

The proposed Northern Ireland Marine Bill

Comments by

**Northern Ireland Environment Link to the Northern Ireland
Assembly Committee for the Environment**

27 April 2012

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 55 Full Members represent over 90,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

These comments are agreed by Members, but some members may be providing independent comments as well. If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be happy to do so.

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Welcome and Background

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) welcomes the opportunity to submit comments to the Environment Committee on the proposed Northern Ireland Marine Bill. As a member of the Northern Ireland Marine Taskforce (NIMTF) NIEL states its support for the views expressed by the NIMTF in their submission to the Environment Committee on the proposed Bill.

General Comments - Omissions from the Bill

There are a number of important omissions from the Bill that cause us concern:

- Unlike the Scottish Marine Act, the proposed NI Marine Bill does not have an overarching aim or general duty against which the provisions and actions taken under the Bill can be assessed. Within the Scottish Act it is a requirement that Ministers and Public authorities: *...must act in the way best calculated to further the achievement of sustainable development... and ...must act in the way best calculated to mitigate and adapt to climate change...* We believe a similar requirement should be at the core of a NI Marine Bill.
- The bill as currently proposed provides the legal framework for creating a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) designed to improve the UK Marine Area. We believe the Bill must create a network which improves the Northern Ireland inshore waters as well as contributing to the improvement of the wider UK Marine Area. The NI Marine Bill should, like the other UK administrations, include a specific clause that enables the creation of highly protected Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs).
- We believe that it is important that there is integration and synchronisation of the MCZ and MSP processes. Failure to do so could lead to environmental damage as planning for the future use of our seas should be informed by which areas need to be conserved.
- When considering their respective Marine Bills, each of the other UK administrations took the opportunity to review their marine management structures. We note that the proposed NI Marine Bill does not make provision for such a review. NIEL would strongly support the NIMTF position that the structure most capable of effectively dealing with the practical implementation of a NI Marine Bill would be a NI Marine Management Organisation.

Comments on specific clauses of the Bill

NIEL fully endorses the specific comments and suggested amendments submitted by the Northern Ireland Marine Taskforce.