



Policy headlines

- Use of the **ecosystem-based approach** aimed at achieving sustainable, balanced, development and the protection and recovery of Scottish seas.
- **Prioritise regional marine planning** alongside National Marine Plan 2 to have a coordinated approach.
- Sustained **training and financial support for marine planning partnerships and local authorities** to develop, monitor and review Regional Marine Plans as marine planning is an ongoing process, support must be sustained beyond adoption.
- **Cross-border collaboration** in developing and managing plans across administrative boundaries, including internationally.
- **Early consultation with communities**, acknowledging the importance of local expertise to increase support for management measures, recognising that healthy seas and the protection of natural resources are a prerequisite for a sustainable marine economy and coastal communities.
- Partnership working to ensure **integration of terrestrial and marine planning systems** as well as with other existing statutory requirements in the marine space.
- Coordinated **long-term monitoring of the marine environment** to support marine planning decisions, and improved access to marine data to improve our knowledge and contribute to adaptive, precautionary management.
- Decision-making processes guided by the **Precautionary Principle** as it is particularly relevant in a marine context where many uncertainties over the scale and severity of human impact on highly complex marine ecosystems remain.

Definitions

Sustainable Development - meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Ecosystem based approach - The ecosystem approach is a strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way.

Marine Spatial Planning - Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is a public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives that have been specified through a political process. MSP is not an end in itself but a practical way to create and establish a more rational use of marine space and the interactions among its uses, to balance demands for



development with the need to protect the environment, and to deliver social and economic outcomes in an open and planned way.

Precautionary principle - The precautionary principle enables decision-makers to adopt precautionary measures when scientific evidence about an environmental or human health hazard is uncertain and the stakes are high.

Net Zero - Scotland's climate change legislation sets a target date for net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045. Net Zero means the amount of greenhouse gas emissions put into the atmosphere and the amount we're able to take out (through carbon storage) will add up to zero.

Scope

In a period of increasing demand for space and resources in the marine environment, and against a backdrop of declining health of marine ecosystems¹ and an ever-changing policy landscape, there is an urgent need to review marine planning processes and ensure that nature is at the centre of decision making.

In essence, marine planning is a process of determining where and when activities are taking place in the marine environment to better plan for sustainable use. It can also provide a clear framework for stakeholder involvement which can help to reduce conflict².

Numerous policy and legislative drivers provide a strong basis for marine planning in Scotland. The Scottish Government is bound by the provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010³, which included requirements to adopt an ecosystem-based approach to sustainable development, a marine planning framework, a network of Marine Protected Areas and to achieve targets for marine ecosystem health. As such, marine planning is relatively new in comparison to land planning and offers an opportunity to shape how we want to manage our seas going forward.

Scotland's National Marine Plan⁴ was adopted in 2015 and set out the strategic policies for the sustainable development of marine resources out to 200 nautical miles (nm). It sets out high-level objectives, general policies (including climate change, natural heritage and water quality) and sectoral policies (including offshore wind, aquaculture, aggregates, shipping, ports and harbours) which are used in decision making, primarily for marine licensing.

In 2021, a review⁵ found that the National Marine Plan required updating in response to the significant changes in policy since 2015, including the impact of Covid-19, Brexit and the ever-increasing effects of climate change which was acknowledged by the Scottish Government when they declared a climate crisis in 2019. In 2022, the Scottish Government set out their engagement strategy⁶ for a new National Marine Plan (known as NMP2) which details the overarching framework for development and delivery over the next three years.

The National Marine Plan also set out provisions for Regional Marine Plans to be developed. Thus far, Regional Marine Planning has begun in three of the 11 marine regions - Orkney, Shetland and the Firth of Clyde - which are all at varying stages of development but are yet to be adopted. While Regional Marine Plans must be based on the National Marine Plan they can be very useful in providing local context to policy development. It is for this reason that the Trust believes Regional Marine Planning must continue at pace with the development of NMP2 and that development of Regional Marine Plans are not further delayed.

Marine Planning

October 2024

There is also a requirement under marine planning policy in Scotland to develop Sectoral Marine Plans for specific industries. In 2020, a sectoral plan for offshore wind energy⁷ was published which aims to ensure future development of the industry in Scotland's inshore and offshore waters is sustainable. At COP15 in Montreal, the Scottish Government set out their new framework for halting the loss of biodiversity by 2030, leading to land and seas which are restored and regenerated by 2045, which is also the target year for reaching Net Zero. As such, renewable energy is a fast-growing industry in Scotland, and it is imperative that developments are sited in the right place to contribute to Net Zero and biodiversity targets. There is a risk that moving at such a fast pace will mean putting vulnerable habitats and species under increased risk from industrialisation in our seas and so robust spatial planning is crucially important.

Effective marine planning is ecosystem-based⁸: integrating ecological, social and environmental goals and objectives toward sustainable development. Ideally, marine plans should be spatial to account for the multiple different uses of the marine environment to have an oversight of how different industries or developments interact across different marine regions, including internationally. In a report published in 2010 on the "Lessons Learned for Marine Spatial Planning in Scotland" from work on the Clyde Regional Marine Plan, spatial planning was identified as being critically important for regional plans to provide "useful locational guidance for developers and regulators"⁹ as well as the development of specialist marine data sets through GIS (geographic information systems).

The Trust is a member of The Irish Sea Network which is made up of the six different nations around the region (Scotland, England, Wales, Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland). The network is developing a shared vision for management of the Irish Sea area which includes the need for collaboration between nations to plan for activities in the sea where there are no boundaries to nature to avoid cumulative impacts. In 2023, the Ecological Considerations for Marine Spatial Planning in the Irish Sea report was published which puts forward the need for "cooperation between nations to create strategic, spatially explicit, ecosystem-based Marine Spatial Plans"¹⁰.



References

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3. [Marine \(Scotland\) Act – Scottish Government Website](#)
4. [Scotland's National Marine Plan – March 2015](#)
5. [National Marine Plan Review 2021 - Three Year Report on the effectiveness of Scotland's National Marine Plan - For period encompassing 26 March 2018 to 22 March 2021](#)
6. [National Marine Plan 2 – Engagement Strategy – October 2022](#)
7. [Sectoral marine plan for offshore wind energy](#)
8. [Guidance Paper – Ecosystem-based Maritime Spatial Planning in Europe and how to assess it – WWF – European Policy Office – April 2021](#)
9. [Lessons Learned for Marine Spatial Planning in Scotland - K Thompson, J E Donnelly – January 2010](#)
10. [Ecological Considerations for Marine Spatial Planning in the Irish Sea - Giving nature a voice in the marine spatial planning process - 2023](#)

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October 2024