



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group meeting: 9 November 2023

Minutes of the Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group meeting of 9 November 2023.

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Attendees

Eluned Jones (Chair, Welsh Government), Elen King, Hishiv Shah & Sharon Davies (Welsh Government), Charlotte Brill (Cefas), Helen Bloomfield, Lucie Skates, Karen Perrow & Lee Murray (Natural Resources Wales), Thomas Fey (Joint Nature Conservation Committee), Julian Whitewright (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales), Emma Harrison (The Crown Estate), Jonathan Monk (Milford Haven Port Authority), Mike Butterfield (Royal Yachting Association), Nick Salter (Maritime and Coastguard Agency), Emily Williams (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), Chloe Wenman (Marine Conservation Society), Neville Rookes (Welsh Local Government Association), Christoph Harwood (Simply Blue), Jennifer Godwin (Seabed User and Development Group), Katie Havard-Smith (Cardiff University), Kam Tang (Swansea University), Mark Russell (British Marine Aggregate Producers Association), Penny Nelson (World Wildlife Fund), Noemi Donigiewicz (Seafish), Alys Morris (Severn Estuary Partnership), Claire Stephenson (Associated British Ports), Mark Simmonds (British Ports Association), John Wrottesley (European Subsea Cables Association)

Welcome and introduction

Eluned welcomed Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group (MPSRG) members and initiated round of introductions.

Update on Marine Planning

Eluned highlighted:

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- **The Severn Estuary: cross-border marine planning guide** – developed in collaboration with the MMO.
- **Overview of marine sector governance** – a high-level and accessible entry point to understanding marine sector governance.
- A new suite of soft constraints mapping which is now live on the **Wales Marine Planning Portal**.

Eluned provide an update on Strategic Resource Areas (SRAs):

- We are currently working to finalise the scope of an initial pilot of proposed SRAs for consultation.
- We envisage that any pilot of SRAs will be limited and small-scale in scope. This will enable us to understand how SRAs can best deliver benefit, and to minimise risk of any unintended consequences, before taking any decisions on any further proposed SRAs.
- We aim to provide further information on the scope of this initial pilot later this year or early in the new year.

Discussion: developing Marine Planning Technical Statement for Marine Ecosystem Resilience, Restoration and Enhancement (Policy ENV_01)

Eluned introduced and provided a short overview of early thinking around developing a technical statement for marine ecosystem resilience, restoration and enhancement.

Eluned invited MPSRG members to share their thoughts and ideas, to inform the approach to taking this work forward. Eluned also clarified that, at this stage, this was an initial scoping exercise and there was no guarantee that all thoughts and

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suggestions could be taken forward.

MPSRG members discussed this work. Key points included:

- members discussed approaches to identifying the reference point or baseline for restoration and how to define successes, considering the definitions of 'enhancement' and 'restoration'. Welsh Government (WG) agreed to give further consideration to these definitions and to defining the baseline for restoration
- WG highlighted interest in hearing members' views on 'offsetting'
- members discussed importance of ensuring terminology clearly distinguishes between 'voluntary' and 'mandatory' responses to ENV_01. WG agreed that it is important to ensure it is clear when response is voluntary or mandatory
- WG agreed to explore links with emerging thinking relating to a proposed Marine Resilience and Improvement of Natural Ecosystems Fund
- members asked whether there is any intention to consider prioritisation to ensure actions are what the ecosystem needs, while acknowledging the challenges associated with doing this. Suggestions included carrying out gap analysis to e.g., identify policies not already attributed to GES descriptors, or providing a menu of prioritised actions. WG expressed interest in hearing further thoughts on this
- members raised the importance of learning from previous experience and ensuring that any actions are clearly focused and structured around specific objectives, in order to achieve benefit for the environment
- members discussed the development of clear strategic actions and guidance for developers and decision makers. This included consideration of what can be delivered at a local level and what needs to be addressed at a strategic level
- members highlighted that developers want to know what they can do to contribute to ecosystem resilience and enhancement and suggested it would be helpful to have more guidance on this. Members suggested that collaborative, strategic restoration schemes and / or funds might support developers to achieve this

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- members highlighted the need to regularly review wider developments to ensure the technical statement and any other guidance remain current
- following discussion on existing work and what we are trying to achieve with this technical statement, members agreed on the importance of: clarifying what the technical statement is; how it links to and complements (without duplicating) existing work; and who it intends to support
- WG highlighted that we want to consider the risks and well as the benefits to maximise the impact of this work

Eluned encouraged MPSRG members to send any further comments directly to the Marine Planning Team and highlighted the intention to continue to work with members to develop thinking.

Multi-use of wind farms: the opportunity for offshore aquaculture

Christoph Harwood, Director of Policy & Strategy, Simply Blue Group, presented on Simple Blue's work relating to 'Multi-Use of Wind Farms'.

Key points included:

- the lack of land and sea space is challenging developers
- Simply Blue is looking at ways to use windfarms for other activities, e.g., aquaculture, to tackle the issue of overcrowding
- there is potential to use these multi-use spaces to help meet targets via collaboration with conservation and climate change agencies
- with any multi-use spaces, the windfarm will be the priority

MPSRG members discussed some key questions about this work.

The presentation was circulated to MPSRG members following the meeting.

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Marine Licensing Exemptions review

Key points included:

- The review will be informed by ABPmer recommendations to WG in 2020, following its initial review of the 2011 Order. Building on this, WG will also consider the exempted activities listed by the other UK marine licensing authorities, to align exemptions where appropriate. This work will result in a draft set of proposals for consultation.
- There will be a staged approach to consultation:
 - Technical experts e.g., Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Cadw, and navigation authorities
 - Interested Parties e.g., ports, universities, coast defence authorities.
 - Public consultation on final proposals.
- WG currently aims to hold public consultation in spring 2024 with the intention of a new order coming into force early 2025.

MPSRG members discussed some key questions about this work. Sharon noted members with an interest in marine licence exemptions would be consulted and encouraged members to share their views to feed into the development of this work.

Any other business and next meeting

An in-person workshop on cross border Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) biosecurity planning in the Severn Estuary was flagged. Details were forwarded to MPSRG members following the meeting.

The next meeting will be held in January / February 2024.

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