

A Future for our Seas

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is calling for comprehensive legislation to achieve better protection for marine wildlife and effective management of our seas. Achieving these improvements will require coordinated action at UK level and by the devolved administrations. This paper has been developed in consultation with colleagues in sister Link organisations – Wales Environment Link, Scottish Environment LINK, and Northern Ireland Environment Link – who will be calling for specific changes to improve the devolved management of the marine environment.

The right governance of our seas

Legal protection for our precious marine species, habitats and heritage trails far behind that on land, in spite of the fact that our seas suffer the impacts of a wide range of human activities – from fishing and the extraction industries to shipping and recreation. Link is calling for detailed changes to the law to redress this imbalance. One of the major problems which must be tackled is that management of activities at sea is spread across a number of authorities, which are guided by their own priorities rather than by any overarching marine policy. This means it is difficult to assess and address the cumulative effects on the marine environment of the wide range of activities which affect it. For any new marine legislation to be effective, it will need to sit within an overarching framework for marine governance.

What is needed?

We need a properly resourced, overarching framework for marine governance to provide standards for consultation and decision making about activities at sea. While changes to government policy will contribute to the establishment of such a framework, new legislation will also be needed.

How can the law help?

Link believes a coordinated approach to the governance of our marine environment must be based on the following statutory building blocks:

- A statutory duty of care on all government bodies to protect the environment and human health, whilst promoting good stewardship of marine resources;
- The creation of a unifying marine planning system to manage the demands of existing and proposed activities affecting the marine environment (see Link's briefing '*A planning system for our seas*'); and
- A clearly stated statutory purpose for the laws to deliver an effective marine framework (see Link's briefing '*What future do we want for our marine environment?*').



What policy changes are needed?

In addition to changes in the law, proper governance for the marine environment will require:

- Clear identification of Ministers, and others, in each UK country, with responsibility for the marine environment, its sensitive management, the conservation of marine resources and the protection of features of ecological and cultural interest;
- Clarification of the roles of the statutory agencies with respect to the marine environment;
- Powers and structures to allow local input to, and participation in, marine and coastal planning and local resource management;
- Transparency in decision-making which affects the marine environment; and
- The integration of the precautionary principle into marine management.

For the Government to meet its commitment to apply an ecosystem-based management approach to our seas, proper marine governance must be coupled with comprehensive and detailed reforms to the law to protect the UK's diverse marine wildlife and cultural heritage, while providing sustainable solutions for our marine industries and activities.

For more information

To receive further copies of this or other Link marine briefings or the *Marine Charter*, or for further information on any of the issues raised, please contact Annie Smith at Wildlife and Countryside Link: 020 7820 8600 / annie.smith@wcl.org.uk.

The following Link Marine briefings are also currently available:

- *Act before it's too late;*
- *What future do we want for our marine environment?;*
- *Protecting our nationally important marine wildlife sites;*
- *Better protection for marine wildlife;* and
- *A planning system for our seas.*

To receive information on Scottish Environment LINK's parallel campaign for marine reform, please contact Calum Duncan on 0131 2266360 / scotland@mcsuk.org.