

Parliamentary Committee comments on the draft Marine Bill

A joint committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons tasked with commenting on the draft stage of the UK Government's Marine Bill published its report on 30th July 2008.

The Committee welcomed the Bill and made numerous recommendations for improvements to the draft. The Government now has the opportunity to consider these before formally introducing the Bill before Parliament. Six of the Joint Committee's recommendations specifically refer to the importance of marine science in underpinning the Marine Act and the work of the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), the new marine regulatory body to be established under the Act. The full report may be viewed at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt/jtmarine.htm>

A number of individuals and organizations, including the National Oceanography Centre, provided written evidence to the Joint Committee and NOCS Director, Professor Ed Hill, gave oral evidence before the committee on behalf of the Natural Environment Research Council.

Recommendations referring to science and research

22. We consider that scientific input is of sufficient importance to be reflected explicitly in the Bill. The [Marine Management Organisation] MMO should establish a scientific advisory panel to examine the quality of science used by the MMO and to ensure that it is making best use of available information and technology. The panel should report to the MMO board. The MMO should also have a statutory duty to play a strategic role in defining marine science through mechanisms such as the Marine Science Coordinating Committee. (Paragraph 64)

23. The MMO should have a duty under the Bill to promote the publicly-funded production of marine data, to collect such data and to make them publicly available. In order to do this it will need to have the right levels of scientific expertise to be able both to commission research from other organisations and to be an intelligent interpreter of scientific evidence. (Paragraph 65)

24. The MMO will need to be funded adequately to enable it to access privately owned and public data alike, on the current public funding models. Alternatively, and for us preferably, the MMO should be empowered to collect data on a cost-free basis from any public body. The Bill also empowers (but does not require) the MMO to charge for sharing the results of research it undertakes or commissions itself. It follows that we think it inappropriate for any recharges to be made by the MMO for such research other than for the marginal costs involved in retrieving and reproducing the information. (Paragraph 66)

25. In order to integrate the MMO into the wider international network of marine policy, we recommend that an MMO representative be included on the UK delegation to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. (Paragraph 67)

45 We agree that it is vital for the designation of Marine Conservation Zones to be underpinned by scientific criteria. (Paragraph 113)

46. We recommend that the scoping of potential locations for Marine Conservation Zones should be based on the best scientific evidence, taking into account their representative nature, uniqueness, threat and sensitivity. We also emphasise the need to pay regard to existing international obligations (not least in respect of the International Right of Passage), the socio-economic costs and benefits of MCZs, and the ability of zones to accommodate other forms of use without harming their integrity, once the potential sites have been identified. (Paragraph 115)