In December 2004, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs launched its Five Year Strategy: *Delivering the Essentials of Life*. Measures set out in the strategy include a Marine Bill – a long-overdue commitment welcomed by WWF. The government has stated its commitment “to introduce in the next parliament a bill to ensure greater protection of marine resources, and simplify regulation, so that all uses of the sea, including for example wind farms, can develop sustainably and harmoniously.”

WWF believes that legislation in the form of a Marine Act can help solve the crisis in our marine environment by establishing a long-term, holistic vision for its management.

However, the government’s Marine Bill must be sufficiently robust and comprehensive to reform the way our seas are managed and prevent increasing conflicts of interest around UK shores. To inform debate on the content of the proposed legislation, WWF has developed a Draft Marine Bill which outlines how marine wildlife can be protected within a new marine planning system. It also sets out the key principles for achieving the sustainable use of marine resources. WWF’s Draft Marine Bill demonstrates the multiple benefits to all users of the marine environment.

We need to act now to safeguard our marine life and provide healthy seas for future generations.
Why do we need a new Marine Bill?
The seas around the UK are among the most heavily exploited in the world, providing a multitude of important resources and enormous economic benefits through oil and gas reserves, fisheries, transport, dredged materials, renewable energy and tourism. In the future, they may be further exploited for carbon sequestration and bio-prospecting.

Our marine environment comprises an incredible diversity of habitats and species, some of which are of international importance. It is also an important recreational resource for divers, seaside visitors and sailors. But inadequate management of coastal and offshore activities threatens the health of our marine wildlife and the long-term security of maritime livelihoods.

So far, marine legislation and planning have developed in an ad hoc manner and on a sector by sector basis in response to the rising pressures of maritime activities. There has been no overall strategy for the management of our seas. Instead, decision-making and jurisdiction over the marine environment are shared by numerous government departments, agencies and authorities. This has led to confusing, fragmented, often conflicting policies and a costly, bureaucratic system of governance that does not effectively promote the health or economic potential of our seas.

Lundy Island is England’s only Marine Nature Reserve and the UK’s first statutory No-Take Zone.

What’s in WWF's Draft Marine Bill?
Statutory purpose
The Draft Marine Bill establishes a long-term vision for managing the marine environment and sets out the key principles for achieving the sustainable use of marine resources. The Bill places a duty of care on stakeholders, whose activities impact upon the marine environment, to ensure the long-term protection and enhancement of the marine ecosystem.

- We need a new way of managing our seas – an integrated approach that enables the government to plan and manage the UK’s marine area sustainably.
- We need a fair and transparent procedure to mediate between conflicting pressures to prevent further over-exploitation of UK marine resources.
- We need to conserve our maritime heritage, encourage investment in the marine environment and protect the wildlife that lives in our seas.
- We need a new Marine Bill to achieve all of this.
Marine Spatial Planning

The Draft Marine Bill introduces a new strategic planning system for the marine environment similar in concept to the system currently used on land. The Bill provides for stakeholders and local people to help the government develop plans that reflect the dynamic nature of the marine environment, taking into account the many locations that possess similar biological features. These plans will identify zones in which it can be presumed that activities will either be authorised or restricted, depending on the other pressures in those locations and their environmental sensitivity. Some zones will continue to be multi-use areas, while others may have seasonal restrictions placed upon certain activities. Each regional marine plan will be subjected to a strategic environmental assessment. The Bill also encourages the pooling, sharing and publishing of data on the marine environment. This will help inform planning in relation to the marine environment and identify information gaps.

WWF believes that spatial planning – which allows for integrated, forward-looking and consistent decision-making concerning the use of the sea – is crucial to an ecosystem-based approach to marine management because without reform of the present marine planning system, biodiversity conservation will be ineffectual. Integrated management of our seas through spatial planning will streamline offshore development decisions and facilitate sustainable projects. Extending spatial planning to the marine environment will stimulate investment by giving developers the efficiency and long-term regulatory certainty they need.

Important UK marine sites

Parts of the UK marine environment have already been identified, mostly under EU law, as areas in need of conservation – yet they continue to suffer from over-exploitation and lack of protection. The Draft Marine Bill establishes a network of important UK marine sites which are likely to include designated conservation areas. Chosen because they contain threatened habitats and/or species, these sites will be identified in spatial plans so that they can be properly managed and monitored. A spatial planning system will enable some marine areas to have variable levels of protection, depending on their sensitivity. Some may become No-Take Zones, for example, where all extractive activities are prohibited, either seasonally or permanently. There is evidence that a No-Take Zone can deliver fish stock recovery not just within that area but also in neighbouring zones, where fish would spread. However, it is likely that human activities will be able to continue in many sites, provided that the ecological integrity of the area is conserved.

Important UK marine features

WWF’s Draft Marine Bill gives the government a duty of care to conserve important species living in, or travelling through, UK waters. The government will be required to identify and publicise a list of species and to monitor their status. The government will also be required to consult stakeholders about species on the list, revising it where necessary. Where information about a species is lacking, the Bill provides for a precautionary approach. To ensure the list is respected by all users of the marine environment, the Bill includes punitive measures against anyone who deliberately or recklessly damages, destroys or disturbs an important feature. This part of the Bill will give meaningful protection to a wide variety of marine biodiversity, from coldwater coral to basking sharks. It will encourage all users of the marine environment to consider more seriously their impact on wildlife that is often hidden from view.
WWF recognises the urgent need for legislative action for the marine environment. We hope publication of the Draft Marine Bill will prompt all stakeholders, including the UK government, to get to work immediately on marine legislation. Increasing demands on the marine environment will multiply conflicts of interest, stifle the economic potential of maritime industries and prolong damage to the ecosystem. A comprehensive, integrated management system based on a strategic marine plan must be delivered without delay. Piecemeal or token conservation efforts will not succeed in reversing declines in marine species and habitats unless there is a holistic solution to these critical problems.

WWF thanks Wildlife and Countryside Link’s Marine Task Force for its advice and expertise during preparation of the Draft Marine Bill.

While it has been possible to draft one Bill for England and Wales, WWF has also developed bespoke legislation for Scotland and Northern Ireland to take into account the devolved and unique nature of their own marine management.

For a full copy of the WWF Draft Marine Bill please visit www.wwf.org.uk/marineact or contact Janet Brown, Senior Marine Policy Officer, or Saskia Hervey, Senior Public Affairs Officer, on 01483 426444

www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/5year-strategy/5year-strategy.pdf

Coastal communities and livelihoods should also be considered when developing a Marine Bill.

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