



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh National Marine Plan Strategic Resource Area (SRA) Identification: Design Principles

July 2021

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Welsh Government, as the marine planning authority for the inshore and offshore Welsh marine plan areas, has set out its intended approach to identifying potential Strategic Resource Areas (SRAs)¹ to support implementation of the Welsh National Marine Plan (WNMP). This work forms one strand of our wider spatial approach to WNMP implementation and understanding opportunities and constraints related to sustainable resource use.²

SRAs, if progressed, will describe and safeguard discrete areas of natural resource to which WNMP policy SAF_02 applies. We will take an integrated and co-ordinated approach to SRA development, considering needs holistically across a range of sectors rather than progressing plans for an SRA on a standalone basis for an individual sector.³

Strategic Resource Areas (SRAs)

SRAs, if progressed, will describe and **safeguard key areas of natural resource** with potential to support future sustainable use.

SRAs are also intended to **facilitate proactive dialogue** between sectors to ensure any plans to expand resource use do not unnecessarily constrain either sector.

As set out within the WNMP, we intend to explore the potential identification of SRAs in relation to nascent marine renewable energy technologies (wave energy resources, tidal stream energy resources and, potentially, tidal range energy resources and floating offshore wind energy resources⁴), as well as aggregate resources and aquaculture shellfish and seaweed resources.

Purpose of this document:

This paper sets out the design principles⁵ which will help to guide the development of potential SRAs. It forms part of, and should be read in conjunction with, a wider suite of documents which provide the context to SRA development⁶. These include:

- Approach to developing SRAs to support implementation of WNMP safeguarding policy (July 2021, setting out the aims of, policy context to and an overview of the approach to SRA development).
- Approach to developing SRAs to support implementation of WNMP safeguarding policy – annex: alignment with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources July 2021).
- Design Principles (this paper, July 2021) to help guide SRA development.
- The spatial approach to WNMP implementation (forthcoming), setting out the different strands of work being taken forward, including SRA development.
- SRA derivation report(s), as appropriate, (forthcoming, to be developed as part of SRA mapping).

1 For further details, refer to the paper on the Proposed approach to developing Strategic Resource Areas to support implementation of WNMP safeguarding policy (July 2021).

2 For further details, refer to the paper on the Proposed approach to developing Strategic Resource Areas to support implementation of WNMP safeguarding policy (July 2021) and the forthcoming paper on the spatial approach to WNMP implementation.

3 For further details, refer to the paper on the Proposed approach to developing Strategic Resource Areas to support implementation of WNMP safeguarding policy (July 2021).

4 Fixed wind considerations are covered by the BEIS-led Future Offshore Wind Scenarios Research project; outputs from this work will be considered and applied as appropriate.

5 Previously referred to as design criteria.

6 These documents can be found at gov.wales/marine-planning

Definitions:

Understanding potential constraints which may influence the viability of a development or introduce consenting complexity can help inform SRA identification. Constraints mapping will be an important component to identifying, at a strategic plan-level, areas of natural resource which may merit safeguarding through SRAs. In developing potential SRAs, we will therefore work with stakeholders to identify and consider relevant hard and soft constraints, using the following definitions:

Hard constraint – a spatial consideration which means, for the lifetime of that constraint, new development for a particular sector is, in practice, not possible.

For example, significant fixed infrastructure would be considered a hard constraint in relation to new aggregate extraction.

Soft constraint – a spatial consideration which relates to a particular sector. Soft constraints may have a varying degree of relevance to the prospects and nature of a new development.

For example, a Marine Protected Area would be an important consideration for a new renewable energy development but does not necessarily mean new development cannot progress.

Soft and hard constraints are afforded equal consideration in planning and licensing decisions.

Where SRAs are introduced, we will keep relevant matters under review, including an understanding of any changes to relevant spatial constraints and potential implications for the SRA boundary.

SRA Design Principles:

The WNMP (paragraph 55) states '*In identifying an SRA, the marine plan authority should:*

- Apply technical criteria to best represent the resource most likely to be practically and economically viable given current technologies;
- Apply other sectoral spatial needs to refine the extent of the SRA, seeking to minimise or avoid conflict and encourage coexistence;
- Identify areas where consideration may need to be given to alternative options for resource use;
- Identify environmental constraints and opportunities relevant to the SRA;
- Identify social constraints and opportunities relevant to the SRA; and
- Consider the relationship between the SRA and the objectives and relevant general and sector policies of this Plan.'

In working with stakeholders to map and develop potential SRAs for consultation, we will:

- Be guided by relevant WNMP objectives and policies.
- Apply the best available evidence throughout the process.
- Apply technical criteria relating to sector-specific practical and economic considerations in order to understand the potential technical viability of resource use.
- Identify and exclude areas of sector-specific 'hard' constraints [for example, in relation to SAF_01a].
- Take account of 'soft' constraints and amend a potential SRA as appropriate [for example, considering existing activity (SAF_01b); environmental considerations (policies ENV_01, 02, 07); social/cultural considerations (policies SOC_05, 06, 07)].
- Seek to minimise conflict between sectoral opportunities.

- Seek to promote coexistence⁷ and optimise spatial planning for resource safeguarding.
- Incorporate ‘adequacy of scale’ considerations with respect to a sector’s scale of operation and potential growth rate⁸ etc.
- Avoid SRAs overlapping each other where coexistence between activities may not be possible.
- Ensure clarity of safeguarding through avoiding disproportionately complex boundaries and disjointed or fragmented areas, where possible, in the final proposed SRAs.

We intend to concentrate the process towards the inshore plan area where there is typically greater overlapping and interrelated activities and resources. We will consider resources and activities related to the offshore plan area as appropriate throughout the process.

⁷ The WNMP defines coexistence as when multiple developments, activities or uses can exist alongside or close to each other in the same place and/or at the same time. Co-location is a subset of coexistence and is where multiple developments, activities or uses coexist in the same place by sharing the same footprint or area. (WNMP paragraph 98).

⁸ Incorporating consideration of factors such as, for example, maturity of the sector and proximity to market, potential demand/markets, government policy, supporting infrastructure and supply chains.