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World Oceans Day – Marine Campaigners Press for Protection of UK Seas

A massive 165,000 pledges of support for new marine laws will be presented to 10, Downing Street today by leading conservation organisations, demonstrating the significant level of public support for better protection for our seas.

Wildlife and Countryside Link, the coalition of major UK environmental non-governmental organisations, is delighted that a draft Marine Bill was included in the Government's recent legislative programme. This will introduce a new framework for managing the seas around the UK. However, strong laws are urgently needed and the coalition will use today's event to press the Government to progress rapidly and thoroughly in drawing up the new Bill.

The 165,177 pledges of support are being sent by supporters of the Marine Conservation Society, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, The Wildlife Trusts, and WWF-UK. Six representatives from organisations within Wildlife and Countryside Link will hand over the postcards at Downing Street at 12.30 PM.

This presentation follows a lobby of Parliament by members of the same organisations on 9 March, when hundreds of wildlife campaigners spoke to their MPs about the importance of a new Marine Bill.



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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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Ben Stafford, Chairman of Link's Marine Campaign, said *"World Oceans Day is a chance for everyone to appreciate just how important the seas and oceans are to our lives. While the seas around us are threatened by, amongst other things, pollution and over-fishing, they are home to an enormous wealth of wildlife, and still provide us with food, resources and pleasure. But without effective planning and management, combined with increased protection, our marine resources and wildlife will continue to suffer"*.

Ben Stafford continued: *"The presentation of so many pledges of support for marine legislation at Downing Street today shows that the public see a Marine Bill as a real priority. LINK believes that the new legislation will be good for industry as well as the environment. The Government must now get on and make it happen."*

ENDS

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Editors Notes:

The total number of pledges of support (including signatures on petitions, dedicated pledge statements and postcards) collected by the Wildlife and Countryside Link organisations is 165,177.

[1] World Oceans Day is the annual celebration of the seas around us. Since first being held at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, World Oceans Day has been extremely successful in raising awareness of the World's oceans and their importance for wildlife and all life on Earth.

There are four main objectives to World Oceans Day:

- It is a chance to change perspective - encouraging individuals to think about what the sea means to them and what it has to offer.
- It is a chance to learn - many people do not realise the wealth of diverse and beautiful creatures and habitats which are found in the sea, and how our actions affect them.
- It is a chance to alter our ways - people can be encouraged to become caretakers of our seas and to conserve them for the future.
- It is a chance to celebrate - whether you live inland or on the coast you can organise or participate in events focusing upon our seas.

[2] Wildlife and Countryside Link is a coalition of the UK's major environmental non-governmental organisations. The Link marine campaign is led by: the Marine Conservation Society; the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society; The Wildlife Trusts; and WWF-UK, and is supported by other Link members including: Buglife – the Invertebrate Conservation Trust; the Council for British Archaeology; the Herpetological Conservation Trust; the Shark Trust; the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

Wildlife and Countryside Link is campaigning for the Government's Marine Bill to include, among other things:

- Improved protection of marine wildlife sites and species, including stronger protection for nationally important marine wildlife sites;
- A planning system for the sea (known as marine spatial planning), allowing co-ordinated, strategic decision-making about which marine areas should be prioritised for nature conservation, which for economic development (e.g. fishing, offshore energy development, aggregate dredging) and which for recreational activities;
- Reform of inshore fisheries.

The Labour Party's 2005 General Election manifesto said (p101): "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." The Conservative and Liberal Democrat General Election manifestos also included pledges to introduce a new Marine Bill.