

Link Marine Charter Parliamentary Briefing

What is the Marine Charter?

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together 44 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside. Taken together our members have the support of over 8 million people in the UK and manage over 750,000 hectares of land.

The Marine Charter (www.marinecharter.org.uk) is an initiative of Link's Marine Working Group aimed at reiterating the strong cross-party support for a representative and ecologically coherent network of well managed Marine Protected Areas in UK seas by 2016. This network will be made up of sites of international importance (Special Areas of Conservation for habitats and species, Special Protection Areas for birds), and sites of national importance (Marine Conservation Zones in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and nature conservation Marine Protected Areas in Scotland as well as intertidal Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ramsar sites).

While the national components are being delivered separately by each of the UK administrations, the development of an ecologically coherent network is a UK commitment, requiring UK Government coordination.

Why do we need a network of Marine Protected Areas?

This network is essential to halt, and then reverse, the alarming deterioration of marine habitats and species. A growing body of scientific evidence, including from the Government's own assessment, Charting Progress 2¹, demonstrates that marine ecosystems are in decline as a result of pressure from human activities^{2,3,4}. Equally, there is firm evidence that the establishment of effectively managed Marine Protected Areas can bring about recovery of marine wildlife, whether measured in terms of variety or abundance of species⁵.

The network will also result in significant social and economic benefits derived from marine goods

and services which will continue to be realised for generations to come. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment calculated the contribution of marine biodiversity in the UK alone to be £1.7bn per year. The Natural Capital Committee's second State of Nature report highlighted the key role that Marine Protected Areas can play in fostering the kind of recovery required to ensure that the full benefits of a healthy marine environment are realised. For example, the report suggested that the restoration of marine fisheries to historic stock levels seen from the 1930s-70s, in part through the introduction of Marine Protected Areas, could be worth up to £1.4bn per year of additional value.

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment made clear the need for a network of Marine Protected Areas, observing that, while the UK's seas are important to people's quality of life, they are significantly less well protected than terrestrial sites. Indeed, of the 652 Special Areas of Conservation in the UK, only 108 are coastal or marine, and only 16 of these are offshore. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment also emphasised that seafloor habitats are the foundations of the vast array of goods and services that our seas provide⁶. The species and habitats requiring protection are the building blocks of our marine ecosystems, providing direct use benefits for sustainable fishermen, anglers and divers, as well as recognised non-use benefits to wider society.

- 1 Charting Progress 2, Crown Copyright, 2010, <http://chartingprogress.defra.gov.uk/>
- 2 International Earth system expert workshop on ocean stresses and impacts. Summary report. IPSO, Oxford, June 2011
- 3 UK National Ecosystem Assessment, June 2011, <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>
- 4 Jackson, J.B.C. (2008) Ecological extinction and evolution in the brave new ocean. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science. Vol 105 suppl. 1 pp 11458-11465
- 5 Lester et al.: Biological effects within marine reserves Mar Ecol Prog Ser 384: 33-46, 2009
- 6 UK National Ecosystem Assessment, June 2011, <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>

Managing the network

If the network of Marine Protected Areas is to be effective in reversing the decline in marine wildlife, improving resilience and promoting recovery of marine ecosystems, then damaging activities need to be excluded, but low impact sustainable activities may continue where consistent with the conservation objectives of the site.

We believe community and local stakeholder involvement is the foundation for site management discussions. However it is vital that the eventual management mechanisms such decisions inform fulfil two key requirements: (a) that they are an effective means of achieving the conservation objective for the site, and (b) that they have statutory underpinning. Voluntary measures in isolation have repeatedly been proven not to work, to provide no legal recourse, to be highly time consuming and extremely expensive. Without some form of legal redress in enforcing these statutory conservation objectives, the good work and cooperation of many can be undermined, often irrevocably, by a minority, with no effective means of redress and creating little more than 'paper parks'.

Key to the management of small (<12metres) commercial fishing and charter vessels, near and within Marine Protected Areas, are Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems. We believe that these should be rolled out to all inshore vessels and we will be encouraging Government to assist fishermen by funding these. We believe this approach would be welcome by most of the inshore fleet. The system also contributes important information for integrated marine planning, wind-farm development/ co-location in addition to assisting with Marine Protected Area management.

Next Steps

The UK Government has committed to an additional two tranches of Marine Conservation Zones in Secretary of State waters in 2015 and 2016 and a further suite of Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation also needs to be designated, including for mobile species. We also

await further marine sites in devolved waters. In February 2014, Defra announced that it is considering 37 further Marine Conservation Zones for consultation in the second tranche in 2015, a move which we support providing the vast majority of the proposed 37 are designated. Government has made clear that these sites were selected to fill gaps in the network. Therefore any sites that are dropped will need to be replaced with alternative sites of equivalent ecological value. While the provision of greater detail on proposed sites and timeframes is welcome, it is critical that the lengthy period between this recent announcement and the formal consultation in January 2015 is focused on gathering additional scientific data that will help to inform the most effective management methods required to achieve the conservation goals of the sites. It cannot be considered an opportunity to reduce the number of sites that are formally consulted on.

Public support for a network

In the development of the landmark 2009 Marine and Coastal Access Act, more than 627,000 people supported the call for more Marine Protected Areas. Over 40,000 responded to the recent Defra consultation on the first tranche of Marine Conservation Zones – one of the largest ever responses to a Defra consultation. 350,000 signatures were delivered to Downing Street in July 2013 in support of this full network. Great public support for MPAs was also demonstrated to the devolved administrations.

What can Parliamentarians do?

Add your voice, by signing the Marine Charter, to the broad and substantial constituency who support the designation of an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas in UK seas.

To support the Marine Charter, email – marinecharter@wcl.org.uk

Names of supportive Parliamentarians will be displayed on the website, and updated throughout the year.



Further information, including more detail on the benefits of Marine Protected Areas and the development of the network, is available at www.marinecharter.org.uk