

2022-2023



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management

## ACTION PLAN FOR WALES





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# Introduction

This is the fifth Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management Action Plan for Wales (2022-2023), 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 2022-2023 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 2022-2023 Action Plan is accompanied by the publication of the Wales MPA Network Management Annual Report 2021-2022 that provides an update on delivery progress of actions prioritised in last year's Action Plan (2021-2022).

# The Actions

Each action within the 2022-2023 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:

**1. 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.

**2. 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.

**3. 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.

**4. 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.

**5. 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 as set out in the MPA Network Management Framework. The Steering Group has agreed a list of 23 priority actions, this includes eight 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 2021-2022 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"> <li>• Nature based solutions and adaptation in the coastal zone;</li> <li>• Supporting implementation of marine planning; and</li> <li>• Building the resilience of the marine environment.</li> </ul>	<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

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	Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee Welsh Government

## 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, wil 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 <b>guidance</b> 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

## 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>



## Investigating the impact of landfill sites at the coast on MPA features \*NEW\*

Description	Outcomes
<p>This project aims to improve our understanding of landfill pressures on MPA features and identify options for prevention. This project will identify priority sites where actions to deliver improvements will be key to prevent, mitigate or manage impacts from landfills as a part of future management.</p> <p>We will improve this understanding by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing an assessment method for vulnerability of Annex 1 features and SACs to eroded or leached landfill waste under different climate change scenarios.</li> <li>• Identifying Annex 1 features most at risk from eroded or leached landfill waste under different climate change scenarios and shoreline management policies.</li> <li>• Identifying management measures to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts.</li> </ul>	<p>This project will improve our understanding of these potential impacts to better inform protection of the MPA network from landfill waste, prioritising the most vulnerable features and habitats and the most effective actions.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2023	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 2023	Relevant Authority groups

Feature Improvement development project *NEW*	
Description	Outcomes
<p>This project will focus on pro-actively developing project proposals to improve the condition or management of MPA features.</p> <p>This action will gather the data required to inform targeted and effective project proposals and will be facilitated by site officers (MPA Officers and NRW staff) who have expert knowledge and networks in place to contribute.</p> <p>The focus will not simply be on local action, but on actions that can address whole features across the network or target certain pressures or activities.</p>	<p>The project will produce 5-10 prioritised and fully developed multi-site or network-level project proposals ready for implementation when suitable funds are available. Proposal will include identification of relevant stakeholders and management tools (including highlighting any HRA or licensing needs and timescale considerations), required action(s), SAC features affected, resource requirements, and scalable options for delivery and costs.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2023	Relevant Authority Groups

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
Ongoing	Natural Resources Wales Welsh Government

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

Description	Outcomes
<p><b>The Wales Clean Seas Partnership</b> (WCSP) are responsible for developing and delivering the <b>Marine Litter Action Plan</b> (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><b>The partnership will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review annual beach clean surveys across Wales.</li> <li>• Discuss and propose how to address emerging litter items of concern affecting the marine environment.</li> <li>• Support the recycling scheme for end of life fishing gear in Wales.</li> </ul>	<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 \*NEW\*

Description	Outcomes
<p>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.</p> <p><b>Year three will focus on two elements:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating the findings and recommendations of this project into the Wales litter Action Plan via the Clean Seas Partnership.</li> <li>• Implementing one of the recommendations from the litter review, the provision of litter bins for fishing tackle. This is a problem across a number of sites and can have devastating consequences for wildlife and people. The work will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identifying priority sites across the network;</li> <li>– Identifying suitable and willing champions (businesses, local organisations or volunteers) to adopt the bins;</li> <li>– Buying the equipment;</li> <li>– Installing the bins.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>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.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2023	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

## A Wales wide approach to reducing recreational disturbance \*NEW\*

Description	Outcomes
<p>The project will focus on developing a partnership approach to reducing recreational disturbance impacts on MPA features. It will do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinating the Wild Seas Wales Partnership.</li> <li>• Piloting the use of hyper-local campaigns (addressing specific issues with target audiences).</li> <li>• Updating the Wild Sea Wales Website.</li> <li>• Implementing the Wales Coastal Explorer App promotion plan.</li> </ul>	<p>This project aims to develop a network-level, Wales-wide approach to address recreational disturbance to marine life, coastal features, and habitats of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering a strategic approach to education and engagement on coastal landscapes and wildlife, targeting recreational coastal users and minimising disturbance to designated features.</li> <li>• Creating a long-term strategy for alleviating pressures from recreational activities on coastal features and marine wildlife in Wales.</li> </ul>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2023	Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum

## Reduce disturbance to marine mammals and birds \*NEW\*

Description	Outcomes
<p>This year the focus of this work will be on two main areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working in partnership with North Wales Police to produce videos on disturbance and marine codes that can be used across the network.</li> <li>Producing additional content for the Wales Coastal Explorer App.</li> </ul>	<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 2023	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"> <li>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;</li> <li>Developing techniques to assess and predict the effects of INNS on habitats and species;</li> <li>Building capacity to protect marine biodiversity and minimise risks to protected features.</li> </ul>	<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 2023</p>	<p>Welsh Government Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee</p>

## UK Bycatch Mitigation Initiative \*NEW\*

Description	Outcomes
<p>The UK Bycatch Mitigation Initiative was published in 2022 and sets out actions under 5 policy areas, covering seabirds, cetaceans and seals.</p> <p>The UK and Devolved Governments will seek to develop a bespoke action plan incorporating these actions where necessary.</p>	<p>A bespoke action plan for Wales which brings together the key actions needed to address bycatch.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
<p>Ongoing</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 <b>Habitats and Species regulations</b>.</p> <p>The project is <b>assessing interactions</b> 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"> <li>• 35 medium risk habitat and bottom towed gear assessments (16 multi-rig and 19 queen scallops);</li> <li>• 14 medium risk fish and bottom towed gears assessments;</li> <li>• 12 medium risk bird and static gear assessments (netting &amp; lines).</li> </ul>	<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 2023	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

## Shoresearch Cymru – Initiation Phase \*NEW\*

Description	Outcomes
<p>Building from the pilot phase last year this project will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing of concepts and repetition of monitoring from the pilot phase;</li> <li>• Expansion of the Shoresearch provision to new parts of the MPA network across North Wales and through collaboration with WTSWW and EMS officers;</li> <li>• Finalising a workable and applicable data transfer pathway between Shoresearch and NRW;</li> <li>• Developing a Shoresearch Cymru online training 'deck' and expansion of other training;</li> <li>• Increasing numbers of trained volunteers and upskilling of current volunteer community.</li> </ul>	<p>This phase will enable the foundation work put in place through the pilot to be rolled out and its potential to support the condition monitoring of the MPA network to be put into action and appropriately expanded to other areas of the network.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
<p>March 2023</p>	<p>Wildlife Trust Wales North Wales Wildlife Trust Natural Resources Wales</p>

## UK Seabird Island Biosecurity Programme (SIBP)

Description	Outcomes
<p>Working together with partners, the RSPB is leading on the delivery of the <b>Biosecurity for LIFE project (2018-2023)</b> 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>

## NRW's Marine Nature Networks Programme **\*NEW\***

Description	Outcomes
<p>Natural Resources Wales are planning to deliver 10 ambitious projects over the next 3 years, all aimed at improving the management and condition of our Marine Protected Area Network in Wales. The suite of projects forms part of Welsh Governments Nature Networks Programme.</p> <p>The projects being delivered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving Marine Conservation Advice Project;</li> <li>• Implementing Management Measures for Saltmarsh grazing across the Marine Protected Area Network in Wales;</li> <li>• Understanding the likely scale of deterioration of Marine Protected Area (MPA) features due to coastal squeeze;</li> <li>• Rumney Great Wharf Saltmarsh Restoration Polders Enhancement Project;</li> <li>• Investigations into the decline of species and benthic habitats and identification and delivery of management measures required to reverse biodiversity loss and increase marine resilience;</li> <li>• Marine Invasive Non-Natives Species (INNS) management and Network Wide Biosecurity Planning;</li> <li>• Wales Acoustic Marine Mammal Survey (WAMMS);</li> <li>• Implementing Management Measures for bait collection across the Marine Protected Area Network in Wales;</li> <li>• Coastal Adaption Programme;</li> <li>• Marine litter – dealing with derelict vessels.</li> </ul>	<p>There will be range of outcomes from this programme of works, from a full suite of new condition assessments and conservation objectives for our Welsh SACs and SPAs to better grazing management on key saltmarsh sites.</p> <p>Other outcomes include gaining a better understanding or the scale of deterioration of MPA features due to coastal squeeze and the establishment of new polders at Rumney Great Wharf helping to restore saltmarsh.</p> <p>There will also be more investigative outcomes leading to better understanding of the reasons for the decline of certain species and benthic habitats in our MPA network and the development of a way to monitor and manage underwater noise.</p> <p>Another outcome will be the development and implementation of INNS biosecurity plans across 6 large MPAs in Wales and the development of guidance on the disposal of derelict recreational vehicles.</p>
Delivered by	Key Management Authorities
March 2025	Natural Resources Wales