



Press release

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Marine Bill weighs anchor

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link), a powerful alliance of conservation groups, today welcomed the publication of the government's consultation on its marine bill, as the first concrete step on the way to a long-awaited marine act, but called for legislation to follow as quickly as possible.

"The government's promise, in its last General Election manifesto, to introduce a new marine bill was a clear acknowledgement that current marine conservation legislation does not work," said Ben Stafford, Chairman of the Link Marine Campaign. "Currently marine wildlife and marine cultural heritage are not properly protected and there is no coordinated marine spatial planning system to manage the range of activities at sea."

"The marine bill provides a unique opportunity to address these shortcomings, by putting in place marine protected areas, and establishing a new marine spatial planning system. However, consultation is no substitute for legislation, and we hope the discussions over the next few months will be followed quickly by a full marine bill in Parliament."

One of Link's key demands is for a network of marine protected areas, which should encompass a representative range of habitats and species found in our waters. These must include nationally important sites for marine wildlife, not just those of European significance. Our seas are of great importance for a whole range of marine creatures, including seabirds, dynamic mammals such as whales, dolphins and seals, and rare and unusual fish and cold-water corals.

Ben Stafford added: "Link recognises that the government wants to consult widely on what should be in the bill, although we do have a sense of déjà vu, as these matters have been discussed many times, and through a range of reviews. We hope that the recommendations of the government's own Review of Marine Nature Conservation, which reported in 2004, will be foremost in Ministers' minds. That review recommended the establishment of a representative network of marine protected areas, and delivery of this will be the key to whether the bill is a success or failure. The 8.4 million members of Link organisations will be watching the consultation process with interest."

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"Bringing voluntary organisations in the UK together to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside"

Chair: Hilary Allison, Director: Alexia Wellbelove

Wildlife and Countryside Link

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Editor's notes

- Wildlife and Countryside Link is a coalition of the UK's major environmental non-governmental organisations. Leading members of the Link marine campaign include the Marine Conservation Society; the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society; The Wildlife Trusts and WWF-UK, with other members including Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust; the Council for British Archaeology; the Herpetological Conservation Trust; Marine Connection; the Shark Trust; the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the Zoological Society of London.
- On March 9 2005 wildlife campaigners from over 200 parliamentary constituencies – representing almost one third of the UK - travelled to Westminster to urge their MPs to back new legislation to protect sea life.
- In the 2003-4 parliamentary session, 315 MPs from all parties signed an Early Day Motion (EDM) calling for comprehensive legislation to protect the marine environment, making it the third most signed EDM of the session.
- Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is necessary to deliver an ecosystem-based approach to management of activities at sea. Link believes that MSP can offer numerous benefits for industry and government; for example, it should allow for greater certainty about where industries could develop, helping to avoid conflicts between different economic interests, or between industry and nature conservation. MSP should also benefit nature conservation by allowing proper consideration of the combined impacts of all activities on marine ecosystems.
- NGOs in the devolved countries are campaigning for similar legislative commitments from the devolved administrations in parallel with (and not subsequent to) the Westminster bill, and the Government will need to work closely with all the constituent parts of the UK as it frames its bill.

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