



Scoping of a robust strategic assessment tool for co-existence of activities in marine plan areas

Aim

The project aimed to scope a robust and flexible approach to the assessment of co-existence that could be applied to all marine sectors and activities identified in the Marine Policy Statement.

The approach should be suitable for use by all relevant Marine Management Organisation (MMO) functions and should incorporate environmental, social and economic variables.

Introduction and methodology

It is becoming more important that space within the marine environment is used effectively to ensure activities can be carried out in a sustainable manner with minimal conflict between users. Effective use of space can be enabled through co-existence of activities – defined in the draft East marine plans as "where multiple development, activities or uses can exist alongside or close to each other in the same place and/or at the same time".

Co-existence generally requires co-operation of two or more marine users and it may also be possible to facilitate this co-operation and co-existence through targeted policies within marine plans. Careful assessment of both the positive and negative consequences of co-existence in addition to consideration of the cost of any mitigation measures necessary to achieve successful co-existence of activities will be essential to the success of this.

This project was commissioned to explore how MMO functions like marine planning and marine licensing might need to consider and assess co-existence. The report provides recommendations for the most suitable approach.

MMO staff members were consulted on their potential requirements for assessment of the cost and benefit of co-existence in their roles.

A review of existing assessment tools and approaches was performed. The outputs of these exercises informed the development of an outline framework approach that could be applied to the assessment of co-existence.

Results

A number of high level requirements for co-existence assessment were identified during consultation and were incorporated into the scoping of the framework:

- economic, social and environmental variables must be considered
- the approach must be flexible, proportionate and transparent
- the assessment must be informed by robust science and data proportionate to the scale of assessment
- spatial scales should be strategic or regional for marine planning and site specific for marine licensing
- temporal scales should be relevant to the activities under assessment

The proposed framework compares a co-existence versus no-coexistence scenario and seeks to qualify, and where possible quantify, potential implications of each to establish the relative cost or benefit of co-existence. The framework is applied at 3 stepped levels:

1. screening is the first step and should identify locations or situations where co-existence cannot occur
2. initial assessment is where co-existence can potentially occur, a qualitative or semi-quantitative assessment of potential interactions between activities or between activities and the natural environment may be carried out
3. detailed assessment is where appropriate data is available, a detailed quantitative assessment may be performed building on previous assessments



Scoping of a robust strategic assessment tool for co-existence of activities in marine plan areas

The assessment must be underpinned by a comprehensive evidence base and therefore the level at which the assessment is completed is determined by the availability of information for the assessment.

Conclusions and recommendations

Current information limitations at the plan-level preclude the use of detailed assessments in marine planning. However, in some cases where required to support option development and appraisal and plan policy development, it may be possible to collect additional data to allow initial assessments in addition to the screening step.

At the project level (such as in marine licensing) and if driven by policy requirements, initial project-specific assessments might be undertaken by developers at the screening or scoping stage with more detailed project-specific assessments at the pre-application stage. If this were required, high level guidance on co-existence assessment would help ensure consistency and robustness of assessments.

Detailed assessments could also identify potential management measures and the associated costs and benefits for activities that might be able to co-exist within marine protected areas. This process is effectively being followed for the current conservation assessment processes for commercial fishing activities affecting Natura 2000 sites and for identification of management measures within marine conservation zones.

The report recommends that the MMO fully develops and adopts the proposed framework for co-existence assessment by:

- defining relevant mandatory protection zones and buffers applicable to the screening step, in agreement with stakeholders

- developing a series of interaction tables with stakeholder input to identify the main interactions between activities, identify methods for assessing the interactions, identify information requirements to support application of the co-existence assessment methodology and also identify relevant existing information sources
- trialling the screening process within marine planning to evaluate a range of potential co-existence opportunities using available data
- trialling the assessment process or processes within marine planning in the long term – this will help identify information gaps
- if appropriate, developing high-level guidance for co-existence assessment in support of marine licences
- maintaining relevant spatial data layers for the co-existence framework in accordance with existing data management practices
- updating information on the costs of impacts and mitigation measures every 2 years

MMO comments

The project provides a useful indication of the level of information required to fully consider and assess co-existence at scales relevant to MMO functions. It also proposes a potential approach to facilitate consideration of co-existence by MMO as required under existing policy.

The development of tools to facilitate appropriate consideration of co-existence in MMO functions is an on-going process. The approach and recommendations within this report will help inform the next steps of this work.

Further information

Please direct any correspondence to the Evidence Team by emailing evidence@marinemanagement.org.uk