

Review of the Marine Protected Areas Strategy for the Northern Ireland Inshore Area 2024 – 2030

Consultation Document 2024



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

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Front cover image credit DAERA - Subtidal seagrass in Skerries and Causeway Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Ministerial Foreword



I am delighted to launch a public consultation into the Review of the Marine Protected Areas Strategy (MPA) for the Northern Ireland Inshore Area 2024 – 2030. The first MPA Strategy was published in 2014, but since that time environmental policy in relation to biodiversity loss and climate change has changed across the globe. The understanding of the positive role that marine ecosystems can play in contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation has also evolved.

This review of the first MPA Strategy therefore acknowledges the important role that MPAs play in addressing biodiversity loss and their amazing ability to provide natural, or ‘nature-based’ solutions to climate change. The Review also acknowledges other environmental and societal benefits that MPAs can provide.

The Review of the MPA Strategy has taken place in tandem with the development of the first Blue Carbon Action Plan for Northern Ireland. Blue carbon habitats such as saltmarsh, seagrass beds, shellfish beds, kelp, and maerl beds have the potential to be managed to protect and even increase their carbon sequestration. It was therefore a timely opportunity to consider the protection and restoration of blue carbon habitats, as many of these are located within the existing MPA network.

Both the Review of the MPA Strategy and Blue Carbon Action Plan have been developed using an innovative co-design approach with the Biodiversity and Climate Stakeholder Working Group. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the stakeholders that have been involved in the development of this Plan so far. I would also like to strongly encourage anyone who feels they can contribute, in words and also in actions, to respond to this consultation so that together we can produce an updated MPA Strategy that will ensure appropriate protection of our precious marine environment.

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Introduction

Since the publication and implementation of the original Marine Protected Area (MPA) Strategy in 2014¹, several key strategic policy drivers have been developed at global, UK and Northern Ireland levels relating to biodiversity loss and climate change. Our understanding of how MPAs function and the role that marine ecosystems play in climate change adaptation and mitigation has also grown significantly over this time.

Recognising this, in February 2022, the DAERA Minister made an Oral Statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly announcing this current review of the MPA Strategy, acknowledging the role that MPAs play in addressing biodiversity loss and their potential application as a nature-based solution to support adaptation and resilience to climate change. This review will also seek to maximise co-benefits that a well-managed MPA network can provide.

This paper details the reviewed MPA Strategy for Northern Ireland 2024-2030. It has been developed using a co-design approach with the Biodiversity and Climate Stakeholder Working Group² through three facilitated workshops and on-to-one meetings that took place through 2022 and 2023.

How to Respond to this Consultation

You are invited to respond to this consultation through an [online survey](#) that is quick and simple to complete. Please supplement your response with any relevant supporting information, evidence and/or analysis. If you are unable to complete the survey online, please contact the team by email: marineconservation@daera-ni.gov.uk or call 028 7744 2191. The type of survey questions you will find in the online survey are described at relevant points throughout this document.

¹ [Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland inshore region](#)

² See [Annex 1](#) for a list of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Stakeholder Working Group members.

Northern Ireland Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Network

MPA Strategy 2014

In 2012, the United Kingdom (UK) Government and the Devolved Administrations published a Joint Administration Statement³ that set out their commitment to contribute to the establishment of an ecologically coherent MPA network across the North-East Atlantic. Ecological coherence refers to the representation and replication of biodiversity features, and the linkages between those features. It also refers to the resilience of the network as a whole, and how well the range and geographic variation of the biodiversity features are covered within the network. It is a concept that relates to a network of protected sites being regarded as a whole, greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Northern Ireland's first MPA Strategy, A Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland Inshore Region (within 12 nautical miles of the coast) was published in 2014. It committed the Department to establishing a network of marine protected areas to deliver on international and national obligations for marine nature conservation by 2020. To deliver on these obligations, a network of 48 MPAs has been developed, protecting sensitive and ecologically important species, habitats and geological features. The establishment and management of the network has taken account of the need for ecological coherence and the role of Northern Ireland's MPAs not only in the wider UK MPA network, but in the wider North-East Atlantic.

Currently, three additional MPAs are designated in the offshore region of the Northern Ireland marine area: Pisces Reef Special Area of Conservation, Queenie Corner and South Rigg Marine Conservation Zones. These sites have been designated under the *Marine and Coastal Act (2009)*⁴ and the *Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations (2017)*⁵ respectively and are under the jurisdiction of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

³ [Joint Administration Statement](#)

⁴ [Marine and Coastal Act \(2009\)](#)

⁵ [Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations \(2017\)](#)

Existing MPA Network

The current Northern Ireland MPA network consists of various sites protected by designation under three pieces of environmental legislation and the RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands.

Marine **Special Areas of Conservation** (SACs) and Marine **Special Protection Areas** (SPAs) are designated under the *Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995*⁶. The primary aim of SACs is to protect habitats and species listed in Annex I and II of the Habitats Directive⁷, while SPAs are for the protection of important areas for breeding, over-wintering and migrating birds.

Coastal **Areas of Special Scientific Interest** (ASSIs) are declared under *The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002*⁸ for their species, habitat and/or geological features.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are designated to safeguard vulnerable or unique marine species and habitats of national importance in the Northern Ireland inshore region. The *Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013*⁹ includes provisions for establishing MCZs and allows the Department to make byelaws to control activities that are likely to be damaging.

Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the *Ramsar Convention*¹⁰ and classified as MPAs.

⁶ [Conservation \(Natural Habitats, etc.\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1995 \(as amended\)](#)

⁷ [EU Habitats Directive \(1992\)](#)

⁸ [The Environment \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2002](#)

⁹ [Marine Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2013](#)

¹⁰ [Ramsar Convention](#)

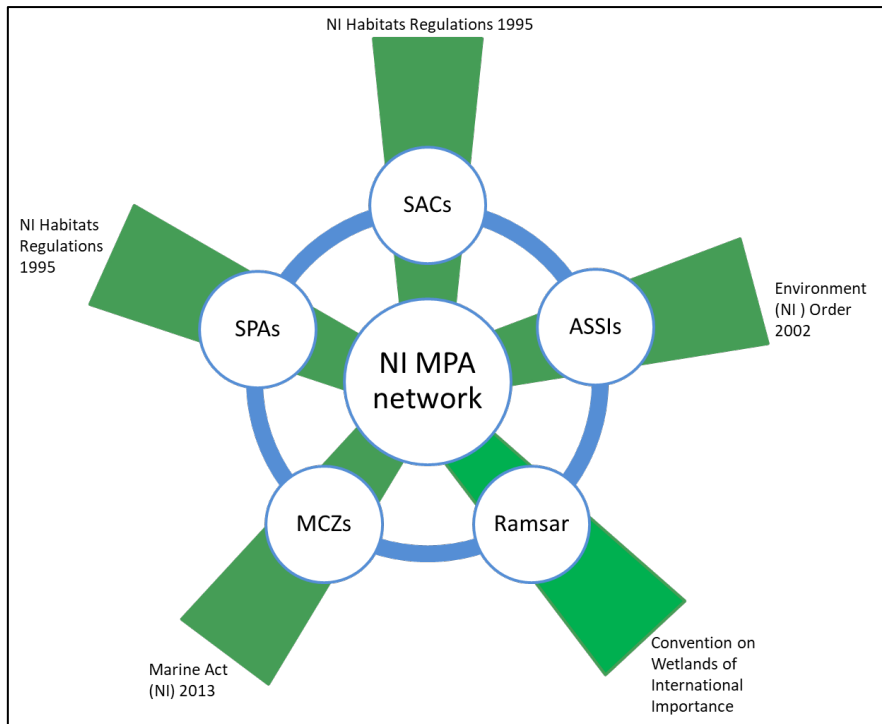


Figure 1: The contribution of nature conservation legislation governing the marine area to Northern Ireland’s Marine Protected Areas (MPA) network.

The Northern Ireland Marine Protected Area map layer can be viewed on the Northern Ireland Marine Mapviewer¹¹ or downloaded from Open Data NI¹².

¹¹ [Northern Ireland Marine Map Viewer \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](http://daera-ni.gov.uk)

¹² [Northern Ireland Marine Protected Areas \(MPAs\) - Datasets - Open Data NI](#)

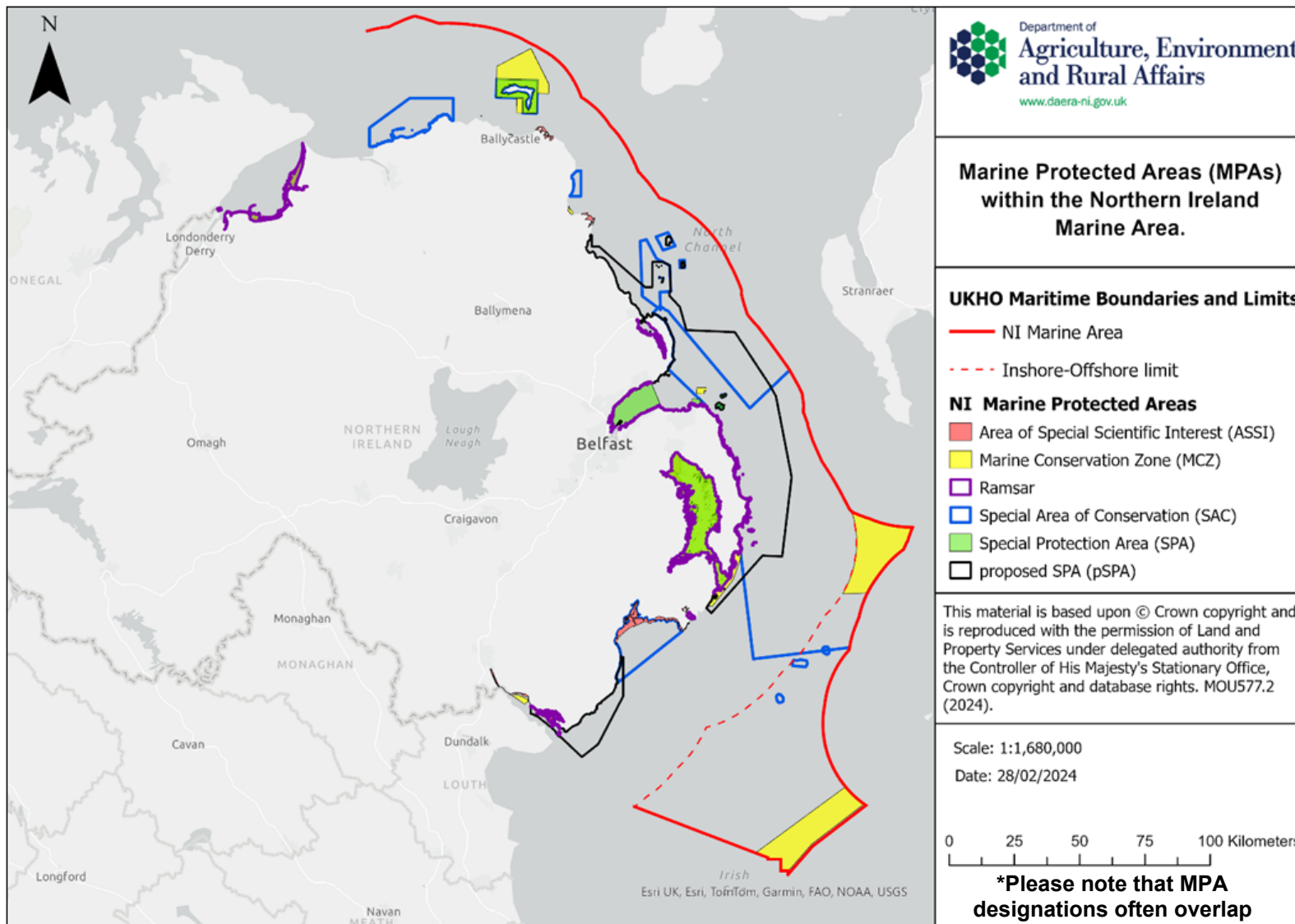


Figure 2: Northern Ireland's Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network

Northern Ireland's First MPA Strategy 2014 - 2020

The first MPA Strategy set out what action the Department intended to take by 2020 to contribute to the delivery of an ecologically coherent MPA network in the North-East Atlantic.

Northern Ireland's inshore MPA network currently consists of 48 protected areas, accounting for 38% of the inshore region area. An assessment carried out by the UK statutory nature advisor, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), in 2018 concluded that Northern Ireland's inshore MPA network was very close to reaching the objective of establishing an ecologically coherent network, with the majority MPA features of conservation interest represented and replicated¹³. The 2023 DAERA Environmental Statistics Report¹⁴ stated that 87% of marine habitat features and 86% of marine mammal features were in favourable status.

JNCC stated that the MPAs in the Northern Ireland inshore region also made a substantial contribution to the MPA network in the adjacent biogeographic regions to Northern Ireland; the Irish Sea and Minches & Western Scotland regions. Only a small number of features did not meet the range of benchmarks set by the network criteria. These shortfalls typically related to replication, or the amount of habitat protected.

A 'conservation objective' is a statement describing the desired ecological/ geological state (quality) of a feature (habitat, species or geological) for which an MPA is designated.¹⁵ The conservation objective establishes whether the feature meets the desired state and should be maintained or falls below it and should be recovered to favourable condition. Management measures have been progressively developed to ensure the conservation objectives are achieved. The *Marine Protected Areas (Prohibited Methods of Fishing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022*^{16 17} have been introduced to manage fishing activities in MPAs and are intended to further the

¹³ [Assessing progress towards an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland inshore region | JNCC Resource Hub](#)

¹⁴ [Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report](#)

¹⁵ [MCZ Guidelines for Conservation Objectives – Information on Activities and Management](#)

¹⁶ [Marine Protected Areas \(Prohibited Methods of Fishing\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#)

¹⁷ [The Marine Protected Areas \(Prohibited Methods of Fishing\) \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

conservation objectives while enabling fishing at sustainable levels. The Interreg VA¹⁸ programme provided €16.9m for the MarPAMM¹⁹, COMPASS²⁰ and SeaMonitor projects²¹, which have developed management recommendations and significantly improved the evidence base relating to MPA features and protected species. It is essential that we continue to build on this platform and this revised strategy will set out the next steps.

The MPA Strategy Review

Since the publication and implementation of the original MPA Strategy in 2014, several key strategic policy drivers have been developed at global, UK and Northern Ireland levels relating to biodiversity loss and climate change. Our understanding of how MPAs function and the role that marine ecosystems play in climate change adaptation and mitigation has also grown significantly over this time.

It is acknowledged the important role that MPAs play in addressing biodiversity loss and their potential application as a nature-based solution to support adaptation and resilience to climate change. The review seeks to maximise co-benefits that a well-managed MPA network can provide, such as improved wider biodiversity and protected nursery grounds for commercial fish species, and societal benefits, including improved water quality and opportunities for recreation, eco-tourism, improved health and increased ocean literacy.

A Blue Carbon Action Plan for Northern Ireland – meeting the challenges of climate change

This review took place in tandem with the development of Northern Ireland's first Blue Carbon Action Plan (hereafter referred to as the 'Blue Carbon Action Plan') using a co-design approach with stakeholders. The concurrent development of the Blue Carbon Action Plan offered a timely opportunity to consider the protection and restoration of blue carbon habitats within the existing MPA network, where

¹⁸ [Interreg VA programme](#)

¹⁹ [MarPAMM](#)

²⁰ [COMPASS](#)

²¹ [Sea Monitor](#)

appropriate. The MPA network can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation by protecting blue carbon and other habitats which:

- support resilience to the pressures associated with climate change.
- play a key role in coastal protection against projected increases in storm events and sea level change.
- contribute to atmospheric carbon dioxide capture and storage (carbon sequestration).

The challenge presented by climate change is significant as environmental conditions have the potential to change over a relatively short period of time, impacting habitats and biodiversity, and the ecosystem services they provide. Future shifts in species distribution would have significant implications for ecosystem functioning and disrupt overall coherence of the MPA network. Adaptive management and flexibility will be required to address this complex challenge. Our increased understanding of the potential impacts of climate change on how the MPA network functions must be reflected in future management and designation of MPAs to maximise conservation benefits and resilience throughout the network.

A Co-Design Approach

This reviewed strategy has been developed using a co-design approach with stakeholders supported by DAERA. This approach, taking account of the views of a wide range of stakeholders and securing buy-in for proposed actions, represents a balanced and sustainable model to deliver biodiversity and climate change policies for our marine environment. Stakeholder engagement in marine conservation creates potential opportunities for community led conservation initiatives and builds support for potential solutions to challenges as they emerge creating a foundation for successful adaptive and flexible management approaches.

The co-design process began in September 2022 with the establishment of the Climate and Biodiversity Working Group and the appointment of facilitators from the Strategic Investment Board. A broad range of stakeholders with an interest in marine policy were included in the Working Group ([Annex 1](#)) and their purpose was to

consider proposed draft objectives of the Blue Carbon Action Plan in tandem with the review of the MPA Strategy.

An Ecosystem Approach to MPA Management

Northern Ireland's coast and sea has always had an important influence on our society and plays a central role in our human wellbeing and economic prosperity, offering a source of recreation and a place of work to many. This reviewed strategy adopts an ecosystem approach to MPA management. An ecosystem-based approach can be defined as "an approach which (a) ensures that the collective pressure of human activities is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of Good Environmental Status within the meaning of the UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, and (b) does not compromise the capacity of marine ecosystems to respond to human-induced changes"²² ²³. This approach maintains and enhances the health of the ecosystem alongside appropriate human uses of the marine environment for the benefit of current and future generations. The ecosystem-based approach is embedded within global, regional and national commitments.

Broader Strategic Context

The co-design and development of the Blue Carbon Action Plan and the review of the MPA Strategy supports several high priority, high-level and interlinked policies and strategies relating to climate change and biodiversity on a global, UK, and Northern Ireland level.

Global and North-East Atlantic Region

United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity

At an international level, the review of the MPA Strategy and development of the Blue Carbon Action Plan will contribute towards a number of biodiversity targets within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), agreed at the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2022²⁴, particularly:

²² [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statements/joint-fisheries-statement-jfs)

²³ [The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1753)

²⁴ [Convention on Biological Diversity Targets](https://www.cbd.int/targets)

- **Target 2** which aims to “ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity”,
- **Target 3** to “ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas”²⁵, and
- **Target 14.** That the multiple values of biodiversity are integrated into decision-making at all levels.

GBF Target 14 aims to ensure that the values of biodiversity are fully reflected or mainstreamed in all relevant decision-making frameworks. Biodiversity underpins a wide range of services that support economies, food production systems, secure living conditions and human health. Decision-making frameworks often do not appropriately account for biodiversity or its values, and therefore these are not always suitably reflected in relevant processes, including regulations and planning and development processes.

[OSPAR Convention, MPA Design Principles and Ecological Coherence](#)

The OSPAR²⁶ Convention (Oslo-Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic), particularly the **North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (2030)**²⁷ commits its contracting parties to the protection and conservation of the ecosystems and biological diversity of the maritime area of the region. This also includes targets relating to the achievement of biologically diverse and healthy seas, and restoration of degraded habitats while safeguarding ecosystem function and resilience to climate change. OSPAR has played a primary role in coordinating the contribution to the implementation and achievement of Good Ecological Status and Good Environmental Status under the UK Water Framework Regulations and the UK Marine Strategy respectively.

²⁶ www.ospar.org

²⁷ [North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030](#)

The OSPAR agreement includes the development of an ecologically coherent network of protected marine sites. OSPAR developed seven MPA design principles to maximise ecological coherence in an MPA network which are followed throughout the region. These design principles, which are fundamental to the establishment of an effective MPA network have been applied to the design of the existing network and remain relevant today. The OSPAR MPA design principles are presented in [Annex 3](#).

United Kingdom (UK)

UK Marine Strategy

The overarching **UK Marine Strategy (2010)**²⁸ sets out a comprehensive framework for assessing, monitoring, and using our seas to achieve the UK's shared vision for clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse marine environment. The requirement to assess, monitor and put in place measures to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status for UK seas is enshrined in legislation and demonstrates the combined commitments of the four administrations to work together to monitor and protect what are some of the most biologically diverse and productive seas in the North-East Atlantic. Within the updated UK Marine Strategy Part Three, DAERA has stated its commitment to the development of a new MPA Strategy and an action plan to protect and restore blue carbon habitats.

UK Joint Fisheries Statement

The value of both climate resilient ecosystems and blue carbon habitats are recognised within the **UK Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS)**²⁹. The JFS sets out the ambition of the UK to continue delivering sustainable management of fisheries, recognising that a healthy and resilient marine environment is the foundation for a prosperous seafood sector and thriving coastal communities. The JFS also recognises the importance of protecting and restoring blue carbon habitats to support resilience to climate change and that sites designated as Marine Protected Areas must be monitored to assess their state, and compliance with any management measures must be enforced.

²⁸ [UK Marine Strategy \(2010\)](#)

²⁹ [Joint Fisheries Statement \(JFS\)](#)

Northern Ireland

[The Climate Change Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#)

The **Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022**³⁰ is a key statutory instrument that creates a framework that will establish a pathway to achieving emission reduction targets which will ensure that Northern Ireland makes a contribution to the achievement of the UK 2050 Net Zero target. The Act includes a target for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 as well as a set of interim targets for 2030 and 2040 for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland.

The Act sets out that the biodiversity impact must be considered in setting the carbon budget; plans and policies to achieve the budget (such as sectoral Climate Action Plans) should, where practicable, use nature-based solutions that enhance biodiversity; and illustrate responsibility to protect or restore ecosystems to aid carbon mitigation efforts. The Climate Action Plan sets a roadmap to net zero, enhancing biodiversity in the process.

[Draft Green Growth Strategy](#)

The draft **Green Growth Strategy**³¹ is the Northern Ireland Executive's multi-decade strategy, balancing environment, climate and the economy in Northern Ireland. It sets out the long-term vision and framework for addressing biodiversity loss and climate change in an ambitious and sustainable way. The objectives and actions outlined in the MPA Strategy will contribute to achieving the vision of Green Growth.

³⁰ [Climate Change Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#)

³¹ [A Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland – Balancing our climate, environment and economy.](#)

The draft Green Growth Strategy 2050 vision is that:

Northern Ireland has taken significant action for the climate and our environment, has placed nature and biodiversity on a path to recovery, and moved from a high to a low emissions society.

We have made this change fairly and have demonstrated a responsibility for each other and for the place in which we live.

As a result of all our efforts, we have a more resilient environment with a healthy ecosystem and a strong sustainable economy. More people are employed in green jobs and all generations benefit from improved wellbeing.

[Northern Ireland Environmental Improvement Plan](#)

As part of the Northern Ireland Executive's Green Growth strategy, DAERA is progressing a new **Northern Ireland Environmental Improvement Plan**, which will form the basis for a coherent and effective set of interventions that can deliver real improvements in the quality of the environment and thereby improve the health and well-being of all who live and work here. Legislative provisions contained within the Environment Act 2021 place a statutory duty on DAERA to publish the Northern Ireland Environmental Improvement Plan.

The MPA Strategy sets out the steps that we will take to protect habitats and species and improve the overall status of MPAs within the MPA network and will make an important contribution to the Environmental Improvement Plan.

[Draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland](#)

The draft **Marine Plan for Northern Ireland**³² is being developed within the framework of the UK Marine Policy Statement to facilitate the sustainable development of the marine area. The draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland has a number of objectives in common with the MPA Strategy, such as contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, promoting healthy, resilient and adaptable marine ecosystems and promoting the marine resource, its recreational

³² [Draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland](#)

value and its wider economic, environmental and social benefits to all. The plan also commits to contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, which can be progressed by protecting and restoring blue carbon habitats within the MPA network.

The drive to improving energy security and achieving net zero will impact our marine environment as there will be an incentive to deploy offshore wind infrastructure. Other ongoing human activities also have the potential to negatively impact the functioning of the MPA network. Marine spatial planning needs to provide a mechanism to ensure that the conservation objectives of the network are not adversely impacted by wider human activities.

[DAERA draft Nature Recovery Strategy](#)

DAERA is currently developing a draft **Nature Recovery Strategy** which has strong linkages to the reviewed MPA Strategy and development of the Blue Carbon Action Plan. Protecting, restoring and, where possible, creating marine habitats, and maintaining these as healthy functioning ecosystems for the long-term is the principal of this combined exercise. It is essential that a balance is struck, ensuring the right measure is carried out in the most appropriate place so that carbon mitigation efforts do not undermine biodiversity, rather complement and enhance it. The draft Nature Recovery Strategy is also working to implement the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework³³.

³³ [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(cbd.int\)](https://www.cbd.int/framework)

MPA Strategy 2024 – 2030

Proposed Vision

The vision outlines where we see ourselves within the next few decades. The vision of the updated MPA Strategy is:

Northern Ireland's marine area is effectively conserved, managed, restored and valued through a network of ecologically representative, resilient and equitably governed protected areas.

This Vision complements and reflects the values of the Visions developed on a global and regional scale by CBD:

A world living in harmony with nature where, by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework - the global vision for diversity

and OSPAR:

The UK marine environment is clean, healthy and biologically diverse, with seas which are productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.

OSPAR North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 and UK Marine Strategy - the regional vision for the UK Marine environment

Online questionnaire format:

. Do you agree with the proposed vision?

Yes

No

Do you agree with
the proposed vision?

Please provide further comments to support your answer

Statutory Obligations and International Commitments

There are a number of statutory obligations and international commitments that will be delivered through this strategy. These include:

- International obligations under the Global Biodiversity Framework and OSPAR requiring that by 2030 at least 30% of the marine area is effectively managed within a network of protected areas which is representative and ecologically coherent.
- Requirements to meet Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy Regulations.
- Requirements to meet Good Ecological Status under the Water Framework Regulations.
- Duties under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) and contribute to the favourable conservation status of regionally important species and habitats.
- Duties under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and international duties for marine nature conservation, including the delivery of an ecologically coherent network of well-managed sites.

Proposed Aims

The aims of this 2024-2030 Strategy are to:

1. Further develop and manage the MPA network to ensure it achieves its conservation objectives while being ecologically coherent, representative and climate resilient;
2. Use a co-management approach to develop and implement effective management measures for network features; and
3. Assess the effectiveness of management measures through appropriate monitoring and an adaptive management approach.

Online questionnaire format:

For each of the proposed aims, you will be asked the following questions:

	Yes	No
Do you agree this aim?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Please provide further comments to support your answer		
<input type="text"/>		

Proposed Objectives

The following nine objectives are proposed to deliver our Vision and Aim to 2030:

Further develop the MPA network to ensure it is representative, ecologically coherent and effectively managed to achieve its conservation objectives.

1. From 2024, evaluate and take actions to improve the ecological coherence of the existing MPA network.

2. By 2030, comply with and enhance, where relevant, the MPA OSPAR network design principles, taking account of the importance of adaptability and flexibility as evidence changes, and in response to climate and other anthropogenic pressures.

Use a co-management approach to develop and implement effective management measures for network features.

3. By 2030, have a well-managed MPA network which enables the achievement of favourable condition and/or Good Environmental Status, through regular monitoring of species and habitats in collaboration with stakeholders.
4. By 2025, we will explore the benefits of implementing management approaches from strict non extractive Highly Protected Marine Areas to sustainable use management measures for MPAs.
5. By 2030, explore how Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) will complement the existing MPA network, and where relevant apply OECMs, in consultation with stakeholders.
6. By 2025, develop and commence implementation of an engagement, outreach and communications strategy, building on co-design principles employed in the development of this strategy.
7. By 2025 DAERA will invest in restoration projects that work towards achieving Global Biodiversity Framework Target 2 in partnership with stakeholders

Assess the effectiveness of management measures through appropriate monitoring and an adaptive management approach.

8. By 2025, establish an inclusive governance structure and develop, publish and deliver a new MPA Monitoring and Reporting Framework outlining statutory requirements and policy drivers.
9. From 2024, develop approaches to scope, develop and measure the co-benefits (costs and benefits) of the MPA network, in partnership with stakeholders.

Online questionnaire format:

For each of the proposed objectives, you will be asked the following questions:

	Yes	No
Do you agree with this objective?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide further comments to support your answer

Proposed Actions

Each of the above objectives is supported by a series of proposed SMART actions that are outlined in [Annex 2](#). SMART actions are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound.

Online questionnaire format:

For each of the proposed actions, you will be asked to consider if they are sufficient to meet the relevant objective.

	Yes	No
Are the actions numbered 1.1-1.4 sufficient to meet objective 1?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

You will also have the opportunity to add comments as below

Please outline which action(s) your organisation may be able to contribute to.

Comments:

Update to MPA Feature List

Clarity was requested during the co-design workshops as to the difference between the Northern Ireland Priority Species list and the Priority Marine Feature list. The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 places a duty on DAERA to publish a list of the species of flora and fauna and types of habitats which in the Department's opinion are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. These are referred to as the Northern Ireland Priority Species and Habitats lists. Marine Northern Ireland Priority Species and Habitats are found both inside and outside the MPA network.

Priority Marine Features is a collective term for those features (habitats, species and geological/geomorphological) which are considered to be of conservation importance in the Northern Ireland inshore region. These are compiled from various conservation lists (including the priority habitats and priority species lists) and a subset of the Priority Marine Feature list referred to as proposed MCZ (pMCZ) features are the basis of the MCZ designation. However, to reduce the confusion surrounding the nomenclature of the two lists it was decided to rename the Priority Marine Feature list as the MPA Feature list. This covers all habitats, species and geological/geomorphological features that are afforded protection within the MPA network.

As part of the MPA Strategy Review, the MPA Feature list was revisited to confirm the inclusion of Blue Carbon habitats, which were not considered during the previous designation of MCZs, and any new marine Northern Ireland Priority Species which were added following the recent review³⁴. A full review of the MPA Feature list was not deemed necessary at this time. Table 1 details the new additions to the MPA Feature list.

³⁴ [Northern Ireland Priority Species | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

Table 1: New features added to the MPA Feature list following the 2023 review of the Northern Ireland Priority Species list.

Species Group	Scientific name	Common name
Algae	<i>Saccharina latissima</i>	Sugar kelp
Echinodermata	<i>Amphiura (Ophiopeltis) securigera</i>	A brittlestar
Fish	<i>Ammodytes tobianus</i>	Lesser sandeel
	<i>Hyperoplus lanceolatus</i>	Greater sandeel
	<i>Scophthalmus maximus</i>	Turbot
	<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>	Sea lamprey
Mollusca	<i>Boreochiton ruber</i>	Northern red chiton
Porifera	<i>Amphilectus lobatus</i>	A sponge
	<i>Hymeraphia breeni</i>	A sponge
	<i>Mycale (Carmia) subclavata</i>	A sponge
	<i>Spongosorites calcicola</i>	A sponge

Proposed Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation

Governance

DAERA is committed to reporting under several statutory requirements which align with the objectives of this strategy, and against which a governance structure should be established. This will facilitate an ecosystem approach to management of the MPA network as a whole, where adaptive management can be applied as changes in feature condition are detected.

A number of site-level management groups are already in place and will be incorporated into an agreed governance structure to reflect considerations both across the Northern Ireland marine area and wider transboundary areas. These include the Strangford Lough MPA Management Steering Group, the Rathlin Forum, and MarPAMM stakeholder groups (North Coast, Co. Down – Murlough and Carlingford Lough). Additional site management groups may be established if required.

Other existing groups will contribute towards meeting objectives include the Elasmobranch Conservation Strategy Working Group, the Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group, the Inshore Fisheries Partnership and wider fisheries stakeholder groups, such as Co Fish.

The agreed governance structure of the reviewed MPA Strategy will be closely aligned with the Blue Carbon Action Plan governance arrangements to streamline progress against objectives for both areas where there are linked actions.

Monitoring and Evaluation

An objective of this review is to develop, publish and deliver a new MPA Monitoring and Reporting Strategy outlining statutory requirements and policy drivers, to ensure sufficient information is collected to underpin assessment and reporting obligations. This will also incorporate monitoring of discrete blue carbon habitats to meet the

objectives of the Blue Carbon Action Plan. This in turn will enable provision of management advice across individual sites and the entire network.

The MPA reporting requirements to which DAERA currently contribute are outlined in Figure 3 below, with timelines in Figure 4. Additional output includes the Northern Environmental Statistics Report biodiversity metric which is published annually.

	International			UK				NI
	Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	OSPAR Convention	Bern Convention	Habitats Regulations	Birds Directive	Marine Strategy	Water Framework Regulations	Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013
Reporting cycle frequency/ next due	Intervals determined by Conference of the Parties (COPs)	Every 10 years 2030	Every 6 years 2025	Every 6 years 2025	Every 6 years 2025	Every 6 years 2024	Every 6 years 2023	Every 6 years 2024

Figure 3: MPA Related Reporting Requirements

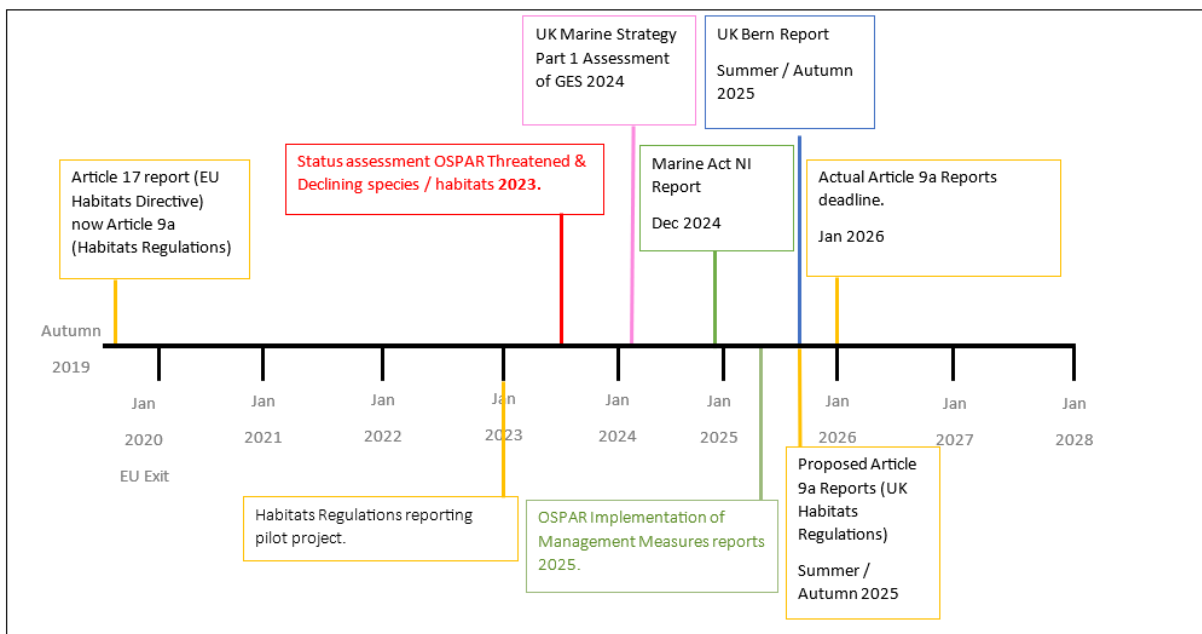


Figure 4: MPA Reporting Timeline

The draft Nature Recovery Strategy also places a duty on public bodies to report on their biodiversity status and reporting against the Northern Ireland Climate Action Plan may draw on the condition reports of the MPA network.

Having timely and accurate information on the effectiveness of management measures will enable the application of adaptive management approaches to habitat protection, restoration and augment the ecological coherence of the network.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this consultation. Having reviewed the Review of the Marine Protected Areas Strategy is there anything else that you wish to add?"

Please provide further comments to support your answer

Annex 1: List of Co-Design Stakeholders

Non-Governmental Organisations

- Ulster Wildlife (UW)
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- Northern Ireland Marine Task Force (NIMTF)
- National Trust
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)
- Seasearch Northern Ireland

Industry

- Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation (NIFF)
- Anglo North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation (ANIFPO)
- Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation (NIFPO)
- North Coast Shellfish Fishermen
- Islander Kelp
- Aquaculture Representatives Group (ARG)

Government and public bodies

- Department for the Economy (DfE) - Renewables
- The Crown Estate
- Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
- Newry Mourne and Down District Council
- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- Loughs Agency
- The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)
- Seafish

- SportNI
- Rathlin Development Community Association

Universities

- Queen's University Belfast (QUB)
- Ulster University (UU)

Cross-border

- Department for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- University College Dublin (UCD)
- University College Cork (UCC)
- Coastwatch and Sustainable Water Network (SWAN)

Correspondence only

- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Belfast City Council
- Mid Ulster District Council
- County Down Rural Community Network
- Ulster Farmer's Union
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Northern Ireland Scallop Fishermen's Association
- North Eastern Lobster Fishermen's Co-operative (NELCO)
- Renewable NI
- Outdoor Recreation NI

Annex 2: MPA Strategy Action plan

Table 1: MPA network development and associated actions

Aim	Objective No.	Objective	Action No.	Actions – How will we achieve the objectives
Further develop the MPA network to ensure it is representative, ecologically coherent and effectively managed to achieve its conservation objectives.	1	By 2030, evaluate and take actions to improve the ecological coherence of the existing MPA network.	1	In 2024, DAERA will produce an updated MPA Network Report to be laid at the Assembly.
			2	In 2024, DAERA will develop a timetable for further designations to improve the ecological coherence of the MPA network.
			3	DAERA will raise the awareness of the existing MPA layer which is published on Open Data NI and displayed on the publicly accessible Marine Map Viewer.
			4	DAERA to raise the awareness of already available quality assured citizen science data from CEDaR. DAERA will provide a link on their website to access the CEDaR data.
	2	By 2030, comply with and enhance, where relevant, the MPA OSPAR network design principles, taking account of the importance of adaptability and flexibility as evidence changes, and in response to climate and other anthropogenic pressures.	1	In 2024, DAERA will determine if the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 allows scope to designate and adapt MPA extent and features with changes in environmental conditions.

Table 2: Management and associated actions

Aim	Objective No.	Objective	Action No.	Actions - how will we achieve the objectives
Use a co-management approach to develop and implement effective management measures for network features.	3	By 2030, have a well-managed MPA network which enables the achievement of favourable condition and/or Good Environmental Status, through regular monitoring of species and habitats in collaboration with stakeholders	1	From 2024, DAERA will publish Storymaps to communicate existing management measures.
			2	From 2024, project delivery partners and landowners will adopt an integrated coastal management approach for protected sites.
			3	From 2024, management plans will be consulted on and will be in place for the existing MPA network.
			4	By 2030, management plans will be consulted on and will be in place for any additional MPAs added to the network.
	4	By 2025, we will explore the benefits of implementing management approaches from strict non extractive Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) to sustainable use management measures for MPAs	1	DAERA will explore the costs and benefits of different MPA management approaches.
			2	DAERA will develop policy on management approaches for MPAs, including the potential role of HPMAs.
	5	By 2030, explore how Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) will complement the existing MPA network, and where relevant apply OECMs, in consultation with stakeholders.	1	From 2024, DAERA will coordinate across terrestrial counterparts and wider within the UK to agree definitions, criteria, and application of OECMs.
			2	DAERA will develop policy on how OECMs may be used to complement the existing MPA network.

	6	By 2025, establish an inclusive governance structure and develop and commence implementation of an engagement, outreach and communications strategy, building on co-design principles employed in the development of this strategy.	1	Publish a suggested governance structure (including transboundary representation) within first three months of the MPA Strategy being published, and once agreed implement accordingly.
			2	From 2024, DAERA and stakeholders in MPA management groups will work together to publish annual MPA management progress reports.
			3	From 2024, Stakeholder delivery of actions aligning to priority objectives will be recorded/ mapped.
	7	By 2025 DAERA will invest in restoration projects that work towards achieving CBD Target 2 in partnership with stakeholders	1	Identify what restoration is required via BCAP and other marine recovery strategies (Seabird/Elasmobranch etc).
			2	DAERA to develop proposals for funding schemes to support restoration projects.
			3	Stakeholders to explore other funding opportunities and develop proposals for restoration projects while utilising existing schemes such as Environment Fund and Peace Plus

Table 3: Monitoring and associated actions

Aim	Objective No.	Objective	Action No.	Actions - how will we achieve the objectives
<p>Assess the effectiveness of management measures through appropriate monitoring and an adaptive management approach.</p>	<p>8</p>	<p>By 2025, develop, publish and deliver a new MPA Monitoring and Reporting Framework outlining statutory requirements and policy drivers.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>DAERA will produce an MPA and Blue Carbon habitat Monitoring and Reporting Strategy which is supplemented by quality assured citizen science, academia and industry data.</p>
			<p>2</p>	<p>DAERA will develop a method for evaluating and demonstrating management effectiveness across the network e.g. using a scorecard.</p>
	<p>9</p>	<p>From 2024, develop approaches to scope, develop and measure the co-benefits (costs and benefits) of the MPA network, in partnership with stakeholders.</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>DAERA to consider the recommendations from the NI-MANACA (Marine Natural Capital) assessment and commission follow on projects to fill evidence gaps and to utilise in MPA management.</p>
			<p>2</p>	<p>Introduce a community engagement strand within existing MPA management plans, to help maximise the co-benefits of MPAs in local areas</p>

Annex 3: OSPAR MPA Design principles

Representativity	The network should represent the range of marine species, habitats and ecological processes present in Northern Ireland's inshore region;
Replication	Ensure replication of habitats and species with other parts of the UK as appropriate to achieve an overall network;
Adequacy	The network should be of adequate size to deliver its ecological objectives and ensure long-term protection and/or recovery;
Viability	The network should be made up of self-sustaining, geographically dispersed component sites of sufficient size large enough to ensure habitats and species are self- sustaining;
Connectivity	Ensure the network has linkages among individual MPAs and between regional networks;
Management	MPAs should be managed to ensure protection of the feature(s) for which they were selected and to support the functioning of an ecologically coherent network; and
Best available evidence	The designation of MPAs should be based on the best information which is currently available. Where there is a lack of full scientific certainty this should not be used as a reason for postponing decisions on the selection of sites.

Annex 4: Glossary

Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) – are declared under *The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002*³⁵ for their species, habitat and/or geological features.

Biodiversity – is the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they form part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Ecological coherence – refers to the representation and replication of biodiversity features, and the linkages between those features. It also refers to the resilience of the network as a whole, and how well the range and geographic variation of the biodiversity features are covered within the network.

Ecosystem-based approach can be defined as an approach which (a) ensures that the collective pressure of human activities is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of Good Environmental Status within the meaning of the UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, and (b) does not compromise the capacity of marine ecosystems to respond to human-induced changes.

Ecosystem services – provide benefits to people from the resources and processes supplied by natural ecosystems.

Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) – used to refer to MCZs designated under section 13 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 in the Northern Ireland inshore region and in section 116 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 in the Northern Ireland offshore region. MCZs are designated to safeguard vulnerable or unique marine species and habitats of national importance.

Marine Protected Area (MPA) – Used to describe a geographic area of the marine environment which has been designated for specific conservation objectives in relation to the features present. The ultimate aim of these sites is for long-term

³⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2002/3153/part/IV>

management to achieve sustainable use, both for marine ecosystems and associated stakeholders.

MPA Network – used to describe a network of designated sites, often interconnected by type (SACs, SPAs, MCZs), legislative drivers and devolved areas

OSPAR – refers to the Oslo - Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic. It is an agreement by relevant governments and the European Community to co-operate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.³⁶

Ramsar³⁷ sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the *Ramsar Convention* and are classified as MPAs.

Restoration - the process of improving or returning a marine ecosystem or habitat to a healthier and more natural state after it has been damaged or degraded by human activities or environment factors.

Special Areas of Conservation³⁸ (**SACs**) – are designated under the *Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended)*³⁹ for the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna.

Special Protected Areas (SPAs) – are designated under the *Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended)*⁴⁰ to select sites for bird species included in Annex 1 of the Directive, and also for regularly occurring migratory species.

Sustainable Development – “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Brundtland Report, 198730)

³⁶ www.ospar.org

³⁷ https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/scan_certified_e.pdf

³⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1012/part/2/crossheading/european-sites/made>

³⁹ [Conservation \(Natural Habitats, etc.\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1995 \(as amended\)](#)

⁴⁰ [Conservation \(Natural Habitats, etc.\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1995 \(as amended\)](#)

Annex 5: CBD and OSPAR Targets in relation to MPAs

CBD target related to MPAs –

- **Target 3:** Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

OSPAR North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy target(s) related to MPAs –

Strategic Objectives:

- **S5.O1:** By 2030 OSPAR will further develop its network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective conservation measures (OECMs) to cover at least 30% of the OSPAR maritime area to ensure it is representative, ecologically coherent and effectively managed to achieve its conservation objectives.
- **S11.O2:** By 2023, and every six years thereafter, OSPAR will assess at a regional scale the OSPAR network of marine protected areas in respect of the resilience of marine biodiversity to climate change, with the aim of ensuring that the network provides a good representation of species and habitats and that its spatial design and management regime remains relevant.
- **S12.O2:** By 2025 OSPAR will take nature-based carbon storage into account when reviewing the criteria for the designation of marine protected areas and reviewing the OSPAR List of threatened and/or declining species and habitats.

Annex 6: Publication of Responses

Confidentiality

The Department will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation may be disclosed on request. The Department can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations as these provide guidance on the legal position of any information given by you in response to this consultation. Any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses will not be treated as such a request.

Data Protection

Section 8 (e) of the Data Protection Act 2018 permits processing of personal data when necessary for an activity that supports or promotes democratic engagement. Information provided by respondents to this consultation exercise will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation.

Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority (the Department in this case). This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances.

The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided.
- The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties 'in confidence' which is not confidential in nature.
- Acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office:

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Email: ni@ico.org.uk

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