

Draft Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland Inshore Region

Comments by

Northern Ireland Environment Link

27 September 2013

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 62 Full Members represent over 90,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

These comments are made on behalf of Members, but some members may be providing independent comments as well. If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be delighted to do so.

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Welcome and Background

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland Inshore Region. As a member of the Northern Ireland Marine Taskforce (NIMTF), NIEL wishes to state its full support for the views expressed by the NIMTF in their submission on this important consultation.

General comments

- We welcome the draft strategy for Northern Ireland's MPAs and the progress this represents for marine conservation, and the achievement of international, regional and national commitments
- We support the use of MPAs as a tool for marine conservation, this includes advocating the science of the benefits of MPAs for both benthic and pelagic species, as well as the benefits to communities from MPA designation.
- We are broadly content with the strategy, and its description of the high level goals for creating a network of sites that is coherent for Northern Ireland and fits in to the broader National and bio-geographic network.
- We are very supportive of the recognition in the strategy of the ecosystem services provided by the marine environment.
- We are also supportive of the ambition of the network to protect, conserve and (where appropriate) restore biodiversity.
- We welcome the inclusion of mobile species within the strategy, and we would like to see the network of sites protecting the range of mobile species in our inshore waters, including cetaceans and sea-birds.
- While we are generally content with the draft strategy there are a number of issues that require additional information or clarity before we can endorse the document. These issues are detailed within the NIMTF response.
- We look forward to receiving more information on the process, such as the MPA network guidance and information on how we can engage with this process as a coalition of environmental NGOs.

Specific Comments on Draft Strategy

NIEL fully endorses the specific comments submitted by the Northern Ireland Marine Taskforce.