

The Spatial Planning Pilot Project

As part of the Government's Marine Stewardship initiative, Defra has commissioned a consortium comprising ABPmer, Terence O'Rourke, Risk & Policy Analysts, Geotek, Hartley Anderson and Coastal Management for Sustainability to research options for developing, implementing and managing marine spatial planning in the UK.

The project will investigate how marine spatial planning could be used to contribute to sustainable development in the marine environment, in particular how a plan might provide for new and existing sustainable human uses while also providing better protection of environmental and heritage resources.

There are two key objectives for the research:

- to obtain a better understanding and appreciation of available evidence and experiences to date in the field of spatial planning and its relevance and applicability to UK marine and coastal waters;
- to undertake a pilot project at an appropriate scale in the Irish Sea to determine the feasibility and practicality of developing and applying a marine spatial plan.

Practical considerations that need to be addressed include the availability and quality of data needed to prepare the plan, how different stakeholders should be involved in the plan's preparation, the geographic scale of the plan, links to other planning mechanisms in the coastal zone, how cumulative effects would be addressed, how potential conflicts would be resolved and how and when the plan should be reviewed (eg to reflect changes in human use of the marine environment or in light of new data). Linked to this are issues relating to monitoring and enforcement.

The literature review will cover the following aspects:

- experiences with existing or proposed marine spatial plans at the regional sea and sub-regional level both in Europe and globally;
- experiences with other forms of marine planning, in the UK, for example estuary management plans, Single Schemes of Management, strategic environmental assessments for oil & gas, offshore wind and aggregates;
- relevant studies that have been undertaken in the UK, for example, ODPM's Development Plan for Marine Aggregate Extraction in England, Defra's Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) stocktake and the Review of Marine Nature Conservation's (RMNC) Irish Sea Pilot project;
- identification of lessons and best practice from the current land-use planning system in England that may be relevant for planning in the marine and coastal environment, including consideration of how the land-sea interface can best be taken account of;

- National, European and international legislation that may be relevant to developing a marine spatial plan, for example, at a European level the Water Framework Directive, the Habitats and Birds Directives, the ICZM Recommendation, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive and the European Marine Thematic Strategy.

The literature review will seek to highlight lessons and best practice that could be applied in developing a marine spatial plan in the UK. It will also recommend possible approaches, standards and options that can be tested in the pilot project.

The pilot project will take the form of a simulation to develop a marine spatial plan in the UK half of the Irish Sea. The plan is intended to take account of all uses of the sea Whilst the inputs to the pilot will be real, the output of the pilot will be hypothetical, ie the plan drawn up in this project will not actually be used to plan or regulate marine activities.

The pilot will build on the work undertaken by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee for the Irish Sea Pilot Project as part of the Review of Marine Nature Conservation.

Information will be collated on all relevant existing and possible future human uses in the pilot area and used to identify and to seek to resolve potential conflicts between different uses or between uses and environmental/heritage interests

Stakeholder participation in the pilot project will be essential to its success. To this end, the project is setting up an Advisory Group comprising Government Departments and Agencies, environmental interest groups and industry stakeholders to contribute to and advise on the development of the plan. In addition, a wide range of regional stakeholders will be invited to contribute information for the plan and to participate in its development.

The draft literature review will be circulated for comments in February. A number of workshops are being planned for the early summer during which stakeholders will be encouraged to actively participate in the plan making process. The project is due for completion in late autumn 2005.