The UK Marine and Coastal Access Act includes five key areas that will help us to achieve our marine Vision

1. **A network of Marine Protected Areas**

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are at the heart of marine nature conservation. We are therefore delighted that the Act requires the designation of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) as part of a UK network of MPAs. This aspect of the legislation is of paramount importance in the delivery of our Vision. It is therefore vital that:

- An ecologically coherent network of MPAs, including a sufficient number of highly protected sites, is designated by 2012
- MPAs protect examples of the whole range of common or 'typical' habitats and species found in healthy seas, as well as rare, threatened or vulnerable wildlife
- MPAs have strong, proactive conservation objectives, and are well managed and effectively enforced
- The network boosts the health of the marine environment as a whole, allowing damaged, degraded areas to recover and building resilience against current and future pressures

2. **Modernised inshore fisheries management**

The Act strengthens the approach to inshore fisheries management in England and Wales. A change of name for the marine fisheries management bodies is not enough. Link wants to see:

- Fisheries managers embrace their new powers and responsibilities to deliver sustainable fish stocks and healthy ecosystems
- A sustainable industry that supports long-term livelihoods and promotes and delivers conservation outcomes
- Full engagement by inshore fisheries managers with a wide range of stakeholders to deliver sustainable inshore fisheries

3. **Improved marine licensing system**

The reformed licensing system that will streamline and simplify decision-making in our seas must ensure:

- A strategic approach to decision-making, in conformity with the marine planning system
- Greater transparency, clarity and openness about decisions
- Greater safeguards for the marine environment

We are delighted that the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act is finally here. Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link), together with our sister Link organisations - Wales Environment Link, Scottish Environment LINK and the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force - have campaigned for ten long years for comprehensive marine legislation to protect our seas and enable recovery of damaged areas.

The seas around the UK are among the most productive and wildlife-rich on Earth. They have an amazing array of habitats - from colourful reefs, to seagrass meadows and undersea cliffs and caves - which host an incredible diversity of marine wildlife.

The UK’s seas support thousands of marine plants and animals, from tiny corals to massive basking sharks and whales. Our seas also support many thousands of jobs in many different industries, are an important part of our cultural heritage and bring enjoyment to millions of people each year.

But our seas and their wildlife are under increasing pressure and marine biodiversity is declining. Over the centuries they have been taken for granted, regarded as a limitless resource. Fragile habitats have been destroyed, once-common species are now on the brink of extinction, fish stocks have collapsed and marine resources have been depleted. The ocean processes that are as important as the rainforests in mitigating climate change are also threatened. Less than 0.001% of the UK’s seas are currently fully protected from all damaging activities.

With the 2009 UK Marine and Coastal Access Act we have a fantastic opportunity to turn this situation around. This is a ‘once in a generation’ opportunity to manage our seas sustainably, to protect marine ecosystems and allow them to recover and thrive again.

Link’s Vision for the future of our seas is for...

Healthy, well-managed seas, where wildlife is flourishing and ecosystems are protected, connected and thriving

The UK Marine and Coastal Access Act finally provides the legislative tools that the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly Government need to take real action towards our Vision. Scotland’s and Northern Ireland’s Marine Bills will complete the jigsaw. **Now is the time for action.**
Our Vision for the Future of our Seas

How will we ensure our Vision is achieved?

The passing of the Act is only the first step towards achieving our Vision. Link will press hard to ensure swift and effective implementation of the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act by the UK Government. We have a wealth of experience in looking after our seas and marine wildlife. We will therefore continue to work with government and other marine stakeholders to ensure that the legislation delivers better marine management and real benefits for marine wildlife and people.

Joined-up action is needed by all four UK administrations to deliver our vision. Link’s sister organisations will be pressing hard for implementation of the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act by the devolved administrations, as well as campaigning for strong marine legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland to complement the UK Act. We look to all four administrations working together to deliver our Vision for the future of our seas.

For more information about this Vision please contact: Joanna Butler at Link, joanna@wcl.org.uk or 020 7820 8600
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“Healthy, well-managed seas, where wildlife is flourishing and ecosystems are protected, connected and thriving.”