

# **COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE COUNTRYSIDE**

## **An Advisory Council to the Department of the Environment**

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### **PRE-CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT MARINE POLICY STATEMENT**

CNCC welcomes the opportunity to comment on this important document at an early stage in its gestation. We are generally very pleased with the tone and content of the Statement, and particularly welcome the aims and approach set out in 1.3 and 1.4, emphasising sustainability, the move towards a low-carbon economy, habitat and species protection, the ecosystem approach and the integration of marine planning with terrestrial planning. These should underpin the crucial role that the Statement will play in providing 'a framework for development of Marine Plans and for consistency in decision making' (1.8). However we are unclear as to how the five points in 1.3 relate to the 5 High Level Marine Objectives which have been agreed and signed off by all UK Administrations. This is potentially confusing, and it might have been better to have set out the HMLOs and their sub-points in full. In addition we are disappointed that there is no mention of an objective to attempt to restore the marine environment to a richer and healthier state. There has been a history of inexorable and universal deterioration since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and we believe that there should be an ambition to reverse this process.

We are also pleased that there is clear recognition (1.9) of the need for co-ordination of planning across administrative and regional boundaries, of particular relevance to Northern Ireland.

Apart from these general comments, we have a number of more specific points that we would like to raise:-

1.10 Line 3. 'relevant considerations'. There does need to be some authority that decides what is 'relevant' and what is not, and perhaps some appeal mechanism to deal with disputes as to the relevance of any issue.

1.14. While we are delighted that the UK Administrations are committed to management of coastal areas in line with the principles of ICZM, unfortunately Northern Ireland has yet to implement this in any way, and so this commitment remains purely theoretical.

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1.15 We welcome the Appraisal of Sustainability, and look forward to the opportunity to comment on it. We trust that it will cover the whole of the UK.

Figure 1 (p.7) **Living within environmental limits**, point 3 'rate' should read 'rare'!

2.5 The list of goods and services should include the provision of food. We would also suggest that on Line 7 'a number of' should read 'most commercial fish stocks'. It is important to acknowledge exactly how serious the problem with fish stocks is both in UK waters and globally.

2.7 Line 5 'Sites of Scientific Special Interest' should read 'Sites/Areas of Special Scientific Interest'.

2.14 We believe that it would also be useful to identify areas where renewable energy technologies would be discouraged or even forbidden. This could save a lot of time and energy in the planning process.

2.22 We welcome the new offshore transmission regime, and trust that it also applies to Northern Ireland. The need for co-ordination between marine and terrestrial planning is critical in this area, where we foresee major problems in bringing ashore the electricity generated offshore, often in areas of high landscape and nature conservation value.

2.34. We feel that there should be acknowledgement of the fact that most fishing activity is currently not sustainable and is leading to continuing deterioration in fish stocks and wider biodiversity.

2.40 We strongly welcome this clear statement of the need to take climate change into serious consideration in coastal and marine planning.

2.43 We suggest some mention of the importance of recreation to physical and mental health as well as providing economic benefits.

3.20 We welcome the strong statement of the importance of biodiversity. In Northern Ireland it will 'be the duty of every public body, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions' – Draft Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill 2009, which should become law in 2010.

3.22 We are unhappy with the second part of this sentence. A suggested alternative is 'where significant harm would result, the development should proceed only if in the overwhelming public interest'.

3.24 Line 3. 'where appropriate'. We suggest that this phrase is excluded – it is always appropriate that statutorily protected species are protected!

3.28 This paragraph should contain reference to Marine Nature Reserves. The few that have been declared suffer from a lack of overall protection, as exemplified by Northern Ireland's only MNR, Strangford Lough.

3.32 We welcome the recognition that there is the potential for cumulative effects of noise from multiple sources.

3.38 This again highlights the issue of who decides on the 'wider social, economic and environmental benefits'.

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3.40 This paragraph seems rather tentative. An alternative to the first sentence would be '...., it is widely predicted that climate change will lead to changes in storm ....'. Line 3 remove 'including'. Line 5 replace 'that' with 'most of which'.

3.44/3.45/3.46 **Coastal change.** These three paragraphs make very little sense and need to be rewritten.

3.50 We are delighted to see reference to Seascope. This has been widely ignored by terrestrial planners and should be a vital part of all coastal planning considerations.

3.55/3.56 We are pleased to see the strong connections being made to the Water Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plans.

4.1 Bullet point 5. We welcome this move to co-ordinate marine and terrestrial planning, but are concerned that this statement suggests that terrestrial planning issues have greater weight. The important point is that there should be reciprocal liaison that works equally in both directions.

4.15 Recent events in the Gulf of Mexico have highlighted the increasing dangers as oil exploration and extraction are pushed into ever more difficult and challenging places. We are currently also concerned about the impact from very concentrated brine discharge from creating underground storage chambers in Permian salt deposits.

4.23 We would like to see more explicit mention of the issues around bringing electricity ashore in areas of high scenic and nature conservation value. Many of the areas most suitable for tidal generation are also biodiversity hotspots or are adjacent to important designated landscapes. This is a real issue that needs to be addressed strategically and not piecemeal as it is at present.

4.26 We suggest the inclusion of the possible effects of electrical fields on elasmobranchs (cartilaginous fish, such as dogfish and skate) as a potential impact.

4.35/ 4.39 Many major ports are situated within or adjacent to environmentally sensitive areas, including SACs, SPAs, and Ramsar Sites (e.g. Belfast, Londonderry and Larne in Northern Ireland). This needs to be spelled out as a major additional factor in this potential impact.

4.57 It should be mentioned that sandbanks (the source of marine aggregates, and with much of the UK resource being located in the southern North Sea) are a primary Annex 1 habitat under the EU Habitats Directive, and extensive areas are currently being proposed as SACs.

4.59 The contradiction between the first and last sentences of this paragraph needs to be addressed!

4.71 We suggest that the public health benefit of recreation is mentioned again here.



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