



## Marine Planning that prioritises sustainable development - to enable recovery of marine environment

November 2020

In 2011, the UK Government published its UK Marine Policy Statement, setting out the role for Marine Spatial Planning to manage competing demands on the marine area, taking an ecosystem-based approach. By 2021, England will have completed the first iteration of plans for all marine plan areas, with some areas having had plans in place for over 6 years.

**An undelivered opportunity?** Marine plans promised to ensure that *“Development at sea prevents, minimises and mitigates the cumulative environmental harm; leaves the marine environment in a better state than it was found; and recognises the importance of ocean recovery.”*

Marine plans are a powerful tool to manage man-made threats to the marine Environment, but do not deliver their potential in their current format. The East Marine Plan second iteration, is the time to take stock and for all stakeholders to discuss their needs from future marine plans to identify how marine plans should evolve, enable sustainable development, allowing the restoration of declining species and habitats. An effective Marine Planning system would enable the UK to plan its way into GES, rather than simply seeking to reduce impacts.

### What is the current state of play?

The Marine Policy Statement<sup>1</sup> recognised that the demand for use of our seas and the resulting anthropogenic pressures on them will continue to increase. To address this, we must manage the competing demands on the marine area, taking an ecosystem-based approach.

At its core an ecosystem based approach seeks to ensure that the collective pressure of human activities within the marine area is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) and does not compromise the capacity of marine ecosystems to respond to human-induced changes.

Despite this, to date Marine plans have failed to act in a strategic manner and effectively manage development at sea or deliver an ecosystem-based approach. Currently the marine plans do not provide clear guidance on what activities are compatible with the delivery of an ecosystem based approach and appear to operate on a first come first served basis. Not only does it limit the ability to provide a strategic oversight to the deployment of developments, but at times it compounds the impacts of already built and consented projects. Increasing the risk to the natural environment, rather than reducing it.

Further, an effective marine plan will act as a clear delivery mechanism for the overarching ambition of the UK Government to deliver GES. *The revised 2019 Marine Strategy Part one: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status*<sup>2</sup>, sets out clear operational targets to be delivered between 2018 and 2024. However, the current marine plans do not directly translate the relevant operational targets into clear policy recommendations for marine plan users. As the 2019 UK Governments report on progress to achieve healthy seas by 2020 shows, we are currently failing on

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<sup>1</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/69322/pb3654-marine-policy-statement-110316.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69322/pb3654-marine-policy-statement-110316.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/841246/marine-strategy-part1-october19.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/841246/marine-strategy-part1-october19.pdf)



11 out of 15 indicators, and the persisting decline of many marine species and habitats continues to raise concern. Action to deliver GES combined with greater recognition of the importance of protected site networks role in enabling recovery must be underpinning principles of future marine plans. Drawing on existing legislative frameworks, including the Birds & Habitat Directives, will aid in ensuring damaging developments are minimised and where possible avoided.

To achieve net zero requires a complete transition away from fossil-fuel energy generation, and “unprecedented”<sup>3</sup> changes to the way society operate. We need to reduce our carbon emissions. This can be, in part, through deployment of large-scale renewable energy infrastructure such as offshore wind. However, the natural environment, if in good health and recovering can also play an important role in carbon sequestration.

The Offshore Wind Sector Deal established a target of 30GW by 2030, further increased to 40GW by Government. Marine planning has a key role to play in the energy transition to ensure that these targets are met. However, the current iterations of marine plans fail to take the urgently needed strategic approach to the deployment of offshore wind, deferring to leasing areas already identified by The Crown Estate.

Ultimately, the current system restricts planning consideration to the project level, locks developers into sites with unresolved environmental impacts and prevents the Marine Management Organisation from taking a more strategic approach. Unchecked, this becomes a significant threat to nature, 2030 targets and the UK’s ability to meet net zero commitments.

A revised Marine Policy Statement, that sets a clear ambition to deliver ocean recovery, supported by a marine planning system that delivers an ecosystem based approach, is essential.

### **What does success look like?**

**Effective spatial marine plans** need to be explicit on what activities will be supported, under what circumstances or where they will not be supported. Activities that hinder, or delay delivery of Good Environmental Status, or undermine the Marine Protected Area network, should be given a lower priority within the marine plan area.

**Supporting the role of the MPA network, avoiding developments in biologically sensitive areas and encourage low impact designs;** A well-managed and ecologically coherent network of MPAs is a key objective under the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 and the Marine & Coastal Access act, and crucial in the achievement of Good Environmental Status . Through the Global Oceans Collation, the UK Government is advocating for 30% of the world’s oceans and seas to be within a well-managed protected area network, clearly this ambition must also be delivered at home in UK waters.

**Address cumulative impacts of at sea developments, setting out clear and strategic decarbonisation in harmony with nature;** The role of offshore wind in tackling climate change is undeniable. However, we must ensure that in acting on climate through decarbonisation, we do not increase the threat to nature. The continued development in environmentally sensitive areas risks significantly exacerbating the impacts of already built developments<sup>4</sup>. For example, the level of

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/9/3/034012/meta>



offshore wind already approved for deployment in UK waters reveal that the long-term conservation of our internationally important seabirds is threatened<sup>5,6</sup>.

**Limit the impacts of construction on Nature;** Implement noise limits and a requirement to utilise effective mitigation measures such as bubble curtains to minimise disturbance to marine wildlife from marine developments. Consideration should also be given to during critical periods for wildlife, such as breeding season.

**Tackling Climate change:** Nature has a major role to play and healthy ecosystems (including whales, dolphins and porpoises) can lock up carbon. Sea sediments, phytoplankton and kelp forests store huge amount of carbon as highlighted by the Scottish Government Report <sup>7</sup>, as well as saltmarshes and seagrass, as highlighted by the National Assembly for Wales' Research<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, marine plans must go beyond only *protecting* the environment and instead ensure its long-term health and regeneration . Whilst we support protection in accordance with the Habitat Regulations, to ensure healthy, functioning ecosystems, marine plans must ensure the *recovery* of our degraded marine environment to boost resilience and support adaptation.

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<sup>5</sup> Natural England's final position for Offshore Ornithology at the close of the Norfolk Vanguard Offshore Wind Farm Examination was that it is not possible to exclude an adverse effect on integrity on the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA in combination with other plans or projects.

<sup>6</sup> Natural England – Supplementary Advice for Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA: 'Natural England has advised regulators that the predicted in-combination collision mortality from consented or proposed offshore windfarms could adversely affect the integrity of the SPA'

<sup>7</sup> <https://data.marine.gov.scot/sites/default/files//SMFS%201101.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.assembly.wales/Research%20Documents/19-080%20Blue%20Carbon/19-080-Eng-Web.pdf>