



## Seas Our Future: A vision for UK seas

### An Environment Links UK briefing

August 2019

#### Summary

The latest assessment of progress towards delivering 'Good Environmental Status' (GES) under the UK Marine Strategy was a stark warning of the state of our seas. It is clear that a step-change in approach is needed to turn the tide and restore nature within a generation. To do this, the UK Marine Strategy must be more ambitious with targets focused on recovery rather than protection of the status quo. To achieve this, more resources are required to fill data gaps and improve monitoring and protection of critical and vulnerable habitats and species. Without this, we risk losing our iconic nature and all the benefits that a healthy marine environment provides.

#### 1. Introduction

The UK Marine Strategy is the greatest opportunity in a generation to improve the health of marine ecosystems. It is the most holistic framework for marine protection in the UK, bringing together action to reduce all human pressures with the need to conserve and recover marine ecosystems generally, as well as protecting particular habitats and species. With the latest marine strategy assessment concluding that just 4 out of 15 indicators for healthy seas had been achieved, we must seize this opportunity to deliver an ambitious strategy.

A full analysis of the environmental, social and economic benefits of applying the operational targets and achieving GES was absent from the consultation but is critically important given the expected (and visible) growth of the marine economy. The revised strategy should include this analysis and be accompanied by financial targets to ensure appropriate funds are ring-fenced and available to deliver the research, monitoring and management changes that are needed to deliver GES. Such expenditure should be considered a healthy investment in the state of our seas and coastal communities and one that will deliver financial, social and economic returns in the future. The latest proposals in the strategy also lack time-bound targets to recover habitats and wildlife. Current proposals will do little more than maintain the status quo of a degrading environment.

We can and must do better by delivering a greater level of ambition through implementing the following short, medium and long-term targets and measures. Only then will we protect *and* recover the marine environment.

#### 2. Immediate actions - for completion by the end of 2021.

- All Marine Protected Areas across the UK should have robust management measures in place that are implemented and enforced by the end of 2020. Management should be clearly defined in the context of recovery of the MPA network as a whole.
- Develop a comprehensive UK Seabird recovery plan by the end of 2020, incorporating measures to tackle seabird bycatch, limit the sandeel and sprat fishery and improve seabird breeding success.

This should include completing the network of Special Protected Areas (SPAs) to limit damaging activities at sea and developing a UK wide island biosecurity strategy.

- Develop a robust Dolphin & Porpoise Conservation Strategy and UK wide, legally underpinned cetacean and seal bycatch strategy by the end of 2020. Additional resource must also be provided to monitor stranded seals in England and Wales by the end of 2020.
- Implement an effective noise reduction strategy by 2021. This should be developed in coordination with neighbouring countries and OSPAR noise management policies and underpinned by monitoring of both ambient and impulsive noise and include mitigation measures such as bubble curtains.
- Ensure the underwater noise stakeholder working group agrees a plan of action to advance understanding and minimise impacts of underwater noise by 2021.
- Ensure the Fisheries Bill includes a commitment to maximum sustainable yield and full documentation of catches with the use of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) required as standard on all over 10m vessels and 'at risk' under 10m vessels in the UK fleet and vessels in UK waters. This will generate vital information to ensure accurate and comprehensive stock assessments for target and non-target species and protected species bycatch.
- Map areas of importance for carbon storage and sequestration, e.g. sea grass beds, by 2021 and incorporate into future Marine Protected Area management and designation.
- Set up a call for evidence on legacy and emerging persistent chemical pollutants in the UK marine environment to inform policy actions on contaminants by the end of 2020.

### **3. Intermediate measures - for completion by the end of 2023.**

- Identify suitable sites for Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) and complete designation by 2022. Achieving this will benefit other descriptors such as seabirds, cetaceans, seals, benthic and pelagic habitats and underwater noise.
- Implement marine plans that use an ecosystem based approach to ensure licensing limits the cumulative impacts of anthropogenic activity and increase connectivity between marine and freshwater environments. A complete review of the 1st cycle of Marine Plans should also be completed by 2022.
- Update policy to cover the full range of contaminants entering UK seas and appropriate risk assessments. This will ensure a proactive approach to understanding and reducing hazardous chemicals, especially persistent chemicals.
- Develop process to provide early warnings for emerging contaminants of concern by 2022.

### **4. Further ahead - 2024 and beyond**

- Upgrade wastewater treatment plants across the UK by 2025 to ensure removal of all possible microfibres, plastics and pollutants that are bound to them. This will reduce pollutants in aquatic and marine habitats and deliver on WFD and UKMS commitments.

This briefing is based on the detailed ELUK response to the UK Marine Strategy Part One consultation [available here](#).

#### **For questions or further information please contact:**

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## **Environment Links UK**

Environment Links UK (ELUK) brings together environment and animal protection organisations to advocate for the conservation and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. The network comprises the combined memberships of Wildlife and Countryside Link, Scottish Environment LINK, Wales Environment Link and Northern Ireland Environment Link. Taken together, Environment Links UK members have the support of over eight million people in the UK. This briefing is supported by the following ELUK member organisations listed below:

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- Buglife
- CHEM Trust
- ClientEarth
- Friends of the Earth
- Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust
- Humane Society International UK
- Institute of Fisheries Management
- International Fund for Animal Welfare
- Marine Conservation Society
- MARINELife
- Northern Ireland Marine Task Force
- ORCA
- RSPB
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- The Wildlife Trusts
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation
- WWF
- Zoological Society of London (ZSL)