholders.
- The statement that **conservation objectives will include "maintenance of existing habitats" is not qualified**. This objective is acceptable where such sites are already in favourable condition or conservation status. However, this assumption is not clarified in the Ministerial Statement. Simply aiming to maintain a damaged site in its current condition will not help deliver an

ecologically coherent network of MCZs or achieve the UK's objectives for the marine environment.

- The definitions provided for the first two of the principles underpinning the MPA network design, 'representativity' and 'replication', which have a **limited scope covering protection for "all the major habitat types" only**. Link believes that the network must be comprehensive i.e. the principles must ensure conservation of representative and replicated samples of all biodiversity (including all species and habitats, as well as genetic, population, community and ecosystem biodiversity), across their full geographic range.
- The missed opportunity to highlight the potential of an ecologically coherent network of MPAs to make an active contribution to climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience building through for example, restoration and protection of habitats which act as carbon sinks.

Next steps:

While the Ministerial Statement is a high-level statement, we expect the detailed ecological guidance being produced by the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies for the four regional MCZ projects to be specific enough to ensure a consistent approach to network design and MCZ identification and selection, consequently, limiting the scope for different interpretation of the requirements within each region which could impact on the achievement of an ecologically coherent network.

This briefing is supported by the following organisations:

- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
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- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
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