

The Fisheries Bill:

The case for a UK marine strategy

UK and devolved governments must reach agreement on how to maintain and improve on the existing common legislative and policy framework for fisheries management and marine conservation across the UK, so as to ensure effective management of this common resource, contributing to the wider requirement to achieve and maintain Good Environmental Status of UK seas

The UK Marine Strategy sets out how the UK will achieve and maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) in UK waters by 2020 and beyond. It brings the conservation and sustainable use of commercial and non-commercial fish together under the framework of an ecosystem based approach to restoring and maintaining healthy seas. GES means that ecosystems are not adversely affected by the collective pressure of human activities and can support sustainable human use into the future. However, UK seas are not currently in GES, nor will they be unless positive action is taken to reduce human pressures and allow biodiversity to thrive.



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The UK Marine Strategy: a legal framework to restore our seas

The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 that underpin the UK Marine Strategy apply to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, while the Marine Strategy Regulations 2011 apply to Gibraltar. Legal advice for WWF and the RSPB shows that the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 contain the strongest and most detailed requirement to use an ecosystem based approach in the marine environment in UK law, as well as requiring all necessary measures to reach GES. As well as setting out the requirements of the Marine Strategy, the regulations also set out the relationship between the UK secretary of state and each devolved administration. The targets set by the UK Marine Strategy direct fisheries

management across the UK, while it is the responsibility of each UK government to take the necessary measures to achieve these targets in its own waters. This would be better achieved by more joined up policy making across the UK. This should be addressed by the new governance framework.

The future of the UK Marine Strategy

The UK Government has promised that the UK Marine Strategy and Marine Strategy Regulations will continue to be the overarching framework for implementing future marine policies to achieve healthy seas, including the recently published 25 year environment plan for England and the UK Fisheries Bill (expected by the end 2018), following the UK's exit from the EU. The shared responsibility of this strategy will also ensure the working relationship between the UK government and devolved administrations will continue. UK targets, as they stand, having been developed in 2012 before the Common Fisheries Policy was reformed, are significantly less ambitious than these guiding principles. They are not enough to ensure long term sustainable fisheries management, leaving an 'ambition gap' in the UK government's and the devolved administrations' aspiration to be world leaders in marine management and to leave the environment in a better place for future generations. However, these targets are due to be reviewed in 2018 and the UK government and devolved administrations must be more ambitious, using these guiding principles in their future legislative planning for both fisheries management and the wider Marine Strategy, if there is to be a chance of ensuring that GES is meaningful and endures long after 2020.

Risk

Marine ecosystems cross borders both within and outside the UK. Effective management of the marine environment requires overarching goals to achieve GES, which can then be implemented at a regional level in collaboration with other countries sharing the North and Celtic Sea regions. **If similar or improved agreed common environmental standards and frameworks in these areas are not established across the UK after Brexit, effective management will not be achieved, jeopardising our wonderful marine habitats and species.** A strengthened UK role in the OSPAR Regional Seas Convention will help to ensure this does not happen.

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