

**Wales Marine Strategic Advisory Group Meeting
16 March 2015**

Key Messages

The Wales Marine Strategic Advisory Group met on the 16 March 2015 , with 46 attendees across three locations (Llandudno Junction, Cardiff and London).

The next meeting will take place on the 14 September 2015.

Marine Transition Programme update

All of the projects within the Marine Transition Programme continue to Progress. Due to budgetary constraints, the time frames of some of the work have been prioritised or extended. However, there is still sufficient funding to deliver the programme.

The Programme continues to take an evidence based approach; At this point in time the Marine Planning project is driving the evidence project. The Marine Planning Portal was refreshed on the 13 March 2015. The Strategic Scoping Exercise is complete and will be published at the end of March 2015. Following feedback from stakeholders during the consultation period a revised Scope, Vision and objectives is being produced and will be shared with stakeholder shortly.

The Marine and Fisheries website and communication approach have been reviewed. The website will present 'latest news' items on the homepage and a stakeholder engagement section will hold key messages from stakeholder group meetings.

The group suggested the use of downloadable fact sheets would be a useful way of sharing messages. They also asked that when developing the communication approach WG considered how to generate more communications that promote a positive image of Wales'.

Members of the group asked for Clarity on the Welsh Government position regarding the Sea bass fishery. Officials confirmed that WG is in detailed discussion with Defra and a UK position will be ironed out over the coming months. Welsh Government will engage with stakeholders through the IFGs and WMFAG in order to gather input before WG contribution to a UK position is decided.

Marine Protected Areas: Management Options Paper

WMSAG members were updated on progress with the work to manage our MPAs as a network of sites, and were presented with the options paper for network management of our MPAs, which sets out four possible options.

The options are currently being consulted on, with a closing date of 17th April. Members said that sustainable funding for the preferred option would be key, and stressed the importance of local site management, as well as recognising the need for a more strategic approach to network level objectives.

Possible new marine Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas in Wales

Staff from the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales presented information to the group about possible new SACs for harbour porpoise and marine SPAs for sea birds in Welsh waters. Recently held pre-consultation drop in days with stakeholders were discussed and this early engagement was supported by the group.

Discussion focussed on the impact these new sites could have on existing and future activities, such as potential renewable energy developments. It was noted that harbour porpoise are already strictly protected in UK waters under Annex IV of the Habitats Directive and that the sea bird populations in question are stable or increasing.

Four further drop-in days will be held in April and May 2015. In the meantime NRW and JNCC continue to prepare more detailed site documentation including impact assessments which will, subject to Ministerial approval, be consulted on July to September 2015. The Natural Resources Minister will decide whether or not to formally designate any new sites in December 2015.

<http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/marine/information-about-our-marine-work/?lang=en>

<http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/marine/information-about-our-marine-work/?jsessionid=7C91BC83BCEA5367EF588607F99844DA?lang=cy>

Dates for drop in days are set out below; details will be available on the NRW website shortly:

22nd April - Milford Haven,

29th April - New Quay,

12th May - Holyhead,

14th May - Pwllheli

Water Bodies – Updated River Basin Management Plans

WMSAG member were presented information on the Updated River Basin Management Plan Consultation, which closes on the 10 April 2015. The consultation sets out how the estuarine and coastal environment would be managed over the next 6 years. The group noted the overlaps between this work and that of the MSFD. The group heard how many factors contribute to the pollution of water bodies as a result of activities on land, and until land use is properly managed this pressure will not be alleviated. Diffuse pollution from rural areas was cited as a large pressure on the health of water bodies.

The group discussed how to tackle diffuse pollution more broadly and heard how NRW have been engaging with farmers unions through events focused on the Water Framework Directive. The group concluded that all sectors, terrestrial and marine, must pull their weight equally and contribute towards the Good Environmental Status (GED) of water bodies over the next 6 years.

<http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/about-us/Consultations/our-own-consultations/consultation-on-the-proposed-update-to-wales-river-basin-management-plans/?lang=en>

Visit Wales

Gerwyn Evans introduced the work of Visit Wales to the group. Highlighting the importance of Coastal Tourism to the Welsh economy and the Unique Selling Point the coastal environment provides for this sector. He explained that Coastal tourism was worth over £5.1billion to the Welsh economy, with 35% of this attributed to coastal tourism.

Gerwyn concluded that partnership working was crucial to ensure that the tourism industry remained strong; safeguarding jobs and creating opportunities. The group noted that much of the work being delivered through the MTP and that of Visit Wales was intrinsically linked and a collaborative approach to policy development in these areas was essential. During the meeting it was proposed that the Marine planning team could present to the Tourism Advisory Board on the Welsh National Marine Plan.

The group requested that Visit Wales be included on the membership of the WMSAG going forward and agreed that group members would be involved in future pre-consultation activity that Visit Wales has planned for the summer of 2015.

For further information on the Partnership for Growth: Strategy for Tourism 2013-2020

<http://gov.wales/topics/tourism/development1/partnershipforgrowth/?lang=en>