

Wildlife & Countryside Link is calling for comprehensive legislation to achieve better protection for marine wildlife and effective management of our seas

Marine Bill Bulletin

A Future for our Seas – What should the Marine Bill Contain?

October 2005

Why is a Bill needed?

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) has been campaigning for many years for comprehensive legislation to achieve better protection for marine wildlife and effective management of our seas. The UK's seas are extraordinarily rich in wildlife, harbouring more than 44,000 animal and plant species – over 50% of our biodiversity. But they are poorly protected compared to terrestrial wildlife, and under increasing pressure as offshore activities proliferate and climate change disturbs the marine ecosystem. New legislation is needed to bridge the gap between protection of wildlife on land and at sea, and to bring greater coherence to the planning of the many activities which take place in the marine environment.

The Marine Bill will be a once in a lifetime opportunity to improve the conservation and management of our seas, and your support for it will be crucial.

We have therefore welcomed the broad support for new marine legislation from all political parties, and we were particularly pleased to see the Government include a draft Marine Bill in its legislative programme for the current session of Parliament.

Over the coming months, Link will be producing a series of short Marine Bill Bulletins for parliamentarians, to let you know what our key priorities for the bill are, and how you can give much-needed parliamentary support to our Marine Campaign.

The Bill timetable

The inclusion of a draft Marine Bill in the legislative programme is only the first step in the process towards a full Marine Act. The Government has indicated that it intends to publish the draft bill in the later stages of the current session, and that introduction of the full bill will follow once Ministers have considered the outcome of both a public consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny of the

draft. Link recognises that it will take time to get the preparation of such a wide-ranging piece of legislation right, and that rushing the early part of the process could lead to a less comprehensive bill. However, this should not be taken as an excuse for undue delay – we are urging Government to introduce a full Marine Bill to Parliament as soon as possible.

What should the Marine Bill contain?

In its announcement of the legislative programme for this session, the Government set out an encouragingly broad scope for the Marine Bill. It will include: a new, streamlined system for planning and managing activities in the marine environment; extended scope for the protection and restoration of marine species and habitats, and appropriate powers to achieve this; simplification of the arrangements governing consenting development in coastal and marine waters; and updating of the existing, piecemeal legislative framework (for more detail see www.commonleader.co.uk/output/page1232.asp).

Link has similar priorities for the bill, but we know that the devil will be in the detail. We want to see:

- **The identification and designation of a network of nationally important marine sites, including a series of highly protected marine reserves.** The UK has existing legal obligations to protect wildlife sites which are of European importance, but fulfilment of these obligations would not protect the many nationally important sites – the equivalent of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest on land.
- **Stronger measures to protect wildlife at sea**, wherever it is. Much current wildlife legislation is geared towards the terrestrial environment, and will therefore need to be modified to reflect the different character and needs of the marine environment, and the threats which face its wildlife (e.g. noise pollution).

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This bulletin is supported by the following organisations:



- **Marine Spatial Planning.** We welcome the Government's recognition of the need for better planning of the many activities happening at sea. Such a system should, we believe, be good news for both wildlife and maritime industries. Strategic marine spatial planning would allow for greater certainty about where industry could develop, helping to avoid conflicts between different economic interests, or between industry and nature conservation. As part of the process, it is vital that areas of high biodiversity importance are identified where particular kinds of development or activity would be inappropriate.
- **Reforms to the legislation governing inshore fisheries** – Link believes that a new legislative framework is needed to ensure the inshore fishery is managed in a proactive and sustainable manner.

We will provide more information about these issues, and others, in future bulletins. Detailed briefing papers are available on the Link website (www.wcl.org.uk).

Jurisdiction

The Marine Bill must legislate for all waters around England from High Water Mark to the outer limits of our jurisdiction (mostly 200 nautical miles). In Scotland and Northern Ireland, responsibility for many of the areas likely to be in the bill is devolved to the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly within 12 nautical miles. In Wales, the Government of Wales Act 1998 defines Wales as including the sea to the seaward limit of the territorial sea (12 nautical miles) and this bill must allow for powers for the Welsh Assembly Government to this limit. 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.

Public support

Members of the Link organisations have demonstrated their support for a new Marine Bill. Following our successful lobby of Parliament in March this year, many members have sent thousands of postcards, petitions and pledges of support to government. On World Oceans Day, 8 June, we presented more than 165,000 signatures in support of a Marine Bill to 10 Downing Street.

How you can help

MPs can sign Early Day Motion 174 (*Draft Marine Bill*), which sets out the key aspects of what Link believes the bill should cover. We believe that support in Parliament will maintain the pressure for a full bill at the earliest opportunity – in the 2003/04 session, 315 MPs signed a similar EDM, making it the third most signed motion of that session.

We can also provide suggestions for PQs on marine issues. If you are interested, please contact Helen Meech at Wildlife and Countryside Link (020 7820 8600; helen.meech@wcl.org.uk).