

2021-2022



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management

ACTION PLAN FOR WALES





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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Delivery of some actions from 2021-2022 Action Plan had been restricted by the COVID-19 outbreak. Details of this have been reflected in ongoing actions contained in this Action Plan.

Introduction

This is the fourth Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management Action Plan for Wales (2021-2022), produced by the Wales MPA Management Steering Group. It sets out the priority network-level actions to improve MPA management and, therefore, improve or maintain condition of the network of MPAs in Wales. It complements management activity delivered at a local level and identified within individual site action plans where they exist.

The 2021-2022 Action Plan sits alongside the **MPA Network Management Framework for Wales 2018-2023** (Framework) and collectively they provide a steer for Management Authorities to guide delivery of the long-term vision for the management of the network:

The Welsh MPA network is under effective and consistent management which safeguards the marine wildlife and habitats of sites, and leads to site features achieving or maintaining favourable condition. Network management supports resilient marine ecosystems which in turn help to achieve clean, safe, healthy, sustainable, productive and biologically diverse Welsh seas. MPAs are valued for the long-term benefits they provide to the people of Wales through the protection of their rich natural and cultural heritage.

Publication of this 2021-2022 Action Plan is accompanied by the publication of the Wales MPA Network Management Annual Report 2020-2021 that provides an update on delivery progress of actions prioritised in last year's Action Plan (2020-2021).

The Actions

Each action within the 2021-2022 Action Plan contributes to at least one of the Framework's five MPA management principles, to guide delivery of the vision and objectives for the management of the network:

MP1 Strategic Planning: Management should be guided by strategic planning processes at both a sectoral and all-Wales level. It supports sustainable use of the MPA network in ways which conserve and enhance condition, support resilience of marine ecosystems, support wellbeing and deliver sustainable management of natural resources.

MP2 Regulation, development consenting and assessment processes: Regulatory processes, consenting decisions and assessment processes should be delivered consistently and proportionately across the network, and proactively consider and support the maintenance or enhancement (where possible/appropriate) of the condition of relevant sites and features across the network.

MP3 Management advice and guidance: Decision-making and management operations should be supported by clear and consistent advice and guidance on MPAs including their conservation objectives.

MP4 Understanding the condition of, and pressures and threats on, sites and their features to inform management: management should be informed by, and consistently refer to, formal assessment and reporting on the health and condition of features, sites and the network as a whole. Assessment and reporting is informed by a prioritised monitoring programme that improves understanding of condition, change and impacts across aspects of the network where key pressures are identified.

MP5 Wider management: management operations on individual and multiple sites should be prioritised to ensure delivery of activity that has the potential for greatest improvement in the management of key pressures, and on condition across the network. Management activities may maintain or enhance feature condition, identify and address particular local issues and pressures, and raise awareness of MPAs through targeted interventions and engagement with members of the public.

Actions were proposed to the MPA Management Steering Group for assessment against a set of agreed prioritisation criteria, which are set out in the Annex. The Steering Group has agreed a list of 25 priority actions, this includes six new actions identified and added this year. The actions reflect the breadth of MPA management activity, which takes place day in day out, as well as specific interventions and projects. Many of these projects and interventions cover the whole network but some are pilot projects carried out at the site level.

As with the 2020-2021 Action Plan, many are investigatory in nature and it is anticipated they will result in the development of suitable active interventions, which will be put forward for screening and prioritisation for future iterations of the Action Plan.

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Actions

Integrate sustainable management of the MPA network with the Area Statements Process and delivery	
Description	Outcomes
<p>The MPA Management Action Plan is embedded in the Marine Area Statement, which was published in March 2020. Area statements delivery will focus on a range of actions relevant to the management of MPAs across Wales. Many of the relevant actions are already embedded in this action plan.</p> <p>The focus over the coming year will be on engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to agree collaborative action which we can take to deliver the actions in the identified themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature based solutions and adaptation in the coastal zone; • Supporting implementation of marine planning; and • Building the resilience of the marine environment. 	<p>Integration of marine planning and MPA management processes and additional support for MPA network management delivery.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
Ongoing	Natural Resources Wales Welsh Government

Develop an approach to undertaking improved and periodic MPA condition assessments	
Description	Outcomes
<p>The EMFF funded project will develop indicators and a process for improving reporting on condition of features protected within the network of MPAs in Wales.</p> <p>The main activities of the project are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a series of reporting indicators, to allow the more efficient assessment and reporting of the condition of MPA features; • Development of agreed guidance describing how site condition assessments will be carried out on all our MPAs; and • Trial of the new methodology on MPA site(s)/feature(s) in Wales. 	<p>The main outcome of the project will be the ability to carry out timely site level condition assessments leading to a better understanding of the condition of our MPAs in Wales, which will better inform management and focus priorities.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
June 2022	Natural Resources Wales

Further develop a risk based marine monitoring programme across the MPA network

Description	Outcomes
<p>Options for a programme of prioritised, risk-based marine biodiversity monitoring have been delivered at a country and UK-level and opportunities to explore these further are consideration.</p> <p>Whilst the new programme is being implemented, the current monitoring programme will continue to be delivered.</p>	<p>Improved evidence base to inform future assessments of MPA condition and appropriate management measures.</p> <p>In the long-term, this work will enable a greater understanding of the effectiveness of management measures.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
Ongoing	<p>Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee Welsh Government</p>

MPA Network Condition Improvement Programme

Description	Outcomes
<p>This programme of work explores potential management actions, where required, to address identified pressures and threats for the MPA network. This year the programme will continue to focus on working with local management officers to develop projects from existing and new actions and explore possible funding routes for future delivery. Projects will prioritise actions which can deliver improvements to condition or improving understanding of key pressures and threats.</p>	<p>Focus of effort on priority management challenges, will continue to help develop and deliver those actions (1) with the greatest potential to improve (or maintain) the condition of features across the network, or (2) will improve understanding of links between activities and feature condition.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
Ongoing	Natural Resources Wales

Develop consistent and proportionate guidance to improve casework advice, and to support implementation of the Welsh National Marine Plan

Description	Outcomes
<p>The purpose of this work is to develop guidance to support consistent and proportionate assessment of the impacts of regulated activities on the protected features of MPAs in Wales.</p> <p>Guidance is being developed to support implementation of Welsh National Marine Plan policies in decision making e.g. marine licencing and policy specific guidance.</p>	<p>Consistent and proportionate guidance will support improved decision making which will help to improve the security of management and help to maintain the condition, and where appropriate, improve the features of our MPAs.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
Ongoing	Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Developing vulnerability assessment methodologies of network features using inshore vessel monitoring system (iVMS) data

Description	Outcomes
<p>Using existing, small scale, iVMS remote datasets feature interactions will be explored to determine suitability of such data (towed and static) for vulnerability assessments of network features. Work in this area is necessary to pre-empt the roll out of iVMS systems in Wales and future data analysis. Developing this knowledge base and processes now will allow for immediate benefits on MPA network vulnerabilities to fishing.</p>	<p>A report of data analysis methodologies describing which features it would be suitable to use for assessments of interaction pathways. Conclusions will include future recommendations and assessment gaps.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2022	Welsh Government

Deliver MPA management through regulatory consenting and assessment processes

Description	Outcomes
<p>The aim of this work is to make sure that regulatory consenting, assessment processes and activity enabling decision making processes take account of the potential impacts to the MPA network and include appropriate mitigation where necessary.</p>	<p>Decision making that reduces impact on the features of our MPA network.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>All management authorities</p>

Improve maps of the extent and distribution of Annex I marine habitats

Description	Outcomes
<p>This work provides key evidence to support management of SACs (e.g. casework advice) and national level reporting. This mainly involves collation of third party data (e.g. UKHO multibeam data) to update maps.</p>	<p>Improved maps will support management as well as assessment and reporting.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
<p>Ongoing (as new data becomes available)</p>	<p>Natural Resources Wales</p>

How to manage the MPA network for blue carbon *NEW*

Description	Outcomes
<p>A recent evidence report revealed the important role Wales' coasts and seas play as a carbon sink (blue carbon). However, we do not yet understand the contribution of the MPA network to carbon storage and sequestration.</p> <p>We will improve this understanding by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calculating the amount of carbon stored and sequestered by habitats in the MPA network. • Carrying out an options analysis report covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Current feasible management actions that will promote carbon storage and sequestration in Welsh MPAs. – Evidence gaps and barriers for specific management actions and implementation that could be considered in the future, and – Options of pathways to implementation for management of blue carbon opportunities in the Welsh MPA network. 	<p>This project will further our understanding of blue carbon across the MPA network and develop management options for incorporating blue carbon into management.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2022	Natural Resources Wales

Maintain links between the MPA Network Management Action Plan and locally agreed actions, where they exist, and support exploration of funding opportunities

Description	Outcomes
<p>This action will highlight and link to local actions of relevance, including specific local actions in the annual Action Plan as appropriate.</p>	<p>Allows for the sharing of best practice from different sites to the MPA network, encourage cross-site working, as well as promoting the work done at the site level.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
May 2022	Relevant Authority groups

Bait collection in the MPA network in Wales: Evidence gathering and management options *NEW*

Description	Outcomes
<p>Bait digging and collection is known to cause a number of impacts at a range of sites throughout the MPA network.</p> <p>This project will take the results of the drone survey of bait digging hotspots in Wales (previous action) to develop site level management options and projects which will help to better manage this activity and improve site condition.</p> <p>The project will also help to improve existing management of bait at the Gann.</p>	<p>The project will focus on developing site level management options for bait collection at hotspots in Wales.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2022	Natural Resources Wales

Strategic review of grazing on saltmarsh features in Welsh MPAs and development of actions to improve condition *NEW*

Description	Outcomes
<p>This project will work towards providing recommendations for addressing issues relating to saltmarsh grazing to improve and maintain MPA saltmarsh feature condition across the MPA Network. It represents the first stage of ensuring appropriate grazing management by collating evidence and creating a prioritised and realistic list of management actions, which could be tackled in subsequent projects, ideally working with or through partner organisations, farmers and land managers.</p>	<p>This will be achieved by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying where grazing management needs to be changed, considering both saltmarsh vegetation and dependent species. 2. Evaluating the evidence to identify priority areas for grazing management intervention. 3. Producing a list of specific MPA site management actions related to each of the priority areas.
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2022	Natural Resources Wales

Address coastal squeeze impacts on MPAs	
Description	Outcomes
<p>This project will continue to gather evidence to understand the impacts of coastal squeeze on our MPA network including continued engagement with UK wide discussions and projects.</p> <p>Work will continue in Wales to progress habitat creation projects to provide compensatory coastal habitat for anticipated habitat loss arising from work associated with flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes.</p>	<p>Use new knowledge of coastal squeeze impacts to help maintain the integrity of the network.</p> <p>Compensation for loss of some coastal habitats due to climate change.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Natural Resources Wales Welsh Government</p>

Deliver the priority actions within the Marine Litter Action Plan where they provide benefit to the network of MPAs in Wales

Description	Outcomes
<p>The Wales Clean Seas Partnership (WCSP) are responsible for developing and delivering the Marine Litter Action Plan (MLAP) for Wales.</p> <p>The current three year plan is closely aligned with similar strategies focusing on tackling terrestrial litter in Wales.</p> <p>The MLAP supports wider work to address Single Use Plastics and waste initiatives in Wales, taking a 'prevention at source' approach.</p> <p>The partnership will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review annual beach clean surveys across Wales. • Discuss and propose how to address emerging litter items of concern affecting the marine environment. <p>Supporting the MLAP, is an EMFF grant-funded project currently in the second stage and involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with secondary schools to investigate the feasibility of incorporating marine litter into their Eco-schools work. • The project will also work with the tourist industry to investigate the feasibility of an eco-award through a pilot scheme. <p>The WCSP continues to support the Welsh Government proposal for a pilot scheme to recycle end of life fishing gear in Wales, which is a key action of the MLAP.</p>	<p>Improving our understanding of emerging litter threats upon the marine environment can support future management measures, which may be required to sustain the Welsh MPA network.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
Ongoing	Welsh Government Wales Clean Seas Partnership

Community Litter Project

Description

The original plan was to use the review of community litter projects from year 1 to deliver actions from EMS Management Schemes and the Clean Seas Partnership. Due to COVID-19 this project has been adapted to attempt to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on local litter picking groups and the impact of COVID on the amount and types of litter being found within the coastal fringe of the MPA's and across the country, alongside any behaviour changes, for example, increased use of single-use items like masks.

Specific work outputs this year will include:

- Monitoring data from the litter picks.
- An indication of best practice guidelines for litter picking groups whilst operating under COVID-19 circumstances.
- An insight into the impact of COVID on marine litter and pollution.
- An insight into the impact of COVID on individual's behaviour in using single use items and littering.
- Future work feasibility study including trialling the use of drones, AI and multispectral cameras to monitor litter and types of litter.

Outcomes

Awareness raising of marine litter and support for projects to reduce plastic use. Reduction in the amount of plastic and other litter entering the marine environment locally.

Delivered by

March 2022

Key Management Authorities

PLAS RAG

Wales Native Oyster Restoration Project

Description	Outcomes
<p>The focus of the EMFF funded Wales Native Oyster Restoration Project is the establishment and monitoring of a series of native oyster restoration plots in the Milford Haven waterway. The outputs of this exercise will address questions around the approach and feasibility of native oyster restoration in Wales, specifically related to oyster survivability, recruitment, stocking density, effects of the oyster disease <i>Bonamia</i> and the non native species <i>Crepidula fornicata</i>, as well as monitoring potential positive effects including habitat enhancement and increased associated species composition.</p>	<p>The key outputs of the project will be the Wales Native Oyster Restoration Guidance report and a Native Oyster Action Plan which will outline the approach and 'next steps' for native oyster restoration in Wales. The key outcome will be clarity on whether native oyster can be restored in Wales and information on the best way to restore native oyster in Welsh waters.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2023	Natural Resources Wales

The Bilingual Wales Marine Code App *NEW*

Description	Outcomes
<p>The project will focus to develop/build on the existing Pembrokeshire Marine Code App into a single all-encompassing all-Wales bilingual rebranded Marine Code App. Taking the information that already exists for other areas across Wales.</p> <p>This project will seek to deliver:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce one integrated Wales wide Marine Code App with distinct regional areas/codes of conduct. • Liaise as required with MPA Officers and members of the Wild Seas Wales group as appropriate to facilitate coordination of content input. • Host workshops. • Content management training. • Launch and promotion of the App, Wales-wide. 	<p>Spread awareness and wider behaviour change in order to maintain and improve feature condition by minimising the risk of disturbance to marine species, ultimately improving resilience and to provide wide-ranging educational information and proactive guidance to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lead to better understanding of marine wildlife. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise risk of disturbance to marine species by highlighting where any conflicts between breeding/feeding/nesting animals may be locally and providing guidance to encourage sustainable activity. 2. Maintain feature condition and improve resilience for the main target species.
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2022	Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum Welsh Partnership of Local MPAs

Reduce disturbance to marine mammals and birds

Description	Outcomes
<p>This year the focus of this work will be on three main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all generic county level codes are consistent and have the same noted distances. Produce a standard set of backing material to support the marine codes. This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Guidance on various activities that may have an impact. – Leaflets and species ID guides to provide further information about the marine code and why they are necessary. • Review the effectiveness of the seal pup disturbance panels developed in Year 1 of the project. <p>Working with Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum on the development of the marine code App.</p>	<p>Marine codes at key sites for highly mobile species are fit for purpose.</p> <p>Contribution to maintaining Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> in favourable condition.</p> <p>Marine users are aware of potential disturbance issues across Wales, and how this can affect vulnerable species.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2022	PLAS RAG

Develop a bio-security plan for marine Invasive Non-Natives Species (INNS)

Description	Outcomes
<p>This EMFF funded pilot project will deliver a biosecurity plan for Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau (PLAS) SAC. It will also inform development and implementation of biosecurity planning across the MPA network.</p> <p>This will be achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with stakeholders to address the main pathways of introduction and spread of marine INNS, including working with local fishermen to identify how marine INNS may impact their fisheries; • Developing techniques to assess and predict the effects of INNS on habitats and species; • Building capacity to protect marine biodiversity and minimise risks to protected features. 	<p>Protection of features of the site by managing the key pathways by which marine INNS are introduced and spread at the site level through the use of good biosecurity.</p> <p>Lessons learned will inform biosecurity planning across the MPA network.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
September 2022	Natural Resources Wales PLAS RAG

Develop a UK Dolphin and Harbour Porpoise Conservation Strategy

Description	Outcomes
<p>This work aims to develop a consistent, UK-wide approach to managing pressures and threats on nine of the most commonly found dolphin, porpoise and small whale species in UK waters within and outside MPAs.</p>	<p>The strategy, in addition to existing legal obligations, will inform targeted management to improve understanding and conservation status of these species in UK waters.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
<p>March 2022</p>	<p>Welsh Government Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee</p>

A Plan of Action to reduce the incidental bycatch of seabirds in UK waters

Description	Outcomes
<p>This year's work aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish the 'Plan of Action'. • Undertake QA on the toolkits and roll these out to end-users. • Monitoring "gap analysis" will be undertaken. • Reports on mitigation methods and "hotspots" will be finalised. <p>Internationally, JNCC has been helping OSPAR contracting parties to define/scope a possible seabird bycatch indicator, in preparation for OSPAR's Quality Status Report 2023.</p>	<p>Improving the evidence base and management tools to address bycatch in the marine environment will contribute to MPA management, including those sites for seabirds.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
<p>March 2022</p>	<p>Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee Welsh Government</p>

Assess and where necessary manage the impact of commercial fishing activities on MPAs

Description	Outcomes
<p>The aim of the project is to ensure that commercial fisheries management within European Marine Sites affords adequate protection to designated features, in line with the Habitats and Species regulations.</p> <p>The project is assessing interactions between species and habitats and different types of fisheries gear. These assessments are being used to inform whether future fisheries management measures are necessary.</p> <p>This year, project activities will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 mammal vs fixed nets; • 40 habitats vs mobile towed gears; • 20 further assessments to be agreed by the steering group. 	<p>Improved evidence base on the pressures/threats from all relevant commercial fishing activities to inform whether management may be needed.</p> <p>Exploration and implementation of management interventions, where required, to improve or maintain the condition of features across the network.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2022	Welsh Government Natural Resources Wales

Operate a risk-based approach to fisheries enforcement

Description	Outcomes
<p>This work, which includes enforcement and prosecution, within the Welsh zone and its MPAs, operates a risk-based and intelligence-led approach to marine enforcement, using technological improvements to maintain a focus on high-risk fisheries activities.</p> <p>It serves to act as a strong deterrent to help prevent unlawful fishing activities and contribute towards the continued protection of MPA features and the overall condition of the network.</p>	<p>Approach will improve evidence base and support site management to protect designated features in MPAs.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
Ongoing	Welsh Government

National Shoresearch Project *NEW*

Description

This one-year pilot will develop a citizen-science data collection project that will help Welsh INNS and MPA network features monitoring.

In the pilot:

- NWWT will develop a specific training package for volunteers to develop their survey and identification skills.
- Develop connections with other organisations and projects such as the PLAS Biosecurity project.
- Make sure there are effective and efficient data flow mechanisms.
- Learn from previous English Wildlife Trust Shoresearch collaborations with Natural England.

The aim is to form a bespoke Shoresearch citizen science product that works for the Welsh needs and benefits the management of the MPA network through the improvement of data collection.

Outcomes

The pilot will improve the understanding of threats and pressures, which will develop as frequent monitoring will expand the knowledge base and therefore allow for more informed management.

The collaboration with NRW will allow the pilot to focus on specific INNS and features to benefit condition monitoring and the development of wider management initiatives.

Delivered by

March 2022

Key Management Authorities

Wildlife Trust Wales
North Wales Wildlife Trust
Natural Resources Wales

UK Seabird Island Biosecurity Programme (SIBP) *NEW*

Description	Outcomes
<p>Working together with partners, the RSPB is leading on the delivery of the Biosecurity for LIFE project (2018-2023) by developing and implementing effective biosecurity measures to protect the UK’s 42 seabird island SPAs from introduced predatory mammals. Alongside this the RSPB and partners are developing the AfterLIFE plan of the Biosecurity for LIFE project to secure the legacy of the project by maintaining the awareness raised and the effective biosecurity measures, and by continuing the evaluation and review process such that these measures may be enhanced and expanded across all UK offshore islands with important biodiversity.</p> <p>Continued engagement and support of the UK Seabird Island Biosecurity Programme Working Group to ensure a coordinated approach for the protection of the seabird island SPAs from introduced predatory mammals.</p>	<p>Improved protection of Welsh seabirds breeding on SPA islands through effective biosecurity measures (prevention, early detection and rapid response) that are maintained in the long-term.</p> <p>Commitment to island biosecurity best practices and implementation of island biosecurity through effective partnerships between NGOs, local councils and communities, and the statutory nature conservation organisations.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
<p>March 2023</p>	<p>RSPB Welsh Government Natural Resources Wales</p>

Annex

Prioritisation guidance for screening and scoring actions to include in the MPA Network Management Action Plan

Introduction

The MPA Management Steering Group (the Steering Group) has developed an MPA Network Management Framework to aid Welsh management authorities to better manage the MPA network in Wales. Alongside this Framework is the MPA Network Management Action Plan (the action plan) which is updated and reported on an annual basis.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to explain the criteria for scoring potential actions which may be included in the MPA Network Management Action Plan. This guidance will help potential action owners to decide whether their actions are suitable for inclusion or to help them tailor their actions to make them more suitable for inclusion. Although potential action owners may not be involved in the scoring process it is useful to understand how the scoring system works.

Summary of process

Table 1 summarises the five prioritisation criteria, further detail to apply them is provided in the subsequent sections. Only actions that reach the threshold score (as laid out in Table 1) for all criteria will be included in the action plan.

Table 1: Threshold scores and maximum scores for each criterion

	Criterion	Threshold score
1	What is the spatial extent of the action?	2
2	What is the ability of the action to deliver improvements, or to improve our understanding of pressure/threats or their management?	2
3	Is the action consistent with the MPA management principles?	2*
4	What is the feasibility of the action?	2
5	How does implementing the action represent value for money?	N/A

* Against at least one of the management principles

The following more detailed guidance will help potential action owners to understand the criteria and how they are used when prioritising actions for inclusion in the action plan.

Criterion 1. What is the spatial extent of the action?

This criterion is focused on what area of the network the potential action covers, the scores will be allocated based on the scale of the impact of the action on the MPA network. This is a network action plan therefore the larger the area of the network covered or the greater the number of features (or a large proportion of the feature across the network) involved the higher the score. A potential action can be given a threshold score (2) if the action could be considered a demonstration project at a local scale which could be rolled out or implemented in other areas of the network.

Elements to consider: It is important to be clear what sites and/or features the action will benefit. If the action is a demonstration project, it is important to highlight other sites that would benefit in the longer term and if possible, how the project could be rolled out across the network.

Use the table below to understand how your potential action will be scored.

Criterion 2: Scoring Table	
Explanation	Score
The action is on a single site only and has no wider application across the network*.	0
The action is for a small number of sites or a small proportion of the network.	1
<p>The action is for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiple sites or • a large proportion of the MPA network or • a large proportion of a feature across the network. <p>A score of two can also be awarded if the action is a demonstration project# with strong potential to be delivered across the network after a local pilot stage.</p>	2 (threshold score)
The action is for the network (e.g. whole feature and/or pressure wide).	3

* These actions should be prioritised through local action plans where they exist or the NRW Actions Database.

A demonstration project would need to address an issue that is of concern across the network but suitable to be carried out at a single site level to prove the approach.

Criterion 2. What is the ability of the action to deliver improvements in condition, or to improve our understanding of pressure/threats or their management?

This criterion has been divided into two parts. Any potential action will only be assessed against one of these criteria (i.e. only 2a or 2b):

- If you have a project that will address one or more of the pressures or threats acting on one or more of the features of our MPA network, then you need to assess your project under criterion 2a.
- If, however, the potential action is related to the need to gain a better understanding of a specific pressure or threat then the action will be assessed against 3b. The 3b criterion will also be used if the potential action involves needing to better understand or trial a specific management approach.

In summary, if an action involves direct action 2a is the most suitable criterion. If it is an investigation project 2b is the most suitable criterion, please do not try to link a potential action to both, even if the action contains elements of both.

Both criteria can be used for pressures or threats, these are defined as follows:

- **Pressure:** something that currently has an adverse impact on one or more features.
- **Threat:** something that is currently not a pressure but is considered likely to become a pressure in the near future unless action is taken.

Criterion 2a. What is the ability of the action to deliver improvements to, or maintenance of, feature condition?

This criterion relates to actions that will result in improvements to, or maintenance of, the condition of features of the MPA network usually by managing pressures/threats to the feature. The action could also be linked to management of activities affecting feature condition or the restoration of a feature.

Elements to consider: Be clear about which pressures the potential action is targeting and which features are impacted by the pressure and how. Explain precisely how the potential action will ameliorate the pressure targeted. It would be good to be clear here who will be involved and their roles.

Example actions that would need to be considered under 2a:

- An action to develop a network wide strategy to manage pressures on a feature e.g. UK Dolphin and Harbour Porpoise Conservation Strategy.
- An action to reduce nutrient inputs affecting a coastal feature as a pilot project.
- An action to reduce the impact of boat disturbance (e.g. code of conduct) on a whole feature.

Use the table below to better understand how your potential action will be scored.

Criterion 2a: Scoring Table	
Explanation	Score
The action is not targeted at a pressure or threat with a link to feature condition.	0
Threat*: The action will manage one or more of the suspected threats that could affect the condition of the MPA network features.	1
Pressure: The action will manage one or more of the known pressures affecting the condition of the features of the MPA network. Threat: The action will manage one or more of the threats that could affect the condition of the features of the MPA network.	2
Pressure: The action will manage one or more of the known pressures significantly affecting the condition of the features of the MPA network, using a proven approach. Threat: The action will manage one or more of the threats that could significantly affect the condition of the features of the MPA network using a proven approach.	3

* There is no score of 1 for pressures as to be prioritised for the action plan the pressure should be already known.

Criterion 2b. What is the ability of the action to improve our understanding of pressure/threats or their management?

This criterion is related to actions that will result in improving our understanding of the pressures or threats to the MPA network or improving our understanding of the different management measures that could be used to address these pressures or threats.

Elements to consider: It is important to be clear about which gap in understanding the potential action is trying to fill. Consider why it is a gap and how the potential action will fill it. If considering a new management approach (either to investigate or trial) be clear about exactly what the management measure is and the outcomes that will be achieved and if possible where the approach has been used successfully elsewhere. Use the table below to understand how your potential action will be scored.

Example actions that would need to be considered under 2b:

- An investigation into the impact of coastal squeeze on the MPA network features;
- An investigation into the impact of marine litter on our MPA features; or
- Trialling a new management approach to bait digging on a site (if it is also something that could be rolled out to other sites).

Criterion 2b: Scoring Table	
Explanation	Score
<p>The action will not improve our understanding of:</p> <p>a. pressures or threats; or</p> <p>b. the management measures needed to address them.</p>	0
<p>Threat:</p> <p>The action will partially improve our understanding of:</p> <p>a. one of the threats which could affect the condition of the MPA network features; or</p> <p>b. the management measures needed to address this threat.</p>	1
<p>Pressure:</p> <p>The action will increase our understanding of:</p> <p>a. one or more of the pressures and how they are affecting the condition of the features of the MPA network; or</p> <p>b. the management measures needed to manage those pressures.</p> <p>Threat:</p> <p>The action will improve our understanding of:</p> <p>a. one or more of the threats that could affect the condition of the features of the MPA network; or</p> <p>b. the management measures needed to manage those threats.</p>	2 (threshold score)
<p>Pressure:</p> <p>The action will significantly increase our understanding of:</p> <p>a. one or more of the pressures and how they are affecting the condition of the features of the MPA network; or</p> <p>b. the management measures needed to manage those pressures.</p> <p>Threat:</p> <p>The action will significantly improve our understanding of:</p> <p>a. one or more of the threats that could significantly affect the condition of the features of the MPA network; or</p> <p>b. the management measures needed to manage those threats.</p>	3

Criterion 3: Is the action consistent with the MPA Management Principles?

This first criterion is focussed on how well the potential action meets one or more of the five MPA network management principles. The potential action can be scored against any or all of the MPA management principles in Box 1. A potential action may not be relevant for all management principles and there is no need to try and make an action fit all criteria. Some guidance for potential action owners is provided under each management principle in italics.

If an action scores negatively against any management principle it should not be taken any further through the prioritisation process until these issues are addressed. Use the table below to understand how your potential action will be scored.

Criterion 3: Scoring Table	
Explanation	Score
The action has inconsistencies with the management principle.	-3
The action is not relevant to the management principle.	0
The action is partially consistent with the management principle.	1
The action is consistent with the management principle.	2*
The action is consistent with the management principle and will also bring about a positive change in ways of working.	3

* Threshold score – the potential action needs to score a 2 against at least one management principle.

Box 1: MPA Management Principles

MP1 Strategic Planning: Management should be guided by strategic planning processes at both a sectoral and all-Wales level. It supports sustainable use of the MPA network in ways which conserve and enhance, and contributes towards resilient marine ecosystems, wellbeing and delivery of sustainable management of natural resources.

Does the potential action have a significant Wales wide planning aspect contributing to resilient marine ecosystems, wellbeing and delivery of sustainable management of natural resources?

MP2 Regulation, development consenting and assessment processes: Regulatory processes and consenting decisions are delivered consistently and proportionately across the network, and proactively consider and support the maintenance or enhancement (where possible/appropriate) of the condition of relevant sites and features across the network.

Does the potential action relate to the regulation, development consenting or assessment processes for MPAs in Wales?

MP3 Management advice and guidance: Decision-making and management operations is supported by clear and consistent advice and guidance on MPAs including their conservation objectives.

Does the potential action relate to the production of guidance to improve the management of our MPAs?

MP4 Understanding the condition of, and pressures and threats on, sites and their features to inform management: management is informed by formal assessment and reporting on the condition of features, sites and the network and the associated pressures. Assessment and reporting is informed by a prioritised evidence programme (including monitoring) which improves our understanding of the relationship between pressures and threats and condition.

Does the potential action improve our understanding of the pressures and/or threats on our MPAs?

MP5 Wider management: management activities across the network are prioritised towards those that have the potential for greatest improvement on condition and security of management. Common management challenges are address collectively across the network.

Does the potential action improve the management and therefore the condition of the network of MPAs in Wales?

Criterion 4. What is the feasibility of the action?

This criterion relates to the ability of the potential action owner to carry out the action. It is important under this criterion to consider how exactly the action will be carried out and if the methods proposed have been used successfully elsewhere.

Elements to consider: It is important to consider the technical feasibility of your project including practical, logistical and technical ability (including skills and expertise) needed to undertake the action. Consider appropriateness of the methodology for the site or context.

Use the table below understand how your potential action will be scored.

Criterion 4: Scoring Table	
Explanation	Score
The action is not technically feasible, even if resources were available.	0
The technical feasibility of the action is currently unproven.	1
There are no significant issues with technical feasibility/appropriateness.	2
Technical feasibility is proven.	3

Criterion 5. How does implementing the action represent value for money?

This criterion relates to the value for money of the action, the response is not scored but you need to consider in your answer how proportionate the cost is to the size of the project and the benefits it will deliver. Although there is no scoring associated with this criterion it is still important to be clear how the cost of the project was developed and the benefit of the project outcomes to the MPA network.

Elements to consider: It is important to consider the benefits of your project in relation to the cost of the project. Focus on the outcomes of the project. Please include the direct costs as well as other resources necessary to achieve the action and the expected outcomes of the project linked to improvements in condition or understanding of features of the network.