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### Response to Modernisation, development and conservation

**By Joanne Green**

Protecting the UK environment has been in and dealt with by the current government's political agenda. In 2011 the Environment Minister Richard Benyon released a Written Ministerial Statement promising to create, 'a network of national protected areas in British seas to ensure our underwater wildlife flourishes in years to come' (Benyon, 2011). These zones are being delivered by DEFRA and were prepared by leading scientists in Natural England and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2013).

Following on from a public consultation which closed in March 2013, it is expected over 8% of UK waters and almost one quarter of English inshore waters will become Marine Conservation Zones (DEFRA, 2012). Also expected is that the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 will be adhered to with respect to section 126 which requests local authorities are to ensure decisions are made after having taken into account socio-economic factors so that the balance is achieved between nature and public interest (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2010). These points illustrate that increasing urbanisation must give 'something back' to nature such as protection by management of those sensitive marine locations. Note that marine extends inland.

Marine conservation is important too for tourism, fishing and industry. Sir Sidney Chapman questioned the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the planning of marine habitats will 'take into account of the review of regulations affecting development in coastal waters' (Hansard, 2002). A review is not overtly obvious in the DEFRA April press-release for the new Marine Protected Areas (Government, 2013) however there is enough evidence a review did occur due to the accompanying legislation to Marine Protected Areas. For

example the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) Regulations 2012 for England and Wales mentions the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in its Transitional Provision section 25 (2) (National Archives, 2012). And Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats & Conservation) Regulations 2012 for Scotland and Northern Ireland mentions in Addition 77 (2) 'have regard to how the Habitats Directive and Wild Birds Directive are implemented in other member states' (National Archive, 2012). Collectively these Regulations extend from English waters surrounding the UK and extend cohesion to European waters to proactively protect habitats so biodiversity levels are not damaged beyond what they may currently be.

With respect to Western City Developments versus heritage one must first ask 'which heritage?' Is the heritage to be 'saved' the coal which is being imported from abroad and burned at or is it the UK natural gas from our continental shelf? The removal of either can destroy ancient habitats. Coal imports rose in 2011 from 2010 by over 22% and energy from renewables rose by 33% in the same years (Office for National Statistics and Department of Energy & Climate Change, 2012). Therefore is an answer to preserving those ancient and heritage sites the creation of renewable energy? Creating renewable energy onshore could result in habitats being protected in different parts of the globe and as a modern response to development and conservation.

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