

Marine Pollution

Preparing the Marine Bill

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Managing our use and impact on the marine environment is one of the most significant challenges we face today. It is a vast and important resource providing us with valuable economic, environmental and cultural benefits. A healthy and productive marine environment is not only vital for those who make a living from its resources, but it is critical to the balance of the earth's ecosystems, and the fight against climate change, as the sea has a crucial role in absorbing greenhouse gases.

There is a need to balance and effectively manage the different and increasing pressures from human activities on the marine environment and protect the unique biodiversity our seas contain. In Europe, emerging policy developments addressing this issue, the European Marine Strategy Directive and the European Maritime Green Paper, are progressing in a way that support our direction for the marine environment. Other broad national developments will also influence what we do in the marine environment, for instance our proposals on climate change and planning reform.

Clear Vision

Currently, we have many existing systems for managing marine activities and protecting marine wildlife and the marine environment. These generally lack cohesion, are costly and do not provide a strategic approach. Defra has important responsibilities for the marine environment and we are working towards achieving our vision of clean, safe, healthy, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas through the development and delivery of a 'Marine Project' comprising:

- **A marine strategy** - setting out how we should balance the protection of the marine environment with the sustainable use of marine natural resources, supported by effective monitoring;
- **A strategic vision for marine fisheries** - setting out the long-term objectives for fisheries management;
- **A Marine Bill** - the legislative vehicle for introducing change.

A Sea Change, a Marine Bill White Paper, was published

on 15 March 2007, with an associated partial Regulatory Impact Assessment. It sets out our intentions for the scope and content of a Marine Bill. We are proposing to introduce a new framework for managing the seas by establishing a strategic system of marine planning and new licensing and delivery arrangements that will balance conservation, energy and resource needs to help achieve the Government's vision for the marine environment. As the White Paper explains, these proposals have been developed in discussion with other Government departments, and the administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and take account of extensive recent public consultation.

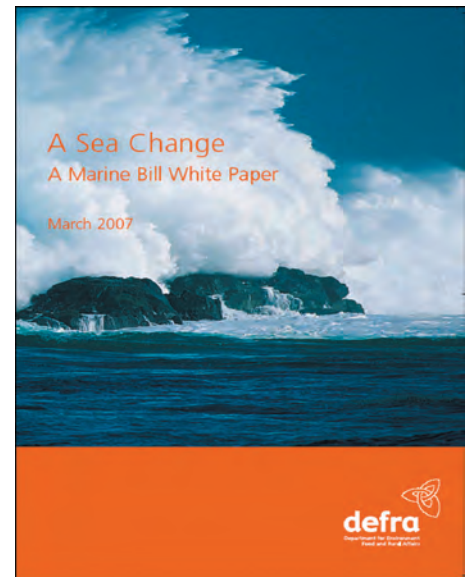
We are proposing that for the UK Government a new Marine Management Organisation (MMO) will be the champion for the integrated management of our seas. It will be guided by a marine policy statement and will be the UK Government's focus for marine expertise. By cost-effective delivery of a number of the Marine Bill policies, the MMO will provide a holistic approach to marine management and increase integration and effectiveness.

A new system of marine planning will provide a much-needed strategic approach to the use of marine space and the interactions between its uses. It will encompass all marine activities and deliver sustainable development by facilitating forward-looking decision-making. Marine plans will guide decisions on licence applications and other issues such as marine conservation zone site selection, and provide users of the sea with more certainty about where and when marine activities can take place.

Fit-for-Purpose System

Our proposals set out a rationalised and integrated marine licensing system to simplify the current fragmented and inconsistent regimes governing coastal and marine development. We aim to create a fit-for-purpose system that is more efficient and transparent whilst generating savings for industry and Government through reduced risk, delay and costs.

Together the new planning system and streamlined



licensing arrangements will improve the speed, quality, accountability and transparency of development decisions. Strategic planning for the future will lead to more efficient use of the marine environment, improve capacity to incorporate emerging technologies, whilst ensuring sustainable development and protection of our valuable marine environment.

Proposals for marine nature conservation provide for new mechanisms that will supplement existing tools for the protection of marine ecosystems and biodiversity. We are proposing arrangements that will enable us to establish a network of marine conservation zones for nationally important species and habitats. They will be flexible, giving us the ability to protect marine species and habitats when and where it is necessary and in the most appropriate way.

The Marine Bill will also modernise inshore fisheries' management arrangements to reduce the risk of fish stock decline, make fisheries legislation more transparent, deter illegal fishing, and provide greater protection to the marine environment.

The framework that is introduced by the Marine Bill will need to be flexible enough to allow us to respond to changing demands and priorities. The last few years have seen a huge growth in wind farm development. In the future, we will need to find space for wave and tidal power, and can expect demands to change as we make further technological advances. We want to be able to look back and see that the framework introduced by the Marine Bill made a real difference in making our seas fit for the 21st century so that future generations will continue to benefit from a clean, healthy and productive marine environment. ●

For more information visit: www.defra.gov.uk or email: marinelegislationdivision@defra.gsi.gov.uk