

Marine and Coastal Bill Published

January 2009



The UK Government's Marine and Coastal Access Bill, which will extend in part to Northern Ireland, was published on 5 December 2008. The Bill will enable a more strategic approach to be taken to the use of the UK's marine waters by introducing, among other things, an agreed UK-wide approach to marine planning and a reformed and modernised marine licensing system which will apply in Northern Ireland.

The Bill extends to Northern Ireland for certain aspects of marine planning and a reformed marine licensing regime which will be operated by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

The first stage of the new marine planning system will be the drafting of a marine policy statement to create a more integrated approach to marine management and settling both our short and longer-term objectives for sustainable use of the marine environment.

It is hoped that proposed changes to the marine licensing system will result in more consistent licensing decisions which are delivered efficiently to a more transparent timescale, giving greater certainty to applicants.

Environment Minister Sammy Wilson welcomed the new legislation and confirmed that his Department will be developing further marine legislation for Northern Ireland which will compliment the UK Bill. The Minister explained that "our legislation will focus on how we intend to plan for the sea around Northern Ireland and provide increased protection for the rich diversity of our marine species and habitats."

The Department of the Environment will bring forward separate and complimentary legislation for marine planning in Northern Ireland's territorial waters and for increased protection for marine nature conservation.

The Department has established an interdepartmental working group which will take this work forward and is aiming to consult on policy proposals by the end of 2009.

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