

TOWARDS A PLANNING SYSTEM FOR THE SEA

Government Ministers have given their backing to a pilot project which could lead to a new, plan-led approach for protecting and managing Britain's seas in a more sustainable way.

The project, which is being funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), is examining the basis for marine spatial planning and for a simplified approach to consenting developments at sea, in order to minimise potential conflicts and improve the protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

The project is a key element of the Government's Marine Stewardship initiative to protect and manage the marine environment better. Marine spatial planning has also been advocated by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and the Review of Marine Nature Working Group in its recommendations to Government.

A consortium of marine environmental research bodies and planning specialists including, ABP Marine Environmental Research (ABPmer), Terence O'Rourke, Risk & Policy Analysts, Geotek, Hartley Anderson and Coastal Management for Sustainability, will undertake a review, engage stakeholders and assess the practicability of introducing a system of marine spatial planning for the UK.

Dr Stephen Hull of ABPmer, who is heading the project, said:

“This pilot study is an exciting and challenging project and provides an opportunity to test many ideas that have been discussed by the marine community over the past few years. Marine spatial planning is potentially a key mechanism for delivering sustainable development in the sea and could provide greater certainty for marine developers whilst also improving nature conservation. We will be seeking to engage all relevant stakeholders actively as part of the pilot project – such involvement will be crucial to its success.”

Jim Claydon, Technical Director, Terence O'Rourke, added:

“This project involves a significant extension of the concept of spatial planning and we look forward to the challenge of devising ways in which marine plans can be implemented and made compatible with terrestrial planning regimes.”

The pilot project will include a peer review of international projects and material on marine spatial planning and other relevant initiatives, including the applicability of land-use planning concepts to the marine environment. It will also involve the development of a simulated plan for part of the Irish Sea, building on the work undertaken for the recent DEFRA-led Review of Marine Nature Conservation.

A number of regional workshops will be held next year as part of the plan-making process and information on the project will be made widely available.

The project is due for completion in late 2005.

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Editors' Notes

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has suggested a definition of a marine spatial plan as "*a strategic plan for regulating, managing and protecting the marine environment that addresses the multiple, cumulative and potentially conflicting uses of the sea.*"

Practical issues to be addressed in the pilot include the availability of marine data, how sea areas could be zoned, how the land-sea interface is best addressed, how stakeholders should best be engaged and what arrangements are needed to review and update the plan.

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