

The Environment Committee/Northern Ireland Marine Bill

Dear Sir/Madam
20th April 2012

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the Northern Ireland Marine Bill.

Marine Conservation Northern Ireland has been founded to strive to ensure we have a thriving sustainable marine environment capable of supporting a wealth of diversity in our seas.

We support the NIMTF in their submission to the Marine Bill, the only exception to this being the stipulations in clause 24 section 3, this is too open and could allow complete exclusion to anglers who have enjoyed the open access to our marine and who have so little impact on the marine environment to be considered negligible.

Anglers are the eyes and ears of the marine and have a very strong conservation view, catch and release is the norm.

We are currently in discussions with a local aquarium and NIEA with a view to using their overspill of new born stocks of thornback rays to be re-introduced back into the marine environment where they were once plentiful. These rays currently must be destroyed as an amendment is required to the aquariums zoological license.

Both the aquarium and NIEA are enthusiastic about this as there are many species which could do with such help under the ICUN directive for re-introductions to the wild.

It is our intention to include local schools in this project when releasing the baby rays back to the wild.

We believe it is essential to monitor fully how these rays are doing and have full support from Inland Fisheries Ireland who have stated they will be happy to provide the suitable micro tags.

In addition to this many sea anglers routinely tag and record then release rays,sharks etc and provide that data to either the Scottish tagging group or IFI.

We will be setting up a full programme for tagging and data collection of all elasmobranches in our waters and will partner the IFI in this.

The N.I Marine Bill identifies MCZ's which will have the authority to prevent any activity or access to certain areas.

We require access to various areas to collect this data by capturing these fish to record them, this is only achievable by anchoring often in deep water.

We would ask the Committee to allow access to the MCZ's to Marine Conservation NI to enable us to carry out this much needed scientific research work.

Kind Regards

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