



Interview DR HELEN PHILLIPS

Dr Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England, presents the organisation's views on the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, introduced to Parliament in the Queen's Speech in December 2008.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP WORLD-CLASS MARINE LEGISLATION

THE PRESENCE OF A MARINE CONSERVATION ZONE WILL NOT AUTOMATICALLY BE INCOMPATIBLE WITH A WIND FARM OR OTHER ECONOMIC ACTIVITY SUCH AS FISHING OR DREDGING, EXPLAINS DR PHILLIPS.



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As an island nation, the sea, access to it and the resources it provides have been some of the defining features of our history and in the development of our economy. This is as true today as it was during Nelson's time over 200 years ago. Today it is the seas close to home that dominate our thinking as we grapple with the challenges of harvesting the potential from the huge resource in the winds that blow around our shores.

England's seas are easily the equal of our onshore landscape and habitats. We have some 10,000 species of plant and animal in our seas and an array of amazing undersea landscapes from the sands of the Dogger Bank to the reefs off the south west coast. Out of sight is often out of mind and few of us understand the changes that our seas are undergoing driven by climate change, fishing and development. On land we have planning laws which help give developers and the natural environment the opportunity to co-exist. At sea there is no equivalent structure.

This is about to change with the publication of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, which was announced in this month's Queen's Speech. This is a hugely exciting time for all of us involved in marine work: a unique opportunity to develop a world-class piece of legislation that ensures that the legitimate uses of the sea can continue while we protect and help our seas to recover.

Will the Marine and Coastal Access Bill mean the end of the offshore renewable industry? In a word, no. You might expect me to say that but I genuinely believe that this Bill can offer something for everyone. Everyone involved in the protection of our environment agrees that we need to see a network of Marine Conservation Zones, so that the amazing wildlife in our seas is given the protection it deserves. Designation of Marine Conservation Zones and the new marine planning framework will help to provide

the certainty the renewables and other industries are seeking on where and how development can occur.

We believe it is important that there is a duty and a timescale to designate Marine Conservation Zones, and that duty should lie with Natural England as it does on land with Sites of Special Scientific Interest. We also think it is important that anyone who ignores the law and damages Marine Conservation Zones should be punished by the courts. Otherwise those who abide by the rules are disadvantaged and confidence in the legislation will be undermined.

The presence of a Marine Conservation Zone will not automatically be incompatible with a wind farm or other economic activity such as fishing or dredging. We already have years of experience from our work on land and at sea of helping to guide through developments in protected areas. We will actively explore how renewable energy projects can support marine stewardship in general and coincide with marine protected areas specifically as we believe there are benefits to the marine environment (and other users) of co-locating compatible uses.

We are committed to working with developers to find ways of delivering more renewable energy, not less, and I am convinced that there is no contradiction between a high-quality, well managed marine environment and a thriving, successful offshore industry which is helping to deliver the renewable energy we all want to see.

The Marine and Coastal Access Bill must be passed into law and it needs to be a Bill that delivers the changes that ensure our seas are managed for the future and that allows industries who have equally legitimate uses of the sea to flourish. I know that this can be delivered and I look forward to continuing our work with the renewables industry as we seek to deliver this together.