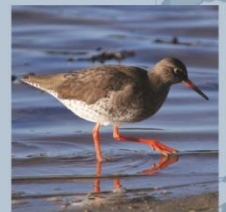
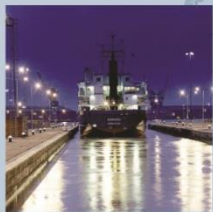


# Marine Planning in the UK

## *Making a Difference?*

September 2015

Creating sustainable solutions for the marine environment



**Stephen Hull is a thought leader and practitioner in the field of marine planning. He has led and contributed to a wide range of studies to support and inform implementation of marine planning in the UK. In this White Paper Stephen reviews implementation of marine planning in the UK and highlights the progress that is being made as well as some of the challenges in ensuring that marine planning contributes to sustainable development in UK seas.**

## Introduction

Ten years on from the Defra Irish Sea marine planning pilot study<sup>1</sup>, and following the enactment of legislation for marine planning through Marine Acts for the UK<sup>2</sup>, Scotland<sup>3</sup> and Northern Ireland<sup>4</sup>, establishing the necessary institutional frameworks and adopting the UK Marine Policy Statement<sup>5</sup>, marine plans for UK seas are finally being produced, including:

- East of England Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans (East marine plans) (adopted 2014)<sup>6</sup>;
- a national marine plan for Scotland (adopted 2015)<sup>7</sup>
- Shetland Islands Marine Spatial Plan (SIMSP) (adopted 2014)<sup>8</sup>
- Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters (PFOW) Marine Spatial Plan (consultation draft published in 2015)<sup>9</sup>

Work is also well underway for the development of national marine plans for Wales<sup>10</sup> and Northern Ireland<sup>11</sup> and the regional plan for the South Inshore and South Offshore Marine Plans<sup>12</sup> in English waters. In Scotland work is also beginning on the development of Regional Marine Plans<sup>13</sup> which will extend out to the 12nm limit with the first partnerships for the Clyde and Shetland expected to be established in 2015.

## The need for marine planning

Historically, the planning and management of UK seas has progressed in a piecemeal fashion with planning occurring on a sectoral basis and development decisions being made on a case by case basis. Against a backdrop of increasing competition for space amongst human use activities in the marine area and a continued decline in marine biodiversity, Safeguarding our Seas (Defra, 2002)<sup>14</sup>, identified an *'urgent need for a coherent and integrated approach to planning and management in UK seas to address the continuing decline in marine biodiversity and to ensure efficient use of marine resources'*.

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<http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&ProjectID=12701&FromSearch=Y&Publisher=1&SearchText=ME1407&SortString=ProjectCode&SortOrder=Asc&Paging=10#Description>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/pdfs/ukpga\\_20090023\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/pdfs/ukpga_20090023_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/pdfs/asp\\_20100005\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/pdfs/asp_20100005_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2013/10/pdfs/nia\\_20130010\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2013/10/pdfs/nia_20130010_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-marine-policy-statement>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/east-inshore-and-east-offshore-marine-plans>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/national>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nafc.uhi.ac.uk/departments/marine-science-and-technology/strategy/marine-spatial-planning>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/regional/activity/pentlandorkney/Consultation>

<sup>10</sup> <http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/marineandfisheries/marine/marine-planning/?lang=en>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/common\\_policy-marine-plan-for-northern-ireland-home.htm](http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/policy/common_policy-marine-plan-for-northern-ireland-home.htm)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/south-inshore-and-south-offshore-marine-plan-areas>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/regional>

<sup>14</sup> <http://eelink.net/~asilwildlife/BritishMarineStewardship.pdf>



In response, the UK Government and devolved administrations have enacted new legislation - the Marine Acts - which have provided for a statutory system of marine planning across UK waters with the intention of supporting an integrated approach to planning and management. The description of the marine planning system for England<sup>15</sup>, in setting out the role of marine planning, notes that *'marine planning will contribute to the effective management of marine activities and the more sustainable use of our marine resources by creating the framework for consistent, sustainable and evidence-based decision-making. It will enable the Government to set a clear direction for managing our seas, to clarify objectives and priorities, and to direct decision-makers, users and stakeholders towards more strategic and efficient use of marine resources'*.

Six key outcomes from the marine planning system are identified as<sup>15</sup>:

- sustainable development of the marine area, with sustainable use of marine resources and improved protection and enhancement of the marine environment;
- sustainable economic growth as objectives for marine resources are identified and decisions are taken to help deliver them;
- optimising the potential of environmental resources and ecosystem services to support socially, culturally and economically important activities while living within environmental limits;
- reduced risk of damage to ecosystems, the physical marine environment and the heritage assets; longer term cumulative effects taken into account, including climate change adaptation and mitigation;
- through the participatory approach, marine planning will assist in promoting the appreciation, understanding and a sense of ownership of the diversity of the marine environment, its seascapes and its natural and cultural heritage; and
- improved quality of life for coastal communities through stronger connection between local marine and coastal economies and improved access to, understanding and enjoyment of their marine areas.

### Making a difference?

So with all this activity and the various approaches being adopted across devolved administrations, what can we learn from these early plans, what difference are they making to the way in which our seas are managed and are they contributing to sustainable development in UK waters?

### Framework for Marine Planning

The Marine Acts provide for a statutory system of marine planning at national/regional levels. The UK wide Marine Policy Statement (MPS) provides the overarching framework within which all UK marine plans are to be produced. In England, the responsibility for developing marine plans lies with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) whereas within the devolved administrations the responsibility for national planning has been retained within central government (Marine Scotland in Scotland, Welsh Government in Wales and the

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/183195/110318-marine-planning-descript.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183195/110318-marine-planning-descript.pdf)

Department of Environment in Northern Ireland). Within Scotland, the development of regional plans will be taken forward by regional marine planning partnerships<sup>16</sup>

While UK marine planners are charged with taking forward integrated planning and management, it is important to recognise that the statutory marine planning system sits alongside rather than replaces many existing sectoral planning processes. For example, planning for UK oil and gas exploration and development is the responsibility of the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), fisheries management is largely pursued through the Common Fisheries Policy, the planning of Marine Protected Areas has been taken forward by nature conservation departments within national administrations and planning to meet the requirements of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive in UK seas is coordinated by Defra and devolved administrations. The continuation of sectoral planning approaches limit the extent of integration that can be achieved by marine plans, with most plan policies signposting existing policies and requirements within pre-existing sectoral plans. In England, this is compounded by the institutional arrangements for marine planning where the MMO, a Non-Departmental Public Body is responsible for co-ordinating plans and securing agreement with more powerful central government departments such as DECC, Department for Transport and Defra.

### Plan Development Processes

All UK marine planning initiatives have followed a broadly similar planning process involving evidence gathering, the identification of issues, establishment of a vision and objectives, consideration of plan options, and the development of policies to give effect to the preferred options, all informed by stakeholder engagement. The process applied for English marine plans is illustrated in Figure 1 but all UK marine planning processes have, to date, broadly followed a similar approach.



Figure 1: illustrative process for the development of English marine plans (Source: Marine Management Organisation)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/regional/partnerships>



## Gathering Evidence

Early marine planning efforts have been important in collating existing evidence and defining and subsequently acquiring additional information where this has been identified. For example, the MMO has commissioned and delivered a significant number of projects that have generated spatial mapping products<sup>17</sup>. Both the MMO and Marine Scotland have established marine planning data portals which host a wide range of spatial data<sup>18,19</sup>.

## Identifying Issues

The development of all of the marine plans has been underpinned by analysis of the issues within the marine plan areas, drawing on available evidence and the development of options to address these issues. This analysis has informed the development of plan policies. There are a wide range of different issues affecting the marine environment, but there may be limited scope for marine planning to address them<sup>20</sup>. However, marine planning can signpost some of these wider issues and the mechanisms through which they should be/are being addressed, the process of developing marine plans needs to focus on those issues where marine planning has a role to play in resolving those issues. To date it has proved challenging within marine planning processes to clearly articulate the 'marine plan issues', to build consensus on solutions, and thus to develop more specific policies for their resolution. In part this reflects the complexity of marine systems and the lack of shared stakeholder understanding of issues and potential solutions and the challenges in presenting large volumes of information in an accessible form. A greater focus by marine planning bodies on adequately presenting and framing the plan issues and adequately structuring the debate plans should help to improve the specificity and effectiveness of marine plan policies.

## Stakeholder Engagement

All of the planning processes have entailed a level of stakeholder engagement. Statutory plans such as the East marine plans and the Scotland national marine plan are subject to formal public participation requirements<sup>21,22</sup>. This has resulted in a level of consultation and engagement of relevant stakeholders but the plans have largely been written by the plan making bodies (Marine Management Organisation and Marine Scotland respectively). The PFOW plan, while not a formal regional marine plan, sought to test the Scottish regional plan making process and therefore also followed a standard public consultation and engagement process. The Shetland Marine Spatial Plan



<sup>17</sup>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/426346/Evidence\\_Projects\\_Register080515.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/426346/Evidence_Projects_Register080515.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://planningportal.marinemangement.org.uk/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/nmpihome>

<sup>20</sup>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/400766/Options\\_report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/400766/Options_report.pdf)

<sup>21</sup>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/312377/east\\_final\\_spp\\_aug\\_ust2013.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/312377/east_final_spp_aug_ust2013.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00474307.doc>

is a non-statutory plan that has been developed under the guidance of a Local Advisory Group including key stakeholders with a predominantly local focus. This represents more of a partnership approach to plan development compared to the other planning processes, recognising that partnership approaches are potentially easier to pursue at more local levels. It is also of note that the Shetland stakeholders have been working together since 2006 and the longevity of the partnership facilitates such methods of working.

## What's in the plans?

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All of the plans conform to a broadly similar pattern containing a vision and objectives, supported by more detailed environmental, social and economic policies. The East Marine Plans have included a separate detailed Implementation and Monitoring Plan<sup>23</sup> but details on how the other plans are to be implemented and monitored is generally lacking.

### Vision and Objectives

The development of the respective plan visions and objectives all build upon the UK Marine Policy Statement and, for the draft PFOW Plan, the national marine plan for Scotland. A general observation of the first plans has been that the objectives are set at a high level, in many ways similar to the objectives within the UK MPS. The South marine plans are seeking to establish more specific objectives (SMART objectives)<sup>20</sup> compared to the East marine plans on the basis that this might facilitate monitoring of progress towards the achievement of these objectives. However, when planning at a regional scale, which includes marine areas with very different characteristics, it may be challenging to define SMART objectives that are applicable at this scale.

While there is no provision within English, Welsh or Northern Ireland marine planning processes for the development of 'nested' sub-regional plans, it is of note that the non-statutory guidance for English marine planning system clarifies that '*Where more detailed and/or locally specific policy is required in certain locations, for example in particularly busy parts of the inshore region such as ports and estuaries, area-specific policy should appear within the Marine Plan*'<sup>15</sup>. It may be helpful for future marine plans to consider developing more local objectives and policies which reflect geographical differences across the marine plan area.

### Policies

All plans have included policies to support achievement of plan objectives. All except the PFOW draft plan have included spatial policies linked to maps. These policies include general policies for the protection of the marine environment and to support national/regional economic and social development. They also include with more specific sectoral policies both to provide locational guidance for activities and to minimise impacts to the environment and on other marine users. However, many of these policies simply signpost existing policies, with plans containing only a small number of spatially explicit policies that might be considered to be new. For example only four out of 38 policies within the East marine plans were considered to be new spatially explicit policies<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/324567/eastimpfinal.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/324567/eastimpfinal.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/312503/east-plan-hra-letter.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/312503/east-plan-hra-letter.pdf)



The specificity of the policies varies between the different plans. For example, the national marine plan for Scotland includes quite generic policies with few spatially explicit policies. The key spatial policies in the plan relate to future offshore renewables development for which the plan formally adopts option areas for offshore wind, wave and tidal development established through an earlier sectoral marine planning process<sup>25</sup>. In contrast, the SIMSP includes some spatially targeted policies, particularly in relation to commercial fisheries and aquaculture based on more detailed information and consultation at local level.

For the PFOW draft plan, the general consensus expressed by stakeholders during the Planning Issues and Options consultation was that given the current state of knowledge of environmental impacts, technology development and marine activities/use, zoning of activities was not a realistic prospect in the short to medium term. The principle of supporting co-existence and compatibility between marine users was therefore considered the preferred approach. For

this reason, the draft Plan does not identify areas for exclusive use for specific developments and/or activities. For offshore renewables, the draft Plan identifies Option Areas for offshore wind, wave and tidal development consistent with the national marine plan.

The draft PFOW plan policies (the development of which was co-ordinated by Marine Scotland) show clear alignment with policies within the national marine plan. This is less evident in the SIMSP which was finalised in advance of publication of the national marine plan. With the development of regional marine plans for Scottish waters it might be expected to see a greater level of conformance between the national plan and regional plans such as SIMSP.

The East marine plans and the national marine plan for Scotland include specific policies relating to economic and social impacts. For example, the latter includes the following general policies:

- *GEN 2 Economic benefit: Sustainable development and use which provides economic benefit to Scottish communities is encouraged when consistent with the objectives and policies of the Plan.*
- *GEN 3 Social benefit: Sustainable development and use which provides social benefits is encouraged when consistent with the objectives and policies of the Plan.*

The plan also states that:

*“The economic benefit of proposed development and growth in activity should be considered carefully and taken into account, appropriately and proportionately, in marine decision making. Particular consideration should be given to opportunities that aim to provide benefit to communities, local job creation and local training either directly or through supply chain projects...”*

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0042/00428241.pdf>

*.... The social benefit of proposed developments and increasing use should be considered carefully and taken into account, appropriately and proportionately, in marine decision making. Consideration should be given where industries and developers assist in supporting development of onshore infrastructure, helping to achieve community cohesion and reducing social disparity. Impact of proposed development on existing activities, including those which promote health and wellbeing, should also be taken into account in decision making.”*

Within the East marine plans, there are a number of policies relevant to social and economic assessment, including:

- *Proposals that provide sustainable economic productivity benefits which are additional to GVA generated by existing activities should be supported (Policy EC1).*
- *Proposals that provide additional sustainable employment benefits should be supported, particularly where these benefits have the potential to meet employment needs in localities close to the marine plan areas (Policy EC2).*
- *Proposals that provide health and social well-being benefits including through maintaining, or enhancing, access to the coast and marine area should be supported (Policy SOC1).*

These policies are variously intended to encourage industry to:

- demonstrate the economic benefits of their proposals in an explicit manner;
- provide clarity to industry that development that can deliver additional employment benefits should be considered favourably, especially where employment can be accessed by those in localities within or close to the plan area;
- provide clarity that social and environmental impacts may be considered in decisions relating to economic benefits; and
- provide direction to industry that decision makers should support applications that can show they will bring positive benefits to society.

However, the practical application of these policies is unclear and further guidance would be helpful in ensuring that appropriate socio-economic information is available to support decision-making.

Existing marine plans vary in the level of integration achieved with terrestrial policies. For example, the SIMSP has been adopted as Supplementary Guidance to the Shetland Islands Local Development Plan. The strong linkage particularly facilitates integrated terrestrial and marine spatial planning. For national marine plans such as the East marine plans and the national marine plan for Scotland such integration is less overt. The greater level of integration achieved by the SIMSP reflects the more local scale of the plan, and the existing and extensive marine responsibilities of Shetland Islands Council, as well as the composition of the Local Advisory Group co-ordinating the development of the Plan with many members having strong connections with both terrestrial and marine planning interests.

## Implementation of Plans

All of the plans introduce a plan-led approach to decision-making for the relevant areas. In effect this means that any responsible body taking decisions affecting the relevant marine area needs to do so in accordance with marine plan policies unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise. Importantly within England and Wales, where decisions are being made in relation to developments covered by National Policy Statements (NPS), these policies take precedence over marine plan policies. This is particularly relevant to many of the larger



development projects such as marine renewable energy and oil and gas. The pre-eminence of NPS within England and Wales will limit the impact of marine plans in relation to these activities.

A number of the marine plans include enabling policies to support specific economic development activities such as offshore renewables, carbon capture and storage, marine aggregates and aquaculture. Depending on the activity, additional management actions may be required to support realisation of plan objectives. For activities such as marine aggregate extraction, the industry is mature and development is likely to proceed without additional support. However, for offshore renewables and carbon capture and storage, the emerging nature of the technologies requires a high level of wider support in terms of public subsidy and research and development.



In relation to aquaculture the UK Government and devolved administrations have ambitious plans to expand production, including marine production of finfish and shellfish. For example, the Ministerial Foreword to the report 'Planning for sustainable growth in the English Aquaculture Industry'<sup>26</sup> notes that 'The Government are keen to encourage the development of efficient, competitive and sustainable aquaculture industries, while protecting the health status and conservation of UK farmed, wild migratory and freshwater fish, and shellfish. We want to enable the industry to fully develop its potential to become an efficient, competitive and sustainable provider of high quality seafood'. While the inclusion of supportive

policies within marine plans can help to provide space for aquaculture expansion, it is likely (due to limited available space in inshore areas) that future expansion will need to focus further offshore with attendant technical and economic viability issues. A high level of investment in aquaculture research and significant funding support is likely to be required if the potential for aquaculture expansion is to be realised.

To improve implementation of marine plans, particularly some of the enabling policies, there needs to be greater clarity and connectedness between the marine plans and wider management actions that are necessary to support achievement of plan objectives. Given the spread of responsibility for marine matters across government (Environment Food & Rural Affairs, Energy and Climate Change, Department for Transport, Communities and Local Government, Culture Media and Sport, Ministry of Defence, The Crown Estate) and across devolved administrations, as well as the need for partnership with the private sector, this is considered to be a challenging task.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of marine plans is an important element of the management cycle in helping to inform future refinements to marine plans<sup>27</sup>. The monitoring and periodical reporting on the implementation of marine plans is a legal requirement under Section 61 of Marine & Coastal Access Act 2009, Section 16 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and Section 9 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013. The legislation requires that at

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/82402/120112-aquaculture-consult-doc.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/82402/120112-aquaculture-consult-doc.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Carneiro, G., 2013. Evaluation of marine spatial planning. *Marine Policy* 37 (2013) 214–229

intervals of not more than three years after each marine plan is adopted (or five years for Scottish plans) there is a duty to report on:

- the effects of policies in the marine plan;
- the effectiveness of those policies in securing plan objectives; and
- the progress towards achieving any objectives set out for that region in a marine plan and the Marine Policy Statement.

Once prepared these reports will be published and relevant Ministers must decide whether or not to amend or replace the marine plan.

The development of implementation and monitoring arrangements across the published plans is variable. For the draft PFOW plan it has been recognised that the regional marine planning process will commence immediately following the pilot exercise that developed the draft plan. On this basis it was considered more appropriate to leave the development of implementation and monitoring arrangements to the regional planning process. For the SIMSP, the intention is to establish a baseline against which future change to both the condition and uses of the marine area, and the design and functioning of the governance system can be assessed.



The national marine plan for Scotland provides very little detail on how the plan will be implemented or monitored, other than noting that the statutory monitoring reports will '*review the effects and effectiveness of the policies and the progress being made towards securing the objectives*'.

A detailed implementation and monitoring plan (IMP)<sup>21</sup> has been produced to accompany the East marine plans. This recognises that there are a number of other influences within the marine plan areas, and therefore that it will be challenging, and in some cases impossible, to assess how an outcome (such as a higher rate of employment) or what portion of an outcome can be attributed solely to the East marine plans. The East marine plans IMP has therefore focused on seeking to identify the contribution that the plans have made to an outcome, rather than attempting to assess the contribution of plans in relation to other contributing measures, or to explain the reasons why the wider outcome has or has not been achieved.

Carneiro<sup>27</sup> provides an excellent review of the challenges associated with assessing the effectiveness of marine plans, in particular, the difficulty of establishing a robust counterfactual against which to assess the impact of marine plans and in measuring the contribution of plan policies where there are multiple and varying influences affecting desired outcomes. Building on the East marine plans IMP, ICF Consulting Services & ABPmer<sup>28</sup> developed a logic model and framework that can identify the contribution of marine plans to the achievement of desired outcomes. This framework is being applied in the development of the South marine plans IMP.

<sup>28</sup> ICF Consulting Services & ABPmer (in prep). Review of Marine Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Development of Baselines. Project MMO1087.

The issue of attribution is a particularly important challenge for UK marine plans, given the plethora of pre-existing and ongoing sectoral and environmental planning initiatives. The relative lack of 'new' policies and the reliance on signposting existing policies, suggests that the early marine plans are likely to contribute relatively little to key marine outcomes, which are still largely governed by existing sectoral plans. Achieving greater influence on important marine outcomes will be a key challenge for future marine plans.

## Early Conclusions

While experience of the preparation and implementation of marine plans is still very limited, a number of tentative conclusions can be drawn about progress so far.

### The Positives...

The process of developing and publishing plans is already delivering some of the intended benefits although it is difficult to quantify the scale of these benefits.

### Information

The preparation of marine plans has been important in bringing together information (particularly spatial information) about the plan areas and the location and nature of human activities within those areas. It has also helped to drive improvements in the quality of spatial information products for UK seas. The process of bringing this information together in one place is important in facilitating application of a more integrated approach to decision-making in the marine environment. Technological improvements in data capture and reducing costs in data collection should ensure that the quality and availability of information to support marine planning continues to improve over time.



### Process

The various processes followed in developing the marine plans have brought together a diverse range of stakeholders with an interest in the marine environment. This in itself is positive and helps to support more integrated consideration of the marine environment. The level of engagement between different marine plan initiatives has varied. For wider scale plans, consultation and some involvement has occurred. For more local scale plans such as SIMSP, there has been more of a partnership approach. The tiered approach to plan-making in Scotland provides an opportunity to adopt more participative approaches compared to the other devolved administrations.

### Increased Clarity

The publication of marine plans and the introduction of a plan-led approach to marine licensing are contributing to increased clarity and certainty about decision-making in the marine environment. However, there is scope to further improve clarity through the development of more refined spatial policies within marine plans.



## Policies to avoid/minimise adverse impacts

All the marine plans have articulated policies to provide additional protection to the marine environment as a whole, which can inform marine licensing decisions. However, the lack of scientific knowledge of environmental carrying capacity and thresholds means that there remains some uncertainty in decision-making.

## Ongoing Challenges....

### Integrated planning and management

Within the UK, responsibilities for planning and management of its seas remains fragmented and the marine planning bodies have little direct influence over many of the activities covered by marine plans. For example, oil and gas exploration continues to be managed by DECC, planning for Marine Protected Areas has been taken forward separately from the development of marine plans and planning for EC environmental directives such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive is coordinated centrally by Defra. This means that marine plans provide at best a weak form of integration with most policies simply signposting existing policies and requirements within these discrete initiatives. Furthermore, any new policies proposed by the planning bodies have to be consistent with these pre-existing policies, significantly reducing the scope for marine plans to address any limitations of the existing situation.



Given existing institutional arrangements and responsibilities, it will be challenging to improve current levels of integration. However, the ongoing rationalisation of Government in the face of budget cuts and the continuing processes of devolution provide a significant opportunity to bring greater coherence to the scope of national and regional marine planning processes.

### Clearer identification and framing of marine plan issues and options

In order to develop effective marine plan policies, it is important that marine plan issues are correctly identified and framed to promote discussion on appropriate solutions. This is very challenging given the complexities of the marine environment and the complexities of the marine planning and management system itself. A considerable effort is required from marine plan authorities and from stakeholders, to build consensus around marine plan issues and solutions. The time and effort required should not be underestimated. In order for stakeholders to invest effort in the process, they must feel that the outcomes will make the effort worthwhile.

### Clearer spatial policies

The early marine plans have contained very few new spatial policies. The development of more targeted policies would improve the clarity of plans and thus support their implementation. Greater recognition that marine plan areas are not homogeneous and more focus on sub-regional issues and solutions could help to improve the specificity of policies.

### The ecosystem approach

The inclusion of economic and social objectives and policies within marine plans can support ecosystem-based management in pursuit of sustainable development. However, greater clarity is required in terms of how economic and social policies will be applied in decision-making. A recent study for MMO<sup>29</sup> highlighted the complexities and data challenges of implementing an ecosystem-based approach to marine planning. However, this is an important direction of travel for marine planning in moving towards more sustainable management of UK seas. The use of cost benefit analysis techniques as part of regulatory impact assessments for marine plans would help to make trade-offs more transparent.

### Integration with terrestrial plans

Better integration of marine and terrestrial plans is important because all marine activities are dependent on landside infrastructure. The MMO has published guidance to local authority planners<sup>30</sup> on the integration of marine and terrestrial plan policies and has sought to engage local authorities in marine plan preparation and implementation. However, evidence from the SIMSP indicates that integration may be more feasible for local marine plans although the differing institutional arrangements for terrestrial and marine planning within the UK may continue to limit the extent of integration that can be achieved. It is of note that in several other countries in Europe, marine planning out to 12nm is the responsibility of local/regional planning authorities (for example, Germany and Sweden) which facilitates integration of terrestrial and marine planning.

Increasing pressure on public funding within the UK is also likely to reduce the amount of time available to marine and terrestrial planners to promote integration of plan policies.

### Marine planning and management

The preparation of marine plans is part of a wider planning and management process. While regulatory decisions will be made in accordance with marine plans, the achievement of some plan objectives, particularly those that seek to enable economic and social development, will need wider supporting actions. This is likely to require greater partnership between the marine planning authorities, public bodies with sectoral planning responsibilities, local authorities and the private sector, particularly as the plan making authorities do not have a clear economic development role. In particular it will require better joining up of R&D, funding support and integration of terrestrial and marine planning. This will be particularly challenging in a climate of continued public expenditure reductions.

### So what does this all mean?

From a public policy perspective, while the UK is implementing statutory systems of marine planning, there are some clear limitations of the system being established and of the current process being followed which will limit the contribution of marine planning to sustainable development. Refinement of the marine planning system and process is likely to be required if marine planning is to make a significant contribution to sustainable development in our seas. While the former may require changes in institutional responsibilities which can only happen in the medium to long-term, there is plenty of scope for improvement in existing planning processes based on learning from the diversity of early implementation initiatives.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integration-of-ecosystem-approach-into-marine-planning-mmo-1048>

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/312294/localauthorityplanners.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/312294/localauthorityplanners.pdf)