

An underwater photograph of a vibrant coral reef. The foreground is dominated by large, rounded, orange and yellow coral structures. In the mid-ground, a blue and orange striped fish swims towards the right. The background shows darker, more complex coral structures and seaweed. The overall lighting is bright, highlighting the colors of the marine life.

The last living wilderness a future for our seas

Wildlife & Countryside
Link is calling for
comprehensive
legislation to achieve
better protection for
marine wildlife and
effective management
of our seas

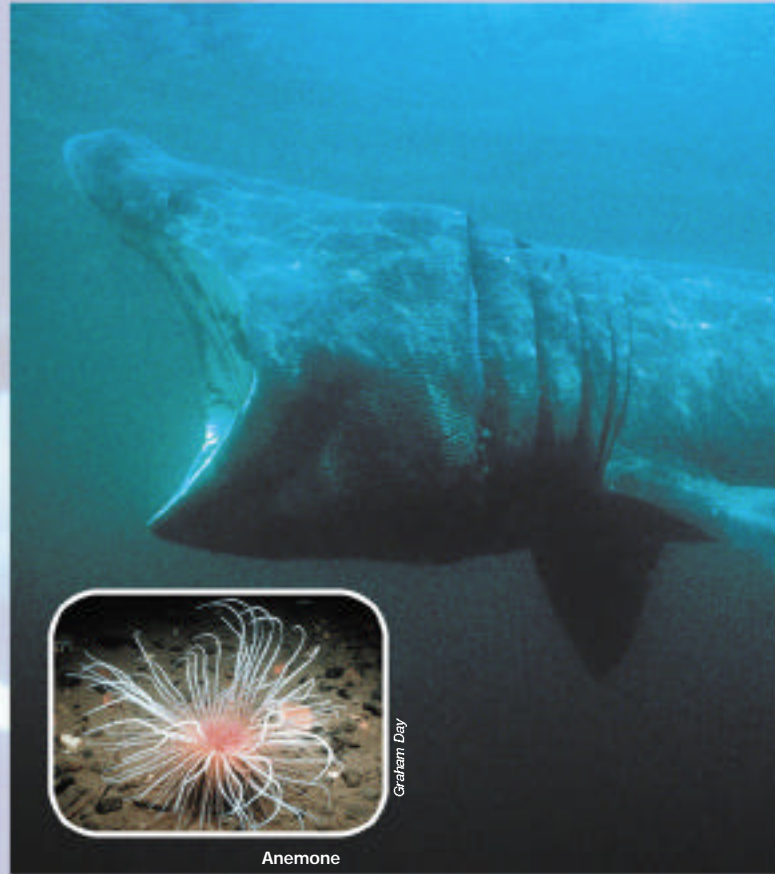
Wildlife and
Countryside

LINK 

The oceans and seas cover two thirds of the planet

They are perhaps our last great living wilderness. Britain's seas are no exception, rich in spectacular underwater habitats and species, home to diverse and exotic creatures: bizarre deep sea fish, sharks, leaping whales and dolphins, fragile sea anemones, sponges and cold water corals, as enthralling as their tropical counterparts. Over 40,000 species, fifty per cent of the UK's wildlife, are found at sea. Our estuaries and coasts provide a vital chain of migration sites for seabirds and wildfowl, en route between their breeding and overwintering grounds.

"On the last day, we went out with a local man in his boat... Those fifteen minutes sitting at peace on the sea's surface were a revelation to me. The place was as busy as Piccadilly. Porpoises circled us, whales swam across our bows and puffins, guillemots, shags and gannets flew past us at every point of the compass with an earnest sense of purpose. It was a salutary lesson that there is as much life in the water as there is on land." **Robin Cook**, *The Point of Departure* p.186. Published by Simon and Schuster 2003. ISBN No: 0743252551



Yet our seas are in crisis

Our marine species and habitats are under pressure: Our current national legislation to protect wildlife extends only 12 nautical miles out to sea, and there is no adequate system for designating and protecting marine areas. Marine industries are moving further and further offshore, and it is crucial that we protect species and sites throughout our territorial sea.

Our fish stocks are in decline: Seen as the last of the hunter-gatherers, fishermen used regularly to catch fish bigger than a man. Today you'd be lucky to catch one as big as your arm...and thousands are thrown back over the side each year, wasted and dead.



Bird caught in oil spill

There is no integrated legislation or forward plan



Abbotts Hall Farm showing sea lavender

Chris Gomershall/WWF



Dublin bay prawn

Bernard Picton

Basking shark filter feeding

There has never been a systematic, co-ordinated approach or overall vision for the UK's marine resource. The wide range of marine regulatory and policy initiatives introduced in the last thirty years has been developed sector by sector, in response to specific events or legal obligations. This array of approaches to planning and managing activities results in conflicts between sea users and makes it impossible to assess how the activities combine to impact upon declining marine biodiversity and cultural heritage. Increasing levels of devolved management of marine matters add further complexity. Even the Government agrees that there are too many fingers in the pie, too many differing approaches from too many Government departments and no way for them to come together.

"Our seas are becoming a more crowded place in every sense of the word" **Elliot Morley MP, Minister for the Environment**, in his evidence to the EFRA Select Committee, Sixth Report of session 2003-2004. HC76 Ev 120.

We need a new approach

In order to save this marine wilderness on our doorstep, Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is calling for comprehensive legislation to achieve better protection for marine wildlife and effective management of our seas, to benefit both the environment and sea users. Holistic and wide-ranging reform is needed, which must include:

- 1 a systematic and coordinated approach to the governance of the sea, to protect our biological and cultural heritage and better manage marine resources
- 1 greater, properly enforced protection for marine wildlife, including identification of protected areas
- 1 a spatial planning system to enable strategic and integrated management of the seas.

To deliver comprehensive marine legislation a coordinated approach will be needed from Westminster in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Executive.



Black-tailed godwit

Jean Edwards

"Current arrangements for controlling development in the coastal waters are complex and piecemeal" (**Lord Falconer, Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration**, DEFRA Press Release, 'Over 44,000 marine species to be safeguarded by UK Seas Strategy', 1 May 2002).



Bernard Picton

Grey seal

Why now?

The time for political action is ripe: a large number of MPs from all Parties have signed motions calling for better laws, and MPs and Peers have repeatedly made the case for stronger legislation during debates in Parliament; MPs on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee concluded that "there is a pressing need to update and streamline the legislative and institutional framework governing marine environmental protection"; and the Government itself has acknowledged the need for urgent action to tackle the problems facing Britain's seas and coasts.

However, actions speak louder than words and Link is now seeking urgent commitments to new legislation.

Time for action

Dolphins
Charles Hood WWF

The marine environment has been taken for granted for generations. Our seas and coastline provide food for millions, work for thousands and pleasure for hundreds of thousands. If we are to continue to enjoy this priceless heritage, it is time to overhaul, modernise and integrate the 100 or so different pieces of legislation, rules and regulations - some of them more than 200 years old - which govern the seas. It's time for action to save this great wilderness that is the source of delights from sea fans to deep sea sponges, whale watching to windsurfing, cod and chips to the Great British summer holiday. We are proud of our history as a maritime nation, but we have neglected the seas for far too long.

"The government is committed to improving marine conservation, and to promoting the sustainable use of the natural resources the oceans offer", **Rt. Hon Margaret Beckett MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, DEFRA,** at WWF's Edinburgh Summit, October 2001

For more information on Link's campaign please log on to our website www.wcl.org.uk or contact Annie Smith at Link on 020 7820 8600 or at annie.smith@wcl.org.uk

This document is supported by the following members of Wildlife and Countryside Link:

