



Accompanied by Natural England chairman Poul Christensen, consultant Paul Johnson explains that access agreements are unsatisfactory for the coastal footpath and new legislation is needed.

lost to coastal erosion (a third in the northeast) and will need replacing.

Consultant Paul Johnson suggested the situation is unsatisfactory and the Government need to legislate on this to give secure legal access right round the coast. A £50,000,000 budget will result in the path's many obstructions being removed over the next decade.

The path will stop at estuaries and not go up them, not the only way rivers will be treated completely differently from the sea. With 98% of rivers in England having no access for boats, permissive or otherwise, DEFRA have taken the line that permissive access is the way forward and the law should not be changed inland. Yet, for the coast the complete opposite is proposed with new legislation replacing unsatisfactory permissive use. Paddlers International asked Natural England chairman Poul Christensen why the difference. He admitted that he did not know. A DEFRA spokesman later declined to give the reason, only to confirm the position and say that the detailed route of the path would be 'agreed through voluntary negotiation.'

The BMF secured important points in the bill. In particular, there is now commitment to the principle of sustainability with social and economic issues being taken into consideration in addition to the environmental issues for which some groups were lobbying exclusively. The Government have also agreed to the removal of a clause restricting the activities of recreational users in proposed Marine Conservation Zones in a way that the BMF and RYA claimed was unjust and not legally viable. Howard Pridding of the BMF said 'Overall, I do not believe there is any major gulf between the environmental lobby groups and those representing economic and social interests'. The prospect of no-go areas for inshore craft has been relished by some environmentalists who would like to see the complete exclusion of boats from some waters. A DEFRA spokesman dismissed such concern, telling *Canoeist* 'There is nothing in the Marine & Coastal Access Act which will automatically lead to closures for leisure craft of any part of our seas and introducing such measures would unlikely to be critical in setting-up Marine Conservation Zones.

'Restrictions on boating, anchorage and other marine activities already apply in and around existing marine protected areas, and off-shore installations such as wind, oil and gas constructions. It is these sorts

of measures we would expect to be introduced when new marine protected areas are designated.'

Note the critical word 'automatically'. It all comes down to reasonable attitudes by those in authority, not a comforting thought with 98% of inland waters in England and Wales closed to all boats at all times, often as a result of the policies of those who have just been handed major new powers. CCW is talking of Marine Conservation Zones 'with a high level of protection where marine wildlife can go undisturbed' and greeted the new legislation with terms such as the Welsh coast being 'vulnerable to human activities.' The passing of the

bill was warmly welcomed by environmental bodies. The laudable objectives have included protecting wildlife environments in our inshore waters and providing a public footpath right round the coast. However, environmental bodies talk of seas, wildlife, nature and the coast having extra protection in tones which sound ominous to other users.

The BMF has given qualified support, subject to seeing the details of what is proposed, such zones perhaps affecting up to 30% of the British coastline. An example quoted is Skomer, where there is no time in the year when access is not closed to some part of the coast, the locations and standoff distances often hard to identify from small boats, although those on foot are encouraged to visit.

In Scotland, where inland waters are all open to boats, the Marine (Scotland) Bill is also pressing ahead with powers to introduce Marine Protected Areas.

The new Act shifts the balance of power towards environmentalists and walkers and away from boaters and marine businesses. How far it shifts depends on the attitudes of those in control. Public consultation on amending the Countryside & Rights of Way Act for coastal land closed on December 1st.

Astonishing Angling Trust statement

In May, the Angling Trust, claiming to represent all anglers in England after amalgamations in 2009, issued a statement that there is not a right of navigation and that they, like the Government and the EA, consider that access agreements are the way forward. These would be unlikely where there is a potential for environmental damage, on small rivers where there is likely to be a significant risk of conflict or where riparian owners would suffer unreasonable interference with the enjoyment of their property. Agreement would be needed both for launching and to be on the water. Canoeing bodies were accused of frequently misstating the law. Agreements should be made for small groups at local level to bypass intransigence of national bodies. Special Areas of Conservation, SSSIs and fishery protection aspects should be taken into consideration and the Natural England, CCW and national park authorities involved. Angling lawyers would advise on conditions, insurance, liability, signage, provision of information and enforcement. The AT is keen to promote access on all rivers where appropriate. Riparian owners and anglers are encouraged to look at rivers where there have been successful arrangements for canoe access and government or local authorities to fund and facilitate this.

Paddlers International asked for examples of such agreements. Mark Owens, Environmental Campaigns Manager of the AT, replied 'The use of voluntary access agreements is not only the position of AT but also the Environment Agency and government. Pilot studies and agreements were set up 2 years ago as part of a DEFRA funded project in conjunction with Southampton University and a lot of work was done with anglers, riparian owners, local councils and canoeists to get these pilot projects off the ground.

Unfortunately the day before launch the BCU withdrew their support. As far as I am aware the only one left is on a stretch of the Teme and is, I think, strictly controlled by a university canoe club. If you wish further details these can be obtained from the EA. The BCU have other agreements, notably one in the North East and they will be able to help you with this and others. The AT's position regarding the legal aspects are clear and defined in the recent press release. Whilst you claim that canoeists have been trying this approach for decades and imply no success, our members have been fishing these waters for generations and over that time have built up our agreements with riparian owners

Cornish cleanup

A new sewerage scheme on the north Cornish coast should result in improved water quality between Tintagel and Boscastle as it will terminate the use of several raw sewage discharges into the sea. The scheme has been delayed in the aftermath of the 2004 flood at Boscastle.

Scottish sea guidelines

After talking to paddlers and conservation bodies, the SCA have updated their guidelines for sea paddlers, first issued in 1998 and circulated to our relevant subscribers through Select Mailing at the time. The expanded guidelines now include non native species, seaweeds, whales, basking sharks and the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code.

Lomond Canal planned

It is proposed to construct a Lomond Canal. It will reduce flooding in Strathleven and also encourage tourism.

Dolphin movements not understood

Cardigan Bay has Britain's largest coastal population of bottlenose dolphins, 150 to 250 feeding and breeding in the summer. In some summers large numbers disappear or are replaced by others from elsewhere. CCW admit they do not know why.

Welsh seascapes study

CCW have had undertaken a study of seascapes as seen from land. The study will be used to help control developments on and offshore.