

Committee for the Environment
Committee Clerk
Room 245
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Belfast
BT4 3XX



Dear Alex McGarel

26 April 2012

FAO the Committee for the Environment in relation to the Marine Bill call for evidence

NICVA (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action) is the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. It provides over 1,000 members with information, advice, training and support services on a wide range of issues, together with representation for the sector as a whole.

NICVA works to achieve progressive social change, based on equality and equity, working through a community development approach, to empower local communities to pursue their own needs and agendas.

NICVA welcomes the creation of a Northern Ireland Marine Bill and the opportunity to contribute to that. It should be clear from the outset that NICVA has been a long term advocate for a Marine Act and this has formed a key part of NICVA manifestos, including most recently in the 2011 manifesto which calls for Government to:

“Introduce a Northern Ireland Marine Act and establish an independent marine management organisation. Put in place legislation which integrates all sectors of marine activity so that there is minimum disruption and damage to marine wildlife?”

NICVA member organisations are involved with the Northern Ireland Marine Taskforce (NIMTF) who has expert knowledge and expertise in this area. However there are a number of specific issues which NICVA would like to highlight in relation to the proposed Bill which we feel the committee should give careful consideration to:

- The Bill should ensure that the **Marine Spatial Planning** Process and **Marine Conservation Zones** are integrated and synchronised. Failure to synchronise these could lead to environmental damage, it is logical that planning for the future of our seas should be informed by which areas need to be conserved. We therefore urge that these currently separate processes be tied together.
- The Bill in its current form provides for **Marine Protected Areas** in the UK as a whole; however it does not guarantee protection for the Northern Ireland inshore region. The NI Marine Bill should create a network of MPAs for the local Northern Ireland Inshore region.

- Reading of the Bill raises the issue of how the practical inter-departmental responsibilities will be managed. During the development of their Marine Bills, UK administrations have reviewed their respective marine management arrangements, NICVA notes that no such review is proposed in Northern Ireland. As outlined in the 2011 Manifesto, NICVA believe that an **independent marine management organisation** would be the best way of ensuring the necessary cohesive and consistent approach to the implementation, management and delivery of any Marine Act.
- The NI Marine Bill is the most important piece of marine legislation in our history and has long lasting implications. The environment is one of Northern Ireland's most important assets. Making the correct decisions about its future and how it is managed can bring about positive change to the health and wellbeing of our citizens as well as our economy. With that in mind NICVA feel that the Bill should take the opportunity to outline an **overarching purpose and vision** for what the Bill can and will achieve. This will assist in providing direction for government and in communicating to the general public how important this issue is.

NICVA is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Committee's Marine Bill Call for Evidence and hopes our comments are helpful. We look forward to seeing the results of the process.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa McElherron".

Lisa McElherron
Head of Public Affairs