

# Our seas – a shared resource

## High level marine objectives



**The Government vision is  
for clean, healthy, safe,  
productive and biologically  
diverse oceans and seas**



# Foreword

Our seas are shared and valued by everyone – for work, leisure and food. They support valuable habitats and a wide range of species depend on them. They play a vital role in mitigating climate change and providing many important marine resources.

In 2002 the UK Government and Devolved Administrations set out their vision for the marine environment of *clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas*.

Taking forward this vision, the UK Government, Northern Ireland Executive and Welsh Assembly Government invited views, in June 2008, on a number of high level marine objectives. These objectives articulated the outcomes they are seeking for the UK marine area as a whole, while taking account of their distinctive circumstances and responsibilities. The Scottish Government included these objectives in *Sustainable seas for all – a consultation on Scotland's first marine bill* in July 2008.

We appreciate your responses to both consultations and have taken account of them in developing our marine objectives. Comments from stakeholders from across the UK supported common high level objectives for all UK waters. This document now expresses the high level objectives for all the UK Administrations, including the Scottish Government, in response to these comments.

We will be using these objectives to underpin development of a Marine Policy Statement. This Statement, which is provided for in the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, will set out our policies to contribute to achievement of sustainable development in the UK marine area. It will set a clear and consistent framework for coastal and marine planners, regulators and users, helping everyone to work towards common objectives in UK waters. The Statement will guide the development of marine plans, which the Bill is also introducing, and provide a clear tool for decision-making.

We want everyone to have the opportunity to shape the Marine Policy Statement and to work together to prepare marine plans for their local areas.



**Huw Irranca-Davies, MP**  
UK Government Minister for the  
Natural and Marine Environment,  
Wildlife and Rural Affairs



**Richard Lochhead, MSP**  
Cabinet Secretary for Rural  
Affairs and the Environment,  
Scottish Government



**Sammy Wilson, MP MLA**  
Minister of the Environment,  
Northern Ireland Executive



**Jane Davidson, AM**  
Minister for Environment,  
Sustainability and Housing,  
Welsh Assembly Government

# Why we need marine objectives

Defra Photo Library



These high level marine objectives do not replace previously articulated policies or goals, nor do they represent any change in or re-prioritisation of Government objectives. Earlier statements and policies have had a primary focus on sectoral interests, and were focused on processes the UK Government and Devolved Administrations would use to deliver their marine vision.

The high level objectives reflect the full range of the UK Government and Devolved Administrations' policies in the marine area, rather than the priorities of any particular Government Department, for example in relation to specific marine uses or marine environment conservation. It is by considering sectoral interests holistically that we hope to achieve sustainability. A reference list of previously-made commitments relating to the marine area will be maintained at [www.defra.gov.uk/marine/environment/mps.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/marine/environment/mps.htm)

These are the key policies which will drive the particular sectoral and cross-sectoral interests which will need to be integrated.

The articulation of these high level objectives starts the process of the preparation of an integrated Marine Policy Statement by all Administrations across the UK. This Policy Statement will prioritise different policies and objectives where required. It will provide a practical tool for organisations that make decisions in the marine area and therefore a framework for achieving sustainable development in the marine area and the wider context.

## We intend that these objectives will:

- steer Administrations and the wider public sector in their (joint) achievement of sustainable development in the marine area and the wider context;
- steer, inform and educate the public, business and voluntary sectors in their actions and attitudes;
- underpin the UK approach to negotiation and implementation of European and international marine policy; and
- underpin the development of an integrated Marine Policy Statement by Administrations which will provide a means to achieve these objectives in practice.

The objectives are designed to provide a comprehensive set of outcomes which will drive UK Government and Devolved Administrations' marine policies in a coherent and consistent way. This is in line with the integrated approach that Administrations are proposing to take through new legislation. However, whilst Administrations will seek to deliver integrated solutions that meet socio-economic and environmental objectives equally, we recognise that individual decisions may have a negative impact on the achievement of some of our objectives – truly sustainable development will require difficult choices.

It is for this reason that we have chosen to set out our high level objectives in sections that reflect the five principles of sustainable development.<sup>1</sup> Whilst we will integrate these potentially conflicting objectives in decision making, we have unpacked the individual elements at this stage simply to allow us to identify explicitly and transparently the full range of objectives in the marine area.

# What success would look like...

In twenty years our marine environment will be very different. We will have achieved our vision of **clean, safe, healthy, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas**, the “Good Environmental Status” required by the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the “Good Status” required by the European Water Framework Directive.

Effective, integrated and strategic management of human activities in the marine environment will result in society getting more benefit from the use of the marine environment than previously, whilst its rich natural and cultural heritage are better protected – we will be achieving sustainable development in the marine area and the wider context.

Climate change will have driven change both in relation to the environment itself and the way in which people use it. Renewable energy developments will be commonplace and Carbon Capture and Storage will be underway. The environmental impacts of using the marine environment will be managed in this context and account will be taken of the changing acidity and temperature that will already be affecting our oceans and seas. We will be responding to this in our actions so that the integrity of marine and coastal ecosystems and marine cultural heritage is conserved.



We will be using the sea for a variety of reasons, delivering greater economic and social benefits. However, marine planning means that activities in the marine environment will co-exist and that the impacts of different activities on each other and on the environment will be properly taken into account and managed consistently. Marine industries as a whole will be generating wealth for the nation.

People will respect the marine environment for its own sake, for the resources it delivers and for the role it has played in shaping our culture.

Consumers of marine products, for example offshore renewable energy or seafood, will expect these to have been obtained sustainably, and producers will therefore ensure that the environmental and social impacts of their operations are assessed with this in mind. Those who use the marine environment will behave responsibly. Underwater noise will be restricted to levels that do not significantly affect the marine environment and litter will be disposed of in ways which do not harm the marine environment. Regulation of the seas will facilitate safe navigation, and management for the coastal zone will support sustainable development and the cultural heritage of coastal areas. There will be appropriate protection for, and access to, our marine heritage assets and important recreational sites. The diversity of seascape character around our coastline will be maintained.

Our seas will be cleaner and healthier than they are now and they will be ecologically diverse and dynamic. Pollutants, contaminants and toxins will be at levels that do not significantly affect human or ecosystem health. Ecosystems will be resilient to environmental change so that they deliver the goods and services we need for present and future generations. Representative, rare, vulnerable and valued species and habitats will be protected. Measures will be in place to make sure that there is no net loss of biodiversity as a result of human activity and that non-indigenous species introduced by humans do not adversely affect the ecosystem. Measures such as an ecologically coherent network of well-managed Marine Protected Areas will help deliver this and in some cases enable ecosystems to recover from previous damage. Fish stocks will be abundant and harvested sustainably, with access to them shared appropriately between commercial and recreational fishermen.

In the long term, management of human activities in the marine environment will be such as to secure long-term benefits for the whole of society, therefore delivering sustainable development in the marine area and the wider context.

# Marine objectives

Our high level objectives are articulated below in the context of the five sustainable development principles. They set out the outcomes sought by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations. Our actions and regulatory structure will support the delivery of these outcomes to achieve sustainability. However, everyone has a responsibility to help secure these outcomes.

The way in which the objectives are presented below does not indicate any priority between objectives or bullet points.

## Achieving a sustainable marine economy

- Infrastructure is in place to support and promote safe, profitable and efficient marine businesses.
- The marine environment and its resources are used to maximise sustainable activity, prosperity and opportunities for all, now and in the future.
- Marine businesses are taking long-term strategic decisions and managing risks effectively. They are competitive and operating efficiently.
- Marine businesses are acting in a way which respects environmental limits and is socially responsible. This is rewarded in the marketplace.



Paul Leonard

## Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society

- People appreciate the diversity of the marine environment, its seascapes, its natural and cultural heritage and its resources and act responsibly.
- The use of the marine environment is benefiting society as a whole, contributing to resilient and cohesive communities that can adapt to coastal erosion and flood risk, as well as contributing to physical and mental wellbeing.
- The coast, seas, oceans and their resources are safe to use.
- The marine environment plays an important role in mitigating climate change.
- There is equitable access for those who want to use and enjoy the coast, seas and their wide range of resources and assets and recognition that for some island and peripheral communities the sea plays a significant role in their community.
- 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.



## Living within environmental limits

- Biodiversity is protected, conserved and, where appropriate, recovered, and loss has been halted.
- 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.
- Our oceans support viable populations of representative, rare, vulnerable, and valued species.

## Promoting good governance

- All those who have a stake in the marine environment have an input into associated decision-making.
- Marine, land and water management mechanisms are responsive and work effectively together for example through integrated coastal zone management and river basin management plans.
- Marine management in the UK takes account of different management systems that are in place because of administrative, political or international boundaries.
- Marine businesses are subject to clear, timely, proportionate and, where appropriate, plan-led regulation.

- 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.

## Using sound science responsibly

- Our understanding of the marine environment continues to develop through new scientific and socio-economic research and data collection.
- Sound evidence and monitoring underpins effective marine management and policy development.
- The precautionary principle is applied consistently in accordance with the UK Government and Devolved Administrations' sustainable development policy.



# Delivering the objectives

The wide range of existing policies that will contribute to delivering these high level objectives will be integrated and reflected in the work to prepare a UK Marine Policy Statement.

The UK Government and Devolved Administrations will be developing the Marine Policy Statement over the next two years. The Policy Statement will set

out their relative priorities for the marine area and will also identify how marine delivery agencies, such as the proposed Marine Management Organisation for England, should approach the difficult choices that will need to be made to achieve sustainable development in the marine area and the wider context.

## Monitoring and reporting on our progress

The UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy (UKMMAS) sets the framework within which we collaborate in assembling the evidence necessary to monitor progress towards our vision.

Indicators and contributory objectives are being developed within the various UKMMAS groups

and will address some aspects of the high level objectives in this paper. They will be a key means of informing us about how we are progressing towards our vision and will give us the evidence necessary to adapt and refine our policies to respond to the changing state of the marine environment.



Defra Photo Library



## What we mean by:

### Ecosystems approach

The ecosystems approach has been defined in various ways, but the core of the approach lies in integrating and managing the range of demands placed on the natural environment in such a way that it can be conserved and indefinitely support essential services and provide benefits for all.

### Ecosystem goods and services

The processes by which the environment produces resources utilised by humans such as clean air, water, food and materials.

### Marine businesses

Businesses using or benefiting from the marine environment in any capacity.

### Marine cultural heritage

The historic environment of the seas includes individual sites and assets of historic, archaeological, architectural or artistic interest, whether or not they are afforded statutory protection by heritage protection legislation.

### Precautionary principle

Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing proportionate and cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

### Role in mitigating climate change

A part to play in decelerating the process of global climate change by lowering the level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere:

- by accommodation of technologies, such as renewable energy installations, which contribute to this aim
- by its continued role in regulating our climate by acting as a natural carbon sink via both biological and physical (ocean circulation) processes.

### Safe

A state which enables people to feel secure and confident in using the coasts, oceans and seas, because associated dangers (such as from pollution, litter or navigation hazards) are eliminated where possible; because people are educated to avoid dangers where they cannot be eliminated; and because systems are in place to help people to overcome dangers if they are encountered.

### Seascape

An area of sea, coastline and land, whose character results from the actions and interactions of land with sea, by natural and/or human factors.

### Viable populations

The population level of a species that ensures it is capable of continued, self-sustained survival.




# Where to find more information

You can find more information on

- The UK Marine Policy Statement at: [www.defra.gov.uk/marine/environment/policy.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/marine/environment/policy.htm)
- Marine and coastal issues in Northern Ireland at:  
[www.doeni.gov.uk/index/protect\\_the\\_environment/natural\\_environment/marine\\_and\\_coast.htm](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/protect_the_environment/natural_environment/marine_and_coast.htm)  
and [www.dardni.gov.uk/index/fisheries-farming-and-food/fisheries.htm](http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/fisheries-farming-and-food/fisheries.htm)
- The Scottish marine and coastal environment at:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Directorates/Wealthier-and-Fairer/marine-scotland](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Directorates/Wealthier-and-Fairer/marine-scotland)
- Marine and coastal issues in Wales at: [www.wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/?lang=en](http://www.wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/?lang=en)





Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR  
Telephone: 020 7238 6000  
Website: [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2009

PB 13258



Published by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.  
Printed on recycled paper containing 80% post-consumer waste  
and 20% totally chlorine free virgin pulp. Please recycle if possible.