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Marine Conservation Society 2017 General Election Manifesto Asks for UK Seas

The snap election provides a unique opportunity to renew and review your commitments for the needs of the UK's Seas. I am writing to you to outline the Marine Conservation Society's manifesto asks and to request that you include these in your revised manifesto.

As the only UK charity dedicated solely to the protection and sustainable management of our seas, the challenges MCS seek to address have never been greater. Decades of unsustainable exploitation have had a devastating effect on countless habitats and species that grace our coastline and seas, deteriorating the vast goods and services they provide to our economy and communities. MCS hopes that your 2017 manifesto commits to developing protections for UK seas and beyond to ensure the recovery and maintenance of our seas, coastlines and communities.

Progress within some areas - such as the increased number of EU stocks (excluding in the Mediterranean Sea) being fished in line with scientific advice (less than 30% fished at sustainable levels in 2007 compared with 52% in 2015) and the advent of Marine Planning in our seas undoubtedly offers promise if delivered as intended. The carrier bag charges and the proposed ban on microbeads show an understanding that marine litter is a growing problem. Others - such as the development of a full network of marine protected areas around the UK's coastline, and the dramatic increase in marine litter (in particular plastics) - require urgent support and continued attention.

MCS works across a range of key issues impacting our seas through a wide variety of forums, including with the scientific and academic communities, NGO coalitions, corporate partnerships and Government led forums. Given this breadth, this briefing is intended to provide you with a concise sense of MCS's priorities, but it is not an exhaustive account of the range of work we address. I hope it helps you in providing details of the priority issues that we are looking at the next Government to address, and the strength of public support behind these asks. I would of course be very happy for the relevant staff and expertise to discuss any of the issues outlined in greater detail.

- **Complete an ecologically coherent network of well-managed marine protected areas in UK seas**
The landmark Marine Acts passed in Westminster, Holyrood and Stormont¹ each set out the provision to collaboratively establish a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) which covers the full range of features in UK seas. Our domestic network of MPAs needs completion. The designation of an ecologically coherent network of MPAs has a broad and substantial constituency. In addition to the overwhelming public support, The Sea User's Development Group, whose members include UK Oil & Gas and the Association of British Ports, has signed a joint statement with eNGOs in support of an ecologically coherent network of MPAs. The House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee reaffirmed in their Marine Science Inquiry report that, as with the 2009 Marine Act, there remains cross party support to see a full network delivered. More recently, the EAC report (launched on April 25) urged Government to finish the job of designating sites in England, and ensure that they are well-managed. Additionally we urge the Government to work constructively with the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland collectively to complete the UK network.

¹ The wording on the requirement of a network set out in the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) is mirrored within the Marine (Scotland) Act (2010), and the Northern Ireland Marine Act (2013).



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- **Ensure sustainable UK fisheries and aquaculture**

The Government should maintain and strengthen legal requirements that limit catches to levels consistent with achieving maximum sustainable yield (MSY), provide the basis for precautionary and ecosystem-based fisheries management, create a time bound discard ban with full documentation and accountability for all species subject to catch limits, and encourage ongoing research and innovation to better monitor and reduce the impact of fisheries and aquaculture on the marine environment. The UK and devolved governments have a shared vision of “clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas”². It is imperative that governments work together to deliver this vision and put sustainability at the heart of fisheries and aquaculture management. The long-term social and economic sustainability of the fishing and aquaculture industries across the UK is dependent on a productive and biologically diverse marine environment that supports healthy fish stocks.

- **Introduce a deposit return system for single use drinks containers and a comprehensive ban on microbeads to significantly reduce marine litter**

Single use drinks containers are a very conspicuous form of beach litter and make up around 10% of litter found on UK beaches. We believe that a deposit return system for such items as plastic and glass bottles and aluminium cans, offers the best solution for this type of litter. Such systems are in place in around 40 countries or states around the world and have been shown to increase high quality recycling, decrease litter and reduce costs for Local Authorities. The proposed ban on microbeads is a good step forward in stemming plastic pollution. Plastic does not biodegrade. Microbeads from domestic and cosmetic sources end up in our seas and seafood. Larger pieces break down into small pieces that last for hundreds if not thousands of years, with huge social, economic and environmental consequences. More than 260 species of marine wildlife are known to have become entangled in litter or mistaken it for food. Our surveys have recorded a staggering increase in litter of 130% over the two decades since MCS began involving thousands of volunteers in monitoring and cleaning our beaches.

Finally, I have also enclosed a copy of the Greener UK’s manifesto vision which further highlights the need for healthy, diverse, sustainable seas as well as guidelines for policy makers for delivering sustainable seas. This collaborative piece of work was produced by Greener UK, a group of 13 major environmental organisations, with a combined public membership of 7.9 million people.

I would like to thank you, and your party, in advance for supporting our seas.

Yours sincerely

Sandy Luk
Chief Executive, Marine Conservation Society

² The UK Marine Policy Statement, “Safeguarding our Seas: A Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Development of our Marine Environment” Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, March 2011