

**Newsletter No. 21, January 2006  
Marine Information Network  
Friends of the Earth Local Groups**

**2006 : Looking into the Future.**

The start of the year is an opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved over the previous twelve months, to consider the prospects and to plan for the future. This Newsletter will be doing exactly that.

Before we take a detailed look at the agenda the first thing that you, as a MARINET member, must do is renew your membership. Membership runs from January to December and our constitution requires annual renewal. You will find the required form attached. At the AGM in September we decided to continue to make **no charge for membership**, and to simply ask each member to make a donation to help with our running costs (around £600 a year) according to your individual circumstances. We hope you will continue to remain a member and to support the Network.

A major development and success for MARINET during the past year has been the development of our website **www.marinet.org.uk**. This is now a major source of information to both the general public and our members about the work of MARINET. Visits by the public to the website have been steadily rising and we are now receiving around 80 a day. This means that you and the Network now have a unique opportunity to connect with the public, and we want to develop this further to enable you to recruit new members to your Local Group and to tell website visitors about the marine issues that are important in your area.

As a result we are developing a **Regional Page on the website** where you will be able to register the existence of your Local Group, provide contact details, and record the major issues and themes about the sea and coast which concern you. Also, we will be providing the facility for you to present short articles or reports about these issues so that members of the public can learn further about these important matters.

The Regional Page will, naturally, be sub-divided by region (e.g. South West, East Coast, N. Ireland and so forth) and on the attached Membership Renewal form you will see a space for you to provide the details to enable your Local Group to be listed on the website. Having said this, there is no obligation in this regard. If you want your membership to remain on a lower profile and not to be listed on the website, then please simply ignore this section of the form. However we think this will be a major opportunity for you to secure free publicity for your Local Group and your work on the marine environment, and we hope you will take it up.

We are also broadening our national campaign work. During 2006 we will be continuing our important work on calling for stronger environmental impact assessments of dredging the seabed for sand and gravel and, particularly, with regard to the new sites in the English Channel. However, we want MARINET to be relevant to all members and all aspects of the marine environment, so we will be taking on the important challenge of trying to see that the Government's proposals for a Marine Bill are properly focused on the real issues and do not engage in tinkering but rather make fundamental changes for the benefit of our seas and coasts. For further details of both the **Marine Bill campaign** and our work on **marine aggregates**, please see overleaf.

Wishing you and all your members a happy New Year. May it be full of success.

## **The Marine Bill.**

The UK Government is proposing to introduce a Marine Bill into Parliament during 2007/8. Between now and September of this year the Government is asking interested persons and parties what should be in this Bill, and in October the Government will produce a Draft Bill for further consultation. For full details of what the Government is currently thinking, and for background papers, please go to the **Marine Bill section of the MARINET website**, [www.marinet.org.uk](http://www.marinet.org.uk)

Briefly, key ideas centre upon developing a planning system for the use of the UK seas (known as marine spatial planning) Also decisions on planning licences will reflect an ecosystem approach to management (having regard to the wider impact and sustainability). Central to all of this will be the management of fish stocks (currently depleted and, due to fishing practices, causing ecological damage) and the development of marine nature conservation as a management tool. To implement all this, the Government is considering creating a Marine Management Organisation, whose exact nature and terms of reference are not yet defined.

MARINET welcomes these developments. They are a considerable improvement on what exists at the present time. But, do they go far enough ? Indeed will they actually succeed and produce real, lasting benefits ? This is important for a Bill which fails to deliver on restoring health to our seas and coasts will be a serious lost opportunity, and the prospect of further decline in the marine ecosystem is frightening and totally unacceptable.

As a result, MARINET is proposing two things to ensure that this Bill addresses reality:

- 1. A network of inter-connected Marine Reserves** which cover, at a minimum, **30% of UK seas** (up to 200 nautical miles from the coast). These Marine Reserves will prohibit all extractive activity (including fishing) within their boundaries and serve to regenerate fish stocks and protect marine biodiversity. This proposal is in line with the recommendations of the 2005 Report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.
- 2. The Government should set up a specific Department concerned with the management of our seas, known as The Ministry of the Sea.** This Department would have a **Secretary of State who would sit in the Cabinet**, and this Minister would be directly responsible for all marine matters, including the management of fisheries, the issuing of planning licences, and the development and running of the extensive network of Marine Reserves.

If you and the members of your Local Group, and affiliate members of MARINET, **would like to support** and lobby the Government, Parliament and your MP for a Marine Bill that is drafted in this way in order to secure these objectives, please contact the MARINET co-ordinator, details below.

## **Marine Aggregates.**

It has been agreed at the MARINET AGM in September (Local Groups Conference) that this important work should continue. Aggregate materials (sand and gravel) are vital materials to the construction industry and hence the UK economy, and MARINET's campaign recognises this. However, it is essential that marine aggregates are not extracted in a way that damages adjacent coastlines and the marine life in the area. At the present time, there is strong evidence that both occur. As a result, the MARINET campaign is focused on ensuring that the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) which accompany licence applications have **actually done their job and properly assessed all issues**. At present, some EIAs **are failing** in this regard.

Marine aggregate licences exist all around the UK coasts, but are focused principally along the **East Coast** in order to supply the construction industry in London and SE England. These East Coast licences have been operating for around 40 years now, and some are nearing commercial exhaustion with the result that the industry wants to open up new extraction sites in the eastern **English Channel**. MARINET believes that it is vital that if this is to occur (for reasons of economic necessity), then it must only be allowed **if it can be proven** that the rich marine life in the English Channel, and associated fisheries, **will not be damaged**.

Please see the **Marine Aggregate section of the website** for further details [www.marinet.org.uk](http://www.marinet.org.uk)

**To be involved and to give support to these campaigns**, please contact the MARINET co-ordinator: Stephen Eades, Allington House, Allington, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 6LN, tel. 01249 653972.