



British Ecological Society

Response to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affair's Consultation on the Marine Bill White Paper

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June 2007

Introduction

1. The British Ecological Society is the learned society for ecology in the UK. Founded in 1913 its mission is to promote the science of ecology worldwide. The BES has established a Marine Policy Advisory Group to provide expert advice on the development of the Marine Bill and related issues.

General Comments

2. The BES strongly believes that utilising sound science needs to be a consistent principle throughout the Marine Bill, which is in line with the UK's principles for sustainable development. This response makes a number of recommendations on how this could be enhanced in the Marine Bill.

Marine Spatial Planning

3. The British Ecological Society remains supportive of introducing marine spatial planning. However, the BES is concerned that the commitment to an ecosystem approach, which was present in the last consultation, is missing in the White Paper. Developing an ecosystem approach for the UK's marine environment is essential for delivering international, European and national commitments.
4. Marine spatial plans need to incorporate scientific evidence in order to protect ecosystems and look ahead at the predicted impacts of climate change on the marine environment. Therefore, the BES recommends that the use of scientific evidence to underpin decision-making should be included within the statute.
5. The BES supports Strategic Environmental Assessments for all spatial plans. SEAs will be important tool for considering the potential environmental impacts of multiple activities in an area. However, they could be improved by becoming more quantitative in their assessments. In drawing up the plans, the BES suggests that the MMO consults a range of scientific advisors, including but not limited to CEFAS.
6. The BES strongly supports the need for monitoring, review and revising plans. This is a crucial component of evidence-based decision making and sufficient funding should go towards monitoring and improving information gaps identified during the planning process. A six yearly cycle of review plans seems appropriate, as long as there are mechanisms for incorporating new developments on a shorter time frame.
7. Membership of Marine Planning Steering Groups should include scientists with local knowledge and expertise. This would help groups incorporate technical and scientific information into their decision-making.

Marine Nature Conservation

8. The BES recommends that marine ecosystem objectives, which are referred to as marine objectives in the White Paper, be given statutory basis in the next iteration of the Marine Bill, even if this only extends to incorporating existing international obligations. Scope should be given for developing further MEOs as the science develops in this area. It is extremely important that ecosystem considerations are incorporated into the spatial planning process and marine management regimes. Defra should continue to fund research and work with the scientific community to develop marine ecosystem objectives.
9. The BES supports creating Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). Management measures need to be appropriate to the objectives for the zone. Although this will vary depending on the site, there is a need to have a significant proportion of sites that are highly protected. This is important for marine ecosystem research and education and achieving the Government's marine objectives.
10. It is extremely important that MCZs produce an ecologically coherent network that provides connectivity between sites. MCZs may play an extremely important role in enabling species to adapt to climate change through dispersal.
11. All management measures, including MCZs, should be subject to review and adaptation. Altered boundaries and in particular alterations to the activities included or restricted by the management regime are likely to occur as monitoring programmes assess the condition of the site.
12. It is important that climate change is factored into marine nature conservation considerations. Climate change will be an additional pressure on marine ecosystems, which will be hard to mitigate. Therefore, reducing pressure from other stressors, like fisheries, may become even more urgent in the future. It is therefore important the MMO factors in climate change considerations into its decisions.

Modernising Marine Fisheries Management

13. It is crucial that SFCs have a statutory purpose of 'sustainable management of fish stocks in the marine environment through an ecosystem-based approach.' SFCs need to contribute to the Government's vision for the marine environment. Therefore, the SFCs decisions need to fit within the UK's marine spatial planning goals, including marine ecosystem objectives.
14. The BES supports the position that reformed SFCs should seek to minimise fisheries impact on marine ecosystems and maintain and enhance aquatic resources. The BES supports the need to collect data relating to fisheries and their impact on the marine ecosystem. Data should be made available to the MMO and other relevant parties, including the scientific community. In-line with the ecosystem approach of utilising best available science, the BES encourages Defra to name scientists as relevant party for membership on SFCs. This would support SFCs in carrying out their duties, especially with regards to data collection and research.

Marine Management Organisation

15. The BES strongly agrees with Defra's statement that 'a sound evidence base is essential for making informed policy and management decisions.' The MMO needs

to be appropriately resourced to manage both environmental data and scientific advice for developing strategic plans and making marine management decisions. Data and scientific advice will need to come from a range of marine research organisations, including government research centres, research council institutes and universities, besides the MMO itself.

16. The BES strongly agrees that the management of marine data is important function for the MMO. The MMO will need to utilise a range of environmental data to inform its work. It is essential that it works with other parties to utilise and expand information in a co-ordinated and collaborative way. Implementing the Marine Bill will give greater weight to efforts to coordinate data and fill gaps, which will require developing the UK's marine environment monitoring system. The BES supports the need for the MMO to be involved in existing processes to do this. Data held by the MMO should be made available to the scientific community to advance ecosystem models and links to socio-economic factors.
17. Developing ecosystem models to predict the ecological effects of future scenarios, both natural and social, will be helpful in developing forward looking plans. This work will require considerable scientific expertise and resources. The MMO will need to have specialist scientific staff with the ability to carry out certain activities 'in house' and be an intelligent customer of commissioned research. The MMO will have to have considerable technical expertise in data management and geographic information systems. The MMO should support, recognise and promote scientists within the organisation.
18. Defra needs to make clear how data and advisory needs of the MMO will be funded. Ideally, the MMO will have a research and development budget of its own to fill gaps, but the emphasis of its work in this area should be to utilise existing data and expertise, where possible.

Openness

19. The British Ecological Society is pleased for this response to be made publicly available and will be publishing it on our website: www.britishecologicalsociety.org. Should Defra have any questions regarding this submission, please contact Nick Dusic, Science Policy Manager, British Ecological Society, 26 Blades Court Deodar Road, London SW15 2NU; E-mail: Nick@BritishEcologicalSociety.org; Telephone: 020 8871 9797.