



Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill

Parliamentary briefing

The importance of marine conservation legislation to protect our national marine sites - English Nature's views

Briefing issued by English Nature in support of John Randall MP's Private Member's Bill

Many marine species and wildlife habitats receive less protection than those on land, but the marine environment is at present being degraded and poorly managed. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 is now in effect and the imbalance between marine and land-based wildlife protection is even greater than before. Protected marine sites and a suite of wider measures are needed to allow sensitive species to live, breed, feed or over-winter safely and without disturbance. Better enforcement of wildlife protection measures is also essential.

There is currently no effective British legislation to protect nationally important wildlife sites. This is in sharp contrast to the situation on land where there is a long-established history of protection through the SSSI framework. We need a system to complement the process already in place under the Habitats Directive that now protects internationally important areas, and one that therefore provides the tools to enable the country to fulfil its national wildlife responsibilities in full.

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It is for these reasons that English Nature welcomes the Marine Wildlife Conservation Bill being put forward by John Randall MP and the proposed approach to marine biodiversity areas. These measures would both safeguard our national areas outside European Marine Sites as well as ensuring that within such areas previously unprotected national wildlife interests are afforded national protection.

Implementation of any site-based system arising from this Bill would need to complement an additional suite of wider measures that are also required and also take account of the special characteristics of the marine environment including its three-dimensional and dynamic nature. This would require new and novel approaches to be implemented to provide for an effective network of sites, as well as drawing upon the experience of European Marine Sites and the legislative framework for Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

The selection, designation and management processes would need to ensure a cost effective approach and would need to ensure all competent authorities made an appropriate contribution. Clear Government policy guidance is essential to support any system of protection.

English Nature looks forward to helping in the further development of this Bill and urges MPs to be at Westminster to give the Bill their support at Second Reading on Friday 26 October.

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