Seascape Assessment for the South Inshore and Offshore Marine Plan Areas

Aim

The project aimed to provide a seascape assessment including a character study and visual resource mapping for the South inshore and offshore marine plan areas. It also included development of an approach to visual resource mapping for future marine plan areas.

Introduction and methodology

The MMO required a character assessment for the South Marine Plan areas to support marine planning. The Marine Policy Statement outlines that for all coastal areas visual, cultural, historical and archaeological impacts should be considered at a strategic level and any wider social and economic impacts of developments on seascape should also be considered. This requires evidence both to characterise the Inshore and Offshore areas and to determine the visual resource of seascape from land.

The seascape assessment followed the approach developed by Natural England and applied to the East inshore and Offshore Marine Plan Areas[1]. The assessments were developed using:

- a review of descriptive and quantitative information listed by theme in the seascape wheel,
- field studies by boat,
- six stakeholder workshops, and
- consultation on the draft outputs.

A steering group was used to guide the work and included the MMO, Natural England, English Heritage and Defra.

Evidence gathered related to bedrock geology, bathymetry, biodiversity, cultural heritage, human activities and landscape and seascape designations. The Shell Channel Pilot was also used for preparing the descriptions.

A method to develop visual resource mapping was explored and agreed by the steering group. Maps of visual resource aligned to the marine character areas for comparability were produced.

The approach to visual resource mapping is a new method, developed specifically for this project that builds on aspects of previous work. This work was carried out and presented using Geographic Information System (GIS) tools.

The approach for both the character assessment and the visual resource mapping is described in the accompanying technical report so that it can be replicated if necessary.

Results

Following a review of evidence and consultation with stakeholders fourteen marine character areas (MCA) have been agreed, eleven adjacent to the coast and three offshore in the English Channel.

The technical report contains notes from the discussion at stakeholder workshops.

Each MCA is presented separately and includes the visual resource maps for that character area. Each MCA consists of information on:

- location and boundaries,
- overall character,
- adjacent national character areas,
- adjacent nationally protected landscapes,
- key characteristics,
- natural influences,
- cultural/social influences,
- aesthetic and perceptual qualities,
- land with views of the MCA, and
- visibility of sea from land.

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[1]

http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/marineplanning/areas/east_seascape.htm

The visual resource mapping establishes areas of high to low visibility within MCAs and provides brief descriptions of the main highlights of the work for each MCA. The maps firstly look at views of the MCA. Secondly, there are maps of visibility of sea from land that are presented at 0-1km, 1-5km, 5-10km and 10-20km from the high water mark on land. Finally, a map of the relative visibility of viewers on land is displayed.

Conclusions and recommendations

This seascape assessment has been produced for marine planning purposes. It fulfils a requirement outlined in the Marine Policy Statement. The project presents a character study and visual resource mapping for the South Marine Plan areas and an approach to develop visual resource mapping for future marine plan areas in England.

The work has used the recommendations from previous work carried out by Natural England on the East inshore and offshore marine plan areas to engage with stakeholders and include field assessment in the development of seascape assessment.

It should be noted that the assessment is an objective not a subjective view of seascape character and visual resource.

The technical report has some recommendations for ensuring future assessment and mapping work is carried out to an appropriate standard.

It also highlights that in order to use the information for making planning decisions work on establishing value and sensitivity would be required to provide the qualitative information.

There are also further refinements that could be made to visual resource inputs for a more detailed analysis.

MMO comments

The South seascape assessment is the first assessment of its type in England to include a character study and visual resource mapping.

The assessment has been shaped in consideration of the marine policy statement, the development of marine plan policy and lessons learned in the East.

The South seascape assessment is valuable in the development of an evidence base for marine planning purposes. The assessment can be used to add a 'sense of place' to the South marine plans.

Visual resource mapping is a new concept in England that will add clarity to the decision making process. It is expected to reduce the burden on decision makers and developers during the application process.

The use of the existing approach to characterisation along with the new approach to visual resource mapping will be used as a template for future marine plan areas.

Further information

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