Exploring the Potential of Using Office for National Statistics (ONS) Data for Marine Planning

Aim

The aim of this report is to explore the potential of using Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, to improve Marine Management Organisation's (MMO) social and economic evidence base related to marine sectors and communities within the marine plan areas. This information can contribute to the development, implementation and monitoring of English marine plans and overall to sustainable development in the marine environment. In this framework, the report highlights the challenges of using ONS socio-economic data and considers their relative suitability to MMO's requirements.

Introduction and methodology

Socio-economic evidence is required by MMO to support implementation of a marine planning system that integrates the social requirements, economic potential and the environmental imperatives of our seas within a framework for managing sustainably the marine environment. Improving socio-economic evidence to support English marine plans is in line with MMO's Strategic Evidence Plan and exploring synergies with ONS is a cost-effective way to meet MMO needs.

In this context, the project's primary objective was to outline where both social and economic evidence and data was required in the marine planning process in order to investigate the possibility of retrieving it from ONS. Specific data requirements were identified along with sector and spatial challenges. Important socio-economic metrics were selected building on published and on-going MMO projects and an assessment of suitability of datasets for marine planning was performed. Data access points and sources were also highlighted and recommendations were made.

Finally, the South marine plan areas were used as a case study to demonstrate the potential of employing ONS data.

Close engagement and consultation with ONS experts was necessary to the success of this project.

Results

This project has explored the potential of working with the ONS to provide data that matches the marine plan boundaries and relates to the industrial sectors that are of interest within marine planning. Through the work carried out, a method has been established by which data to support many metrics (e.g., Gross Value Added (GVA), employment, economically inactive rate, life satisfaction etc.) can be derived for each marine plan area, from sources that will be consistently collected.

Other key products of this project were the presentation of example metrics covering the South Inshore and Offshore Marine Plan Areas using ONS data, as well as related data source recommendations and limitations. In particular, recommended data sources included published data such as Virtual Microdata Laboratory (VML), Nomis, Annual Business Survey (ABS) Special Analysis and Regional Accounts data.

Analysis of the ONS data revealed that the metrics that have been identified have strengths and weaknesses. They are only a partial representation of all relevant factors to be considered for a full socio-economic characterisation, while some sectors are difficult to separate (e.g., marine recreation and coastal tourism from other recreation). Nevertheless, economic data is available through ONS on the majority of the relevant economic sectors, while both quantitative and qualitative social information have the potential

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to provide a good degree of insight into key areas of social change within coastal areas.

Conclusions and recommendations

Despite specific exemptions and limitations, it has been acknowledged that the use of data from regularly conducted, independent surveys means that reliable information will be available on a consistent basis year after year. This enables an assessment to be made of the relative importance of different marine economic sectors, and for changes to be tracked over time. It also provides insight into the social and attitudinal characteristics of the population affected by marine plans.

Inevitably there is a level of geographical imprecision due to certain local authorities having extensive inland areas and the need for apportionment of certain sectoral information (e.g., marine recreation and coastal tourism are difficult to separate from other recreation). However, ONS data can in large part meet the sectoral challenge, where it is available, at the maximum level of detail offered through the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system of coding. The same holds for the geographical challenge. Local authority boundaries can be mapped closely to the adjoining marine plan areas. In addition, one of the key benefits of using ONS data is that it enables temporal data challenges to be overcome as it becomes available at a recurring basis.

Overall, within the data already collected by ONS, it appears that many of MMO's needs could be met. Furthermore, it is noted that considering introducing new survey work to collect additional data on marine sector activity is expected to be harder to implement, especially if it necessitates the development of new industrial codings with specific relevance to marine industries.

MMO comments

This report explores the potential of improving MMO's socio-economic evidence by making use of ONS available data. In particular, the final output informs MMO about the ONS data suitability in terms of a source of geographically relevant and temporally continuous data that can be used to support the marine planning process.

Further information

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