

2007 A Sea Change: A Marine Bill White Paper

Solent Forum Steering Group Response

This response was prepared by the Solent Forum Officer on behalf of the Solent Forum Steering Group and is specifically related to the role of coastal partnerships and fora. It represents a collective view of the individuals of the group and not that of the constituent authorities or other organisations that are members of the Solent Forum. It also does not prejudice the right of individuals from making individual comments.

Introductory Remarks

The Solent Forum Steering Group welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Marine Bill White Paper and congratulates Defra on continuing to take steps to create a Marine Act to implement a suite of measures that will safeguard our seas. However, we are frustrated that it still remains unclear how many of the proposals put forward in the original document will operate in practice. In particular, there has been no progress on how integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) will be achieved, making it difficult to fully engage in the consultation process. As we said in our previous response to the Marine Bill Consultation document, we would have liked to have read a draft ICZM Strategy for England in tandem with the Marine Bill White Paper, to be reassured that the management of the coastal zone has been fully considered. We are further disappointed that there are no direct references to the role coastal partnerships might play in facilitating ICZM and marine planning.

The general principles of this response are:

- The Solent Forum Steering Group supports the overall purpose, vision, strategic goals and aims of the Marine Bill;
- Marine Planning is an appropriate tool for managing anthropogenic activity and natural processes in the marine environment;
- Some coastal areas, such as the Solent, will require detailed planning (both on land and in the marine environment);
- ICZM should be the process employed in coastal zones to ensure integrated policy making and sustainable coastal development;
- The Marine Bill must provide statutory underpinning of ICZM;
- Coastal partnerships should be recognised as competent ICZM delivery platforms and as appropriate mechanisms to assist the Marine Management Organisation in preparing detailed coastal plans or otherwise.

Integration between land and sea

We are pleased that government is seeking to promote an integrated approach to management across the UK coast. However, although the White Paper states that government expects the Marine Bill to help deliver such integration, how this will be achieved is not discussed. This is a matter of great concern in busy areas such as the Solent. The White Paper only states “Integration between land and marine planning is extremely important and will require careful thought...(4.83)”. The issue is compounded by the lack of an ICZM Strategy for England.

Chapter 2 states that a marine planning system will provide a strategic focus and will take account of and be considered by land planning arrangements, however whilst Chapter 4 on marine planning notes that such a plan must integrate with other plans and processes, it provides no details of how such integrated management will be achieved. Government must use the opportunity provided by the Marine Bill to put in place a nested institutional delivery framework that not only ensures sustainable use of the marine environment but that of the coastal zone as well. As we said in our previous response to the Marine Bill consultation document, without a statutory requirement to work collectively and adequate resources, integrated coastal zone management will continue to be implemented in a limited way.

Planning in the marine area

We welcome the introduction of a strategic, plan-led approach to managing the UK’s marine environment. Among members representing a variety of interests in the Solent area, the resources of which are subject to intense and widespread pressures, it is expected that marine planning will:

- provide a mechanism to integrate management across the Solent system;
- provide an opportunity for a Solent coastal and marine plan;
- encourage data and information sharing;
- bring economic benefit to region;
- provide a strategic and coordinated approach;
- provide an opportunity to make improvements to current coastal planning and management arrangements.

It is concerning to read that “marine plans will be created..., in line with the available resource of the planning body” (4.48). Without sufficient resources marine planning will not deliver what is anticipated. Government must ensure that there are adequate resources to prepare such plans otherwise the plan-making process may be found wanting and could delay decision-making.

Democratic input must be given further consideration, the public already recognises coastal local authorities as providing such opportunities, the Marine Bill should provide a role for local government in the decision making process of marine plans.

The Solent Forum Steering Group welcomes the proposal for detailed coastal planning in some areas (4.47 & 4.102). A recent workshop held by the Solent Forum found that members were interested in developing strategic policies for our coastal zone as it is thought that such detailed coastal planning:

- would provide an opportunity to recognise the dynamic coastal environment and associated risks;
- could lead to the creation of a defined coastal strip or “blue belt” that would require specific ICZM thinking;
- would provide the interface between terrestrial and marine planning;
- would determine Solent-wide objectives/policy for all sectors;
- would provide better integration between sectors;
- could influence marine planning (if done early enough).

We would therefore welcome more detail on such plans, in particular the role of MMO in preparing such plans, which other organisations would be expected to be involved, how such plans are to be resourced and what the status of such plans will be. If non-statutory, full participation can not be guaranteed nor can the influence on other plans. Therefore, they should be statutory and resourced accordingly.

The Solent Forum Steering Group agrees that Marine Steering Groups should be established to advise the MMO on coastal matters, facilitate an integrated approach and contribute to the planning process. How such groups would function is not provided. However, the possible members put forward in the White Paper reflect those found in estuary and coastal partnerships. Therefore coastal partnerships, such as the Solent Forum, would be well placed to provide such a role if adequately resourced.

Coastal Partnerships

We are disappointed that, although the ICZM consultation document fully recognised the achievements of coastal partnerships and fora, the Marine Bill White Paper does not mention them when considering how ICZM might function or how they relate to Marine Steering Groups. Coastal partnerships are at the forefront of delivering ICZM in the UK. They have evolved over the past 10-15 years at approximately 50 locations around the UK’s coastline. Coastal partnerships have unique selling points that make them well placed to aid the delivery of ICZM:

- Impartiality and a proven role in conflict resolution and consensus building;
- The ability to work across sectors and between all levels of decision-making;
- Horizon scanning to inform organisations of coastal issues;
- Attracting project funding and initiating collaborative ventures;
- Providing a gateway service and “one-stop shop” for information and contacts;

- Filling gaps where there are no sectoral responsibilities and mobilising voluntary support and involvement;
- Providing a (bottom-up) conduit to regional and national government;
- Offer a recognised local ICZM mechanism.

We believe that where coastal partnerships operate at the relevant scale, such as the Solent Forum, they would be well placed to provide the Marine Steering Group function, proactively advise the Marine Management Organisation, facilitate detailed coastal planning and provide a platform for debate, information exchange and networking.

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