

**Letter from the Minister for Environment & Agri-Environment Elliot Morley MP to Michael Jack MP, Chairman, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee**

**5 October 2004**

**REPORT INTO THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT**

When we spoke on the 'phone on the 9 September, I updated you on progress made on a number of marine initiatives since Margaret Beckett wrote to you on 28 July about the Government's response to the Committee's report into the marine environment. I promised to write to give you a further update on progress.

As Margaret said in her letter, the report of the Review of Marine Fisheries and Environmental Enforcement was published on 8 July. The report of the Review of Marine Nature Conservation Working Group was submitted to the Government on 26 July. Since then we have been working up our responses to these Reviews. We are on track to respond to both Reviews by the end of the year.

In addition, we have now finalised our project specification to undertake a pilot project on marine spatial planning to test out ideas and options for developing, implementing and managing a marine spatial plan. This could form a key element of a Marine Bill. The invitation to tender has been issued and potential contractors are currently preparing their bids. The project should be well underway by Christmas.

In his speech on 14 September, the Prime Minister referred to Defra's 5 year programme to take forward the wider sustainable development and environment agenda and stated his belief that "*there are strong arguments for a new approach to managing our seas, including a new Marine Bill*". Such a Bill would also provide the vehicle for taking forward the recommendations of the Review of Development in Marine and Coastal Waters.

Elliot Morley MP, Minister for Environment & Agri-Environment