

Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group – Leading a Blue Recovery

The green recovery in Wales must address the overarching challenges of climate change, the loss of biodiversity, and unsustainable production and consumption, while also delivering social and economic benefits. These principles and priorities for recovery have been presented to Ministers by the Green Recovery Taskforce.

The Task Force recognises that there are a specific suite of opportunities and challenges for a green recovery for our coasts and seas – a ‘blue recovery’.

The Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group (WMAAG), representing marine and coastal stakeholders across Wales, has worked to develop this collective call for an **integrated Blue Recovery package** building on a range of related proposals submitted to the Green Recovery Task Force in 2020. We outline here a package of actions needed to develop more resilient coasts and seas that can better support the social and economic well-being of coastal communities, as part of the delivery of a wider green recovery across Wales.

The case for action

- **Our coasts and seas make a significant contribution to well-being.**
- We are a coastal nation and our **marine environment more than doubles the size of Wales.**
- A recent [ONS Report](#) values the **UK’s marine natural capital assets at £211 billion**. We gain numerous tangible benefits from our seas in the form of **healthy food, renewable energy, and building materials**, along with associated employment. Our ability to work remotely during the pandemic and continue to engage globally, is reliant on **subsea telecommunications** cables that link us to the rest of the world. **Tourism** is a key economic sector in Wales and the attraction of our dramatic coastline, seascapes and wildlife plays an important role. We have a number of **first class marine research** departments in Welsh Universities, providing high quality employment and undertaking R&D and evidence collection that is fundamental to sustainably managing our marine environment. Our **ports and harbours** provide gateways for sustainable growth around our coasts.
- Our seas also provide a host of less visible but no less important benefits. Habitats such as salt marsh and sea grass can **store and sequester carbon, as well as providing protection from coastal erosion and flooding**, and therefore play a crucial role in addressing the climate emergency. Moreover, there is a growing body of evidence supporting the **beneficial impacts on mental health and well-being** of spending time near the sea and in ‘blue space’¹.
- Coastal communities in Wales are facing the **immediate economic impacts** on the tourism sector from Covid19, Brexit’s impact on fisheries, alongside a general trend of

¹ [Marine and coastal areas linked with better health and well-being - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

higher deprivation in comparison to non-coastal towns² while the rapid growth in second homes threatens their distinctive cultural and economic future.

- Additionally, many coastal communities are also facing the **longer-term challenge of adapting to the impacts of sea level rise, coastal erosion and flooding** as a result of climate change³.
- **A resilient marine ecosystem is fundamental to a blue recovery.** The recent State of Natural Resources Report (2020) indicates a mixed picture for wildlife around our coasts and seas with the impacts of climate change, pollution and non-native species all exerting pressure. The report emphasises the opportunities to build the resilience of the marine ecosystem through the restoration of habitats, maximising carbon sequestration potential, and completing the contribution to an ecologically coherent and well-managed network of Marine Protected Areas.

What would a blue recovery look like?

The Green Recovery Task Force process in 2020 led to several proposals that could form part of a blue recovery. These included actions to address behaviours and management on land in ways that can have a significant positive impact on the health of our seas. For example, actions for a circular economy can reduce marine litter, actions to promote health and well-being of communities can make more of blue spaces (and significant opportunities such as the Wales Coastal Path), whilst actions that improve waste and water management can support much needed improvements to coastal water quality. A blue recovery will be based on the resilience of the marine ecosystem with the opportunities it presents for our economy and wellbeing of our communities. There were also therefore a range of marine-specific proposals reflecting opportunities around certain marine sectors, challenges for communities living at the coast, and actions needed to improve the ecological resilience of our seas, particularly focussing on the Marine Protected Area network.

Individual members of WMAAG, such as the Welsh Fisherman's Association have put forward a clear vision for their contribution to a blue recovery with the WFA setting out recommendations for management of sustainable fisheries and a commitment "*to ensuring a profitable and sustainable fishing industry that helps coastal communities to prosper and our unique marine environment to flourish.*" We believe that connecting such individual commitments into a collective, coherent programme of action with Government can ensure that our marine area can make its proper contribution to achieving our national wellbeing goals

² [Coastal towns in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

³ [Welsh Government's National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management 2020](#)

Figure 1 summarises the outcomes sought by partners from a blue recovery, relating these to the existing Welsh National Marine Plan, as well as to the core themes from the Green Recovery Task Force report.

In bringing together this Blue Recovery proposal, WMAAG has recognised that there are a range of existing programmes and frameworks already supporting delivery of these outcomes. In particular, the group focussed on the barriers to the effective delivery of existing plans and policies, in order to identify the key enablers of a blue recovery.

Where are we now?

Our distinctive Welsh legislative frameworks (Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act and Environment (Wales) Act) can support a green and blue recovery in Wales.

Many frameworks and programmes are already in place that could be upscaled in order to increase the pace of delivery for a blue recovery:

The first [Welsh National Marine Plan](#), published in 2019, provides a clear vision and policy framework for the sustainable management of our seas. The [Marine Area Statement](#) provides further detail on the priorities, collectively agreed actions needed to build the resilience of our seas and the wider benefits this can provide.

ENABLERS OF A BLUE RECOVERY (All WNMP Objectives)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable funding and financing that supports delivery of blue recovery objectives • Capacity in coastal communities that enables joined up engagement and involvement in planning for the future 	
NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS (WNMP Objectives 1,6,7,8,9,10,11,13)	TRANSFORMING SOCIO-ECONOMIC SYSTEMS (WNMP Objectives 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,12,13)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved condition of Wales MPA network supporting a resilient marine ecosystem • Delivery of a cross Wales programme of active marine and coastal restoration that delivers blue carbon and enhances biodiversity • Where we are investing in a coastal defence, naturebased solutions have been considered and implemented where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marine planning process that delivers nature recovery • Sustainable deployment of marine renewables through an improved evidence base • Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture sector supported by increased market for seafood consumption in Wales that delivers benefits to health and wellbeing benefits • Strong and sustainable coastal tourism sector • Reduced marine litter

Figure 1: Key outcomes sought from marine proposals to the Green Recovery process, aligned to objectives in the Welsh National Marine Plan

There are a range of established groups and projects, involving WMAAG members, dedicated to delivery under this policy framework, such as the Marine Protected Area Management Group, Consenting and Strategic Advisory Group for marine renewables, the Clean Seas Partnership, Assessing Welsh Fishing Activities project, Marine Resilience Sub Group, and the Wales Marine Fisheries Advisory Group (this latter group has been under review for some time and is currently without a Chair.) The utilisation of these groups in affecting change and the effective use of the stakeholder expertise is critical.

However, there are still gaps to address, including the call for a new Fisheries Bill, fishery improvement plans and fisheries management plans; and opportunities for marine considerations to be better embedded, for example, in terrestrial planning processes and Public Service Board delivery. Critically the pace of delivery does not currently meet the urgency of the need for action, with frustrations being expressed across a range of interests including renewables, fisheries and conservation groups.

WMAAG members are clear that there is need for greater investment (ideally multi-annual investment) with a clear implementation plan that can deliver a blue recovery.

What needs to happen to deliver a blue recovery?

A series of discussions with the WMAAG group (see Annex for a summary table) has identified the need for a package of enabling actions in order to ramp up and deliver existing projects, plans and actions, as well as define new ones to deliver resilient marine ecosystems through nature-based solutions and socio-economic opportunities.

These enablers are key to prime and build capacity to deliver any further actions:

- *Developing **ocean literacy**⁴ across all parts of society will raise awareness of the economic, environmental and cultural significance of our coasts and seas*
- ***Sustainable long term investment** is crucial to support delivery of key objectives supported by relevant targets and milestones*
- ***Building capacity**, particularly at the local level, through schemes such as the proposed National Nature Service, can enable meaningful community engagement to address local opportunities and challenges through a shared ambition and common cause.*

⁴ Defined as having ‘an understanding of your influence on the ocean, and its influence on you’.

1. Greater awareness and focus on the opportunities and importance of a resilient Welsh marine ecosystem, both politically and locally [enhancing ocean literacy across Wales]

- Set clear targets, goals and measures for the resilience of our marine ecosystem in supporting a Blue Recovery. This could include targets in relation to restoration of marine and coastal habitats linking to international calls to protect 30% of land and sea within well managed areas for nature by 2030;
- Fostering and enhancing an understanding of the importance of our seas and their stewardship, environmentally, economically and culturally across our communities, and administrations; for example, embedding marine and coastal objectives more explicitly within the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, particularly Public Service Board delivery.
- Strengthen implementation and development of the Welsh National Marine Plan to support sustainable development of Welsh waters and embed nature recovery. This will include supporting a stronger spatial focus in planning, through addressing strategic evidence gaps and taking a multi sector approach that takes into account cumulative effects on the environment.
- Realising the economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits from a truly sustainable Welsh fishing industry (Reference; WFA-CPC 'Sea our Future) through evidence led adaptive fisheries management. This must also include the potential for Welsh molluscan aquaculture cultivation that sustainably delivers significant nature-based solutions and eco-system services in the marine environment in the course of producing healthy seafood protein
- Invest in opportunities to build the resilience of the marine ecosystem through the restoration of habitats, maximising carbon sequestration potential, and completing the contribution to an ecologically coherent and well-managed network of Marine Protected Areas. Using regulation where appropriate when there is evidence of action leading to biodiversity decline and environmental degradation
- Establish a new conversation with Welsh Government underpinned with information on historic lack of investment in marine ecosystem resilience and opportunities for an integrated blue recovery, in line with the WFG and Environment Acts. Working collaboratively to develop specific time bound actions to increase resilience.

2. Investment in a blue recovery for Wales

- Put in place fit for purpose, long-term funding⁵ to increase the pace of delivery of actions to build the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems. This should include actions and activities to address a range of themes, including but not limited to the following suggestions:
 - Improving the condition and connectivity of the Welsh MPA network and wider seas, through improved management and appropriate protection measures
 - Maximising protection and restoration of existing marine and coastal habitats to deliver blue carbon benefits, and exploring opportunities for restoring historically lost habitats, where appropriate.
 - Ensure sufficient resources within NRW to undertake monitoring and evidence gathering to improve our understanding of the current status of marine biodiversity and required actions to improve it
 - Undertake a review of the natural capital and the benefits of well managed seas in Wales, including whole site approach wider seas management.

- The greater engagement and ownership of coastal communities/regions in planning and managing the marine & coastal areas is an essential element of a Blue Recovery.

- A flexible funding model that drives engagement with coastal communities and builds capacity to address local issues and opportunities (e.g. through support for existing/ establishing new coastal partnerships and local community groups or otherwise as appropriate).

- Establish appropriate funding to ensure evidence gaps are met and incentivise data sharing that can enable a more effective approach particularly to the consideration of Offshore Renewable Energy consenting.

3. Establish Networks to identify and address blue recovery opportunities and challenges, meaningfully engaging coastal communities in planning for their futures [capacity building]

⁵ The current focus on short term and capital funding may not be suitable for addressing many issues and actions required (e.g. evidence collection, awareness raising)

- Develop and deliver a flexible model for meaningful engagement with coastal communities at a local level (such as through coastal partnerships and embedding marine and coastal considerations more strongly within PSB delivery) to enable the identification of impacts on communities, bottom-up solutions and opportunities, including local projects and evidence needs to facilitate sustainable development
- Build capacity to embed marine and coastal considerations across different policy areas to maximise opportunities for delivering a blue recovery and multiple benefits for society taking preventative action at source, for example:
 - Embedding ocean sciences and research in Curriculum for Wales to support and foster ocean literacy and stewardship.
 - Incorporating benefits of sustainable locally sourced fish and shellfish in a national food strategy
 - Better recognition of the economic role of coastal tourism, which is critically reliant on a resilient marine ecosystem
 - Enabling improved delivery of nature-based solutions to contribute to or address coastal erosion and flooding.
 - Maximising opportunities to support health benefits from the marine environment, e.g. through social prescribing.
 - Addressing pollutant sources through urban wastewater treatment and in upstream catchments.
- Raise awareness of the economic opportunities and benefits to communities offered by healthy resilient ecosystems and sustainable and innovative economic activity

In conclusion

WMAAG members want to engage with the new Government through a new partnership to lead a blue recovery that can deliver a healthier marine environment, contribute to meeting the climate change challenge and deliver more and better jobs for our coastal communities.

We can achieve this through bringing together a range of economic sectors, organisations and individuals committed to the blue recovery vision, to work with Government to deliver investment and an implementation action plan that can turn this vision into reality over this Senedd term.

Annex

Success/ Enablers	Outcomes	Actions
<p>Sustainable financing and funding for a blue recovery [investment]</p> <p>Greater awareness and focus on the opportunities and importance of a resilient welsh marine ecosystem, both politically and locally [ocean literacy]</p> <p>New and existing networks in place to identify and address blue recovery opportunities and challenges with coastal communities engaged and involved in planning for their futures [capacity building]</p>	<p>Fit for purpose funding made available to deliver a blue recovery (i.e. less focus on capital if appropriate)(such as NRW Strategic Allocated Funding; Multi year programmes)</p> <p>Marine and coastal issues better embedded in existing processes, such as PSB delivery, leading to positive action</p> <p>Place-based capacity to engage with communities and businesses to deliver a blue recovery, and address community concerns better (e.g. water quality regulation)</p> <p>Better local engagement around marine and coastal issues and therefore more action on the ground to address opportunities and challenges</p> <p>Sustainably developed and deployed marine</p>	<p>Establish new conversation with Govt underpinned with information on historic lack of investment in marine ecosystem resilience and opportunities for an integrated blue recovery, in line with WBFG and Env Acts.</p> <p>Articulate the actions needed to improve both marine ecosystem resilience (particularly improving condition of the MPA network) and wider marine resilience which include the socio-economic and cultural aspects and the type of resources needed to support this.</p> <p>Establish appropriate funding for MRE consenting evidence pot to ensure evidence gaps are met and incentivise data sharing</p> <p>Fisheries and aquaculture require policies and legislation that protect and enhance the environment and support SMNR and sustainable development</p> <p>Propose the need for clear targets and goals/commitments and measures for a Blue Recovery. This could include targets for e.g. restoration; ocean literacy; identification of a champion (Commissioner for our coasts</p>

	<p>renewable energy resources delivering on Wales's energy security and carbon reduction objectives, whilst fully considering other interests, and ecosystem resilience.</p> <p>Understanding of net benefit of sustainable marine renewable deployments and the value attributed to domestic supply of clean energy</p>	<p>and seas?); more focus from the FGC and reporting within PSBs?</p> <p>Develop and deliver a flexible model for engaging coastal communities at a local level (coastal partnership or otherwise)</p> <p>Highlight the opportunities from our coasts and seas to deliver across different policy areas – e.g. coastal tourism; health (social prescribing; flooding; sectoral employment, decarbonisation of homes and industry, etc)</p> <p>Identify opportunities to increase ocean literacy across Wales – e.g. embedding in the curriculum; eco-schools; engagement and citizen science projects (such as Natur am Byth? Others?); tourism and recreation;</p> <p>Cross policy working to prevent issues at source e.g. water quality impacts from urban wastewater and agricultural pollution, coastal litter from tourism</p>
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Members of Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group

Aquaculture Industry Wales

Bangor Mussels

Blue Marine Foundation

British Association for Shooting and Conservation

British Marine Aggregates Association

British Ports Association

British Sub Aqua Club (Wales)

Severn Estuary Partnership

Cragen Lyn a Mon

Dwr Cymru Welsh Water

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Keep Wales Tidy

Marine Conservation Society

Marine Energy Wales

Milford Haven Port Authority

Natural Resources Wales

One Voice Wales

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum

Pwllheli Partnership

Renewable UK

Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales

Royal Yachting Association

RSPB

Seabed Users and Developers Group

The Crown Estate

Visit Wales

Wales Environment Link

Wales Federation of Sea Anglers

Welsh Fisherman's Association

Welsh Local Government Association

Welsh Marine and Fisheries Advisory Group Chairman (currently vacant)

Wildlife Trusts Wales

World Wildlife Fund

