

Wales Marine Strategic Advisory Group Meeting 23 February 2016

Key Messages

The Wales Marine Strategic Advisory Group met on the 23 February 2016 in Aberystwyth.

Review of WMSAG

The review discussed the value of the WMSAG as a forum to communicate with marine stakeholder representatives. The group agreed that the WMSAG is an important marine forum and should continue to meet, providing that consideration was given to the frequency at which the meetings occur.

Marine Planning: Next Steps

Recent changes to the draft Welsh National Marine Plan (WNMP) and the next steps were outlined. Developments included amendments to the WNMP, following suggestions given during informal consultation exercises between September 2015 and February 2016.

Amendments to the plan included:

- Alteration to the language of the WNMP to resemble that of a terrestrial management plan
- A reduction of the overall length the WMNP document including reducing the overall number of plan objectives and policies and clarifying their purpose and ability to be evaluated
- Retain clear links to the Marine Policy Statement (MPS) and the UK High Level Marine Objectives but more clearly incorporate the requirements of and context of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Environment Bill/Act being introduced
- Greater spatial description so that the plan adds clear value to decision-making.
- Improved consistency to the sector policies with safeguarding and supporting policies.

Next steps include:

- Ongoing stakeholder and policy engagement
- Policy refinement and sector maps
- “Policy freeze” in late February in order to initiate the process of the Sustainability Appraisal of the plan
- Further development of policy implementation guidance with particular focus on sector policies

- Refinement of plan narrative following feedback and policies amendment - March
- Scoping of implementation and evaluation plan to support decision-making and reporting – June

The Environment Bill and Sustainable Development of Natural Resources

With the National Assembly for Wales' recent decision to pass the Environment (Wales) Bill, work will begin on implementing the bill through legislative policy reform.

The Bill's aims include the improved management of natural resources at a rate that can maintain and enhance the resilience of our ecosystems. The bill also takes into account the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs and contribute to the achievement of the well-being goals.

Guidance around how the Bill will apply within a marine context will be developed and made available for comment in the coming months. WMSAG members were asked to indicate their interest in involvement with a Task and Finish group to form the guidance.

WMSAG members made clear the importance for steps to be made to swiftly inform marine organisations of the Bill's content. This would reduce the risk of leaving key stakeholders feeling that they had not been involved, consequently discouraging ownership in the approach.

SPA/SAC consultation: An overview

Dan Crook presented information on the proposed SACs and SPAs for Wales. This included the location of the sites, the designated features and the next steps.

The WMSAG was encouraged to respond to the ongoing 'Proposed new marine Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas' consultation, which can be found on the NRW website, [here](#). The consultation has been extended and now runs until 3 May.

Marine Protected Areas: Network assessment so far

The interim results of the progress towards an ecologically coherent network of MPAs were presented to the group. The Welsh Government asked the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) & Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to review the extent of protection offered to features by existing MPAs and to identify any potential shortfalls against the network obligations.

The interim results show that Wales is making substantial progress towards meeting its contribution to MPA network obligations for inshore waters. The network is well

connected with good representation of all the broad scale habitats and the majority of the features of conservation interest. Work is ongoing to complete the assessment and a small number of gaps are anticipated for Wales. The results will be available in the summer. Some group members expressed an interest to discuss the results of the review outside of the WMSAG and a subsequent summer meeting will be arranged for this purpose.

Restoring and Enhancing Marine Biodiversity: Task and Finish Group proposal

A proposal was presented to the group to establish a Task and Finish with a focus on Restoring and Enhancing Marine Biodiversity. The aim of the group would be to support the restoration and enhancement of marine biodiversity to aid its recovery, building on the resilience of marine ecosystems to support the sustainable use of our seas for future generations.

The aim will be achieved by drawing upon the diverse expertise of WMSAG members to:

- Identify, prioritise and develop projects.
- Establish a top 10 list of habitats and species at risk.
- Agree the most beneficial and achievable projects to take forward.

Members of the group requested that the Section 42 list containing information on features currently at risk be circulated to the group for information.

Proposed management measures for Cardigan Bay Scallop Fishery: History, Science and Stakeholder discussion

The Welsh Fishermen's Association and Wales Environment Link were given the opportunity to present their views on the proposed management measures for Cardigan Bay Scallop Fishery consultation. The WFA invited Professor Michel Kaiser of the Bangor University School of Ocean Sciences to present on their behalf. He set out the scientific evidence that underpins the Welsh Government's recent proposal to change the management of the Cardigan Bay scallop fishery, which had closed to public consultation on 17 February.

Gill Bell presented the views of the Wales Environment Link and Marine Conservation Society, including concerns that the scientific approach was not appropriate and did not take full account of wider environmental issues. Welsh Ministers are considering the consultation responses and available evidence and will make a decision in due course.