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Parliamentary Briefing

Marine and Coastal Access Bill

A requirement to produce the Marine Policy Statement

The organisations listed above are closely engaged in the Marine and Coastal Access Bill. We are also members of Wildlife and Countryside Link's Marine Task Force¹, which has been campaigning for several years for improvements in marine conservation.

Background

There should be a requirement, not just a power, on the policy authorities to prepare and adopt a Marine Policy Statement (MPS). Without an obligation, the MPS (and the associated marine plans) may not be produced and the Bill will not implement any of the strategic and overarching benefits anticipated from a new marine planning system.

The difficulty is who to put the duty on, because clause 43 states that, an MPS can be prepared by the Secretary of State alone or with one or more of the Devolved Administrations. Therefore, a duty on the marine policy authorities to produce an MPS jointly would be a much stronger commitment than that currently agreed to by the four UK Administrations. However, it would be challenging to get agreement on this from all Administrations.

The Government's response, "*Taking forward the Marine Bill*", to the Joint Committee's Report on the Draft Marine Bill stated that it was its "*clear intention to create an MPS within two years of Royal Assent, followed by a series of marine plans*" (response to Recommendation 33). We would like further reassurance from Government during the Committee Stage in the House of Lords regarding that timetable, rather than putting a specific date on the face of the Marine & Coastal Access Act.

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¹ Wildlife and Countryside Link is a coalition of the UK's major environmental organisations working together for the conservation and protection of wildlife, the countryside and the marine environment.