

PRESS RELEASE



Marine
Conservation
Society

MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY DEMANDS STRONGER PROTECTION MEASURES FROM TODAY'S DRAFT MARINE BILL FOR NORTHERN BRITAIN

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) is urgently calling for the Marine Bill, published today in draft, to be toughened up with measures and powers to establish a network of highly protected marine reserves where marine life is fully protected from damaging activities. MCS with British Sub-Aqua Club divers and UK aquaria representatives are today marching to the House of Commons to deliver 100,000 MARINE RESERVES NOW! petition signatures calling for government to commit to a network of Highly Protected Marine Reserves through the Marine Bill. 19,993 petition signatures were collected from aquaria in the north of Britain.

The draft Marine Bill heralds a new approach to managing our seas and protecting marine life including measures for marine planning, inshore fisheries reform, and protection of marine species and habitats. But, MCS, BSAC and other organisations are concerned that the Bill in its current form does not make a strong enough commitment to the establishment of an effective network of Highly Protected Marine Reserves, or provide the necessary powers for the relevant bodies to prohibit damaging activities, rather than just restrict or manage them.

'The piece-meal management of existing so-called 'protected areas' such as Special Areas of Conservation does not adequately protect our valuable marine wildlife. Some of these sites allow practices such as scallop dredging, beam trawling, gillnetting and dredging to damage our marine environment' said Dr Jean-Luc Solandt, MCS Biodiversity Policy Officer, *"We fear the proposals set out in the draft Bill will only repeat the errors of the past, with Government allowing short-term commercial interests to compromise much-needed long-term protection and sustainability. That's why we are marching on Westminster today with our 100,000-signature petition. The Government must acknowledge that the British public supports the urgent need to implement a comprehensive network of Highly Protected Marine Reserves and let our over-exploited marine ecosystems recover.'*

Statutory advisors on marine conservation (such as Natural England) currently don't have the necessary powers to set up and restrict damaging activities inside present marine protected areas. Through the bill, MCS urges government to equip their conservation advisors with the powers to designate sites and control damaging activities – powers they have had on land since 1981. As a result of better protection on land, we have over 4,000 terrestrial protected areas in England for UK

Mary Tetley, BSAC Operations Manager:
606751

Tel: 0151 3506220 / Mobile: 07780

Linda Martin, Communications Manager, the Deep, Hull Tel: 01482 381 090 / Mobile: 07751 288434

Chris Marritt, The Blue Planet Aquarium (PR), Ellesmere Port Tel: 0161 932 1023 / Mobile: 07730
812631

For photos of celebrities supporting the campaign, please contact Dr Jean-Luc Solandt

Marine Conservation Society www.mcsuk.org

Wolf Business Park, Alton Road, Ross-on-Wye HR9 5NB Tel: 01989 566017

NOTES TO EDITORS

- 1. The Marine Conservation Society (MCS)** is the UK charity dedicated to the protection of our seas, shores and wildlife. MCS campaigns for clean seas and beaches, sustainable fisheries, protection of marine life and their habitats, and the sensitive use of our marine resources for future generations. Through education, community involvement and collaboration, MCS raises awareness of the many threats that face our seas and promotes individual, industry and government action to protect the marine environment. MCS provides information and guidance on many aspects of marine conservation and produces the annual *Good Beach Guide* (www.goodbeachguide.co.uk), the *Good Fish Guide* and www.fishonline.org on sustainable seafood, as well as promoting public participation in volunteer projects and surveys such as *Beachwatch*, *Adopt-a-Beach* and *Basking Shark Watch*. See www.mcsuk.org
- 2. The British Sub Aqua Club (BSAC)** was established in 1953 as a club for divers and remains so today. As the Governing body for underwater activities in the UK, BSAC provides a training programme for divers and instructors and safety advice tailored to safe enjoyment of the sport in the UK and throughout the world. BSAC welcomes divers from all backgrounds and currently has more than 40,000 members and 1,200 branches in the UK and overseas, making it the biggest diving club in the world. www.bsac.com
- 3. The Marine Reserves Now campaign** has collected over 101,677 signatures from the general public over 12 calendar months between March 8th 2007 and March 22nd 2008. 86,745 of these signatures were collected from UK aquaria, representing 85% of the total. 9,043 (9%) were collected from the online petition website www.marinereservesnow.org.uk.
- 4. Major aquaria from the north have supported the campaign since March 2007:**

The 19,993 petition signatures collected from northern Britain aquaria were from:

Chester Zoo	254
Aquarium of the Lakes	389
Blue Reef, Tynemouth	1280
Scarborough Sealife centre	4283
The Deep, Hull	6611
Blue Planet, Ellesmere Port	7176

- 5. A survey** carried out by the University of York in 2005 sent to 2,000 British citizens revealed that over 95% of respondents believed that over 20% of the seas should be in Highly Protected Marine Reserves. The actual figure of current HPMR in the UK stands at less than 0.002%.
- 6. The effectiveness of international marine reserves** has been highlighted in a report by the Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (2007). This consortium of 23 international marine scientists compiled a report which outlined the results from 124 research studies on the effects of marine reserves. *PISCO (2007). The Science of Marine Reserves (2nd Edition, International version)*. www.piscoweb.org
- 7. UK behind rest of the world in designating Highly Protected Marine Reserves** 33% of the Australian Great Barrier Reef has been designated as a Highly Protected Marine Reserves; New Zealand has 32 marine reserves; the USA this year designated the largest Marine Reserve in the world covering an area of over 341,362km²; the Philippines has local laws requiring each community

(equivalent to each English parish) to set up Marine Reserves. With so much international action and political commitment to use this effective tool to preserve ecosystems, the UK only has one tiny highly protected marine reserve – an area just 3.3km² off Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel, representing a meagre 0.00195% of our inshore waters. Many exceptional sites exist in the north for diving including the St Abbs, Filey and the Easington-Dimlington reef in Humberside wreck, yet they lack any statutory protection, and therefore can still be fished in some way or other. Many international scientists recommend that 30% of our seas should be protected from any extraction or damaging activities to ensure sustainable use of limited resources [*Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, (2004) Turning the Tide: Addressing the impact of fisheries on the marine environment.*] See www.marinereservesnow.org.uk.

8. The long awaited **Marine Bill** will be published in draft on April 3rd, setting out Government's proposals for measures to better protect our marine wildlife and habitats and ensure the sustainable management of our seas and resources. MCS together with many other UK NGOs successfully lobbied Government and secured commitment to introduce a Marine Bill, which should be put to Parliament in Autumn 2008. The Marine Bill will be a once in a lifetime opportunity to improve the conservation and management of our seas.

NGOs including MCS, WWF, RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts believes that the Bill must include:

- Legislation to provide for the designation of a representative network of Nationally Important Marine Sites which must include a series of Highly Protected Marine Reserves;
- Legislation that addresses the existing weaknesses and gaps in the management of inshore fisheries, strengthens the powers of the Sea Fisheries Committees, requires the adoption of a proactive, precautionary ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, and underpins this management with new, adequate and secure funding.
- A forward looking statutory marine spatial planning system, which enables better and more sustainable use of the marine resource and appropriate protection of the natural and historic environment;

Within 12 nautical miles of the Scottish coast, the Scottish Executive is in charge of marine conservation, fisheries, aquaculture, renewable energy and research, among other matters. MCS, along with other members of the Scottish Environment LINK Marine Task Force, is therefore campaigning for the Scottish Executive to develop a separate Marine Act for Scotland in parallel with the Westminster act. A Marine (Scotland) Act must be developed in close co-ordination with the Marine Bill developed at Westminster.

Marine Conservation Society

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