



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022





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## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Marine Protected Area Management (MPA) Steering Group selected and scored actions during the COVID-19 outbreak. Delivery of some of the actions have been subsequently restricted by Welsh Government COVID-19 guidelines. This has been reflected in the following report.

# Introduction

This document is the fourth Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management Annual Report produced by the **MPA Management Steering Group** (Steering Group). Its primary purpose is to provide a progress update on delivery of the actions included in the MPA Network Management Action Plan for 2021-2022 (hereafter referred to as the 2021-2022 Action Plan).

The 2021-2022 Action Plan brought together, priority network-level actions to improve MPA management and, therefore, improve or maintain condition of the network of MPAs in Wales. Each action supported at least one of the five management principles identified in the **MPA Network Management Framework for Wales 2018-2023** (Box 1) (hereafter referred to as the Framework).

The Framework sets the direction of travel for management of the MPA network in Wales and the 2021-2022 Action Plan is a key tool 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.***

This Annual Report includes information on both outputs and outcomes of management activities, reflecting on how actions are contributing to improving MPA management and, therefore, to improving or maintaining the condition of the MPA network in support of this vision. It also provides an opportunity for organisations to highlight network and local scale work that complement the actions in the 2021-2022 Action Plan undertaken by Management Authorities<sup>1</sup>.

In preparing this Annual Report, the Steering Group has considered how it can better assess and critique the contribution the 2021-2022 Action Plan has made to the overall condition of the MPA network in Wales. The Steering Group has reflected this learning in its work to develop the 2022-2023 MPA Network Management Action Plan and will use it to inform future iterations of both the Annual Report and Action Plan.

<sup>1</sup> A term used to refer collectively to organisations with statutory responsibilities in relation to any type of MPA, or who are significant seabed or coastal landowners. This includes relevant and competent authorities as defined by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017), the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) and public authorities as defined by the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009). A term used to refer collectively to organisations with statutory responsibilities in relation to any type of MPA, or who are significant seabed or coastal landowners. This includes relevant and competent authorities as defined by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017), the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) and public authorities as defined by the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009). Please see Annex 3 of the MPA Network Management Framework for a list of Management Authorities in Wales: [gov.wales/marine-protected-area-network-management-framework-wales](https://gov.wales/marine-protected-area-network-management-framework-wales)

# Report Structure

Management Authorities have provided an update on delivery progress for each of their actions within the 2021-2022 Action Plan. Table 1 summarises the action and the outputs and outcomes for each. As part of this process, the European Marine Site Relevant Authority

Groups (RAGs)<sup>2</sup> produced a report to the Steering Group to update on the local activities occurring within European Marine Sites. The full report can be accessed by visiting the Welsh Government website [gov.wales/marine-protected-areas-0](http://gov.wales/marine-protected-areas-0)

# Progress and Highlights

The Steering Group prioritised 23 actions for delivery by Management Authorities in the 2021-2022 Action Plan. **Each action supported at least one of the five management principles within the MPA Network Management Framework (see Box 1)** and the prioritisation process was designed to focus effort on actions, which improve management of the MPA network and, therefore, improve or maintain network condition.

The actions vary in nature, from network scale activities to specific interventions and local pilot projects. Many are ongoing in their nature, for example, actions that are regulatory or assessment process based. Others are discrete tasks or projects with defined start and end dates, often spanning more than twelve months. Ongoing work and those projects and tasks with duration greater than a year will carry on into the 2021-2022 Action Plan, alongside the new prioritised actions. A number of the ongoing actions, particularly those relating to planning and consenting, whilst not always visible to external audiences, continue to provide vital protection to the network and represent a considerable volume of management work.

In considering the outputs and outcomes of each of the actions, the Steering Group has been able to strategically review both individual and collective progress towards the Framework's vision and objectives. In summary, Management Authorities have this year delivered a significant breadth of activity relating to:

- strengthening decision making processes, strategy development and implementation
- improving the evidence base; and
- increasing our understanding of pressures on MPA features and the wider marine environment.

Examples of work delivered from the 2021-2022 Action Plan highlighting both network and local level contributions to the Framework's five management principles include:

### Highlighted Actions:

- This year NRW have produced two new reports and a set of infographics on Blue Carbon as it relates to the MPA network in Wales.
- Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum (PCF), in partnership with others, has created a bilingual app that showcases coastal and marine wildlife and provides guidance on how to minimise disturbance to marine wildlife across the entire Welsh Coastline.
- NRW have completed a project which improve's condition assessment reporting. All SAC and SPA features in Welsh MPAs now have condition reporting indicators, NRW are now planning on carrying out new condition assessments over the next three years.
- Two new desk-based reports on bait digging in Wales has been completed this year they link to management and collection of evidence for bait digging and the installation of an information sign at the Gann, a bait digging hotspot.

<sup>2</sup> Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau RAG; Cardigan Bay RAG; Pembrokeshire Marine RAG; Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries RAG; and Association of Severn Estuary RAG.

- North Wales Wildlife Trust have completed a one-year pilot to develop a citizen-science data collection project that will help Welsh INNS and MPA network features monitoring.
- NRW have completed a strategic review of saltmarsh grazing across the MPA network this report is now being used to help implement identified actions on the ground.
- EMS SAC officers have trialled the use of drone technology to survey for marine litter, seals and seagrass habitats within the PLAS SAC, in what is thought to be a less intrusive method covering a larger geographical area.
- Marine codes have also been reviewed for sites in North Wales in light of changing pressures such as increased use of recreational jet skis. General and species-specific posters and leaflets have been produced and will be sighted at key coastal areas in North Wales.

## Future Action

The current MPA Network Management Framework will conclude in 2023 and will be updated. The efficacy of the framework will be reviewed using completed actions and their impacts upon the condition of the Welsh MPA network. Further considerations by the Steering Group could be to incorporate quantitative targets and outputs for the Framework, however, this process has yet to be defined. It is likely the review of the Framework will be subject to a consultation, therefore, the Steering Group will make an announcement in due course.

The Steering Group continues to support the stakeholder group under the **Welsh Marine Advice and Action Group (WMAAG)**. The Marine Resilience Sub-group which, provides a forum to facilitate more in-depth discussion around MPA management, amongst other marine areas, and enables wider engagement in the development of future Action Plans. Engagement with the group has been limited this year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

# Table 1

## MPA Network Action Plan 2021-2022 – Summary of Progress:

### Integrate sustainable management of the MPA network with the Area Statement Process and delivery

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

The MPA Management Action Plan is embedded in the **Area Statements**, which were 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 were already embedded in the **2021-22 MPA Network Management Action Plan**

The focus over 2021-22 was on engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to agree collaborative steps which we can take to deliver the actions in the identified themes of:

- Nature based solutions and adaptation in the coastal zone
- Supporting implementation of marine planning; and
- Building the resilience of the marine environment.

**Progress Summary:**

A strong focus for the marine Area Statement this year has been on Ocean Literacy. Ocean Literacy can be described as “understanding your influence on the ocean and its influence on you”. Understanding people’s values and attitudes towards our coasts and seas, and working towards increasing society’s value of the marine habitat could serve to influence behaviour to support more sustainable action and management of the marine environment.

NRW in collaboration with Defra and Ocean Conservation Trust, conducted a survey to better understand people’s values and attitudes in Wales, with a report due to be published in September. We have also hosted 2 online workshops to develop a prioritised action plan for what could or should happen in Wales to support Ocean Literacy. The Marine Area Statement is supporting the development of a task and finish group under Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group to drive forward work in Wales around Ocean Literacy.

We have also been supporting the development of projects under Nature Networks aimed at improving the management and condition of our Marine Protected Area Network in Wales. This supports the Marine Area Statement theme of building resilience of marine environments.

### Develop an approach to undertaking improved and periodic MPA condition assessments

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Completed

**Action Description:**

This EMFF funded project will develop indicators and a process for improving reporting on condition of features protected within the network of MPAs in Wales.

The main activities of the project are:

- 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.

**Progress Summary:**

This project is now complete, finished end May 2022. Considerable progress was made this year which may be summarised as follows:

- To the end of August 2021, 40 feature level workshops were held covering all SAC and SPA features.
- All features in Welsh MPAs now have condition reporting indicators made up of attributes and targets.
- Between October 2021 and March 2022, 63 individual feature pilot assessments have been completed covering 10 SPAs and 5 SACs.
- 18 meetings were held to help develop the technical aspects of the assessment process.
- 59 individual members of staff from across NRW have contributed over 800 staff hours to the process up to March 2022. This highlights the scale and breadth of this project, and the resources needed to make it a success.

Now that this action has been completed, the next stage to carry out condition assessments will continue in a new project funded as part of the marine element of the Welsh Government Nature Networks fund.

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

**Lead Organisation:** Welsh Government

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

The Welsh Government is continuing to work with NRW, JNCC and other science and policy experts to enable integrated, cost-effective monitoring. This monitoring will fulfil our nature conservation obligations, provide the evidence to assess and detect trends in the health and biological diversity of our seas and underpin the sustainable management of our natural resources.

Whilst the new programme is being implemented, the current monitoring programme will continue to be delivered.

**Progress Summary:**

Whilst statutory monitoring continues, Welsh Government continues to explore a UK wide monitoring programme based on the identified monitoring options to support the MPA network. Welsh Government are continuing discussions with UK and Devolved Governments in how to deliver this.

## MPA Network Condition Improvement Programme

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

This ongoing programme of work explores potential management actions, where required, to address identified pressures and threats for the MPA network.

This year the programme will focus on working with local management officers to develop projects from existing and new actions and explore possible funding routes to deliver next year. Projects will prioritise actions which can deliver improvements to condition or improving understanding of key pressures and threats.

**Progress Summary:**

Throughout 2021/22 the MPA Condition Improvement Programme has been particularly focussing on the following:

- **MPA management case studies:** The case studies showcase work undertaken over the years, providing detail on specific projects related to the maintenance or improvement of MPAs in Wales. The aim of the case studies is to encourage learning and address common issues to help build the resilience of marine ecosystems across the network.
- **Focus on water quality:** As water quality is a key pressure and threat to MPA feature condition there has been a focus on bringing the current site actions up to date. New actions have also been created where relevant to tackle ongoing pressures and threats to marine features. The development, prioritisation and delivery of these actions will be ongoing.
- **Focus on Harbour Porpoise:** New site level actions have been finalised for the three Harbour Porpoise SACs in Wales. Work has now started to prioritise and develop these actions into projects for future delivery.
- **Project development:** This programme continues to work with external and internal partners to develop and deliver projects to improve MPA condition. This includes feeding information from this project into other areas of work such as the new WG funded Nature Networks programme, which has funded 10 projects for delivery between 2022-25. In addition, we have secured funding through the MPA Steering Group to do a 1-year investigation into the impact of landfill sites at the coast on MPA features.

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

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales, Joint Nature Conservation Committee

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

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.

Guidance is being developed to support implementation of Welsh National Marine Plan policies in decision making e.g., marine licencing and policy specific guidance.

**Progress Summary:**

Considerable progress has been made this year producing and updating guidance, including:

- Principles supporting restoration and enhancement in marine and coastal development proposals.
- Information to support Environmental Assessment of tidal lagoon developments in Wales.
- Position Statement on sediment management.
- At sea bird surveys for marine developments.

All are already or will be soon available on the NRW marine guidance webpages:

<https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/business-sectors/marine/?lang=en>

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

**Lead Organisation:** Welsh Government

**Delivery Timescale:** Completed

**Action Description:**

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.

**Progress Summary:**

Some initial exploratory work has been undertaken using over 12 iVMS data collected from the scallop fishery, primarily to test methodology and feasibility. With the legal requirement for iVMS to be included for under 12m vessels, it is anticipated further trials could be planned. However, sufficient data will be required first, therefore, this would be unlikely until at least 2023.

## Deliver MPA management through regulatory consenting and assessment processes

**Lead Organisation:** Welsh Government, All management authorities

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

### Action Description:

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.

### Progress Summary:

This year NRW continued to determine Marine Licences while considering the potential effects on MPAs within all decisions. Where necessary, appropriate mitigatory measures were included as condition(s) within these Marine Licences.

Welsh Government issued a number of fisheries legislation exemptions for a variety of scientific research. Many of these exemptions required an HRA, which confirmed that the exemptions would have no impact on protected species and habitats.

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

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing (as new data becomes available)

### Action Description:

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.

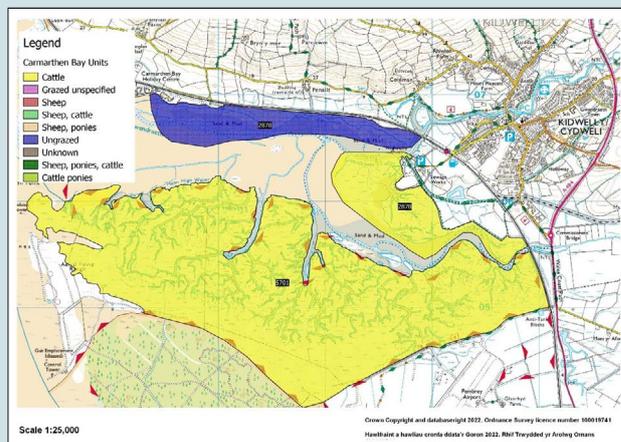
### Progress Summary:

In the past year the focus has been on improving maps of the extent and distribution of saltmarsh habitat. The Saltmarsh Extent map is a comprehensive site-based dataset for Wales, bringing together data from various sources (Phase 1/2/WFD/Article 17) into one single map for the first time. This will simplify any future analysis of saltmarsh habitat (e.g., gain or loss), as well as inform habitat management.

The maps are currently being checked and should be ready for wider dissemination by the end of 2022. The maps of other marine Annex I habitats are available from the [Lle geospatial portal](#) and [DataMapWales](#) (which will replace Lle).



Example Saltmarsh extent map, North Gower.



Example Map from *Strategic review of grazing on saltmarsh features in Welsh MPAs and development of actions to improve condition*: Defence Estates Gwendreath Saltmarsh Pembrey.

## How to Manage the MPA Network for Blue Carbon \*New for 2021-22\*

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Completed

### Action Description:

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. We will improve this understanding by:

- Calculating the amount of carbon stored and sequestered by habitats in the MPA network.
- Carrying out an options analysis report covering:
  - 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.

### Progress Summary:

This year NRW have produced two new reports and a set of infographics on Blue Carbon as it relates to the MPA network in Wales. The first is called *The Blue Carbon Potential of the Marine Protected Area Network in the Welsh Marine Environment*, this report aimed to increase understanding of the blue carbon resource in Wales's SAC network by quantifying the contribution of the network to carbon storage and sequestration. The total contribution of Welsh SAC Annex I features to carbon storage was estimated to be approximately 11 Mt of carbon in the top 10 cm of sediment.

The second report was focussed on *Understanding how management of the Welsh MPA network can contribute to the protection and enhancement of blue carbon* the report reviewed potential management measures which promote carbon storage and sequestration in Welsh SAC Annex 1 habitat features using local, regional and global examples. A range of potential management options for each SAC have been identified along with a high-level evaluation of the feasibility of implementation and wider ecosystem benefits of each measure.

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

**Lead Organisation:** Relevant Authority Groups

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

This action will highlight and link to local actions of relevance, including specific local actions in the annual Action Plan as appropriate.

**Progress Summary:**

The work that European Site Officers do at the site level through the Relevant Authority Group (RAG) is varied. A fuller account of the work they do can be found in a report to the Steering Group on their progress for the year 2021-22.

A number of site level projects have been implemented in 2020-21. These projects aim to either

- reduce impacts on site features helping to work towards favourable condition
- maintain feature condition
- investigate impacts; and
- or focus on education and awareness.

Please note that the hours worked by site officers is directly linked to the funding received and that is reflected in the number of projects carried out at each site.

In addition to project work, all site officers carry out general site management and liaison work including but not limited to:

- Maintaining the RAG and Liaison Groups
- Stakeholder engagement
- Raising awareness and education (including organising events and school visits)
- Sourcing and securing funding including project development
- MPA contact point
- Providing advice and information
- Promoting local marine codes
- Liaison and partnership working
- Working with other site officers to ensure consistency across the network; and
- Sitting on various groups to ensure MPAs are represented and promote joint working e.g., MPA Management Steering Group, Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group etc.

All of this aids connections and liaison between network level actions and local MPA management activity. Allowing learning between projects and promotes work carried out at the site level.

**Bait collection in the MPA network in Wales: Evidence gathering and management options \*New for 2021-22\***

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Completed

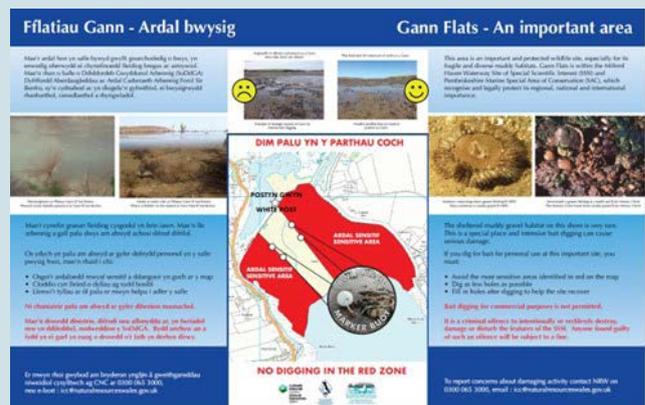
**Action Description:**

Bait digging and collection is known to cause a number of impacts at a range of sites throughout the MPA network. 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. The project will also help to improve existing management of bait at the Gann.

**Progress Summary:**

The outputs of this action include two desk-based reports which link to management and collection of evidence for bait digging and the installation of an information sign at the Gann, a bait digging hotspot.

- **Evidence Reports:** Two reports on bait digging were produced. ‘*Bait digging Evidence Collection – Methodology Review, Report No 603*’ is now available on the NRW website [Natural Resources Wales/ Marine and coastal evidence reports](https://www.naturalresources.wales/marine-and-coastal-evidence-reports). It appraises a number of methods of gathering evidence, including drones, field observations, cameras and aerial imagery. The second report, ‘*Bait Digging Management Options, Report No 602*’ evaluates the most sensitive sites in Wales for bait digging and presents and appraises potential management options available at these sites. This report will be published shortly.
- **Bait digging sign:** A new bilingual sign for the Gann Flats, a protected site with an important muddy gravel habitat, has been designed and installed on site. The sign replaces a previous version, highlighting the importance of the site, and gives clear advice to diggers about how to reduce damage. This sign will be placed at two entry locations onto the shore.



Gann sign, close up and in-situ

### Strategic review of grazing on saltmarsh features in Welsh MPAs and development of actions to improve condition \*New for 2021-22\*

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Completed

**Action Description:**

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.

**Progress Summary:**

The report for the *Strategic review of grazing on saltmarsh features in Welsh MPAs and development of actions to improve condition* is near completion. A final draft for NRW was provided by the contractors, PONT, in March complete with map layers. This is undergoing final checks to ensure it is accessible and to get it registered as an Environmental Evidence Report. The report will have restricted distribution because of sensitivities relating to land management and ownership.

The strategic review of grazing is now being used to help build the work programme for Marine Nature Network Fund project officers to implement identified actions on the ground.

### Address coastal squeeze impacts on MPAs

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Government

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

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.

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.

**Progress Summary:**

NRW has just completed Guidance Note 062 on the Assessment of Coastal Squeeze, which will be available externally shortly. This Guidance explains how to apply Welsh Governments Position ([Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management projects and the National Habitat Creation Programme \(NHCP\): supplementary note | GOV.WALES](#)) on coastal squeeze and the National Habitat Creation Programme to the Habitats Regulation Assessment, using the recently published 'What is Coastal Squeeze?' Report ([What is coastal squeeze? – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)) as well as the information contain within the Shoreline Management Plans. This year NRW will be starting a 3-year project to improve our understanding of potential deterioration of the MPA network to coastal squeeze, building on work undertaken previously for Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau SAC.

NRW continues to progress a portfolio of potential coastal adaptation projects to meet the compensatory habitat requirements under the National Habitat Creation Programme. Some of the projects are at very early stages whereas others are now in the Outline Business Case stage and engagement with stakeholders is underway. More information on ongoing projects is available here [Natural Resources Wales/Flood risk management projects](#)

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

**Lead Organisation:** Wales Clean Seas Partnership, Welsh Government

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

### Action Description:

The Wales Clean Seas Partnership (WCSP) are responsible for developing and delivering the Marine Litter Action Plan (MLAP) for Wales.

The current three-year plan is closely aligned with similar strategies focusing on tackling terrestrial litter in Wales. The MLAP supports wider work to address Single Use Plastics and waste initiatives in Wales, taking a 'prevention at source' approach.

The partnership will:

- Review annual beach clean surveys across Wales.
- Discuss and propose how to address emerging litter items of concern affecting the marine environment.

Supporting the MLAP, is an EMFF grant-funded project currently in the second stage and involves:

- 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.

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.

### Progress Summary:

The partnership continues to support and influence a number of key policy areas such as; single use plastics, microplastics, fishing gear and behavioural change. Key speakers have presented to the group outlining different approaches to prevention and management of marine litter through their respective schemes.

Beach cleans have continued to increase with support following the relaxation of COVID-19 regulations. Discussions around microplastics have gathered pace recognising this is one of the top litter items identified in beach cleans.

The partnership have supported the development of the end of life fishing gear recycling scheme in Wales, which launched in 2021. The partnership has been critical in identifying key areas to target the scheme and supporting the beach litter element of the project.

## Community Litter Project

**Lead Organisation:** PLAS Relevant Authority Group

**Delivery Timescale:** March 2023

**Action Description:**

This year the 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 the second year of 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.

**Progress Summary:**

The project worked with a qualified and licenced drone operator to explore the use of drones in monitoring litter and the ability of drones, multispectral cameras and AI to identify different types of plastic.

Due to in kind funding by Aberystwyth University it has not been possible to include seal and seagrass monitoring in this work however, five reports were produced as outputs to this project.

## Wales Native Oyster Restoration Project

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** March 2023

### Action Description:

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 *Bonamia* and the non native species *Crepidula fornicata*, as well as monitoring potential positive effects including habitat enhancement and increased associated species composition.

### Progress Summary:

This year the focus was on monitoring, intertidal monitoring of benthic plots at Beggars Reach and elevated oyster cages at Burton and Beggars Reach was carried out on two occasions, Spring and Autumn 2021. Subtidal monitoring of benthic plots at Burton and Beggars Reach was carried out in Autumn 2021.

Measures of oyster density and size were recorded from all plots and compared against baseline measures from Autumn 2020 to assess the survivability and growth of relayed oysters. The key results of the monitoring are as follows:

- Survival was highest within elevated cages compared to intertidal and subtidal plots; however, this may be a result of oysters being relocated outside of the benthic plot by tidal movement
- Intertidal plots had higher survival than subtidal plots
- Survival in the cage at Burton was higher than at Beggars Reach, but the reverse was true of subtidal plots, where no relayed oysters were located within any of the subtidal plots at Burton
- Subtidal plots at Beggars Reach showed the highest average growth (length and width) in comparison to all other restoration plots. Cages showed the lowest average growth, in particular at Burton
- Densities of oysters within intertidal and subtidal plots was markedly lower than relayed densities, however evidence suggests this is not solely a result of mortality but that oysters have been relocated outside of plots by tidal movement
- Spat settlement was observed within the intertidal plots at Beggars Reach but no spat settlement was recorded within subtidal plots.

Spat settlement trials were undertaken at Beggars Reach and Burton to assess the level of spat settlement within Milford Haven. Spat settlement within Milford Haven is currently poor with only two native oyster spat on the spat settlement systems. Although the exact reasons for poor settlement on the systems are unknown, it highlights the importance of on-going restoration projects to aid the recovery of native oyster populations.

**The Bilingual Wales Marine Code App \*New for 2021-22\***

**Lead Organisation:** Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum

**Delivery Timescale:** Completed

**Action Description:**

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. The integrated Wales wide Marine Code App will have distinct regional areas/codes of conduct. The app will be produced in liaison with MPA Officers and members of the Wild Seas Wales group as appropriate.

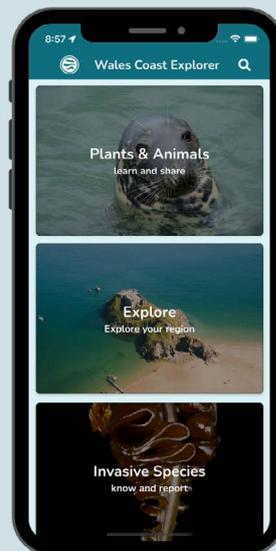
**Progress Summary:**

The Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum have been working in partnership with Marine Protected Area Officers together with input from members of the Wild Seas Wales Group. The partnership has successfully created a bilingual app that showcases coastal and marine wildlife and provides guidance on how to minimise disturbance to marine wildlife across the entire Welsh Coastline.

**The Wales Coast Explorer | Cwrydro Arfordir Cymru app** allows anyone one visiting the Welsh Coast to:

- **Identify coastal wildlife** and find out about their quirky lives with wildlife information provided.
- **Become a citizen scientist** – help the National Biodiversity Network build a picture of Wales’ biodiversity by enabling user to **report of wildlife sightings**.
- Identify and report **invasive species**.
- **Explore the coast**, with guidance on how to **enjoy and not disturb our special wildlife**. Regional marine code information is provided for a place-based approach.
- **Find archaeological sites** along the coast, from shipwrecks to ancient forts – and use the app to share your sightings with the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales!

The App has successfully launched and is available to download for free on all mobile platforms.



Pictures of how the app appears on a mobile device

## Reduce disturbance to marine mammals and birds

**Lead Organisation:** PLAS Relevant Authority Group

**Delivery Timescale:** Completed

**Action Description:**

The focus of this work will be on three main areas:

1. 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:
  - 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.
2. Review the effectiveness of the seal pup disturbance panels developed in Year 1 of the project.
3. Working with Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum on the possible development of the marine code App.

**Progress Summary:**

Outputs of this project include:

- A report on reviewing the mid to north Wales marine codes. This also included a questionnaire that was sent out to stakeholders that in turn helped in revising the codes.
- 4 x revised mid to north Wales marine codes. This is now the North and West Wales Marine Code and how it applies in each county.
- We have produced design work for panels, A5 flyers and social media content. Each local authority has adopted the revised codes and has funded printing of material for their county.
- Seal leaflet.
- Seashore code leaflet.
- MPA Partnership logo and branding.

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

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales, PLAS Relevant Authority Group

**Delivery Timescale:** September 2022

**Action Description:**

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.

This will be achieved by:

- 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.

**Progress Summary:**

The project is progressing well. Over the last year the project has:

- Run four events.
- Sent out questionnaires.
- Provided updates and held meetings for stakeholders whose input is being used to produce the projects action plans.
- Produced a Welsh marine invasive non-native species (INNS) kit for future INNS events.
- Produced two evidence reports looking at the impact of marine INNS and identifying high risk areas of INNS introduction and spread in Wales, these can be found on the project webpage here: [PLAS Biosecurity Plan | Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau \(penllynarsarnau.co.uk\)](https://www.penllynarsarnau.co.uk)
- Investigated the use of eDNA for monitoring marine INNS – An environmental DNA contract is currently underway.

The project has also produced a draft marine INNS guide for Wales and a draft recreational boating action plan which are due to be completed towards the end of the project.

### Develop a UK Dolphin and Harbour Porpoise Conservation Strategy

**Lead Organisation:** Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, Joint Nature Conservation Committee

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

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.

**Progress Summary:**

The UK and Devolved Governments continue to work collaboratively on the Strategy and are aiming to produce a response to the consultation as soon as possible.

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

**Lead Organisation:** Natural Resources Wales, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Welsh Government

**Delivery Timescale:** March 2022

**Action Description:**

This UK-wide three-year project seeks to deliver a coherent approach to understand and where necessary reduce seabird bycatch in UK fisheries.

The objectives of the project in 2021-22 are:

- 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.

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.

**Progress Summary:**

The seabird bycatch plan of action has been subsumed into the UK bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI). The UK BMI includes high level objectives, with suggested actions covering seabirds, cetaceans and seals. Work to develop the strategy follows a data collection exercise of best understanding from across the UK.

The UK BMI will be a new action within the MPA Network Management Action Plan 2022-23.

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

**Lead Organisation:** Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

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 EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

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.

This year, project activities will include:

- 9 mammal vs fixed nets
- 40 habitats vs mobile towed gears
- 20 further assessments to be agreed by the steering group.

**Progress Summary:**

Between April 2021 and March 2022 NRW completed 69 assessments (9 for marine mammals and fixed gears, and 60 for habitats and bottom towed gears). The reports are being published in batches on the Welsh Government website. Please see below the first two batches published:

- Pots and Traps: [Assessing Welsh Fisheries Activities project: pots and traps | GOV.WALES](#) and [Prosiect Asesu Gweithgareddau Pysgodfeydd Cymru: cewyll a thrapiau | LLYW.CYMRU](#)
- Demersal Trawls: [gov.wales/assessing-welsh-fisheries-activities-project-demersal-trawls](#) and [llyw.cymru/prosiect-asesu-gweithgareddau-pysgodfeydd-cymru-treillongau-demersal](#)

## Operate a risk based approach to fisheries enforcement

**Lead Organisation:** Welsh Government

**Delivery Timescale:** Ongoing

**Action Description:**

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.

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.

**Progress Summary:**

During 2021-22 despite the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reducing the number of enforcement operations completed in the Welsh Zone:

- Fisheries patrol vessels carried out 89 patrol days
- Marine enforcement officers inspected 185 fishing vessels and completed 272 landing checks
- 45 marine licence inspections were conducted
- Welsh Government successfully prosecuted 1 infringement through court, issued 2 fixed penalties and several warnings. A number of additional offences are still progressing through the judicial system.

### National Shoresearch Project \*New for 2021-22\*

**Lead Organisation:** Wildlife Trust Wales, North Wales Wildlife Trust, Natural Resources Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** Completed

**Action 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.

**Progress Summary:**

A collaborative approach was taken to review existing Shoresearch methodologies and resources in its suitability to meet the needs of the Welsh condition monitoring strategy for INNS and features (species and habitats) of SSSIs and SACs to focus data collection on Natural Resources Wales (NRW) needs. Alongside this a specific training package for volunteers was created allowing participants to develop their survey and identification skills, in a tiered programme to allow progression and consequently the ability to assign specific expertise levels to assist in data quality management. The current Indicia-based data management platform was tested and evaluated to ensure effective and efficient data flow. In addition, a series of training events and surveys were undertaken with volunteers to test resources and establish a core group of Shoresearch Cymru volunteers.

A lot more information is available on the project webpages including in the monthly blogs (click on Shoresearch Bogs on this page): <https://www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do-landing-page/wildlife-conservation/our-projects/shoresearch-intertidal-citizen-science>

### UK Seabird Island Biosecurity Programme (SIBP) \*New for 2021-22\*

**Lead Organisation:** RSPB, Welsh Government, Natural Resources, Wales

**Delivery Timescale:** March 2023

**Action Description:**

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.

**Progress Summary:**

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.