



# Review of the marine planning monitoring and evaluation framework and development of baselines

## Aim

The primary aim of this project was to review the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework presented in the MMO's East marine plans Implementation and Monitoring Plan (IMP) to assess whether it is fit for purpose and provides a framework that can be utilised for subsequent marine plans, and where necessary make recommendations for improvements. A key area in this regard was the counterfactual<sup>1</sup>. The project specifically reviews the options for counterfactuals, considered their appropriateness and provided guidance on how counterfactuals may be utilised in a marine plan evaluation.

## Introduction and methodology

There is a legal requirement under section 61 the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) (MCAA) to monitor and review the effectiveness of marine plans. The overall monitoring approach, developed for the East marine plans, will be used as a framework for all marine plans whilst recognising that the marine planning process is still developing. As such there is a requirement to ensure that the framework is fit for purpose.

The study consisted of two parts. Part A undertook a structured review of the East M&E framework, exploring a defined set of research questions, set out under six review criteria. The approach sequentially addressed each of the research questions to understand where there may be weaknesses and how they may be addressed. Part B reviewed possible approaches for baselines and counterfactuals and provided conclusions on their relevance to marine plan evaluation.

<sup>1</sup> A counterfactual describes the situation that would occur had the policy intervention not taken place.

## Results

This project has explored the viability of using the East M&E framework for future marine plan M&E. The report identifies some issues that may need addressing to increase certainty that the framework completely meets the monitoring requirements of the MCAA. Recommendations made in Part A describe methods by which the framework can be refined to ensure that it fully complies with the MCAA.

The report also explored various methods for deriving the counterfactual, whilst the approaches discussed may not be applicable to marine plans a recommendation is made that a form of contributory analysis evaluation is undertaken.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The approach taken satisfies the basic M&E requirements of the MCAA and as such can be used as a framework to draft IMPs for future plan areas. However in order to fully satisfy the requirements of the MCAA a number of issues should be addressed.

The primary recommendation from the report is that the components of the logic chains should be re-specified to provide an understanding of how plan policies affect the higher order indicators (those to the far right of the chain) and provide a basis for articulating the contribution to the achievement of plan and high level marine objectives. It is expected that the logic chain should seek to include some of the intermediate outcomes that plan policies are trying to express, it is here that it is expected marine plan policies have the most effect. Describing the intermediate outcomes will also serve to reduce the reliance on assumptions within the logic chain by reducing the logical jump between steps.



The M&E framework does not fully satisfy the relevance criterion as it omits methodologies to enable economic evaluation. It is recognised that the approaches discussed in the Magenta Book may not be appropriate for marine plans as the financial benefits may not be discernible over the short to medium term. However, a series of questions are presented that could help to understand the value of a marine plan.

Where policy signals are weak and non-experimental counterfactual approaches are employed, the importance of explicitly accounting for external factors is heightened. A poor understanding of what these external factors are, how significant they are and how they have changed over the period under evaluation will limit the extent to which conclusions can draw on causality and attribution. Effort should be made up front within the M&E framework to identify relevant external factors and potential indicators so that baseline and time series data can be collected and used to help interpret observed effects.

## MMO comments

This report provides a critical analysis of the East marine plans IMP and makes recommendations for improvement to enable the framework to be used in the development of future marine plan IMPs. The recommendations have already been applied to the development of the South marine plans monitoring plan.

## Further information

Please direct any correspondence to the Evidence Team by emailing [evidence@marinemanagement.org.uk](mailto:evidence@marinemanagement.org.uk)