

Bill Wiggin MP PQs

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the UK's seas must be protected to achieve Good Environmental Status as required under the EU Maritime Strategy Directive. [221645]

Jonathan Shaw: The Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which came into force on 15 July 2008, applies to all marine waters under the UK's jurisdiction.

The directive requires member states to carry out an initial assessment of the state of their seas and to determine in more detail what Good Environmental Status means for their marine waters by July 2012. Until this work has been completed we will not be in a position to assess what the programme of measures will need to comprise of in order to achieve Good Environmental Status.

The directive also requires member states to cooperate with other member states in their marine region to ensure the requirements of the directive are coordinated 22 July 2008 : Column 1024W at a regional level. The UK will be using its role within the OSPAR Convention to pursue this aspect of the directive.

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the UK's seas will need to be protected to fulfill the UK's obligations under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment, OSPAR. [221644]

Jonathan Shaw: All of the UK's seas in the North East Atlantic are within the scope of the OSPAR Convention. The convention requires contracting parties to prevent and eliminate pollution and to take the necessary measures to protect the maritime area against the adverse effects of human activities so as to safeguard human health and to conserve marine ecosystems.

Theoretically, all of the UK's seas are covered by the UK's OSPAR obligations, but in practice, OSPAR operates a risk-based approach to protect those areas, species and habitats that are vulnerable and likely to be affected.

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the UK territorial waters will need to be protected as Special Areas of Conservation to meet the UK's obligations under the EU Habitats' Directive. [221643]

Jonathan Shaw: Given that the Habitats Directive requires us to protect sites containing particular types of habitat, it is not possible to make an estimate of the sea area likely to be affected by designation in the absence of completed surveys of the sea-bed in UK offshore waters. The survey process is ongoing.

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what size of network of marine conservation zones his Department is budgeting for. [221642]

Jonathan Shaw: The coverage of marine conservation zones (MCZs) proposed for designation under the draft Marine Bill will depend on the outcome of stakeholder-based regional projects being established by the statutory conservation agencies. However, for the purposes of assessing costs and benefits in the impact assessment for the draft Bill, it was assumed that there would be 92 MCZs in English territorial waters and UK offshore waters, covering approximately 71,000 square kilometres, or 8.2 per cent. of UK waters to the limits of the continental shelf.

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reasons the Dogger Bank has not been formally approved as a proposed offshore Special Areas of Conservation; and when he expects the approval process to be resolved. [221640]

Jonathan Shaw: Survey of the Dogger Bank was not completed in time for this site to be included among those in respect of which the Joint Nature Conservation Committee launched a consultation process at the end of last year. It is hoped that we will be able to include this site in next year's tranche of offshore Special Areas of Conservation, to be notified to the European Commission by the end of August 2009.

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what fishing activity he intends to permit in UK offshore Special Areas of Conservation sites. [221639]

Jonathan Shaw: The regulation of fishing activity in offshore waters is the responsibility of the EU Fisheries Council and the European Commission. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee has advised that, in respect of the offshore sites which it is so far proposed to designate as Special Areas of Conservation, the use of heavy towed gear should be prohibited in order to protect the features for which designation is proposed. Such controls already apply to the Darwin Mounds site, but it will be for the Commission to propose and ultimately for the Council to decide what measures, if any, should be applied in respect of the other sites proposed for designation.

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what legal provisions exist for restricting fishing activity in order to protect marine biodiversity in UK (a) inshore and (b) offshore waters. [221635]

Jonathan Shaw: Within six nautical miles, sea fisheries committees in England and Wales have powers under the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966 to introduce byelaws to restrict fishing activities for fisheries management and marine environmental purposes. In addition, the Secretary of State, the Welsh Ministers and the Scottish Ministers have powers under the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 to restrict fishing activities for fisheries management and marine environmental purposes.

In the 6-12 nautical mile zone, the Secretary of State, the Welsh Ministers and the Scottish Ministers have powers under the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967 to restrict fishing activities for fisheries management and marine environmental purposes. Where it is intended that such restrictions should apply to the vessels of another member state, they must be approved by a Commission Decision (or a Decision of the Council) following consultation with the Commission, affected member states and the regional advisory council.

Outside of 12 nautical miles, the UK would approach the Commission and other member states to seek adoption of appropriate measures through the common fisheries policy where a need is identified for controls to be placed on fisheries activities in order to protect an area, habitat or species of national importance.