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Queen's speech must include Marine Bill

Wildlife and Countryside Link, the powerful alliance of conservation groups, is calling on the Government to include a Draft Marine Bill in the Queen's speech on Tuesday.

The UK's seas are a massive economic resource. However, there is great concern about the impacts of human activity on marine wildlife, as scientific evidence shows increasing disturbance and threats to it from inappropriate development, pollution – including from noise – and damaging fishing practices.

The Government committed itself to introducing marine legislation in its manifesto. But no timeline has been given and Wildlife and Countryside Link fear further delays will result in long-term damage to our marine environment.

Ben Stafford, Chairman of the Link Marine Task Force said: "UK waters host an amazing array of over 44,000 plant and animal species, more than 50 per cent of Britain's wildlife, yet existing laws are failing to protect them from poor management of human activities."

The UK still lacks a marine spatial planning system. This means that human activities are not managed in a joined-up way and the protection of marine wildlife is being neglected. This pressure is set to intensify with the expansion of the marine renewable industry adding to demands from existing activities such as offshore oil and gas, aggregate dredging, fishing and shipping.

Ben Stafford said: "Our marine environment provides the basis for many important economic activities. It is essential that the government safeguards the health of our marine environment for future generations. A Marine Bill needs to include a new planning system for activities at sea and more effective protection for the UK's sea life."

There have been a number of ministerial statements of support for a Marine Bill from the Prime Minister downwards as well as manifesto commitments from the three main parties, and a pledge in the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Five Year Strategy (for quotes see Notes for Editors).

Link believes that coordinated planning of our marine resources, including a network of Marine Protected Areas, will benefit industry as well as wildlife as it will enable businesses to plan for the long-term, thereby reducing their risks.

Ends



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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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MARINE CONSERVATION
SOCIETY



Notes to Editors:

- The Wildlife and Countryside Link marine lobby group is made up of the Marine Conservation Society; the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society; The Wildlife Trusts and WWF-UK.
- The marine campaign is also supported by Buglife – the Invertebrate Conservation Trust; the Council for British Archaeology; the Herpetological Conservation Trust; the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.
- Link wants legislation to include:
 - better protection for marine species, nationally important marine wildlife sites and heritage sites;
 - a marine spatial planning system which would help strike a balance between different activities, allowing some to be prioritised in different areas;
 - reform of inshore fisheries management.
 - Integrated, ecosystem approach to marine management

Supportive political quotes:

Rt. Hon. Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister, 14 September 2004

Over the coming months we will take forward the wider sustainable development and environment agenda ... For example, on the marine environment, I believe there are strong arguments for a new approach to managing our seas, including a new Marine Bill.

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 9 February 2005.

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Parliamentary Committee questioned Margaret Beckett. Paddy Tipping MP (Labour) asked "When might we see a draft marine bill" to which she replied "I would hope later this year".

4 April 2005

When asked by *The Guardian* newspaper: "If you are re-elected, what single piece of legislation would you like to help enact?" Margaret Beckett replied: "A Marine Act, to enable better planning of all sea uses, including wildlife and industry."

Elliot Morley MP, Minister for the Environment, 13 January 2005

There is widespread support for new legislation to manage and protect the marine environment better. This is why we have announced in the DEFRA five-year strategy that we will introduce a marine Bill to deliver our vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

We want to rationalise it [marine management] and move towards a much stronger ecosystem-based approach.

Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 15 March 2005

Across a range of environmental issues – from soil erosion to the depletion of marine stocks, from water scarcity to air pollution – it is clear now not just that economic activity is their cause, but that these problems in themselves threaten future economic activity and growth.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' recently published Five Year Strategy

“The Government is committed to introduce in the next Parliament a bill to ensure greater protection of marine resources, and simplify regulation, so that all uses of the sea, including for example wind farms, can develop sustainably and harmoniously.”

Labour Party manifesto 2005:

Through a Marine Act, we will introduce a new framework for the seas, based on marine spatial planning, that balances conservation, energy and resource needs. To obtain best value from different uses of our valuable marine resources, we must maintain and protect the ecosystems on which they depend.

Liberal Democrat manifesto 2005:

Save the UK's fish and marine environment:

We will seek early further reform of the Common Fisheries Policy to give local fishermen and other stakeholders a real say in the management of their own regional waters. We will introduce a Marine Act to create a marine planning system to resolve problems of conflicting uses of the sea and sea bed. This would establish conservation zones for highly sensitive areas and strengthen protection of commercial fish stocks, dolphins, porpoises and other endangered marine wildlife.

Conservative Party manifesto 2005:

Introduce a Marine Conservation Bill to provide a coherent and sustainable planning framework that protects marine habitats while enabling beneficial developments such wave and tidal power.

Early Day Motion, 2003-4 parliamentary session

315 MPs from all parties signed an Early Day Motion calling for comprehensive legislation to protect the marine environment – this was the third most signed EDM of that session.

Review of Marine Nature Conservation, July 2004

The government-led Review of Marine Nature Conservation published 16 recommendations. These included a trial of marine spatial planning, the recognition and conservation of a network of important sites and the complete overhaul of marine species protection legislation.

- Wales Environment Link, Scottish Environment Link and the Marine Task Force Northern Ireland will be urging their respective governments to work closely with Westminster to develop UK marine and will be lobbying for more effective marine management in each country.

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