

Wildlife and Countryside Link Briefing

Ministerial Statement on the creation of a network of Marine Protected Areas

Section 123 (subsection 6) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act requires the appropriate authority to prepare a statement setting out the principles which it will apply in designating Marine Conservation Zones to help create the UK network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). It is a requirement to lay the statement before the appropriate legislature and it must be reviewed, and if necessary updated, periodically. Wildlife and Countryside Link welcomes this requirement and believes that the statement must:

- As a minimum, **meet the Minister's assurances in the letter to MPs** [of 22 October 2009] that was laid in the House Library.
- **Clearly articulate the Government's aims** for designating a network of MPAs, as set out in Defra's draft MPA Strategy: *"To recover and protect the richness of our marine environment and wildlife through the development of a strong, ecologically coherent and well managed network of marine protected areas, that is well understood and supported by all sea users, by 2012"*
- Include a strong commitment to the inclusion in the network of an adequate number of **sites that are highly protected** (irrespective of what they are called), from which all damaging activities are excluded.
- Recognise the **primacy of ecological and conservation considerations** in the development of the network (based on science).
- Recognise **socio-economic factors as secondary considerations** in the designation process, which may only be taken into account when doing so will not compromise the ability to achieve an ecologically coherent network of sites.
- Include **ecological coherence network design principles** that fully meet the objectives of those agreed under **OSPAR**, and require that all of them be met:
 1. **Representativity** – the MPA network should encompass representative samples of all biodiversity (including all species and habitats as well as genetic, population, community and ecosystem biodiversity);
 2. **Replication** of all conservation features across their full geographic range;
 3. **Viability** – the network must include self-sustaining, dispersed sites of sufficient size to ensure species and habitats continue through natural cycles of variation;
 4. **Adequacy** – the MPA network must be of adequate size to deliver its ecological objectives and ensure the ecological viability and integrity of populations, species and communities (the proportion of each feature included within the network must be sufficient to enable its long-term protection and/or recovery). Individual sites should be as large as possible and avoid dissecting conservation features. The network should also include sites which provide for protection for ecological processes which sustain ecosystem function;
 5. **Connectivity** – the network should maximise the connectivity between sites, sites should be placed at the mean dispersal distance of the species for which connectivity is required;
 6. **Level of protection** – a range of levels of protection in the network is possible. However, there must be a strong commitment in the statement to the role of highly protected sites. These sites must be included in the network to protect all vulnerable, rare or threatened features, to give the highest level of protection to examples of representative habitats, to

enable damaged or degraded features to recover fully and to act as important scientific benchmarks;

7. **Best available evidence** – the best available scientific information should be used to design the network. Lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing site selection and instead, in such cases the precautionary principle should be adopted.
- Endorse the need for a **bioregional approach** to the identification and establishment of an ecological coherent network.
 - Recognise the need for **coordination across the UK** to ensure that an ecologically coherent network is designated throughout UK waters.

This briefing is supported by the following organisations:

- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- International Fund for Animal Welfare
- Marine Conservation Society
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- The Wildlife Trusts
- WWF - UK

