



**National  
Trust**

## **NI Marine Bill Call for Evidence – National Trust response April 2012**

### **Introduction and background to the National Trust**

The National Trust welcomes the opportunity to submit comments to the Environment Committee on the proposed Northern Ireland Marine Bill.

The National Trust is Northern Ireland's largest conservation and environmental charity, and we are committed to the protection of Northern Ireland's natural, built and cultural heritage, through ownership and the provision of public access. The Trust has the support of 4 million members across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including 56,000 members here in Northern Ireland.

The Trust has a particularly strong interest in coastal and marine areas of Northern Ireland, where our ownership and management includes sites such as Portstewart, Giant's Causeway, Carrick-a-Rede, White Park Bay, Murlough Bay and Cushendun on the North coast; Portmuck and Skernaghan on Island Magee; Ballymacormick, Orlock and Ballyquintin on the Ards Peninsula; many islands and large areas of foreshore and coast in Strangford Lough; and Murlough NNR and Mourne Coastal path in Co Down.

The Trust's perspective on the issues raised in the Northern Ireland Marine Bill is based on:

- Our statutory purpose of conserving and promoting access to the nation's natural and cultural heritage in perpetuity – we are a steward of special and fragile places for ever, with decisions taken for long term public benefit. We are actively involved in the management of the only Marine Nature Reserves in the NI - Strangford Lough: our significant experience of coastal management and use – we have decades of expertise in understanding and managing risks and undertaking our conservation work through the 'management of change', working with natural processes wherever possible i.e. the publication of our "Shifting Shores" booklet.
- Our significant business interests and contribution to tourism in NI including our protection of important natural and cultural coastal landscapes.
- Our public communications and engagement at local, regional and national levels, indirectly through the media and directly through interpretation and events at our sites – we have the potential to reach millions of people and promote greater understanding of the importance of a high quality marine and coastal environment.
- Our partnerships, with local communities, neighbouring coast/land owners other organisations and agencies – we actively want to learn from others and share our own experience and to manage our sites within their wider coast and marine context.

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[www.giantcauseway.com](http://www.giantcauseway.com)

- Our extremely successful Neptune campaign which has not only helped us acquire and manage stunning stretches of coastal land but has helped raise the profile and importance of our coastal and marine environments to millions of people.

**The National Trust is a member of the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force and we strongly endorse and support the comments submitted by NIMTF and we would ask you to take those into consideration alongside this response – NIMTF comments are in the main not repeated here.**

### **General Comments**

The National Trust would like to see more specific references and mechanisms around issues concerning the **Land and Sea Interface**.

### **Seascapes**

The special qualities of coastal landscapes are derived in no small way from the intimate relationship with the marine environment. The connections are numerous and diverse, with social and economic as well as environmental dimensions. These include:

- ecological connections for example nesting and feeding birds use both land and sea; seals use feeding grounds and resting banks;
- natural processes in the marine environment (erosion, deposition and sediment transport) impact on the form of the coast;
- there are strong connections economically and socially, with local communities deriving their livelihood from fishing, tourism and recreational use of the waters adjacent to these areas, often with access from the shore;
- people's enjoyment of the coastal scene from land are further elements of the connection between land and sea; and
- there are strong cultural heritage and historic connections between land and sea.

Some of our AONBs already include seascapes and this should be reflected in the Marine Bill. The National Trust contributed to the recent consultation on enabling legislation for National Parks and we would like to ensure that the Marine Bill includes mechanisms to incorporate seascapes in any proposed National Park developments.

### **Coastal Change**

The issue of coastal change and its management is becoming increasingly important and will require a more strategic approach going forward. We are concerned that this issue is not adequately addressed at present. The NI Marine Bill needs to ensure that the mechanisms are there to manage coastal change effectively in social, economic and environmental terms. Northern Ireland does not have any **Shoreline Management Plans** and we strongly believe that they would be an extremely important mechanism with which to manage coastal change. In addition to delivering better coastal management Shoreline Management Plans would also deliver better consistency of approach to marine planning

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between Northern Ireland and the UK. There also needs to be more detailed mechanisms to ensure that the terrestrial and marine plans are effectively integrated in terms of implementation and enforcement on the coast.

### **Inter-tidal Harvesting**

The unregulated harvesting of inter-tidal shellfish has long been a concern in many of our coastal areas and particularly in Strangford Lough with reports clearly demonstrating that this inter-tidal shellfish harvesting is on a scale well beyond individual use. Harvesting causes disturbance to ecology and can impact on ASSI, SAC and SPA features of the inter-tidal zone. The proposed NI Marine Bill should include mechanisms to regulate and control this activity.

### **Coastal Access**

While the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 has enabled interlocking marine legislation for marine activities and establishment of DOE as the authority responsible for development of marine plans there is no reference to the issue of providing greater coastal access in Northern Ireland. While we understand that the legislation for access is different in NI it does not mean that coastal access should be ignored. For example under the MCA Act Wales has just opened 870 miles of coastal path.

Reference should be made in the bill to the **Biodiversity duty** on all government departments in the exercising of government functions in the marine environment.

### **Governance**

The National Trust is concerned how the practical inter-departmental responsibilities will be managed to effectively deliver the functions of the Bill. We 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.

The National Trust is pleased that marine legislation has entered the Committee stage of the legislative process, and we recognise the important opportunity to make the Bill as effective as possible. We strongly support and fully endorse the comments, amendments and recommendations submitted by the Northern Ireland Marine Taskforce.

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