



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Three-year technical report on the South Inshore and South Offshore Marine Plan

For the period 17 July 2018 to 16 July 2021

Presented to Parliament pursuant to sections 54 and
61 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

Date: July 2021

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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1. Overview of the South Inshore and South Offshore Marine Plan

1.1 When the plan was adopted

1. The [South Marine Plan](#) (the Plan) was prepared by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on behalf of government and adopted by the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on 17 July 2018.

1.2 Outline description of the South Inshore and South Offshore Marine Plan areas

2. The South Inshore and South Offshore Marine Plan areas stretch from Folkestone in Kent to the river Dart in Devon.

The Plan's remit includes the area from the mean high-water spring tidal limit to the boundaries with France and the Channel Islands and covers an area of approximately 10,000 square kilometres.

Delineation between the inshore and offshore marine plan areas exists at 12 nautical miles from baseline. Figure 1 is a map of the plan areas.

1.3 Vision, objectives and policies

3. The Plan helps to deliver the UK's vision for "clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas".

The Plan objectives are written in the context of the [UK Marine Policy Statement](#) (UK MPS) and the related high level marine objectives (HLMOs), which can be viewed in [Annex A](#).

The Plan includes a 20-year vision and its own objectives that describe how the Plan vision will be achieved. The Plan objectives can be viewed within [Chapter 5](#) of this report.

4. The relationship between the Plan objectives and the HLMOs set out in the UK MPS is shown in [Annex A](#). The Plan objectives relate to all the themes covered by the HLMOs:
 - achieving a sustainable marine economy
 - ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
 - living within environmental limits
 - promoting good governance
 - using sound science

5. Plan objectives are delivered through 53 Plan policies accompanied by supporting information and signposting to relevant legislation, guidance and existing measures.

A full description of the Plan objectives and Plan policies as well as the relationship between them can be found in the [South Marine Plan Technical Annex](#). Individual policies are often relevant to several objectives.

Where policies are closely associated with specific objectives, they are identified as direct contributing policies. In cases where a policy indirectly contributes towards an objective they are referred to as indirect contributing policies.

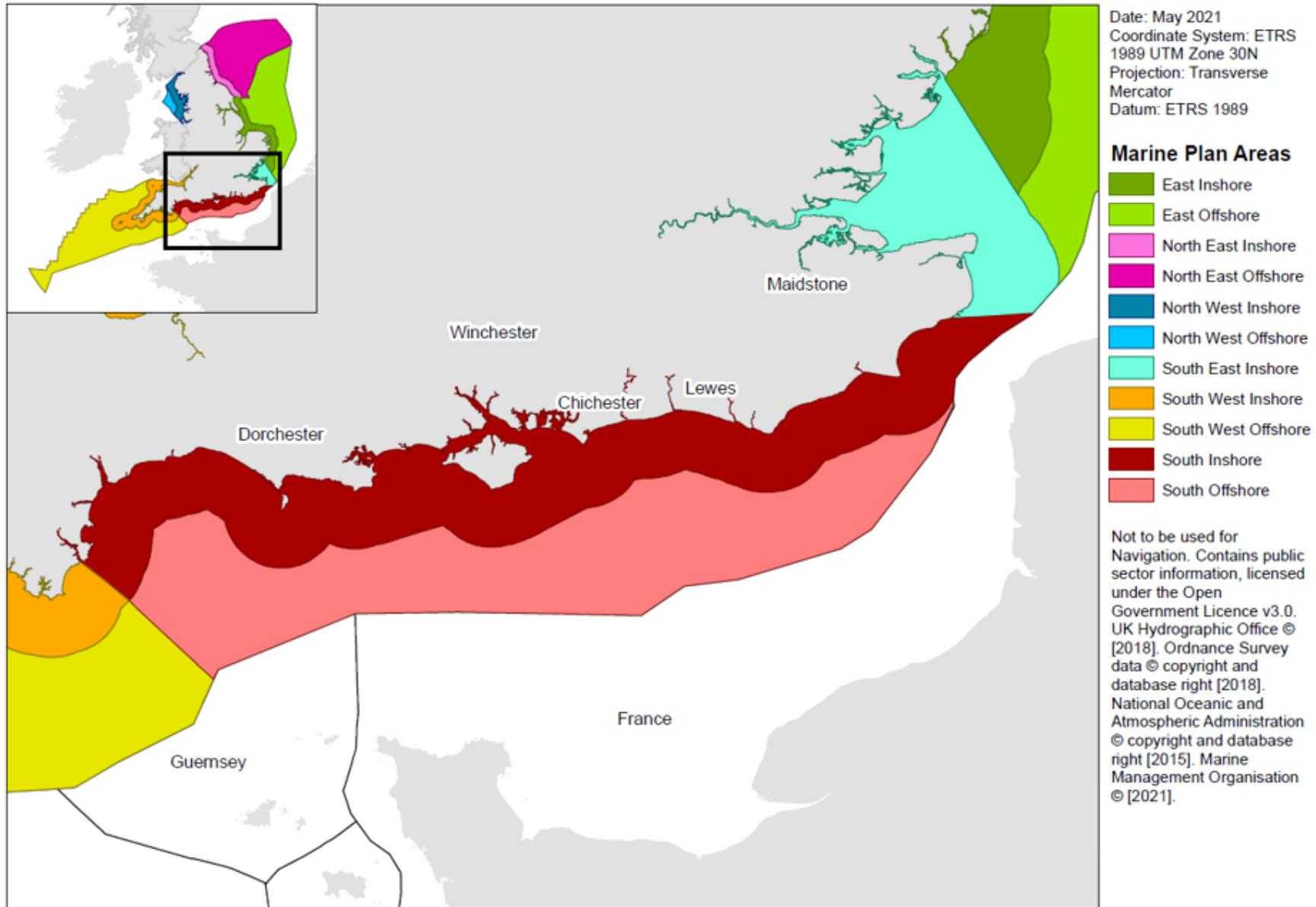
1.4 Implementation

6. In accordance with Section 58 of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#) (the Act) the UK MPS and the Plan are the 'appropriate marine policy documents' for decisions that relate to the South Marine Plan areas.
7. Public authorities making decisions that may affect the UK marine area include, but are not limited to, the MMO, local planning authorities, The Planning Inspectorate, the Environment Agency and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities.
8. Marine Plans should be implemented in a proportionate, consistent, targeted, transparent and risk-based manner, in line with the principles of better regulation.

To simplify fulfilment of regulatory requirements associated with marine planning, implementation of plans is intended to integrate within current decision-making processes as far as possible.

9. While there is no legal requirement to do so, the MMO, in agreement with Defra, has worked to support and encourage effective implementation by public authorities to ensure marine plans are considered in their decision-making processes and to inform monitoring.

Figure 1: South Inshore and Offshore Marine Plan areas



2. Overview of monitoring and reporting on the South Marine Plan

2.1 Monitoring and reporting requirements

10. This report fulfils the requirements set out under sections 54 and 61 of the Act. The context chapter demonstrates how relevant matters are kept under review, capturing contextual changes that have occurred since Plan adoption. This includes changes to relevant legislation, policy and plans.

The process and outcome chapters report on the effects of the policies within the Plan, the effectiveness of the policies in securing the marine plan objectives and the progress towards these objectives. This, therefore, demonstrates contribution towards the HLMOs.

The Three-year report concludes the main findings from the context, process and outcome monitoring processes detailed within this technical report

2.2 Monitoring approach for the first Three year report on the South Marine Plan (2021)

11. The [South Marine Plan Approach to Monitoring](#) was developed in line with the [Magenta Book](#) principles, drew on evidence, and lessons learned from the [East Marine Plan Three year report](#).

The approach presents a framework, against which progress towards the impacts of a marine plan can be monitored. For more information on the framework please see Chapter 3 of the [South Marine Plan Approach to Monitoring](#).

12. Progress is assessed using monitoring indicators that are matched to steps in the framework. These indicators provide the data that enables the progress towards impacts of the marine plan to be tracked.

This framework aims to provide improved granularity by moving to indicators at the policy level, linked to objectives. These changes also address data deficiencies by increasing the diversity of data sources.

2.3 Sources of monitoring information

13. A wide range of indicators have been subject to iterative development and refinement.

To minimise duplication of effort and make the best use of resources, monitoring

draws on information from wider monitoring programmes (environmental, social and economic) where applicable, and more specific data generated by the MMO's marine licensing function (hereinafter referred to as the marine licensing function).

These sources inform both process and outcome monitoring. In instances where particular indicators have been updated, new baseline and progress data was gathered to establish the impacts of the Plan in line with the updated South Marine Plan Approach to Monitoring.

14. Stakeholder surveys sought the views of stakeholders, including marine licence applicants, decision-makers and other third parties, to supplement the analysis of monitoring data. Stakeholder surveys have been completed throughout the development and implementation of the Plan.
15. Where required, monitoring information has been supplemented by evidence at an objective level. Examples include contextual analysis (legislative review, subnational plans), case studies, follow-up interviews and updates to Good Environmental Status (GES).

2.4 Context, process and outcome monitoring

16. The [South Marine Plan Approach to Monitoring](#) addresses indicators for process and outcomes, in addition to an assessment of changes in context.
17. Contextual monitoring describes the context in which marine plans operate. Changes in context since the Plan was adopted may affect successful progress being made and the continued relevance of the Plan. Such monitoring also helps interpret findings of process and outcome monitoring.
18. Process monitoring considers the implementation of the Plan. The main purpose is to determine the degree to which the Plan and its policies are being applied.

If the Plan is not being used, the potential for policies to have an effect will not be realised.

This helps to confirm assumptions made regarding the steps necessary to achieve expected outcomes.

19. Outcome monitoring assesses progress towards objectives (and their contribution to the HLMOs) and the effect of contributing policies. Together with process monitoring it should enable consideration of the link between policies and objectives and, therefore, effectiveness of policies.

2.5 Challenges and limitations

20. Marine plans are not the sole instrument of change. It is, therefore, important to recognise that there are other influences within the marine plan areas, some with

overlapping objectives and these can create challenges, when trying to determine what proportion of an outcome can be attributed to the marine plan.

This represents an important conceptual and practical limitation in the ability to demonstrate cause and effect, between progress for an objective to the effect of plan policies.

21. Applying the South Marine Plan Approach to Monitoring has addressed some of these challenges. Assessing indicators at different stages allows clearer understanding of where a policy may or may not be performing as expected.

This should help provide a picture of how the Plan has contributed towards wider outcomes and impacts.

The data required to assess progress towards the achievement of plan objectives, however, has large data collection, analysis and reporting requirements.

22. Many of the outcomes sought by marine plan policy intervention will take years to progress, for example, the influence of a policy on a proposal's location, through the consenting process, construction and then translation into economic and other expected benefits.

While data enables progress to be shown on some outcomes, these outcomes may be associated with plan use during the previous reporting periods, or in this case prior to plan adoption.

As a result, it is expected that the impact of marine plans is likely to grow over time as the influence increases cumulatively. In some cases, data was not available at timescales appropriate to intended policy effect. However, this limitation is expected during the first reporting window, due to the short amount of time that has passed since adoption (for example, 3 years).

23. The monitoring approach applied is pragmatic, making use of existing data sources collected for other purposes.

However, external stakeholders have no legislative duty to provide the MMO with monitoring information and so the reliance on external monitoring programmes creates numerous dependencies and timing issues, restricting quality of reporting outputs, particularly where existing monitoring programmes may already face constraints.

24. Relevant descriptors of GES under the [Marine Strategy Part One: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status](#), published in 2019, have been used to supplement evidence.

The regional sea scale of the assessment is much broader than the South Marine Plan areas, this limits the degree to which the GES assessment results can be

applied in relation to the Plan.

However, it does still enable some indicative commentary on progress towards objectives and changes to environmental characteristics.

25. The MMO has conducted stakeholder surveys over multiple years. The number of responses varied each year, with proportionately low return rates, compared to the wide range of Plan users, which restricts insights gained from analysis of results.

As a consequence, surveys were supplemented with follow-up interviews to gather more detailed information that can provide, for example, industry-specific insights into Plan use.

26. The need to increase survey response rates and reduce ambiguity in responses has meant survey design and promotion techniques have been modified. However, this must be balanced with the need to maintain continuity for analysis year on year.
27. Limitations of individual data sources are considered within relevant sections of this report. Improvements to indicators continue to be made in order to address current shortfalls of data sources.

3. Context

3.1 Background to context monitoring

28. The Plan was developed within the context of prevailing international, national, and local legislation, in conjunction with relevant policies, strategies and plans informing marine planning at that time.

The aspirations of stakeholders, and evidence such as future projections for resources and utilisation of the South Marine Plan areas were also guiding considerations.

29. The context continues to evolve following Plan adoption and needs to be assessed to determine to what extent context adversely impacts the ongoing relevance and usability of Plan contents.

The MMO regularly reviews and reports on such considerations, working to ensure that the Plan remains aligned to contextual considerations.

30. In consideration of the main characteristics, uses and systems, this chapter of the report focusses on consented activity and changes in the marine protected area (MPA) network.

Conclusions were cross-checked with opinions from the follow-up interviews, where applicable.

31. To assess changes in other relevant matters, a review of the policy and legislative framework (including relevant international and national legislation, national policy, plans and strategies) was conducted to focus on potential implications for the plan. At a Plan-area scale, this involved analysing any change in aspirations articulated through terrestrial plans and strategies bordering the South Inshore Marine Plan area.

32. Furthermore, since 2018, the [North East](#), [North West](#), [South East](#), and [South West](#) Marine Plans have been adopted.

This represents an evolution of the marine planning process, as well as the application of new legislation and national strategic objectives.

A comparison has, therefore, been undertaken to consider the implications for the Plan and how similar issues have been responded to in adjacent plan areas.

3.2 Context monitoring findings

Main characteristics and uses

33. Insights from the marine licensing function ([Marine licences: detailed information](#)) give valuable ongoing information regarding the purposes for which the South Marine Plan areas are used.

A total of 262 marine licences were issued in the first 2 years following adoption compared to 192 issued in the last 2 years prior, an increase of more than 30%.

This suggested increased use and activity within the South Marine Plan areas. It should be noted that this comparison excludes any consideration of activities and uses that are either unregulated or regulated under other planning regimes.

34. Most licensed marine activities (79%) are around coastal development, especially ports and marinas serving commercial and recreational activity. Many of these marine licences were associated with small-scale low risk activities (for example slipway or pontoon maintenance) and overall represent a continuation of existing uses of the South Marine Plan areas.
35. The number of larger or more complex licensed marine activities seeking consent in the South Marine Plan (such as within the renewables and cables sectors) has slightly decreased since Plan adoption. This is unlikely to represent an actual decrease in activity.

Once consented, an activity may be ongoing for several years, and, therefore, should be viewed cumulatively.

Two new interconnector cables ([FAB](#) and [IFA2](#)) were consented prior to Plan adoption, while 3 nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) were also identified.

Of these, Rampion Offshore Windfarm is the only current operational offshore wind farm, though a proposal for Rampion 2 offshore wind farm is expected to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in late 2021.

The [AQUIND Interconnector](#) also represents an additional planned project to link the British and European electric power grids.

These developments represent significant ongoing advancements within the South Marine Plan areas and were also noted in follow-up interviews as factors that will have a bearing on the character of the region.

36. The Marine Strategy Part One - UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status (GES) was published in October 2019, and by providing an update on the progress made towards GES, informs monitoring of the environmental characteristics and living resources of the South Marine Plan areas.

Regarding achievement of GES, most indicators under descriptor 1 (Biological Diversity) demonstrate positive progress, though this has not been met for benthic habitats and is unknown for pelagic habitats.

Other descriptors show that environmental concerns persist around invasive non-native species and marine litter, while unknowns also remain around underwater noise.

It is important to note, however, that specific inferences relating to the Plan areas is limited as the area of interest is grouped under the strategy's greater North Sea region, which covers a much broader extent than just the South Marine Plan areas.

37. The number and extent of MPAs within the South Marine Plan areas has increased since Plan adoption.

In May 2019 the designation of a third tranche of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) was announced ([Marine Conservation Zones: third tranche of designations](#)); significantly increasing the number of MCZs within the South Marine Plan areas to 31 sites. This designation may impact the ongoing relevance of some MPA policies in the Plan:

Case study: Impact of third tranche of MCZ designations on policy relevance

Policy Title: S-MPA-4

Policy text: Until the ecological coherence of the marine protected area network is confirmed, proposals should demonstrate that they will, in order of preference, avoid, minimise and mitigate adverse impacts on features that may be required to complete the network. If it is not possible to mitigate adverse impacts, proposals should state the case for proceeding.

This policy ensures that possible future locations for MPAs, which may be needed to complete the network, remain in sufficient condition to merit designation. The third and final tranche of MCZ designations in 2019 heralded a significant contribution to a more complete ecologically coherent MPA network.

This may reduce the relevance of policy S-MPA-4, the supporting text for which states "when the network is complete, proposals will no longer be required to demonstrate compliance". Corroborating this, survey data indicated that following the designations, S-MPA-4 was less frequently considered. This suggests that the potentially declining relevance may come to be reflected in Plan usage.

It is anticipated that to maintain and enhance the coherence of the network, there will be a growing emphasis on the ongoing management of sites.

This is reflected in the North East, North West, South East and South West Marine Plans, which, adopted in 2021, do not contain bespoke policies regarding confirmation of the MPA network.

Rather, the intent of S-MPA-4 can be seen in the new MPA-1, which references overall marine objectives and the ongoing ecological coherence of the network. This further adds to the picture that the existing policy has become less relevant.

It should be noted that S-MPA-4 does contain provision for decision-makers in the event of the completion of the network: “proposals will no longer be required to demonstrate compliance ... but should be aware of broader biodiversity requirements under S-BIO-4”.

Although this improves the ongoing relevance of S-MPA-4, changes could be made to the Plan to remove aspects of less relevance and to focus more on measures which support the ongoing management of existing designated features.

38. In addition to the third tranche of MCZs, the Solent and Dorset Special Protection Area was classified in January 2020 ([Solent and Dorset Coast potential Special Protection Area: outcome](#)).

As MPA designations increase, the need for increased management of shared space will also increase.

The [Highly Protected Marine Areas \(HPMAs\) review 2019](#) also recommended that HMPAs be introduced.

If implemented, these may significantly influence the ongoing management measures of designated sites, which would need to be considered in Plan monitoring once potential impacts are clearer.

International considerations

39. Another contextual change since Plan adoption has been the UK leaving the European Union (EU) on 31 January 2020, followed by a transition period which ended on 31 December 2020.

Although the rules governing the new relationship between the EU and UK took effect on 1 January 2021, the long-term implications for the South Marine Plan areas will develop over time.

The following case study provides an example of how this change may impact the usability and relevance of the Plan in the short term.

Case study: Plan objectives referencing EU Directives

Objective 11

Objective text: To complement and contribute to the achievement or maintenance of Good Ecological Status or Potential under the Water Framework Directive and Good Environmental Status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive with respect to descriptors for marine litter, non-indigenous species and underwater noise

The UK was a member of the EU during Plan preparation, with the plan prepared in accordance with EU [Maritime Spatial Planning Directive](#) (2014/89/EU), which supports the [Integrated Maritime Policy](#) for the EU. The directive introduced a framework for maritime spatial planning and encouraged sustainable development of marine areas and resources.

European legislation is cited throughout the Plan and 117 references were highlighted during the monitoring review, including references to the Water Framework Directive and GES under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive in Plan objective 11.

Now the UK has left the EU and the transition period has ended, sections of the Plan which cite EU legislation are outdated, while hyperlinks no longer direct users to correct legislation. This may adversely impact Plan usability and policy implementation.

Following enactment of the [European Union \(Withdrawal Agreement\) Act 2020](#), EU legislation has been transposed to UK domestic legislation, while in other instances, new UK legislation is being drafted.

All new or transposed legislation will need to be appropriately reflected if a decision to amend the Plan is taken, or, in the case where the Plan is not updated, guidance be added that enables users to locate applicable legislation and correctly implement the Plan.

40. The UK MPS Section 1.2.3 and [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Environment Plan to Improve the Environment](#) (referred to as The 25 Year Environment Plan in this document) sets out the requirement to ensure marine plans work cohesively with those of neighbouring countries.

The South Offshore Marine Plan area borders France and the Channel Islands, specifically Guernsey (Figure 1). These administrations' approaches to marine planning informs understanding of context related to cross-border issues.

41. Alongside the implications of exiting the EU, national legislation, plans and strategies of marine relevance have continued to evolve and develop in response to emerging priorities.

The following analysis focuses on policy and legislative changes over the last three years and known forthcoming or potential future changes.

42. France adopted a National Strategy for the Sea and Coast in February 2017, which is implemented regionally via Sea basin strategy documents, adopted in Spring 2019.

The region bordering the South Offshore Marine Plan areas is managed by Eastern Channel to North Sea document, which contains 15 general strategic objectives.

Many of these overlap with objectives in the Plan, though with others the link is less clear, for example agriculture, shipbuilding and nautical construction, and artificialisation of the coastline.

These, however, relate to terrestrial or coastal issues in France, and are thus less likely to impact cross-border considerations of relevance to the South Marine Plan area.

No notable contextual developments were identified regarding the Guernsey's Island Development Plan (IDP) which was adopted in 2016.

43. Of the 126 plans, policies, strategies and pieces of legislation cited, 101 have changed in some way since Plan adoption, of which 69 of these are likely to impact the Plan.

Seventeen pieces of legislation have been enacted or amended, many having potential impacts on the plan, with examples including:

- [Fisheries act 2020](#)
- [the Conservation of Habitats and Species regulations 2017](#) (amended in 2019)
- [the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species regulations 2017](#) (amended in 2019)
- [the Marine Licensing \(Exempted Activities\) \(Amendment\) order 2019](#)

44. The 25 Year Environment Plan, published in 2018, introduced the concepts of environmental net gain and natural capital and defined new targets for a range of environmental issues of relevance to the South Marine Plan areas.

The [Environment Bill](#), announced in July 2019 and reintroduced into parliament in January 2020, is one mechanism to deliver the 25 Year Environment Plan.

It contains the intention to mandate biodiversity net gain for terrestrial planning decisions, including those affecting intertidal areas, and may impact environmental targets relevant to Plan policies.

This is also reflected in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#), amended in 2019. At present, a specific recommendation is not possible.

However, consideration should be given to potential Plan revisions that more adequately support the provisions of the Environment Bill, once passed into law.

45. The Plan remains relevant to the UK Marine Strategy and primarily supports achievement of GES through Plan objectives 7, 10, 11 and 12.

It should be noted, however, that the Plan and objectives were developed in consideration of the initial assessment and corresponding programme of measures.

The updated assessment (paragraph 36) has a direct bearing on environmental objectives and policies within the Plan.

This, and the forthcoming update to the programme of measures, will influence how the Plan contributes to achievement of GES.

46. Several national strategies have been developed since plan adoption. The national [Clean Air Strategy 2019](#) highlights the increasing significance of air quality.

It includes reference to reducing shipping emissions and the wider impact of emissions from maritime industries and recognises the [Clean Maritime Plan](#), the UK's route map to achieving zero emission shipping and clean growth for the maritime sector.

47. National strategies, targets, and UK government priorities around the climate change emergency have also evolved:

Case study - evolution of context around renewable energy generation in response to the climate change emergency

The Plan contains policies S-REN-1 (supporting the deployment of relevant supply chains) and S-TIDE-1 (ensures that areas identified for tidal energy developments are considered in the licensing process).

It also contains an information box which highlights how “due to existing national policy and the scale and number of existing projects a specific spatial offshore wind policy has not been included”. However, since Plan adoption:

- the [UK Climate Projections](#) were updated in 2018 along with the [Climate change: second national adaptation programme \(2018 to 2023\)](#), setting out what government, businesses and society are doing to become Climate Ready
- the national target for reduction in carbon dioxide in the [Climate Change Act 2008](#) was amended from 80% to 100% in 2019, to achieve net zero in the UK by 2050
- the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (updated in 2019) emphasised that responding to climate change is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development
- the government announced [The ten point Plan for a green industrial revolution](#) in November 2020, to focus on advancing offshore wind, investing in carbon capture and protecting our natural environment
- in December 2020 the [Nationally Determined Contribution \(NDC\)](#) was increased from 53% to 68% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, with a further increase to 78% in April 2021 ([UK enshrines new target in law to slash emissions by 78% by 2035](#))

These developments represent significant contextual changes in national legislation and targets around climate change and emissions targets, which should be reflected in the marine planning process.

To this end, the North East, North West, South East, and South West Marine Plans contain policies which (REN-2) protect areas identified for any renewable energy generation from other activities, and (REN-3) support installation of offshore renewable energy infrastructure within areas of potential.

There is, therefore, a mandate for a similar position on renewable energy in the South Marine Plan.

This would ensure the plan fully reflects national priorities when informing decision-making around new renewable energy and infrastructure in the South Marine Plan areas. This would also ensure consistency with neighbouring marine plan areas.

In consideration of ongoing uses, this would also provide necessary support to the maintenance and operation of existing or planned projects.

48. Other strategies have been updated or released since Plan adoption, though the impact these may have on the Plan is not yet clear.

The [National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England](#) was published in 2020, under which Flood Risk Management Plans are being revised for 2021 to 2027 and a [Shoreline Management Plan](#) refresh is taking place.

The national [English Aquaculture Strategy](#) (published in 2020) aims to overcome barriers to aquaculture development, of increasing relevance to the South Marine Plan areas (S-AQ-1), It was cited as an important sector in [Dorset Council's Plan 2020 to 2024](#).

Shifting sectoral focusses, as driven by new and updated national strategies, may have future implications for Plan implementation.

Local considerations

49. A comparison of themes in the Plan against 62 local statutory and non-statutory plans and strategies revealed that in most cases, local plan themes overlap with those in the Plan. The frequency of overlap does however vary significantly among themes.
50. Themes cited most regularly (by 48 or more local plans) were ecology and biodiversity, historic environment, climate change, coastal flooding, employment, energy production, tourism and recreation and infrastructure.
Themes cited least frequently (by less than 15 local plans) were MPAs, dredging and disposal, cables, co-existence and aquaculture.

This is to be expected considering these themes relate predominantly to marine issues, with the authority of local authorities not extending beyond mean low water.

The infrequent referencing of aquaculture also correlates with its status as a small scale and relatively novel industry.

However, it has significant localised relevance to the Dorset area. Follow-up interviews also noted an increase in space being used for shellfish cultivation, so the relevance of this sector is expected to increase.

51. Local plans referenced cables relatively infrequently, in contrast with the increase in relevance of cables infrastructure to the South Marine Plan areas (paragraph 35).

This can be attributed to the fact that construction of these projects is not yet complete, and that the landward relevance of cables is localised to regions where landfall occurs.

52. Many of the local plans and strategies were published prior to Plan adoption in 2018, integration and overlap are expected to increase over time.

Despite some apparent divergence which can be accounted for, analysis shows that themes and policies within the Plan broadly match with those that border the South Marine Plan areas.

Suggesting that the context here has not changed, and the Plan remains relevant.

Further development of marine plans in England

53. Marine planning in England has evolved since the Plans adoption. Newer marine plans reflect recent and emerging legislation, current government policies/strategies, and a refinement of engagement and marine planning approaches.

More specifically for the South Marine Plan, equivalent documents for the adjacent South East and South West Marine Plan areas are an additional consideration for decision-makers and sectors operating across more than one plan area.

54. A direct comparison of South Plan policies with those in the South East and South West Marine Plans identified 23 inconsistencies. Where policies in the neighbouring plans had no comparable policy in the South Marine Plan areas.

There were 10 instances where policies found in the South East and South West Marine Plans clearly had no equivalent policy in the Plan.

This includes new policies specifically addressing topics such as cross-border cooperation and cumulative effects, as well as others adding to existing policy sets, such as the protection of safeguarded landing facilities (INF-2).

Of particular note, some inconsistencies reflected changing national priorities and legislation, for example, the increased support of offshore renewables infrastructure (REN-3), linked to climate change targets (paragraph 46), or the facilitation of short-sea shipping (PS-4).

55. A further thirteen inconsistencies occurred where policies in the South East and South West Marine Plans overlapped with an equivalent in the Plan, but there were significant differences in policy intent, strength, and wording.

For example, S-TIDE-1 specifically covers tidal energy, whereas its newer equivalent REN-2 has been broadened to cover all renewable energy generation, again linked to renewable energy priorities.

The national issue of air quality is also absent from the Plan, S-CC-1 focussed solely on greenhouse gases. Although the newer AIR-1 includes provisions for the wider issue of air quality alongside consideration of greenhouse gas emissions, reflecting the priorities of the Clean Air Strategy (paragraph 45).

56. Some policy comparisons revealed inconsistencies in wording between adjacent plan areas, such as with S-CAB-2.

Plans in adjacent areas are compatible, but the different approaches to policy wording, especially with sectors such as cables for which cross-border considerations are inherent. May make interpretation across plan areas more difficult for decision-makers and sectors operating across multiple plan areas.

The plan's content

57. A detailed review of the Plan identified nearly 550 potential textual changes of varying significance that, if amended, would improve the content or enhance its usability.

These include outdated references and legislation, many relating to EU Exit as per paragraph 38, while others related to broken or out of date hyperlinks, including to the Marine Information System, now replaced with [Explore Marine Plans](#) (EMP).

58. The maps in the Plan include 77 datasets to support policy implementation.

Due to periodic updates, 21 of these are now outdated, with 12 of the 25 maps inaccurately representing policy implementation. Although maps could be updated to reflect most recent data, the risk of new data becoming quickly outdated would remain.

The most recent versions of all data can be viewed on EMP, keeping the Plan contextually relevant with regards to the existing evidence base.

59. Additionally, 30 new relevant datasets have been flagged to the marine planning process following Plan adoption.

These will be displayed on EMP, however it would not be clear as to how they should be used in relation to policy.

To avoid a disconnect between the evidence base and the contents of the Plan, the supporting text of individual policies would benefit from amends to describe which policies each dataset applies to, and how they should be used to aid implementation.

3.3 Concluding statement

60. The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has kept relevant matters under review including changes in the key characteristics and uses of the marine plan areas and in legislation, policy and other plans (including marine plans around England).

Taken together, changes in context may affect the continued relevance of the Plan and its functionality since adoption.

61. The review of relevant matters did identify aspects of the Plan that have declining relevance. This includes non-policy specific examples such as references to European Legislation throughout the Plan.

The purpose and functionality of certain policies may also face a decline.

The marine protected areas (MPA) policy (S-MPA-4), featured in analysis, was developed to protect conservation features yet to be designated at the point of policy development.

Progress made towards a more complete network of MPAs will reduce the relevance of S-MPA-4. However, it was noted that implementation of this policy in this first reporting cycle has been successful.

62. The review of relevant matters also identified known changes that could provide a rationale for additions to Plan content. This included updates to supporting text that would more clearly link the evidence base to policy implementation in some cases.

Further to this, a comparison of South Marine Plan policies with those in the South East and South West Marine Plans revealed inconsistencies around renewable energy, air quality and clean maritime growth, among other topics.

Policies in emerging marine plans have been introduced in response to changing national drivers and priorities, and the publication of new legislation and strategies, such as around the climate change crisis.

These policies may also hold relevance for the South Marine Plan areas and would standardise approaches across plan area boundaries.

63. Despite the noted evolution in some contextual matters, the key characteristics and uses of the South Marine Plan areas have not significantly changed since Plan adoption.

While a 30% increase in the number of marine licences granted shows that overall the Plan area is increasingly busy, the sectoral breakdown of activities remains relatively consistent.

The Plan remains aligned with priorities of local authorities, suggesting that, outside of those noted above, the wider policy themes and topics have not substantially shifted.

Similarly, since adoption of the Plan, no significant divergence with bordering international marine plans have been noted.

64. The report identified legislation such as the Environment Bill, which is not yet UK law, and strategies and plans that are either anticipated, or recently published. The impact these might have on the Plan is not yet clear.
65. The review of relevant matters did identify some contextual changes that may in the long term affect the ongoing relevance or functionality of parts of the South Marine Plan, which is to be expected.

However, these do not as yet, appear significant enough to fundamentally hinder the implementation of the Plan, particularly with tools such as [Explore Marine Plans](#) (EMP) in place, that allow for live updates to the evidence base.

The Plan also remains relevant with regards to the ongoing activities in the Plan area and the related contribution the area provides towards delivering the High Level Marine Objectives of the Marine Policy Statement, as well as other relevant overarching strategies.

Consideration could be given to how this contribution may be increased once a clearer understanding of associated outcomes develops in the longer term.

4. Process

4.1 Background to process monitoring

66. The following evidence sources informed process monitoring of the Plan:
- marine licence applications
 - stakeholder surveys and follow-up interviews
 - sub-national policy documents
67. The process monitoring approach included consideration of the wider effects of the Plan.

Marine licence applications

68. A sample of 97 marine licence applications was used to assess the use of the Plan by both the MMO and applicants.

The sample included only marine licence applications within the South Marine Plan areas, granted between 17 July 2018 and 16 July 2020.

Stakeholder surveys and follow-up interviews

69. Responses to relevant stakeholder survey questions were used to assess use of the Plan by both decision-makers and marine licence applicants.

Additional information on the use of the Plan were sourced from follow-up interviews.

Sub-national policy documents

70. A review of 62 adopted and draft sub-national policy documents relevant to the South Marine Plan areas was undertaken. The purpose of the review was to assess the degree to which the Plan has influenced and been integrated by other relevant sub-national policy documents.

Wider effects of marine planning

71. Wider effects monitoring assessed stakeholder awareness and use of the Plan, as well as for available outputs and products that support the use of marine plans. The following evidence sources informed the wider effects monitoring of the Plan:
- direct engagement activities
 - marine planning evidence assurance scores
 - social media performance indicators
 - stakeholder surveys
 - time taken for MMO staff to process marine licence applications
 - web analytics for online marine planning products

4.2 Process monitoring findings

Wider effects of marine planning

72. Overall, monitoring data showed an increase in stakeholder awareness and understanding of the Plan and how to use it. Findings also evidenced improvements to the evidence base and engagement with outputs that support the use of the Plan.
73. Since Plan adoption, the MMO has attended a total of 58 direct stakeholder engagement events related to marine planning and the South Marine Plan areas.

Most direct engagement activities were forums and group events (93%), reflecting the weight placed by the MMO on maximising stakeholder engagement and transparency.

The number of direct engagement events related to marine planning and the South Marine Plan areas attended by the MMO increased after Plan adoption. This increase was largely driven by the delivery of training sessions on the use of the Plan to decision-makers.

74. The MMO has also increased stakeholder use of the Plan through the development of products, underpinned by data and evidence.

The 'Explore Marine Plans' case study shows that stakeholders are using available products designed to support the use of marine plans.

Case study: explore marine plans

The Explore Marine Plans (EMP) digital service is an online, interactive resource for viewing marine plan policies, evidence and supporting information relevant to England's marine area.

In its first year of operation (between 4 November 2019 and 3 November 2020), a total of 3,522 users engaged with the digital service, over 7,533 sessions. The average user session duration is becoming less variable over time.

This finding suggests that users are increasingly able to use the digital service and locate the marine planning information that they need.

Monitoring data also showed that EMP is being used to support the use of the Plan. For example, pages related to the South Marine Plan areas received the highest number of pageviews across all English marine plan areas (26% of 5,628 Plan-specific pageviews).

The MMO will continue to support EMP through regular monitoring and promotion of the online service.

In line with the [Government Digital Service](#) requirements and best practice. Where possible, improvements to the service will also be made, including in response to user feedback.

75. A total of 13 new evidence projects related to marine planning have been completed since Plan adoption, increasing the total number of available evidence projects to 66 in 2020.

All evidence projects were completed independently by the MMO (11 projects) or by non-MMO led projects (55 projects).

The quality of the marine planning evidence base has also improved since Plan adoption, with the average quality assurance score of evidence items increasing from 82% in April 2018 to 84% in October 2020.

76. Increased stakeholder awareness and understanding of the Plan and how to use it was also promoted using social media.

In the period since Plan adoption, the MMO published a total of nine blog posts, eight tweets, five LinkedIn posts and 112 Facebook posts relevant to the Plan and South Marine Plan areas.

Monitoring data showed that users are engaging with online content published by the MMO.

For example, the average number of recipients choosing to unsubscribe from the marine planning newsletter has remained low (5%) in the period since Plan adoption. This finding shows that there is a maintained interest in marine planning among stakeholders.

Plan use by marine licence applicants

77. Overall, monitoring data showed an increase in the use of the Plan by marine licence applicants. However, findings also suggest that further engagement is needed to support use of the Plan by applicants.
78. Stakeholder surveys suggest that applicants are using the Plan when either developing a proposal or deciding on whether to submit a proposal (80% in 2021 survey).

The marine licence application review also found applicants to have confirmed consideration of the Plan (as a whole) in 94% of cases.

79. The level of consideration of the Plan by applicants was higher than the 67% of cases detailed in the Three-year report on the East Marine Plans (for the period 2 April 2014 to 1 April 2017).

This finding shows that proponent awareness of marine plans has increased over time and that marine planning is becoming more embedded within proposal development processes.

Over half (51%) of the marine licence applications reviewed also contained detail of the policy level assessments undertaken during proposal development.

This finding provides further evidence of the increasing influence of the Plan within proposal development processes.

80. Stakeholder survey responses acknowledged several advantages to considering the Plan during proposal development, including the promotion of cooperation and co-existence between different activities and sectors.
81. While consideration of the Plan (as a whole) by applicants has increased, 49% of the marine licence applications reviewed did not contain detail of the policy-level assessments undertaken during proposal development.

The difference in the number of marine licence applications showing consideration of the Plan (as a whole) and at the policy level suggests that there is a disconnect in how the Plan is considered during proposal development and evidenced at the application stage.

A similar disconnect was identified in the Three year report on the East Marine Plans (for the period of 2 April 2017 to 1 April 2020), highlighting the need to provide continued and improved support to applicants to help them use marine plans.

Further promotion of EMP and other products (for example the [using Marine Plans](#) guidance page on GOV.UK) may help to improve applicant understanding and use of the Plan.

82. Follow-up interviews to the stakeholder surveys provided further detail on use of the Plan. Some decision-makers considered that there was a current lack of awareness of the Plan amongst some applicants.

This information provides further evidence for the need to provide continued and improved support to promote use of the Plan.

Plan use in marine licence decision-making

83. Overall, monitoring data showed an increase in the use of the Plan in marine licence decision-making. However, findings suggest that further engagement and training may be required to support the use of the Plan in marine licence decision-making.
84. The MMO considered use of the Plan for all 97 marine licence applications reviewed. One marine licence application was refused by the MMO after being considered non-compliant with the Plan.

However, the MMO granted the vast majority (99%) of marine licence applications after considering them to be compliant with the Plan.

85. Since Plan adoption, the average time taken for MMO staff to process a marine licence application for licensable activities within the South Marine Plan areas has increased to 64 hours in the 2019/2020 reporting year.

This finding shows that improved efficiency as a result of an integrated plan-led approach has yet to be realised.

However, an increase in application processing times is expected during the early periods after Plan adoption as existing systems and processes adapt to the change.

86. Improvements were made to policy assessments and record keeping used to inform marine licence decision-making during the first reporting window of the Plan.

Completed policy assessments were found for 82 of the 97 (85%) of the marine licence applications reviewed ([Annex B](#)).

Missing or incomplete policy assessments most likely occurred as the result of human error. Training sessions were delivered in 2019 and 2020 to help support and improve the use the Plan by the MMO.

87. Overall, 35 of the 82 (43%) marine licence applications with completed policy assessments were considered by the MMO to have demonstrated compliance with all applicable policies within the initial application.

Despite applicants considering the Plan during proposal development (see paragraphs 72 and 73), this finding suggests that initial marine licence applications often do not contain the information needed to satisfy the MMO that compliance with all applicable policies has been demonstrated.

88. Completed policy assessments provided evidence on how often policies are being applied in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)). This information, therefore, also allowed policy influence in marine licence decision-making to be assessed.

Policy influence assessments were made on the assumption that the most influential policies are those which most often require additional information from either consultees or marine licence applicants.

Overall, 12 of the 82 (15%) marine licence applications were returned to applicants for further information related to one or more policies.

Consultees provided the details needed to inform the marine plan policy assessment for 34 of the 82 (41%) marine licence applications.

89. Information was most often required for environmental policies (63% of 317 instances) within the first reporting window of the Plan.

Economic and social policies accounted for 8% and 30% of instances of policies requiring further information. The spatial nature of many of the economic policies (for example, S-AGG-1) may explain why further information was required least often for these policies.

90. Of the environmental policies, further information was requested most often to assist in the assessment of S-MPA-1 (21 instances) and S-BIO-1 (19 instances). These policies may, therefore, be considered as being most influential in the marine licence decision-making process.

Further information was also often requested regarding S-MPA-3 (17 instances), which does not directly relate to licensable marine activities.

This finding suggests that S-MPA-3 may be vulnerable to misinterpretation, resulting in the policy being considered unnecessarily.

Further training on the use of marine plans may, therefore, help to support the appropriate use of policies in marine licence decision-making.

91. Insights into policy influence were also gained from information on how often policies were assessed as being 'not applicable' ([Annex B](#)).

While the assessment of policies as being 'not applicable' may be a signal that the proportionate principle is being applied by the MMO, policies that are often considered to be 'not applicable' are likely to have a weak influence in marine licensing decisions.

This statement does not apply to policies linked to spatially defined areas.

92. Excluding spatial policies, S-CAB-1 (68 instances) and S-ML-1 (66 instances) were most often assessed as being 'not applicable' to the marine licence applications reviewed. This finding may be explained by both policies being highly activity specific.

However, process monitoring showed that several policies applicable throughout the South Marine Plan areas were often assessed as 'not applicable'.

This finding, therefore, provides further evidence for the need to deliver further training to support the use of Plan in marine licence decision-making and to improve policy effectiveness in achieving the Plan objectives.

The Plan use in other planning and consenting processes

93. Overall, monitoring data showed an increase in the use of the Plan in other planning and consenting processes. However, findings suggest that further engagement and training may be required to support the use of the Plan by decision-makers.

94. Survey responses suggest that decision-maker opinion on whether the Plan has provided opportunities to deal with future challenges is mixed.

For example, some decision-makers recognised the important role that the Plan has in promoting sustainable development, whereas others considered the Plan to have had little influence on their activities.

95. In the vast majority of cases (86% of 28 decision-maker survey responses received across all survey years), decision-makers confirmed that the Plan had been considered, at least in some instances, when making authorisation and enforcement decisions.

96. Similarly, the majority of decision-makers (93% of all 27 responses decision-maker survey responses received across all survey years) confirmed that the Plan had been considered, at least in some instances, when making 'other kinds of decisions'.

97. Where the Plan had been considered, survey responses showed that decision-makers are using a wide and variable range of policies (depending on the function of the respondent) to:

- determine planning applications
- develop byelaws
- develop sub-national policy documents
- provide consultation advice

98. Overall, 24% of the 62 sub-national policy documents reviewed referenced the Plan directly (Figure 2), while a further 18% made general references to the MMO and marine plans.

Seven of the 20 (35%) sub-national policy documents published after the Plan was adopted were found to have referenced the Plan.

Integration of the Plan, following its adoption, was highest for area of outstanding natural beauty management plans (three out of six plans) and local plans (four out of five plans).

99. Integration of the Plan with other sub-national policy documents is expected to improve over time, as new sub-national policy documents are adopted, and existing ones updated.

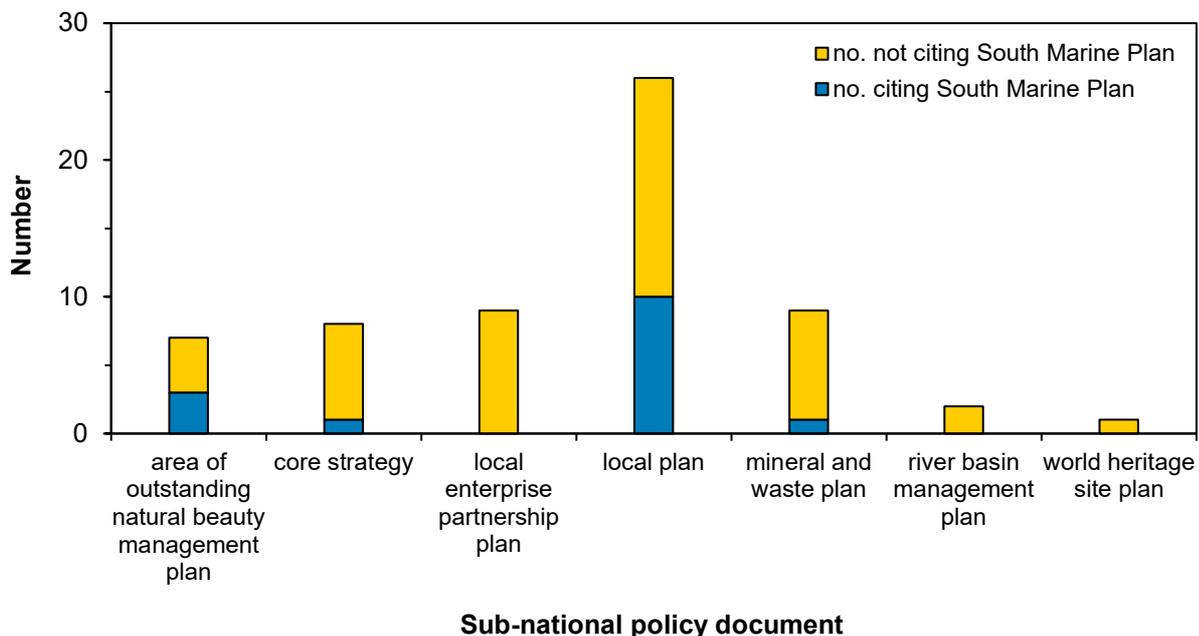
Efficiency improvements are also expected as the number of sub-national policy documents having regard to the Plan increases.

Currently, survey responses suggest that positive effects on cost/time savings have yet to be realised. For example, the majority (over 50%) of survey responses consistently considered that the Plans have had either a 'neutral' (no change) or 'negative' effect on administration costs, across all survey years.

Findings, therefore, suggest that further engagement with decision-makers is needed to promote the integration of the Plan with other sub-national policy documents.

The 'Supporting marine plan use' case study provides an overview of some of the outputs and products developed by the MMO to support the use of the Plan in other planning and consenting processes.

Figure 2: number of relevant sub-national policy documents citing (blue), or not citing (yellow), the South Marine Plan. The bar plot includes sub-national policy documents that have not been updated since the adoption of the South Marine Plan



100. Follow-up interviews provided further detail on use of the Plan by decision-makers. Overall, decision-makers expressed confidence in using the Plan but suspected that some stakeholders were unfamiliar with the Plan and how to use it.

This information provides further evidence for continued engagement with decision-makers to promote use of the Plan in consenting and planning processes.

Case study: supporting marine plan use

The delivery of training sessions is a key engagement activity used by the MMO to increase decision-maker awareness and understanding of the Plan.

Training sessions, therefore, help to promote the use of the Plan in authorisation and enforcement decisions, as well as in non-authorisation decisions.

Attendance of training sessions by decision-makers relevant to the South Marine Plan areas during the 2018 to 2019 and 2020 to 2021 reporting years was high. Feedback received from attending decision-makers confirmed that the 2018 to 2019 and 2020 to 2021 training sessions were well received.

In addition to delivering training sessions, the MMO has also developed several frameworks and outputs that promote the use of the Plan by decision-makers, including:

- an internal framework to inform the preparation and agreement of statement of common grounds with other decision-makers on the development of sub-national policy documents
- a 'marine planning policy assessment matrix' tool to inform decisions on marine wildlife licence applications and byelaw development (for example, commercial fisheries and marine protected area byelaws)

4.3 Concluding statement

101. Process monitoring assessed the use of the Plan by marine licence applicants, the MMO marine licensing function, and other decision-makers, as well as its integration with other sub-national policy documents.

102. Findings evidenced increased awareness and understanding of the Plan and how to use it. Progress was achieved through the delivery of direct engagement activities, combined with the use of digital channels.

The provision of online tools and guidance that support use of the Plan has also helped to build user capacity.

103. Process monitoring showed an increase in the use of the Plan by marine licence applicants and in its influence within proposal development processes.

However, marine licence applications often did not provide full consideration of all relevant policies. The influence of the Plan on proposal development was, therefore, difficult to assess in detail.

104. In contrast, the influence of the Plan in marine licence decision-making was clearly evidenced by detailed consideration that was consistently given by the MMO marine licensing function.

This information provided an improved understanding of the influence and effectiveness of individual policies. This licensing decision-making data showed some variation in the level of influence that individual policies have.

Evidence of policy use also highlighted the need for the continued delivery of training

to support the use of the Plan.

For example, the findings suggested that the MPA boundary change policy (S-MPA-3) is often misinterpreted, resulting in the policy being considered unnecessarily in marine licence decisions

105. Process monitoring showed that decision-makers external to the MMO are using the Plan to inform a range of consenting and planning decisions.

The number of other sub-national policy documents which have regard to the Plan has also increased.

However, evidence suggests that the rate at which the Plan is integrated with other sub-national policy documents could be improved through continued engagement with relevant decision-makers.

106. Overall, the influence of the Plan and its use by both decision-makers and marine licence applicants was evident within the first reporting window.

However, some limitations in the use of the Plan by both decision-makers and proponents were identified.

Findings, therefore, show that awareness of the Plan and how to use it has increased, but suggest that it will take time for the Plan to fully embed itself within decision-making and proposal development processes.

107. No clear limitations were identified that could only be addressed by a change to the Plan.

Instead, many limitations may be addressed through continuous improvements to engagement activities, as well as to the available frameworks and products that support use of the Plan.

However, challenges remain in the monitoring of Plan use by decision-makers external to the MMO, who do not have a legislative duty to report monitoring information on the Plan.

108. The report findings may provide a useful context for monitoring progress towards achieving the Plan objectives in the future.

5. Outcomes

5.1 Background to outcome monitoring

109. Outcome monitoring assessed the effects of policies, the effectiveness of these policies, and their contribution towards progressing Plan objectives and HLMOs.
110. Outcome monitoring of the Plan was informed by both data-driven indicators and stakeholder surveys.

Data-driven indicators

111. Indicators derive findings from sources both internal and external to the MMO. In total 11 indicators, underpinned by 57 individual sub-indicators, were used to inform the outcome monitoring of the Plan.

Stakeholder surveys

112. Responses to relevant questions from surveys were used to assess the extent to which stakeholders felt that the expected policy outcomes had been achieved.

5.2 Outcome monitoring findings

113. This section presents the outcome monitoring findings for each of the 12 Plan objectives.
114. A table showing the outcome findings of all directly and indirectly contributing policies is provided for each objective.

The outcome findings for the contributing policies are intended to reflect policy effects by identifying whether observed outcomes show progress towards or achievement of indicator targets that align with policy aims.

115. The effects of all relevant contributing policies were used to inform the assessment of overall progress made towards the Plan objectives. Progress made towards the Plan objectives was assessed as being either 'positive', 'negative', or 'inconclusive'.
116. Discussions on the outcome monitoring findings are also provided for each of the Plan objectives and address the following items, in order:
- policy aims
 - how policy effects were assessed
 - policy effects findings
 - policy specific limitations and areas for improvement
 - overall progress towards securing the Plan objectives and the effectiveness of contributing policies

117. Individual policies often contribute to many of the Plan objectives. For example, one policy may directly contribute to one of the Plan objectives whilst also indirectly contributing to another.

Discussions on indirectly contributing policies are, therefore, only given where needed to support the conclusion of the overall progress towards securing the Plan objectives.

118. Findings from the stakeholder surveys are not discussed in this section where indicators provided enough information on policy effects, or where survey findings provided no further clarity to the conclusions reached.

119. Suitable indicators or stakeholder survey questions remain to be developed for several policies, resulting in gaps in the monitoring of policy effects and longer-term outcomes.

Where these gaps occur, evidence of policy use in marine licence decision-making has been used to demonstrate how these policies are contributing towards objective outcomes.

The case study below describes the approach used to assess policies through evidence of policy use when data is otherwise unavailable.

Case study: intermediate outcomes delivered through marine licence decisions

Longer term effects and impacts of policies may be uncertain where data gaps persist, but intermediate outcomes, such as evidence of policy use in marine licence decision-making, may be used as an adequate proxy to understand policy effects in the short term. This case study assesses policies listed under all objectives as 'no data'.

The findings presented in Figure 3 demonstrate that, despite having 'no data' for longer term outcomes, it can be shown that the MMO is considering these policies when making marine licence determinations.

This evidences that the Plan policies are being implemented where policy use is within direct control and direct influence of the MMO through its marine licence decision-making and suggests there are likely to be outcomes linked to their implementation, despite monitoring gaps.

Stakeholder survey responses seemingly corroborate this, indicating that positive (albeit limited) progress towards policy aims are being made, with responses suggesting policies with indicator gaps were being considered.

Plan policies have also influenced the conditions and information required from applicants within marine licensing decisions.

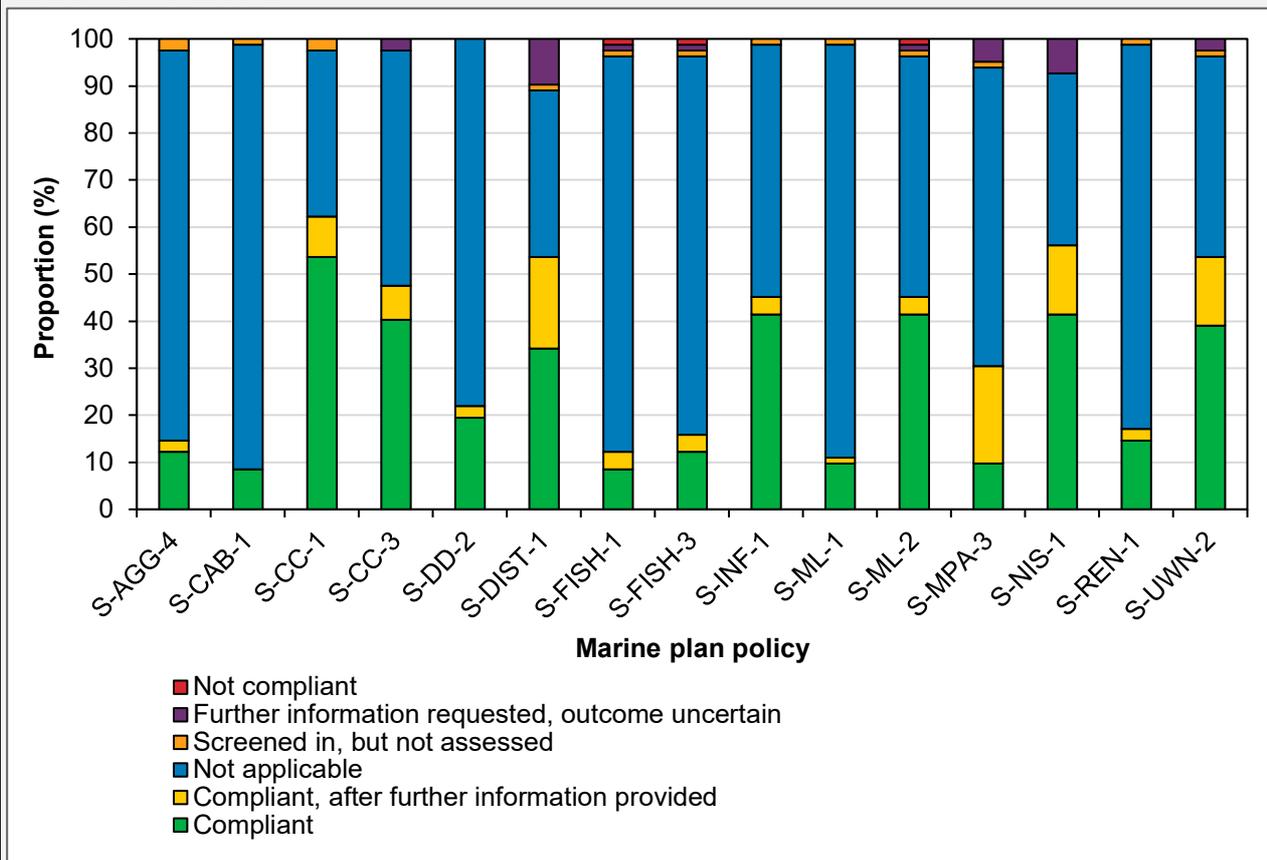
In the sample reviewed, 15% of proposals were returned to marine licence applicants to demonstrate compliance with one or more policies.

This could require further evidence of policy consideration, and in some cases resulted in proposals including additional measures, so as to comply with policies.

For example, a number of proposals were altered to incorporate measures to prevent the spread of non-native invasive species, in order to comply with S-NIS-1.

The continued delivery of training on marine plan implementation will facilitate and support internal and external decision-makers in the implementation of the Plan, and, therefore, progress towards associated objectives, particularly over shorter timescales.

Figure 3: Breakdown of policy-level decisions for 15 South Marine Plan policies without outcome indicators.



Without outcome findings related to specific policy effects, there is limited understanding of how effective these policies are in progressing their policy aims or those of the overall objectives they contribute to.

Development of survey questions or indicators to monitor policy effects and provide outcome findings will be investigated to address these known gaps to provide a more robust evaluation of these policies in the long-term.

Where data gaps may persist despite continued development of monitoring measures, consideration will need to be given as to whether outcomes can be adequately assessed collectively at the objective level, or whether an outcome data gap is indicative of a flaw in policy development that should be addressed with a change to plan content.

High Level Marine Objectives

120. Due to the limited time since the Plan was adopted, achievement of Plan objectives and HLMOs would not be expected to be evident. Some of the wider effects and evidence of Plan use, discussed within [Chapter 4](#), are primary indicators of progress at this stage.

As the objectives contribute towards HLMOs ([Annex A](#)), the evidence of progress towards the Plan objectives suggests that the Plan is making a contribution towards all of the HLMOs.

However, achievement of the HLMOs is wider in scope than objective-specific outcomes, or the South Marine Plan's contribution alone.

Table 1: Outcomes findings for Objective 1 - To encourage effective use of space to support existing and future sustainable economic activity through co-existence, mitigation of conflicts and minimisation of development footprints

| Objective progress: positive | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-AGG-1, S-AGG-2, S-AGG-3, S-CO-1, S-DD-1, S-DEF-1, S-OG-1 | Positive |
| S-PS-1 | Neutral |
| S-PS-3, S-TIDE-1 | Inconclusive |
| S-AQ-1 | Negative |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-ACC-2, S-FISH-4-HER, S-SOC-1 | Positive |
| S-ACC-1 | Neutral |
| S-AQ-2, S-CAB-1, S-CAB-2, S-PS-2 | Inconclusive |
| S-AGG-4, S-INF-1 | No data |

121. All directly contributing policies, except S-CO-1 and S-PS-1, seek to safeguard spatially defined areas for specific marine activities and/or require proposals to reduce or avoid their impact within defined areas where they may have a negative impact on safeguarded activities.

The effects of these policies were assessed using data on the number and location of marine activities licensed by the MMO.

Policy effect assessments also considered the number of licensed marine activities which showed how they reduced their impacts to safeguarded activities within their related marine licence applications, where appropriate.

122. Outcome monitoring findings showed positive effects for several directly contributing policies.

The percentage of granted marine licence applications evidencing compliance with several directly contributing policies increased since Plan adoption ([Annex B](#)).

For example, the average annual number of marine activities licensed by the MMO within Ministry of Defence (MoD) areas that received approval from the MoD increased by 45% since Plan adoption.

123. Decreases in the average annual number of marine activities licensed by the MMO within areas where they may have a negative impact were also found after Plan adoption.

For example, the average annual number of marine activities not related to the marine aggregate sector occurring in areas licensed for aggregate extraction has decreased by 60% since Plan adoption.

124. The assessment of policy effects using marine licensing data was limited, in some cases, by the low number of relevant marine activities licensed in spatially defined areas safeguarded by relevant policies.

However, sample sizes are expected to increase over time as new proposals are developed and licensed. The assessment of policy effects is likely to improve with increasing time from Plan adoption.

125. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 1, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)). This conclusion is supported by the evidence of implementation of the directly and indirectly contributing policies in marine licensing decision-making ([Annex B](#)).

Furthermore, many directly and indirectly contributing policies have shown positive policy effects, and progress towards policy aims.

Policy effects for Objective 1 are easier to assess than other objectives at this stage due to the policy aims, to increase effective use of space, which could be observed via consented activity data following Plan adoption.

These findings show that marine licence applications are increasingly taking account of other users in the South Marine Plan areas and indicates that the contributing policies have been effective in delivering sustainable economic activity through co-existence.

Table 2: Outcomes findings for Objective 2 - To manage existing, and aid the provision of new, infrastructure supporting marine and terrestrial activity

| Objective progress: positive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-PS-1 | Neutral |
| S-AQ-2, S-CAB-1, S-CAB-2, S-PS-2, S-PS-3 | Inconclusive |
| S-INF-1 | No data |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-ACC-2, S-AGG-1, S-AGG-2, S-AGG-3, S-DD-1, S-FISH-4-HER, S-OG-1, S-SOC-1, S-TR-2 | Positive |
| S-ACC-1 | Neutral |
| S-REN-1, S-TIDE-1 | Inconclusive |
| S-AQ-1 | Negative |
| S-AGG-4, S-FISH-1 | No data |

126. All directly contributing policies seek to either support the provision of appropriate and new infrastructure, or to safeguard existing infrastructure supporting marine and terrestrial activities. The effects of these policies were assessed using the following data:

- metrics on aquaculture sector performance, including the number of registered businesses and production volumes (S-AQ-2)
- stakeholder survey responses (S-PS-1)
- the number of legal challenges and complaints to the MMO in relation to licensed marine activities and issues on co-existence and displacement (S-CAB-1 and S-CAB-2)
- the number, location and levels of policy compliance of marine activities licensed by the MMO (S-PS-2 and S-PS-3)

127. Outcome monitoring findings did not allow robust conclusions on policy effects to be made, beyond ‘inconclusive’ or ‘neutral’ for any directly contributing policies with indicator or survey data available.

As detailed in the ‘Intermediate Outcomes’ case study in [Section 5.2](#), S-INF-1 showed high levels of compliance, being considered compliant in 41% of the marine licence applications reviewed. The high compliance with the policy evidences that new infrastructure is being supported in marine licence decision-making and thus outcomes that aligned to the intent of the policy are occurring. However, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which the policy has influenced this outcome.

128. The assessment of the effects of directly contributing policies was limited by existing data gaps and/or by how well data reflected actual policy effects. For example, stakeholder survey responses indicated that port and harbour authorities have been involved in the development and consenting processes of proposals within

port/harbour areas.

However, low and variable survey responses prevented a reliable conclusion of positive progress towards the objective from being made with regards to S-PS-1. Improvements to the monitoring of S-PS-1 policy effects may be gained through the continued development and promotion of stakeholder surveys.

129. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 2, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)).

This conclusion is supported by evidence of implementation of directly and indirectly contributing policies in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)), particularly the use of S-INF-1, which evidences support for provision of new infrastructure and, therefore, progress towards Objective 2.

A large number of indirectly contributing policies, discussed under other objectives, also showed positive outcomes and therefore, it is assumed positive effects. However, at this stage there is limited understanding of the effectiveness of the policies in contributing towards objective progress.

Table 3: Outcomes findings for Objective 3 - To support diversification of activities which improve socio-economic conditions in coastal communities

| Objective progress: Positive | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-REN-1, S-TR-1 | Inconclusive |
| S-AGG-4, S-FISH-1 | No data |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-AGG-1, S-AGG-2, S-AGG-3, S-DD-1, S-EMP-1, S-FISH-2, S-FISH-4, S-FISH-4-HER, S-TR-2 | Positive |
| S-EMP-2 | Inconclusive |
| S-FISH-3, S-CC-3 | No data |

130. S-REN-1 and S-TR-1 seek to support proposals related to sector-specific activities (for example, renewable energy, and tourism and recreation). The effects of these policies were assessed using data on the number of marine sector businesses in the South Marine Plan areas and changes to average Gross Value Added (GVA) over time. Assessment of policy effects also considered the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) as a means of measuring the diversity of marine sector economies.

131. Outcome monitoring findings did not provide clear evidence of policy effects for either S-REN-1 or S-TR-1 as not enough time has passed since the Plan was adopted.

Findings, therefore, did not allow robust conclusions on policy effects to be made, beyond 'inconclusive'.

Policy implementation was shown for S-AGG-4 and S-FISH-1, as discussed within the 'Intermediate Outcomes' case study in [Section 5.2](#).

132. The assessment of the effects of directly contributing policies were limited by the methodology used to attribute business numbers related to policy effects, and as the result of data gaps.

For example, the number of tourism and recreation businesses in the South Marine Plan areas has increased by 0.9% since Plan adoption, suggesting that positive progress has been made towards Objective 3.

However, as multiple years of the data needed to assess GVA were not yet available, the policy effects of S-TR-1 could not be further assessed.

The assessment of policy effects will improve with increasing time from Plan adoption. Furthermore, the continued development of indicators may improve methodologies with which to assess the effects of the policies directly contributing to Objective 3.

133. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 3, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)). This conclusion is supported by evidence of implementation of directly and indirectly contributing policies in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)).

Directly contributing policies assessed have shown positive outcomes, although it is too soon to determine if the policies are influencing the observed changes. Many indirectly contributing policies also showed positive effects and therefore progress towards policy aims.

However, at this stage there is limited understanding of effectiveness of the contributing policies in progressing towards the objective due to the limited time since the Plan was adopted.

Table 4: Outcomes findings for Objective 4 - To support marine activities that increase or enhance employment opportunities at all skill levels among the workforce of coastal communities, particularly where they support existing or developing industries within the South Marine Plan areas

| Objective progress: positive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-EMP-1 | Positive |
| S-EMP-2 | Inconclusive |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-AGG-1, S-AGG-2, S-AGG-3, S-WQ-1, S-OG-1 | Positive |
| S-PS-3, S-REN-1 | Inconclusive |
| S-WQ-2 | Negative |
| S-AGG-4, S-FISH-1 | No data |

134. Both directly contributing policies seek to encourage proposals that support marine-related employment opportunities. The effects of S-EMP-1 were assessed using stakeholder survey responses.

The effects of S-EMP-2 were assessed using Office for National Statistics (ONS) employment data in the South Marine Plan area.

135. Outcome monitoring findings showed positive effects for S-EMP-1. For example, stakeholder surveys indicated that respondents increasingly thought that marine-related employment opportunities, skills and local employment strategies were being considered in decision-making processes.

136. Positive policy effects were also found for S-EMP-2, although only one year of data was available following Plan adoption.

Data showed a 7% increase in total marine-related employment since Plan adoption. Coastal tourism accounted for the largest proportion of marine-related employment at 64%, with aggregates and recreation showing the largest increases in marine-related employment since the Plan was adopted.

137. Given the lag anticipated between policy implementation and these observed changes in employment, the Plan is unlikely to have had much influence over the changes at this stage.

The assessment of the effects of directly contributing policies were further limited by the methodology used to attribute employment related to policy effects.

The monitoring of policy effects is likely to improve over time, as more time passes since Plan adoption and observable trends become clearer.

The continued development of monitoring methodologies is required to robustly assess the effects of the policies directly contributing to Objective 4.

138. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 4, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)).

This conclusion is supported by evidence of use of the directly and indirectly contributing policies use in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)).

Survey findings showed positive progress towards policy aims being made by directly contributing policy S-EMP-1, and many indirectly contributing policies also showed positive effects.

Findings, therefore, suggest that the contributing policies have been somewhat effective in supporting activities that increase, or enhance, marine-related employment opportunities.

It is, however, difficult to discern a trend with limited data available following Plan adoption, and the nature of policy effects which will be realised over a longer time-scale.

Table 5: Outcomes findings for Objective 5 - To avoid, minimise, mitigate displacement of marine activities, particularly where of importance to adjacent coastal communities, and where this is not practical, to make sure significant adverse impacts on social benefits are avoided

| Objective progress: positive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-FISH-2, S-SOC-1, S-TR-2 | Positive |
| S-FISH-3 | No data |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-WQ-1 | Positive |
| S-AQ-2, S-PS-2, S-PS-3 | Inconclusive |
| S-WQ-2 | Negative |

139. All directly contributing policies seek to support and/or minimise displacement of marine activities within the South Marine Plan areas.

With the exception of S-FISH-3, all directly contributing policies were assessed using the number of legal challenges and complaints to the MMO in relation to issues of co-existence and displacement.

140. Outcome monitoring findings showed positive effects for S-FISH-2, S-SOC-1 and S-TR-2. Data showed a decrease in both the number of complaints (45% decline) and legal challenges (100% decline) received by the MMO in relation to licensed marine

activities within the South Marine Plan areas since Plan adoption. In both cases, the numbers of complaints and legal challenges received by the MMO during the first reporting window of the Plan were low.

In total, five complaints and no legal challenges of relevance have been received by the MMO since Plan adoption. No references to specific policies were found within any of the five relevant complaints received during the first reporting window of the Plan.

141. The assessment of the effects of directly contributing policies were limited by the existing indicator methodology which does not capture other consenting decisions made by the MMO, or those made by other decision-makers.

The existing methodology is also likely to only capture the most extreme cases and assumes that all instances of complaint and legal challenge directly result from insufficient consideration of co-existence and displacement in marine licence decision-making.

The continued development of indicators may improve methodologies with which to assess the effects of the policies directly contributing to Objective 5.

142. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 5, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)).

This conclusion is supported by evidence of implementation of the directly contributing policies in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)).

Furthermore, most directly contributing policies have shown positive progress towards policy aims.

Findings, therefore, suggest that the contributing policies have been effective in reducing the impacts of displacement on other marine activities.

Table 6: Outcomes findings for Objective 6 - To maintain and enhance inclusive public access to, and within, the South Marine Plan areas appropriate to its setting

| Objective progress: positive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-ACC-2 | Positive |
| S-ACC-1 | Neutral |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-DD-1, S-SOC-1 | Positive |
| S-PS-2, S-PS-3 | Inconclusive |

143. Policy S-ACC-1 requires proposals to reduce their impacts on public access, whilst S-ACC-2 seeks to support proposals that will enhance public access to and within the marine area. The effects of both directly contributing policies were assessed using stakeholder survey responses.
144. Outcome monitoring findings showed positive effects for S-ACC-2. For example, the percentage of survey respondents confirming that they have seen improved proposal consideration of enhanced public access increased by 22% between 2019 and 2021.

Responses to questions linked to S-ACC-1 showed no change in stakeholder perception as to whether public access to the marine area has improved since Plan adoption. Issues around access were also cited by stakeholders in follow-up interviews, indicating that S-ACC-1 has not been considered consistently.

Findings, therefore, suggest that the reported increase in proposal consideration of enhanced public access have yet to result in observed improvements to public access.

145. The assessment of the effects of directly contributing policies were limited by the sole reliance of stakeholder surveys, therefore, the existing methodology does not provide a means of assessing actual changes to public access, beyond respondent perception.

Consideration should be given to how best to maximise survey data, following recent improvements made, to build a robust understanding of perceptions of public access over time.

146. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 6, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)).

This conclusion is supported by the evidence of policy use in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)). It is further supported by the positive progress towards policy aims shown to some extent, by both directly and indirectly contributing policies.

Findings, therefore, suggest that the contributing policies have been somewhat effective in maintaining and improving public access to, and within, the South Marine Plan areas.

Objective 6 would benefit from further monitoring to understand whether the positive policy effects observed are resulting in real world changes and being effective in progressing towards Objective 6.

Table 7: Outcomes findings for Objective 7 - To support the reduction of the environmental, social and economic impacts of climate change, through encouraging the implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures that:

- avoid proposals' indirect contributions to greenhouse gas emissions,
- reduce vulnerability
- improve resilience to climate and coastal change,
- consider habitats that provide related ecosystem services

| Objective progress: positive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-CC-2, S-CC-4 | Positive |
| S-CC-1, S-CC-3 | No data |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-SOC-1 | Positive |
| S-REN-1, S-TIDE-1, S-MPA-2 | Inconclusive |
| S-MPA-3 | No data |

147. Directly contributing policies seek to reduce the impacts of climate change through various means, S-CC-2 and S-CC-4 require proposals to consider their impacts on existing climate change adaptation measures, coastal change, and habitats that provide valuable services (such as flood defence and/or carbon storage).

The effects of S-CC-2 were assessed using stakeholder survey responses. The effects of S-CC-4 were assessed using data on the extent of coastal and marine priority habitats, as listed under Section 41 of the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#).

148. Outcome monitoring findings showed positive effects for S-CC-4. Overall, data showed the extent of all four priority habitats relevant to S-CC-4 to have increased since Plan adoption, representing a 2.5% mean increase in total spatial extent for each habitat.

Of the four priority habitats linked to S-CC-4, mudflats showed the greatest extent increase (2.2 square kilometres) during the first reporting window of the Plan.

Positive policy effects were also found for S-CC-2, with data suggesting that stakeholders have perceived an increase in the consideration of climate change adaptation measures by proposals since Plan adoption.

149. The assessment of policy effects was limited by the available data on the extent of coastal and marine priority habitats, which provides incomplete coverage of priority habitats.

Any influence of S-CC-4 on the reported increases in the extent of priority habitats is unlikely, due to the short time elapsed since Plan adoption and the time required for priority habitats to establish and expand their spatial extent.

150. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 7, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)).

This conclusion is supported by the findings of positive progress towards some policy aims having been made by both directly and indirectly contributing policies.

Positive progress towards Objective 7 is also evidenced by use of the directly and indirectly contributing policies used in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)).

Findings, therefore, suggest that progress has been made and S-CC-2 appears to be somewhat effective.

However, it is yet too soon to determine the overall effectiveness of contributing policies in supporting the reduction of the environmental, social and economic impacts of climate change.

Table 8: Outcomes findings for Objective 8 - To identify and conserve heritage assets that are significant to the historic environment of the South Marine Plan areas

| Objective progress: inconclusive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-HER-1 | Negative |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-SCP-1, S-TR-2 | Positive |
| S-PS-1 | Neutral |
| S-TR-1 | Inconclusive |

151. Policy S-HER-1 seeks to avoid or reduce negative impacts on heritage assets unless negative impacts are outweighed by wider public benefits.

The effects of S-HER-1 were assessed using Historic England's [Heritage at Risk Register](#) and changes in the number of entries that can be reasonably linked to marine activities licensed by the MMO within the South Marine Plan area.

152. Findings showed a negative outcome, with the highest number of assets (40) on the Heritage at Risk Register listed in 2019 following Plan adoption. However, this does not appear as part of a consistent trend.

Data does show that S-HER-1 is being considered in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)), therefore the policy is either ineffective at securing it's aims or has not yet had sufficient time to influence outcomes.

153. The assessment of policy effects were limited as it cannot be confirmed whether the additions to the Heritage at Risk Register are the result of negative impacts from marine development, or for other reasons.

Furthermore, the existing monitoring methodology does not consider policy effects to undesignated heritage assets or changes in status to entries in the Heritage at Risk Register.

Engagement with key stakeholders, alongside the continued development of indicators, will deliver improvements to the methodology used to assess the effects S-HER-1.

154. Overall, findings on the progress made towards Objective 8, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)), were inconclusive.

This conclusion is supported by conflicting findings between the effects and use of the only directly contributing policy.

As available evidence shows that S-HER-1 is being considered within marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)), it is likely not enough time has elapsed since Plan adoption for the intended positive policy effects to be realised. Findings were also mixed for the indirectly contributing policies.

However, two indirectly contributing policies (S-SCP-1 and S-TR-2) did show some positive progress towards policy aims. Findings suggest the contributing policies have yet to be effective in supporting the conservation of heritage assets, but that further monitoring is required.

Table 9: Outcomes findings for Objective 9 - To consider the seascape and its constituent marine character and visual resource and the landscape of the South Marine Plan areas

| Objective progress: positive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-SCP-1 | Positive |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-DD-1, S-TR-2 | Positive |
| S-PS-1 | Neutral |
| S-TR-1 | Inconclusive |
| S-HER-1 | Negative |

155. Policy S-SCP-1 aims to reduce or avoid negative impacts of proposals on local seascapes.

The effects of S-SCP-1 were assessed using the percentage of granted marine licence applications for activities located in areas with a high degree of visibility of the sea as seen from the land, and in less developed marine character areas (as described in [Seascape assessment for the South Marine Plan areas MMO1037](#)).

156. Outcome monitoring findings showed positive effects for S-SCP-1. Since Plan adoption, data suggests that there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of granted marine licence applications for activities located in areas of high visibility of the sea.

A similar trend was also found in the percentage of granted marine licence applications for activities located in less developed marine character areas.

157. The assessment of the effects of the directly contributing policy was limited by the existing indicator methodology which may overestimate visual impact as the result of its focus on all marine licence applications, not only those for surface or above-surface infrastructure.

Monitoring of policy effects could be improved by broadening the scope of the indicator to include only proposals capable of having a significant negative impact on seascape and activities captured by other consenting decisions (for example, nationally significant infrastructure projects).

158. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 9, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)). This conclusion is supported by evidence of implementation of directly and indirectly contributing policies in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)).

Furthermore, directly and indirectly contributing policies have shown positive

progress towards policy aims.

Findings, therefore, suggest that the contributing policies have been effective in supporting the consideration of landscape and seascape, and its constituent marine character and visual resource.

Table 10: Outcomes findings for Objective 10 - To support marine protected area objectives and a well-managed ecologically coherent network with enhanced resilience and capability to adapt to change

| Objective progress: positive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-MPA-1, S-MPA-2, S-MPA-4 | Inconclusive |
| S-MPA-3 | No data |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-BIO-2, S-BIO-3, S-CC-2, S-CC-4 | Positive |
| S-BIO-1, S-BIO-4 | Inconclusive |

159. All directly contributing policies support proposals that aim to enhance the MPA network and/or require activities to reduce or avoid negative impacts on the MPA network.

The effects of S-MPA-1 and S-MPA-2 were assessed using designated site condition assessments and changes to the condition of sites with marine components.

Data on the number and location of marine activities licensed by the MMO, as well as the number of licensed marine activities which showed how they reduced impacts to MPAs within their related marine licence applications, were also used to assess the effects of S-MPA-1 and S-MPA-2. The effects of S-MPA-4 were assessed using stakeholder survey responses.

160. Outcome monitoring findings did not provide clear evidence of policy effects for S-MPA-1, S-MPA-2 and S-MPA-4. Findings, therefore, did not allow robust conclusions on policy effects to be made, beyond 'inconclusive'.

Evidence showed a 13% increase in the total Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) area in 'destroyed', 'part destroyed' or 'unfavourable declining' condition since Plan adoption; this increase also occurred alongside a 10% decrease in the total SSSI area in 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' condition, since Plan adoption.

161. Marine licensing data showed some positive policy effects for S-MPA-1 and S-MPA-2, with all relevant marine licence applications granted within the first reporting window of the Plan showing consideration of the policies and how they were compliant with them by reducing impacts.

However, there was no evidence of marine licence applications for activities that promoted the enhancement of the MPA network having been granted since Plan adoption. This suggests these policies are not having the effect of furthering positive gains to the MPA network.

162. Whilst there are currently no monitoring measures in place to assess policy effects of S-MPA-3, evidence of policy use and compliance in marine licence decision-making (see 'Intermediate Outcomes' case study in [Section 5.2](#)) shows that proposals are considering MPA boundary changes.

However, the relatively high rate at which S-MPA-3 has been considered in marine licence decision-making may suggest that the policy is vulnerable to being misunderstood ([Section 4.2](#)).

Continued delivery of training on marine plan implementation will, therefore, facilitate and support internal and external decision-makers in the interpretation and implementation of this policy.

163. The assessment of the effects of directly contributing policies were limited by existing indicator methodologies and available data.

Changes in the condition status of MPAs could only be assessed for SSSIs with marine components, as similar data was not readily available for other MPA designations.

The total SSSI area included within the site condition data has also increased over time and is, therefore, likely to have influenced the findings. Furthermore, the condition assessments of SSSIs are surveyed infrequently at irregular intervals which does not allow for a clear assessment over time of condition.

164. The spatially defined areas used to identify relevant marine licence applications may have resulted in the low sample size obtained.

Low sample sizes in the marine licensing baseline data may also reflect the effectiveness of consenting processes that were in place before Plan adoption.

Sample sizes are expected to increase over time as new proposals are developed and licensed. The assessment of policy effects is, therefore, likely to improve with increasing time from Plan adoption.

165. Overall, findings suggest that some positive progress has been made towards Objective 10, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)).

This conclusion is supported by some evidence of implementation of directly and indirectly contributing policies in marine licensing decisions ([Annex B](#)).

Furthermore, many indirectly contributing policies have shown positive progress

towards policy aims. Low sample sizes in the marine licensing baseline data are likely to reflect the effectiveness of consenting processes that were in place before Plan adoption.

This finding suggests that policies S-MPA-1 and S-MPA-2 have not added notable value in supporting MPA objectives and the ecological coherence of the MPA network, beyond existing measures.

The effectiveness of S-MPA-4 in supporting Objective 10 is also expected to lessen as completion of the MPA network progresses ([Section 3.2](#)).

Table 11: Outcomes findings for Objective 11 - To complement and contribute to the achievement or maintenance of Good Ecological Status or Potential under the Water Framework Directive and Good Environmental Status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive with respect to descriptors for marine litter, non-indigenous species and underwater noise

| Objective progress: positive | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-UWN-1, S-WQ-1 | Positive |
| S-WQ-2 | Negative |
| S-ML-1, S-ML-2, S-NIS-1, S-UWN-2 | No data |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-BIO-2, S-BIO-3, S-CC-2, S-CC-4, S-FISH-4-HER, S-SOC-1 | Positive |
| S-BIO-1, S-BIO-4 | Inconclusive |

166. All directly contributing policies support proposals that progress towards achievement or maintenance of GES and/or require activities to reduce or avoid negative impact on the marine environment.

The effects of these policies were assessed using the following data:

- changes in the extent of coastal and marine priority habitats (S-WQ-1)
- stakeholder survey responses (S-WQ-2)
- the number of submissions (required and voluntary) to the [Marine Noise Registry service](#) (MNR) linked to marine activities licensed by the MMO (S-UWN-1)

167. Outcome monitoring findings showed some positive effects for S-UWN-1 and S-WQ-1. Overall, data showed the extent of all six coastal and marine priority habitats linked to S-WQ-1 to have increased since Plan adoption (4 square kilometres total increase).

On average, the spatial extent of the six priority habitats relevant to the policy increased by 2.5% during the first reporting window of the Plan.

168. Survey questions linked to S-WQ-2 showed an increase in the proportion of respondents reporting perceived declines in water quality since Plan adoption.

Concerns regarding water quality were also raised by stakeholders during follow-up interviews, although these were largely related to other influences outside the control of the Plan, such as nitrogen leaching, rather than the influence of the Plan on marine developments.

169. For S-UWN-1, of the nine granted marine licence applications relevant to the South Marine Plan areas identified within the MNR, 44% were recorded as having submitted planned noise data, and 33% were recorded as having submitted actual noise data to the MNR.

170. Data sources and monitoring methodologies made it difficult to assess change in the number of required and voluntary entries over time. The findings presented, therefore, represent marine activities licensed by the MMO in periods before and after Plan adoption.

Despite these limitations, the case study below suggests that S-UWN-1 has supported progress towards Objective 11.

The assessment of policy effects for S-UWN-1 is likely to improve with increasing time from Plan adoption and as the number of entries on the MNR increases. Engagement with key stakeholders may also help to improve the indicator methodology.

Case study: underwater noise

The management of man-made impulsive underwater noise plays an important role in achieving and maintaining GES of the UK marine area, as detailed in the [Marine Strategy Regulations 2010](#).

S-UWN-1 supports the achievement of GES by requiring all proposals linked to impulsive underwater noise generation to contribute data to the MNR and for decision-makers to consider the targets agreed under descriptor 11 of the Marine Strategy Part One: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status.

To fulfil its requirements under the UK Marine Strategy, and ensure that relevant proposals comply with S-UWN-1, the marine licensing function ensures that relevant proposals submit data to the MNR by either:

- notifying the MNR directly during the consultation process
- including conditions to marine licences, requiring licence holders to submit noise data to the MNR

In all cases following Plan adoption, measures were taken by the marine licensing function to ensure that impulsive underwater noise data was submitted to the MNR and these proposals submitted data to the MNR as required.

These findings, alongside evidence of policy use within marine licensing decisions ([Annex B](#)), suggest that S-UWN-1 is being applied and contributing to the evidence base on noise via the MNR and will support future decision making in the UK Marine Strategy on noise.

171. The assessment of the effects of S-WQ-2 were limited by the sole reliance on stakeholder surveys. For example, the existing methodology does not provide a means of assessing actual changes to water quality, beyond respondent perception.

Consideration should, therefore, be given to how best to monitor the effects of the directly contributing policies into the future, in consideration of other monitoring programmes.

172. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 11, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)).

This conclusion is supported by evidence of implementation of directly and indirectly contributing policies in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)), such as the use of S-NIS-1, as discussed in the ‘Intermediate Outcomes’ case study in [Section 5.2](#).

Furthermore, findings show that two directly and many indirectly contributing policies have shown positive policy effects, and progress towards policy aims. These findings, therefore, suggest a mixed picture regarding effectiveness of contributing policies.

The relative contribution of S-UWN-1 appears to be somewhat effective in supporting progress towards the objective, whereas, an assessment of other directly contributing policies’ effectiveness is either not yet clear due to the passage of time, or because of insufficient data.

Table 12: Outcomes findings for Objective 12 - To safeguard space for, and improve the quality of, the natural marine environment, including to enable continued provision of ecosystem goods and services, particularly in relation to coastal and seabed habitats, fisheries and cumulative impacts on highly mobile species

| Objective progress: positive | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Policy code | Outcome findings |
| Directly contributing policies | |
| S-BIO-2, S-BIO-3, S-FISH-4, S-FISH-4-HER | Positive |
| S-BIO-1, S-BIO-4 | Inconclusive |
| S-DD-2, S-DIST-1 | No data |
| Indirectly contributing policies | |
| S-CC-2, S-CC-4, S-CO-1, S-SOC-1 | Positive |
| S-MPA-1, S-MPA-2, S-MPA-4 | Inconclusive |
| S-AQ-1 | Negative |
| S-MPA-3 | No data |

173. All directly contributing policies seek to either support proposals that will enhance the quality of marine habitats and/or require activities to reduce their impacts, or avoid them altogether, where they may have a negative impact on marine habitats or highly mobile species.

The effects of these policies were assessed using the following data:

- changes in the extent of coastal and marine priority habitats (S-BIO-1, S-BIO-3, S-BIO-4 and S-FISH-4)
- stakeholder survey responses (S-BIO-2)
- the number, location and policy compliance of marine activities licensed by the MMO (S-FISH-4-HER)

174. Outcome monitoring findings showed positive effects associated with S-BIO-3 and S-FISH-4.

Overall, data showed that the extent of all six priority habitats relevant to S-BIO-3 to have increased by 2.5% in total spatial extent since Plan adoption.

Both priority habitats relevant to S-FISH-4 were also found to have increased by 2.3% in total spatial extent since Plan adoption.

175. Monitoring findings also showed positive effects for S-FISH-4-HER. There has been a 55% increase in the number of granted marine licences demonstrating compliance with S-FISH-4-HER by including measures to reduce negative impacts to spawning herring.

176. The assessment of policy effects was limited by the available data on the extent of coastal and marine priority habitats, which provides incomplete coverage of priority habitats.

The reported increases in the extent of priority habitats are also unlikely to have been influenced by S-BIO-3 and S-FISH-4, due to the short time elapsed since Plan adoption and the time periods required for priority habitats to establish and expand their spatial extent.

177. Overall, findings suggest that positive progress has been made towards Objective 12, and the HLMOs to which it is linked ([Annex A](#)).

This conclusion is supported by evidence of implementation of directly and indirectly contributing policies in marine licence decision-making ([Annex B](#)).

Furthermore, many directly and indirectly contributing policies have shown positive progress towards policy aims; S-FISH-4-HER in particular has been very effective in progressing towards Objective 12.

Findings suggest that S-FISH-4-HER has been effective; whilst other contributing

policy outcomes have been broadly positive, it is too soon to determine the effectiveness of these policies in supporting the safeguarding and enhancement of the natural marine environment.

The objective, however, covers a wide range of topics and so not all aspects may demonstrate this trend. For example, there was no assessment of the cumulative impacts of marine developments on highly mobile species.

5.3 Concluding statement

178. Outcome monitoring looks at the real-world changes resulting from the marine planning process.

Outcome monitoring assesses effects of policies, and progress towards Plan objectives, and therefore the contribution towards relevant HLMOs, as well as the effectiveness of Plan policies that underpin achievement of relevant Plan objectives.

179. Some positive progress towards securing 11 of the Plan objectives has been made, with findings inconclusive for one objective (Objective 8).

Progress towards Plan objectives also show a contribution towards the HLMOs ([Annex A](#)). As this is the first three-year reporting cycle for the Plan, evidence of policy use has been primary to underpinning these conclusions.

Outcome monitoring shows that in many cases effects are occurring in line with policy intent. However, there are many instances of either insufficient or inconclusive data which limits conclusions on policy effects and effectiveness drawn from outcome findings at this stage.

180. Achievement of the HLMOs is wider in scope than the contribution of the Plan through certain policy or Plan objective specific outcomes. The implementation of the Plan represents a successful step towards 'promoting good governance' and 'using sound science responsibly'.

181. Monitoring showed a mix of outcome findings for policies, with many indicating positive effects, whilst for others not enough time had yet passed for findings to be indicative of outcomes influenced by Plan policy. In some cases, the data available was inconclusive or did not demonstrate a trend.

182. Higher confidence can be placed in the assessment of policy effects and effectiveness where monitoring data related to outcomes that can be observed and influenced over a shorter time period.

An example of this are the more spatially specific policies in the Plan, and the locational data for consented activities that is used to monitor them.

Outcome findings for these policies have shown them to be effective at increasing relevant considerations being taken, and at decreasing proposals sited in areas where they may have a negative impact.

183. For policies, such as those addressing aquaculture and heritage (S-AQ-2 and S-HER-1), for which negative findings were observed since Plan adoption, it is difficult to ascertain how, or if, the observed changes have been influenced by the relevant Plan policies. It is likely too soon for the policies to have influenced these findings.

However, it is indicative that these policies, so far, have proved ineffective. Improvements to our monitoring methodology may need to be made to better understand the effect these policies are having before a potential change to Plan content is clearly warranted.

184. At this stage it is too soon to determine the effectiveness of many of the policies in securing Plan objectives.

Outcome findings for policies that may require longer before measurable policy effects become evident, such as those contributing to Objectives 2, 3, 4, and 6, limit understanding of the effectiveness of these policies in this reporting cycle.

Conclusion and next steps

185. Improvements to monitoring, implementation and Plan content have been identified to address most outstanding limitations.
186. The Plan remains relevant to the MPS HLMOs and broadly aligned with current issues as well as both national and local priorities.

Context monitoring did identify some relevant matters that suggest targeted sections of the Plan could be amended to ensure alignment with current issues and national priorities is maintained.

Any changes to improve or update information and signposting could be made at the same time.

These matters alone, however, do not fundamentally undermine the continued relevance of the Plan.

187. Process monitoring has demonstrated positive progress towards the Plan embedding in the decision-making process within this first reporting window.

While limitations in process monitoring remain, many can be addressed through the continued provision of, and improvement to, existing implementation and monitoring processes.

188. Outcome monitoring findings suggest that positive progress is being made towards almost all objectives, with many policies evidencing positive effects. However, in many cases it is still too soon for longer term policy-influenced outcomes to have occurred.

There is a need to continually improve aspects of outcome monitoring to reduce data gaps and increase confidence in future monitoring efforts.

Over time policies are expected to become more embedded in decision-making and so will increase in impact.

Alongside the continued passage of time, this will allow for higher confidence in attributing observed outcomes to the influence of the Plan.

189. The MMO and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) are currently considering the needs of future marine plans.

While a decision is still to be determined as to what the scope and approach to the preparation of future marine plans will include, the outcome does not have a bearing on the conclusion of this report.

In the future, it may be relevant to consider the conclusions of this report again in line with a future scope of marine plan preparation.

190. Informed by this report, the MMO will provide a recommendation to ministers on whether or not to amend or replace the South Marine Plan.

Annex A: high level marine objectives and corresponding South Marine Plan objectives

| | High level marine objective | South Marine Plan objective |
|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Achieving a sustainable marine economy | Infrastructure is in place to support and promote safe, profitable and efficient marine businesses. | 2, 3 |
| | The marine environment and its resources are used to maximise sustainable activity, prosperity and opportunities for all, now and in the future. | 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 |
| | Marine businesses are taking long term strategic decisions and managing risks effectively. They are competitive and operating efficiently. | 1, 2, 3, 7 |
| | Marine businesses are acting in a way which respects environmental limits and is socially responsible. This is rewarded in the marketplace. | 1, 2, 7, 11 |
| Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society | People appreciate the diversity of the marine environment, its seascapes, natural and cultural heritage and its resources, and act responsibly. | 5, 6, 8, 9 |
| | The use of the marine environment is benefiting society, contributing to resilient and cohesive communities that can adapt to coastal erosion and flood risk, as well as contributing to physical and mental well-being. | 5, 6, 7 |
| | The coast, seas, oceans and their resources are safe to use. | 7 |
| | The marine environment plays an important role in mitigating climate change. | 12 |
| | There is equitable access for those who want to use and enjoy the coast, seas and their wide range of resources, assets and recognition that for some island and peripheral communities the sea plays a significant role in their community. | 6, 12 |
| | Use of the marine environment will recognise, and integrate with, defence priorities, including the strengthening of international peace and stability and the defence of the United Kingdom and its interests. | 1 |
| | Biodiversity is protected, conserved and, where appropriate, recovered, and loss has been halted | 10 |

| High level marine objective | | South Marine Plan objective |
|------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Living within environmental limits | Healthy marine and coastal habitats occur across their natural range and are able to support strong, biodiverse biological communities and the functioning of healthy, resilient and adaptable marine ecosystems. | 10, 12 |
| | Our oceans support viable populations of representative, rare, vulnerable, and valued species. | 10, 11 |
| | All those who have a stake in the marine environment have an input into associated decision-making. | 1, 2 |
| Promoting good governance | Marine, land and water management mechanisms are responsive and work effectively together for example through integrated coastal zone management and river basin management plans. | 12 |
| | Marine management in the United Kingdom takes account of different management systems that are in place because of administrative, political or international boundaries. | 2, 3 |
| | Marine businesses are subject to clear, timely, proportionate and, where appropriate, plan-led regulation. | 1, 2, 7, 11 |
| | The use of the marine environment is spatially planned where appropriate and based on an ecosystems approach which takes account of climate change and recognises the protection and management needs of marine cultural heritage according to its significance. | 1, 2, 7, 8 |
| Using sound science responsibly | Our understanding of the marine environment continues to develop through new scientific and socio-economic research and data collection. | All objectives |
| | Sound evidence and monitoring underpins effective marine management and policy development. | All objectives |
| | The precautionary principle is applied consistently in accordance with the United Kingdom government and devolved administrations' sustainable development policy. | All objectives |

Annex B: policy implementation in marine licence decision-making

Breakdown of MMO policy-level decisions for marine licence applications with completed policy assessments (n=82) granted between 17 July 2018 and 16 July 2020. The term ‘not applicable’ refers to instances where marine plan policies were ‘scoped out’ of the assessment. The information presented represents just one measure of policy use by the MMO in the marine licensing decision-making process.

