

Scottish Environment LINK

Media Release

Wednesday 9th March 2005

Action Urged to Protect Scotland's Sea Life



Representatives from Scottish Environment LINK Marine Task Force will travel to Westminster today to visit Scottish MPs in support of the Wildlife and Countryside Link's Marine Lobby. This show of support by LINK Marine Task Force [1] will raise awareness of the importance of a Marine Act for Scotland aimed at protecting Scottish seas, sea life and the economic activities that rely upon them.

It is envisaged that a UK Marine Bill will bring protection and control over activities in UK waters. However within 12 nautical miles of Scotland's shore the Scottish Executive has devolved control of inshore fisheries, aquaculture, coastal management, renewable energy, conservation, pollution, dumping and dredging, marine works and research, many issues which would not be specifically addressed by a UK Act. The Scottish Executive are currently drafting a Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment [2] and are in an excellent position to administer policies and legislation that will ensure a healthy and sustainable future for Scotland's territorial seas and the marine wildlife and coastal communities that rely upon them. Only last week, in the DEFRA Charting Progress Report, it was recommended that 'where they have responsibility for the management of their territorial waters it will be for the devolved administrations to determine the need to bring forward any new legislation.'

Calum Duncan, Convener of the LINK Marine Task Force, said: "Scotland accounts for some 70% of the UK's territorial seas and was formerly leading the way in marine and coastal conservation. However recent initiatives have seen DEFRA and English Nature forge ahead, leaving the Scottish Executive bobbing in their wake. It is several months since the Executive's Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment consultation concluded and we still await an announcement. To give substance to the rhetoric, we would like to see a firm commitment from the Scottish Executive to introduce a Marine (Scotland) Act.'

A rescue package for Scotland's seas is desperately needed and only a whole package underpinned by framework legislation, a Marine (Scotland) Act, will deliver healthy seas and safeguard the resources and communities that depend upon them [5].

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Contact details for press release:

Calum Duncan, Convenor LINK Marine Task Force - 0131 226 6360;
07879 821494

Editors Notes

[1] Scottish Environment LINK (LINK) is an umbrella body for Scotland's voluntary environmental organisations representing approximately half a million members throughout Scotland. The LINK 'Marine Task Force' consists of the following environmental NGOs working on marine issues in Scotland:

- Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust
- Marine Conservation Society
- National Trust for Scotland
- RSPB Scotland Scottish Wildlife Trust
- WWF Scotland
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

[2] Scottish waters generate £14 billion or 21 % of Scottish GDP the economy each year. Almost 20 % of the Scottish population lives within one kilometre of the coast. Fifty per cent of UK wildlife is found in the marine environment with 14 nationally and internationally important coastal and marine habitats in Scotland supporting an estimated 8,000 species.

[3] At a UK level Labour have been committed to a marine bill for a few months. On Tuesday 14th September 2004 Tony Blair made his first public statement on the need for a marine bill whilst speaking on the need to tackle Climate Change at the 10th anniversary of His Royal Highness' Business and the Environment Programme.

[4] The Scottish Executive's 'Developing a Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment' consultation closed at the end of July 2004. The consultation offered stakeholders the opportunity to influence the development of this strategic framework which is currently being drafted.

[5] The Scottish Environment LINK Marine Task Force, and many coastal stakeholders, believe Scotland's coast and seas need an effective, co-ordinated marine management strategy based on an understanding of how ecosystems work. The only way we will get this is with fundamental reform of how we manage our seas, underpinning the whole package with new framework legislation for the marine environment, a Marine (Scotland) Act. The pieces of the package must include:

1. A Marine Strategy - for inshore seas and associated issues out to 12nm placing local stakeholders and the sea at the heart of decision-making and integrating with UK strategy to 200nm.

2. An identified lead body - a national decision-making 'body' to oversee marine strategic and spatial planning of devolved activities in Scottish waters in co-ordination with a UK body responsible for reserved matters. The Scottish body should have statutory responsibility for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of a marine strategy and spatial plan(s); powers to decide national priorities, co-ordinate sectoral activities, review policy, oversee enforcement of agreed activities, allocate budget, work with UK bodies on reserved issues, collect and exchange information and ensure the active involvement of stakeholders at all levels. This body need not be a new quango, but could be drawn from existing Scottish Executive departments or agencies. It would be responsible to a nominated Scottish Minister who would lead on, champion and co-ordinate marine affairs within Government.
3. Effective Marine Spatial Planning - a hierarchy of plans and policies for Scotland's inshore seas managing the vast range of marine activities and the regulation of proposals for change.
4. Local management - delegating powers and putting in place structures for local decision-making, including input to spatial planning and resource management.
5. Adequate protection for marine species and habitats of national and international importance, encompassing a network of well-managed marine areas protected by law.
6. A duty of care on all bodies whose activities impact upon the marine environment - to protect, manage and enhance marine species, habitats and ecosystems.

Delivery of the above requires the collection and sharing of good marine information founded on robust science; excellent communication to aid sound decision-making, transparency and accountability and allocation of adequate resources to ensure the human and financial capacity is there to implement the marine strategy and spatial planning.

