

Draft Marine Bill - 3rd April 2008

Solent Forum Response by 26th June 2008.

This response has been prepared by the Solent Forum Officers on behalf of Solent Forum members and is specifically related to the role of coastal partnerships and fora. It does not set out opinions on coastal management sectoral interests and it is likely that many members will be making their own representations.. It represents a collective view of the individuals of the group on how it affects the Solent Forum and not that of the constituent authorities or other organisations that are members of the Solent Forum. It does not prejudice the right of individuals from making individual comments.

The Solent Forum welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Marine Bill and congratulates Defra on continuing to take steps to create a Marine Act.

Overview

Coastal Fora seek to integrate the diverse management the coastal zone. The coastal zone comprises the dynamic area between the limits of coastal waters and the coastal strip landwards of mean high water. It also comprises the diverse sectors that use the coastal zone, as well as joins administrative boundaries along the coast into a sensible geographic process unit. Fully integrated coastal zone management would include not only the planning and management of the marine area covered within the draft bill, but the planning and management of the area landward of mean high water which can be affected by our seas. This would include the need to plan and manage a range of activities such as marine industries and coastal defence, as well as the affects on infrastructure and habitat of sea level rise landward of the current mean high water mark

The draft bill indicates that it will help deliver integration at the coast. It states that a marine planning system will provide a strategic focus and will take account of and be considered by land planning arrangements, however the draft bill provides no detail on how such integrated management will be achieved. This is a matter of great concern for such a complex area as the Solent.

For this reasons above, the forum are disappointed that the Marine Bill does not properly address the integration of marine planning with the coastal land based planning system.

Despite the above, the Solent Forum supports the overall purpose, vision and strategic goals of the Marine Bill, as it will improve the current planning and management of UK continental waters to the high water mark. We welcome the introduction of a strategic planning system for the UK's marine environment. The active membership of the Solent Forum represent a variety of interests in the Solent area, whose resources are subject to intense and widespread pressures; it is hoped that the Marine Bill will assist them with marine planning and management of their interests.

The Solent Forum hopes that the creation of an MMO and a marine planning system will:

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

Specific Concerns about the draft Marine Bill

The draft bill does not make clear how many of the proposals put forward will operate in practice and in particular how they will be funded. It lacks detailed information about the marine plans and it is unclear which organisations will be involved in the preparation, monitoring and review of marine plans; Other concerns include:

- The risk that marine planning may be under resourced, leading to insufficient engagement and delays in developing plans; any delays in plan making will postpone decision making
- The MMO may reduce the effectiveness of current organisations managing the coastline and in particular undermine the strong local visions, exemplified by that which exists in the Solent
- Marine plans may lack democratic legitimacy unless local coastal authorities are recognised as the democratic authority with local knowledge and experience
- As marine planning does not fully integrate coastal management, it may actually add a further layer of bureaucracy and make the system even more complex
- The relationship with Water Framework Directive still remains unexplored
- The mechanism to integrate disparate organisations and agendas is not sufficiently detailed
- There are information gaps particularly in the coastal zone that could hinder decision-making
- There seems no provision for a structured hierarchical approach of regional and (where needed) sub-regional marine plans in the Marine Bill. This hierarchical approach would help capture special areas like the Solent where there are a diversity of activities all occurring within one geographical area
- That if coastal plans are non-statutory, they may be difficult to implement unless recognised as supplementary planning documents in both marine and land based planning
- That there is no detail on how Steering Groups will be formed and funded

The Role of Coastal Fora

We are disappointed that there is no direct reference to either the role that coastal partnerships might play in facilitating ICZM and marine planning, or as a potential steering group. 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. We strongly believe that the Solent Forum is an excellent example of how this can work, and already delivers a degree of management of the Solent coastal zone.

Coastal partnerships at the relevant scale are already 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.

Coastal partnerships have unique selling points, noted below, 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.

In particular the Solent Forum:

- Secretariat the management of the Solent European Marine Sites
- Secretariat the Solent Group on Water Quality and Bathing Water, Nature Conservation, Recreation and Bird Disturbance
- Have developed a Solent coastal access project called Solent Circles
- Maintain State of the Solent data and indicators
- Maintain close links with the coastal defence group – SCOPAC
- Provide strategic guidance for the Solent on the request of members
- Provide a streamline consenting guide
- Have begun scoping a Marine Spatial Planning system for the Solent

The Solent Forum would hope that the relevant regional MMO would directly integrate with the Solent Forum, rather than act in competition to it. We can see a role for the forum as a delivery platform and as a mechanism for communication/discussion/consultation with local stakeholders. The Solent Forum would be the key Solent Steering group. We would hope that the MMO and the planning system provide an element of funding to the Solent Forum so that we can assist in marine planning, stakeholder engagement and help develop coastal strategies and plans. In terms of the Marine Bill, it would be desirable to see a clear structure of how such integration might take place. This would ensure that any future Marine Management system builds upon much of the good practice that currently exists around the UK's coastline.

For and on behalf of the Solent Forum Members
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