Making Waves to protect our seas: HLF backs Wildlife Trusts' call to action

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The three-year scheme aims to foster a greater sense of responsibility amongst the public for the protection of our seas and has been timed to coincide with government identification of new Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs – due to be designated from 2013) under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. 'Making Waves' will see a wide range of activities planned to help people learn about the wonderful wildlife and natural marine habitats of the Solent and Eastern English Channel.

Richard Benyon MP, Environment Minister, supporting the project, commented: "I am delighted that Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Sussex Wildlife Trust have been given this grant. I am always keen that there are as many opportunities as possible for people to learn about wildlife and the marine environment especially along such a unique stretch of England's coastline."

Lisa Chilton, Head of People and Wildlife, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, explained how important the new scheme will be: "The wildlife beneath the waves of our region is so colourful, beautiful, weird and wonderful that much of it wouldn't look out of place on a tropical coral reef. There are dainty seahorses, exquisite slugs and even fish with fingers! Few people are aware of this hidden world, and even fewer have had the chance to explore it – so it is perhaps not surprising that our seas haven't been properly protected. 'Making Waves' will help change that. We're going to develop a variety of techniques and media to 'immerse' people in the marine environment and encourage them to conserve it into the future."

'Making Waves' will involve all ages, with a particular focus on new audiences such as young people in coastal as well as urban, rural and inland areas. Two project officers will be employed, one to work with each Trust, to run a co-ordinated regional maritime learning programme to engage diverse audiences. The scheme will target Southampton, the Isle of Wight, Havant/ Emsworth, Brighton and Pebsham/ Hastings and St Leonards in Year 1; and in Years 2 and 3, Lymington, North Hampshire, Portsmouth, Gosport, Selsey, Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Worthing, Crawley and Seaford/Newhaven.

UK waters are home to thousands of different plant and animal species. Some of the UK's most diverse and important marine habitats are to be found in South East England, and over 50% of the region's wildlife resides beneath the sea or on the shoreline. The Isle of Wight Needles and Sussex's Seven Sisters chalk cliffs continue under the sea where rare sea caves and other formations host soft corals, sponges, molluscs, crabs and fish. In the Solent, sheltered estuaries provide ideal habitats for nationally scarce sea grass plants which act as nursery grounds for many species whilst reducing coastal erosion, filtering water pollutants, and absorbing significant amounts of carbon dioxide. These estuaries are also important habitats for visiting and resident wildfowl and waders, and a population of harbour seals. Further offshore, massive sub-sea sand dunes are important areas for sand eels, bass, flatfish, sharks and rays.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: "A key part of this project will be to positively engage people, target new audiences, and break down negative barriers to marine conservation. To many, the sea is an alien environment. New government measures aims to bring in imminent conservation measures for our

seas and promote greater public engagement. Making Waves will play a vital role in this process to protect our seas and will offer people from all walks of life a chance to get involved."

Activities planned include:

- a new marine outreach service for schools
- a programme of staff, volunteer, teacher and group leader training, including new opportunities for volunteers to get involved.
- an extensive programme of events for families and adults in coastal and inland locations and on key tourist routes – including 28 family learning events, practical workshops and road shows
- 20 pop-up exhibitions in different locations
- an intergenerational oral history project exploring people's relationship with the sea
- high quality interpretation materials including a DVD for screening on board ferries, and boat trips with live underwater footage
- new marine heritage web content including live discussions with marine experts
- a marine learning conference at the end of the project

'Making Waves' has been devised by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Sussex Wildlife Trust in response to a survey by Natural England in 2007 that found a lack of public awareness of the marine environment with over 44% of respondents thinking that the sea was generally barren in their region. This three-year project will contribute to the Living Seas strategy of the 47 Wildlife Trusts in the UK which includes the objective of helping people to understand and value this natural environment.

Note to editors
* The HLF grant to the project Making Waves is for £412,400 (89% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

Further information
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