



PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: Environment spokesmen from the three main political parties will pose with campaigners holding colour images of marine wildlife on College Green at 1pm today.

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UK mobilised to save sea life

Campaigners demand pre-election pledge from MPs

Wildlife campaigners from over 200 parliamentary constituencies – representing almost one third of the UK - are travelling to Westminster by boat today to urge their MPs to back new legislation to protect sea life.

They will also lobby for better management of fisheries and more strategic planning of activities at sea.

Their actions highlight growing concern for the survival of marine wildlife, which is threatened by inappropriate development, disturbance, pollution and damaging fishing practices.

UK waters host more than 50 per cent of Britain's wildlife – over 44,000 plant and animal species including dolphins, grey seals, seabirds and a host of marine invertebrates – yet existing laws are failing to protect sea life and vulnerable habitats from human activities.

Wildlife and Countryside Link, the powerful alliance of conservation groups organising today's lobby, fears that despite the Prime Minister's commitment last September to introduce a Marine Bill, the government will not give marine legislation the urgency it needs. All three major parties have stated their support for marine legislation should they win the General Election expected this spring.

Ben Stafford, Chairman of the Link Marine Task Force said: "Our seas are being damaged and exploited in an unsustainable way. Changing the way we manage them would allow us to do much more than simply conserve wildlife, important though that is. A marine bill could also help to untangle the net of complicated regulations, which face marine industries.

"Only legislation will adequately protect the thousands of species currently under threat, while at the same time allowing economic development to happen in a more sustainable way. There has been too much talk; now we need action. MPs' support for legislation is crucial and today's event is about showing how important this issue is.



MARINE CONSERVATION
SOCIETY



"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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“Senior politicians have expressed strong support for marine legislation. Today’s lobby is an opportunity to make sure that as many MPs as possible know about the importance and urgency of marine protection, and the public support changes in the law will enjoy.”

Ends

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Images

The following images are available free of charge but may only be used in connection with this story.

Reference	Description	Contact
MCS1	Brittle star bed	MCS, 01989 566017
MCS2	Sea slug	MCS, 01989 566017
MCS3	Squat lobster	01989 566017
RSPB 6112000-00001-002	Oil rig platforms at Cromarty Firth	RSPB Images, 01268 711471
RSPB 8265000-00144-002	Danish trawler fishing for sandeels with gannets and kittiwake, Firth of Forth	RSPB Images, 01268 711471
RSPB 1616005-00069-002	Guillemot colony at St Abb’s Head, Cumbria	RSPB Images, 01268 711471
RSPB 1003001-00310-002	Gannets in flight over nesting colony,	RSPB Images,

	Bass Rock	01268 711471
RSPB 1003001-00259-002	Adult gannet and chick on nest, Bass Rock	RSPB Images, 01268 711471
RSPB 1616021-00243-002	Puffin close up with sandeels in beak	RSPB Images, 01268 711471
WDCS1	Bottlenose dolphin leaping	Emma Butler, 07834 498 277
WDCS2	Two young bottlenose dolphins leaping	Emma Butler, 07834 498 277

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. For more information about Link’s marine campaign see www.wcl.org.uk or call 020 7820 8600.
- 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.
- Chemical and noise pollution, disturbance and damaging fishing practices are amongst threats Link campaigners want integrated legislation to address. Conservationists have been calling for improved marine protection and better fisheries’ management for more than 20 years. Both the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and 2000 Countryside and Rights of Way Act did little to improve the protection of marine life.
- Domestic wildlife law only extends to 12 nautical miles from Britain’s coast. While there are a number of inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in estuaries and lochs, offshore (beyond 12 nautical miles from the coast) there are no MPAs, compared to 6,500 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 208 national nature reserves on land.
- In the 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.
- In 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.

- The Prime Minister last September recognised the strong arguments for a new approach to managing the marine environment, including a new Marine Bill, in his speech to the 10th Anniversary of the Prince of Wales's Business and the Environment Forum.
- Each year more than 300 dolphins and porpoises are washed up, dead, on UK beaches, the victims of fishing nets. This number is thought to be just a fraction of the true toll - many others sink without trace. Cetaceans are also affected by chemical and noise pollution. The incidence of disease in harbour porpoises has been correlated with pollution levels.
- Just under eight million seabirds from 25 species, including kittiwakes, gannets, puffins and terns, breed annually on British shores. Millions more waders, gulls, divers and seaducks winter in and around our coasts and estuaries. Since the mid-1980s, there has been a decline in the numbers of three of the five tern species breeding in Britain and Ireland. In addition, sandeel shortages have been a major factor in the decline of Arctic skuas (down 37 per cent), kittiwakes (23 per cent decline) and shags (25 per cent drop) in the past 15 years, and the island refuges of many seabird species are under threat from introduced predators such as rats, cats and mink. (*Seabird 2000*: http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds/seabird_2000.asp).
- There are 33,000 wreck sites, and 5,200 wreck positions known in UK seas, of which only 70 are protected; 7,400 located fishermen's net snaggings may indicate further wrecks. There are also thousands of aircraft remains. The number of human remains associated with these losses is enormous. Many of these sites are threatened by erosion, channel dredging development and fishing.
- You could once walk from Harwich to Copenhagen; there are Mesolithic sites (8500 BC) on the Dogger Bank; drowned Bronze Age fields between the Isles of Scilly; prehistoric footprints of humans and animals crossing Morecambe Bay; submerged sacred sites such as Seahenge; drowned forests in the Severn Estuary. There may be other important historic sites needing protection because of their vulnerability to seabed disturbance by fishing and development.
- 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.

