



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

MEETING, DOCUMENT

Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting: 5 March 2024

Minutes of the Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group meeting of 5 March 2024.

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Attendees

Eluned Jones (Chair, Welsh Government), Rhys Davies & Hishiv Shah (Welsh Government), Charlotte Brill & Adrian Judd (Cefas), Helen Bloomfield, Lucie Skates, Karen Perrow & Lee Murray (NRW), Tristian Bromley (The Crown Estate), Chloe Wenman (Marine Conservation Society), Jetske Germing (Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum), Hannah Phillips (Our Dee Estuary), Katie Harvard-Smith (Severn Estuary Partnership), Jennifer Godwin (Seabed User and Developer Group), Fiona Brown & James Guthrie (Associated British Ports), Rhona Macdonald (British Ports Association), Noemi Donigiewicz (Seafish), Kam Tang (Swansea University), Helen Croxson & Nick Salter (Maritime and Coastguard Agency), Rowena Haines (RSPB), Jim Evans (Welsh Fishermans Association), Ben Smith (Wildlife Trust Wales).

1. Welcome and update on Marine Planning

Eluned welcomed new members to the Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group (MPSRG) and initiated a round table of introductions.

Eluned introduced *Paper 1: Current and developing marine planning documents and tools* and invited questions and comments on this.

Eluned highlighted the resource and constraints mapping now published on the [Wales Marine Planning Portal](#) and noted there is currently no update on Strategic Resource Area mapping but she hopes to provide one soon [post meeting note: [a consultation on proposed Strategic Resource Areas](#) was published on 13 March].

2. Optimisation and marine planning: benefits

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balanced across Wales's well-being goals.

Eluned introduced and provided a short overview of: *Paper 2: Discussion Paper – Optimisation and Marine Planning – benefits balanced across Wales's wellbeing goals.*

Eluned highlighted that this paper outlines initial early stage thinking, to start a conversation with MPSRG members, and is not representative of any official Welsh Government (WG) position.

MPSRG members engaged in an open discussion on *Paper 2*.

Key points raised included:

- Members broadly welcomed the focus on 'optimisation' over 'prioritisation' because it focuses on integration rather than trade-offs, while being aware of the complexity of this topic.
- Members highlighted questions about how optimisation might relate to considering trade-offs. WG noted that, given the urgency of addressing climate and nature emergencies, and increasing spatial pressures on our seas, there will need to be a level of prioritisation. However, WG does not intend to move directly into discussions on prioritisation and trade-offs, as it's important to maintain an integrated and holistic approach.
- Members highlighted the need for industry to have certainty in relation to any prioritisation decisions.
- Members reflected on the importance for cross border engagement between WG and other marine planning authorities. WG agreed that is important and outlined ongoing liaison with other marine plan authorities, while balancing political and legislative differences.
- Members discussed sector-sector prioritisation and taking a more holistic approach across wider pressures / drivers / interests. The triangle of nature, fisheries and cable protection was highlighted as a good example of the

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complexities in this discussion.

- Members discussed the potential for descriptors for Good Environmental Status (GES) to support the ongoing conversations on prioritisation.
- Members discussed how to link optimisation back to the wellbeing goals laid out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and potential evidence gaps around the social policies in the Welsh National Marine Plan. Members highlighted: **Integrating Diverse Values into Marine Management - Sustainable Management of Marine Resources (smmr.org.uk)**, as a potentially useful resource to progress thinking on this topic.
- Members noted Welsh National Marine Plan sector safeguarding policies and that colocation or coexistence is not always possible. WG reinforced the intention to work with industry and wider stakeholders as transparently as possible to consider together the best approach (for different scenarios) and to achieve a balance of benefits where possible.
- Members noted that the ability to forecast and predict what areas are currently or will in future be needed is challenging and suggested looking at links between marine planning and **Fisheries Management Plans**.
- Members highlighted questions on the impact of climate change e.g., on fish stocks and habitats.

3. Considerations for Marine Spatial Prioritisation Decision Making

Jennifer Godwin, Seabed User and Development Group (SUDG) presented on *Paper 3: SUDG Workshops Output – Considerations for Marine Spatial Prioritisation Decision Making*.

Jennifer highlighted that these SUDG-curated workshop outputs are currently high-level to encompass the diverse views of the workshop attendees,

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representing a range of backgrounds. The outputs represent a starting point of some common ground to support the effective management of the marine environment (further detail can be found at [Space for Nature and the Blue Economy - Recommendations from Industry on Principles for Marine Spatial Prioritisation](#)).

4. Update on developing a Marine Planning Technical Statement for Marine Ecosystem Resilience and Enhancement (Welsh National Marine Plan Policy ENV_01)

Eluned thanked MPSRG members for their input on the proposed Marine Planning Technical Statement for Marine Ecosystem Resilience and Enhancement. She highlighted that WG is intending to work iteratively on the Technical Statement. The first iteration will be high level and will act as a basis for developing more in depth and longer-term thinking, in partnership with stakeholders.

5. Developing strategic mapping of opportunities for enhancing the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems in Wales.

Helen Bloomfield (NRW) discussed NRW's work on strategic mapping of opportunities for enhancing resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems in Wales.

Helen explained that this work brings together evidence to move us forward to

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achieve outcomes for the marine environment and the Welsh people. The intention is for the evidence framework to be easily adaptable to support delivery of marine resilience.

Helen highlighted key terms and definitions of these terms e.g., recovery and restoration, enhancement.

Helen highlighted the following key points:

- MPA network is the cornerstone of resilience. The priority needs to be improving the condition of this MPA network, but this is not the only opportunity.
- Crucially, we need evidence to underpin decisions around MPA recovery / restoration.
- NRW are looking at maps and supporting information to deliver on environmental enhancement, starting with the spatial boundaries and condition of features for MPAs.
- Next steps include:
 - Assessing what evidence we do know is available and what we need.
 - Considering how we bring together evidence / data to start to build a narrative e.g., around pressures or locations, and how we do this without overcomplicating.

6. Any other business and next meeting

Helen Bloomfield agreed to a follow-up presentation on NRW's ongoing work on 'strategic mapping of opportunities for enhancing resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems in Wales'.

Eluned invited members to suggest ideas and / or to volunteer to present at future MSRSG meetings.

Meeting end.

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