

For immediate use – 17 May 2005

Government's Marine Bill pledge welcomed

Environmental organisations today welcomed the inclusion of a draft Marine Bill in the programme of legislation for the new session of Parliament, but called on the Government to move quickly to bring forward a full bill.



The Labour Party manifesto promised to pass a Marine Act to introduce a new framework for managing the seas around the UK, so the inclusion of the draft Bill in the Government's programme is welcome.

Ben Stafford, Chairman of Wildlife and Countryside Link's marine campaign, said: "We are pleased to see the inclusion of this draft bill pledge in the Government's programme, and we will be campaigning to ensure that the bill makes better protection of marine wildlife a priority. The marine environment provides the basis for an increasing number of economic activities, but without efficient planning and management of these our marine resources and wildlife will continue to suffer."



Ben Stafford continued: "What is vitally important now is that the Government presses ahead quickly with this draft bill, so that a full bill can be introduced at the earliest opportunity. Britain's rich marine wildlife has been damaged through years of neglect, over-exploitation and inappropriate development. There is now an opportunity to make real change, and Ministers must seize it."



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Editor's Notes

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.



"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

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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.

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