



Social Research Strategy

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1. Purpose

The Social Research Strategy (SRS) has been developed to set the focus and direction for the MMO's social evidence and research programme. Socio-economics have been identified as one of the eight priority research areas outlined in the Strategic Evidence Plan (SEP)¹. The cross-cutting nature of social research across the MMO's priority research programmes and the MMO operational functions stimulated the development of this SRS as an important addendum to the SEP.

The purpose of this strategy is to enable the MMO to develop its social research capacity and capability, so that it can fully integrate social considerations into not only marine planning but also licensing, fisheries management and conservation. This SRS informs the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and other relevant bodies of the MMO's priorities for social research and facilitates partnership working in this important area.

2. Introduction

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) was established in 2010 "to make a significant contribution to sustainable development in the marine area"². Its purpose is to "set the standard in integrating the social, environmental and economic considerations in the marine and coastal environment"³. The MMO is committed to basing its decisions on the best available evidence and information. This should provide an understanding of the social dimension of the marine area (which includes the associated coastal zone), as much as it does the economic and environmental dimensions. The MMO has agreed that:

The Social Research Strategy sets out MMO's ambition relating to the use of best available evidence from social research in the management of marine activities to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in England's seas.

Achieving this objective through the SRS is also important because as a relatively new organisation with a challenging remit, the MMO needs to ensure that the evidence it uses is comprehensive and robust; so that the decisions that it makes are trusted by stakeholders who are affected and can stand up to scrutiny. The risk of losing the confidence of stakeholders is underlined by the 'Independent review of the evidence process for selecting marine special areas of conservation'⁴ and Defra's response to this

¹ Strategic Evidence Plan. www.marinemanagement.org.uk/about/publications.htm#sep

² MMO Corporate Plan 2012-15. Foreword. www.marinemanagement.org.uk

³ MMO Corporate Plan 2012-15. Foreword. www.marinemanagement.org.uk

⁴ Independent review of the evidence process for selecting marine special areas of conservation. Chair Dr Ian Graham-Bryce. July 2011. www.defra.gov.uk/publications/

review, published at the end of 2011⁵. Ensuring that the MMO develops sound social science practices, alongside their natural science marine evidence activities is essential to achieving its overall purpose and ambitions.

Development of the Social Research Strategy

This strategy has been produced through a short project, based in the Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management Team (EDKM) at MMO, led by a social researcher seconded from Defra. The process has involved consultation across the MMO, with Defra and key external stakeholders. The SRS will be put into practice as part of the socio-economic priorities identified in the MMO's Strategic Evidence Plan for 2011-15. The SRS launches the social programme of research at the MMO.

Social research is a form of social science and for the purposes of this strategy, the Government Social Research Service (GSR) definition of social research⁶ is applied throughout:

Social research is a scientific enquiry which measures, describes, explains and predicts changes in social and economic structures, attitudes, values and behaviours and the factors which motivate and constrain individuals and groups in society.

3. Context for the Social Research Strategy

The MMO operates in a policy environment which is governed by clear policy statements concerning how social, economic and environmental objectives will be achieved in the marine area. In 2009 Defra published 'Our seas – a shared resource: High level marine objectives' on behalf of all the administrations in the UK and in 2011 the UK Marine Policy Statement (MPS) was published. These documents, together with the MMO's own policy statements, form the context for specifying the social research needs of the organisation.

Relevant legislation at the national level is set out in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, the Planning Act 2008, the Localism Act 2011, the Environment Act 1995, the Transport Act 2000 and the Local Transport Act 2008.⁷ At the European level the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Water Framework Directive, Habitats Directive, Wild Birds Directive, Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, Renewable Energy Directive and INSPIRE Directive are all relevant to the MMO's activities and the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy governs its fisheries management work.

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee is currently considering submissions to its inquiry into marine science, which includes questions about the

⁵ Defra response to the Independent review of the evidence process for selecting marine special areas of conservation. December 2011. www.defra.gov.uk/publications/

⁶ Defra Social Research, www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/

⁷ 'A description of the marine planning system for England'. March 2011. Defra.

effectiveness of the Marine Science Co-ordinating Committee and progress in delivering the Marine Science Strategy. The SRS explicitly includes social science in marine science⁸, although the focus is on influencing human behaviour to reduce negative impacts on the environment rather than understanding the social impact of marine management activities.

National Planning Policy Statements are also relevant to marine planning and the MMO has a role in implementing the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) and the Government's policy on sustainable development.

The MMO's main functions are described in the Corporate Plan as:

- implementing the new marine planning system
- licensing marine works
- managing UK fishing fleet capacity
- managing the UK's fisheries quotas.

The organisation needs to undertake impact assessments and sustainability appraisals that both involve some consideration of the social impacts of planning and licensing, which marine social research could provide. The SRS provides a framework for social research relevant to the achievement of the MMO's objectives.

The GSR ensures that "government... decisions are built on an understanding of, and engagement with, the people and organisations affected by that decision as well as an understanding of the wider social consequences".

GSR has members across a range of government bodies and provides them with accreditation, guidance and professional support.⁹ The Government Office for Science and the National Audit Office also provide advice and guidance on the use of social science, which includes social research, in government for decision making and policy implementation. The guidelines and material provided by these bodies can be used to provide a solid official and authoritative foundation for the MMO in developing its social research activities. As outlined in the SEP the MMO is committed to strong validation using independent expert review to ensure the quality of evidence (SEP Section 4) and multi-disciplinary approaches.

4. Design principles

The SRS has been developed on the basis of a set of design principles, which can be used to guide actions intended to implement the strategy.

⁸ www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13347-mscc-strategy-100129.pdf p.14

⁹ www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/about-gsr

Sustainable development

The MMO's general objective is to take action that makes the greatest contribution to the achievement of sustainable development within the UK marine area. Fulfilling this commitment requires an evidence base which balances environmental, economic and social considerations. An understanding of marine ecology and biodiversity, and the economic value and potential of economic activities in the marine area should be complemented by knowledge of the social value of the marine historic environment and seascape, the impact of the MMO's activities on people who live in, visit and value coastal areas and the wider social dynamics of relevant communities.

Strong validation

The SRS should also provide for strong mechanisms for validating the evidence that the MMO produces and uses. As a new and non-research specialist organisation, there is a substantial organisational risk to its mission if social research evidence is not regarded as authoritative, accurate and authentic. One of the key recommendations of the independent review (see Note 3) is that independent, expert review is built in to processes which produce and interpret evidence. This principle must apply to social science as much as natural science research within the MMO.

Multi-disciplinarity

The SRS is designed to develop just one aspect of the evidence activities of the MMO but it needs to be implemented within a multi-disciplinary approach to evidence concerning the marine area. The marine area is a complex and dynamic system which cannot be understood and managed with the aid of knowledge from single disciplines independently. Marine science is recognised as including social sciences as well as natural sciences¹⁰. Most issues that require evidence and research activity are most likely to involve an inter-disciplinary approach to their analysis¹¹.

Clear relevance indicated by a 'line of sight'

Finally, the SRS should provide a boundary around what social research is relevant specifically to the achievement of the MMO's objectives. Given its clear and narrow remit, although research into a wider set of social issues may appear pertinent to the welfare of coastal communities or the activities that people undertake in the marine area, it is only those aspects which the MMO needs to understand in order to effectively undertake its functions that should be the focus of their evidence activities. There needs to be a 'clear line of sight' between the priorities and projects in the SRS and what the MMO has responsibility for and what the organisation is actually trying to do.

¹⁰ UK Marine Science Strategy 2010-2025. 2010. Defra on behalf of the Marine Science Co-ordination Committee. www.defra.gov.uk/publications

¹¹ The Rural Economy and Land Use (RELU) research programme provides an example of best practice in inter-disciplinary research which is useful in this context. www.relu.ac.uk

5. Mapping social research to MMO operations

Marine planning is a key delivery function for the MMO and is given a priority in terms of developing evidence activity in the Strategic Evidence Plan. The contribution that social research can make to provide the necessary evidence to ensure sound decisions throughout the planning cycle is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The use of social research throughout the marine planning cycle



1. What issues matter for most people and businesses?
2. Assess social impacts for impact assessment.
3. Ensure plan meets social objectives.
4. Review public and stakeholder reaction to the plan's proposals.
5. Targeting key messages to specific audiences.
6. Systematic evaluation of plan and implementation.

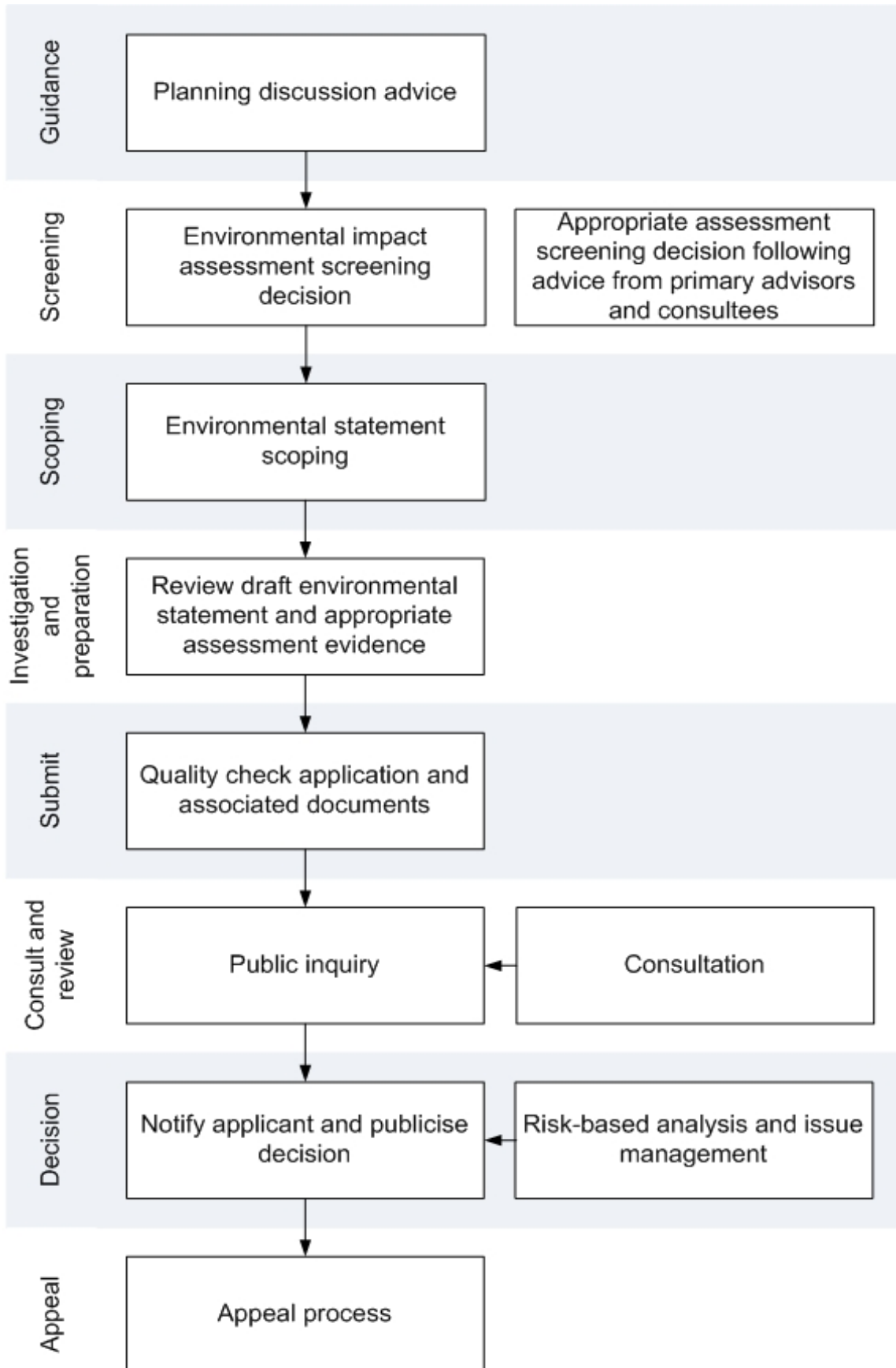
Social research can also be used to provide evidence for the sustainability appraisal exercise which is undertaken alongside each marine plan and as part of the economic assessment of plans¹². Guidance on the production of sustainability appraisals and impact assessments is available. This recommends that the full consideration of social as well as economic and environmental issues should be included in these documents.

To date the MMO has tended to focus on economic or 'socio-economic' issues; given that it is generally economic activities that it has the authority to license and regulate. There is also the assumption that meeting economic objectives, such as enabling increased employment and skills/education opportunities through developments in the marine area, planning will achieve the high level social objectives, summarised in the MPS as 'Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society'.

Moving on from a focus on marine planning, it would also be possible to use social research as an aid to effective marine licensing. Figure 2 illustrates this.

¹² Sustainability appraisal www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/policy/32933.aspx
impact assessment <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/better-regulation/docs/i/11-1112-impact-assessment-toolkit.pdf>

Figure 2: The use of social research to aid the licensing process



With reference to Figure 2, the:

- guidance stage could include an analysis of discussion advice
- scoping stage could include social impacts
- investigation and preparation stage could include providing agreed quality criteria
- consult and review stage could include designing effective consultation methods
- decision stage could include assessing social risks and issues.

Social research methods are already used within the MMO for stakeholder engagement activity, such as the use of surveys, interviews and focus groups. Ensuring that these are conducted systematically according to the GSR Code of Practice and other guidance, such as the European RESPECT ethical code¹³ would give added validity to the material that is gleaned from these exercises for use by the MMO.

Finally, it is expected that public bodies will evaluate the effectiveness of their activities to ensure that public money is being spent wisely¹⁴ and the social research methods which can be employed for these exercises are described in detail in the Magenta Book¹⁵.

6. Existing evidence

The MMO's Strategic Evidence Plan identified a suite of 'Phase 1' short-term priority projects completed in 2011-2012. The reports from these projects were published in October 2012¹⁶ and include:

- (a) socio-economic research on coastal communities, which provides an understanding of the potential for marine planning to facilitate socio-economic opportunities for communities on the coast
- (b) socio-economic data, which identified, collated and analysed socio-economic data in a coherent manner and identified current trends and data gaps, proposing recommendations for addressing these – this project was a collaboration between the MMO and Marine Scotland, working with the MEDIN¹⁷
- (c) recreational activities, which has compiled all available data on the spatial distribution of marine recreational activities in England.

These projects have a general socio-economic data and information focus, in line with the MMO's initial strategic evidence focus.

¹³ www.respectproject.org

¹⁴ NAO (2001) 'Modern policy-making' www.nao.org.uk/publications.aspx

¹⁵ Magenta Book. Second edition (2011) www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/data_magentabook_index.htm

¹⁶ www.marinemanagement.org.uk

¹⁷ Marine Environmental Data Information Network www.oceannet.org

Other sources of external research are Defra and its agencies, such as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Environment Agency, Natural England. Other agencies, such as English Heritage, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the research councils and their funded research programmes and centres throughout UK academia. Independent sector bodies such as the Royal Society for Protection of Birds, other wildlife groups, the governing bodies for sport and a wide range of civil society groups with specific locational and interest concerns are also sources of external research. A general search of these sources has not identified a pre-existing, comprehensive body of evidence which would provide the MMO with the research and knowledge to meet its social research needs¹⁸.

7. Social research themes

In order to identify priorities for social research over the next two years, and to then specify evidence projects, the principle of identifying 'a clear line of sight' can be employed. As marine planning is a key priority activity, discussions around research themes have concentrated on this area of the MMO's work. This process has resulted in drawing out the three general themes in Figure 3 as being the most important for immediate attention.

Figure 3: Key social research themes for MMO

A. Social benefits and public value	B. Contribution to achieving social goods and objectives	C. Social characteristics and behaviours
The social benefit of coastal and marine activities and features, including public values and social asset valuation. ¹⁹	The nature of MMO's contribution to achieving social well-being and minimising social vulnerability for coastal communities and for wider society. ²⁰	Social and behavioural characteristics of marine area users, including tourists, water sports participants, informal recreationists and wildlife enthusiasts. ²¹

8. Implementation

It is the intention of the MMO to employ or second a social researcher as well as up-skilling existing staff on social research issues. The MMO has developed an intelligent

¹⁸ A 'sources table' of relevant social research and analysis that has been undertaken by Defra has been provided to EDKM as part of this project and a contacts list of academic researchers with an interest in marine social research issues.

¹⁹ Building on the National Ecosystems Assessment in the NEWP and linked to the follow-on project on social and cultural ecosystems www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/uknea/. Natural England's research on valuing nature, countryside recreation and people's involvement in marine conservation is also relevant. www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/research/

²⁰ This can build on the element of the MMO's marine planning work, which has distilled social issues from engagement with stakeholders to identify specific social objectives for the first marine plans.

²¹ This can build on Defra's extensive work on influencing behaviour, segmenting and targeting different social groups and linking social impacts, well-being and sustainable development. www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/social/

customer capability that will be driving social research work in the organisation. It is envisaged that most of the commissions on social research will be achieved through the MMO's framework agreement on 'Marine Science to Support Marine Environmental Management'. The MMO will also seek to establish a 'knowledge transfer partnership' through the Economic and Social Science Research Council to provide the expertise and up skilling necessary.

In addition, the MMO will continue to draw on Defra's Social Research Group, the wider Social Research Network to support the organisation's development of social research capacity and capability. There are also other opportunities to collaborate with other bodies with cross-cutting interests such as the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), Natural England and the National Trust and academic experts in marine science and beyond.

9. Validation

The MMO has established a strong culture of quality assurance including a process which is published on its website.²² It is also actively working with its evidence suppliers, through the commissioning process and establishment of the MMO 'Marine science to Support Marine Environmental Management Framework' as a procurement mechanism to ensure that the evidence activity undertaken by contractors is robust and quality assured. These processes have also been shared across the Defra Network as an example of best practice. The MMO aims to achieve ISO 9001 Quality Management System accreditation by December 2015.

Nevertheless, it is important that as the MMO develops its social research activity it seeks to draw on the external validation opportunities offered by expert bodies, such as GSR, the Defra/Department for Energy and Climate Change Social Science Expert Panel, the Social Research Association (Learned Society for social research linked to the Academy of Social Sciences) and the Economic and Social Research Council. This will help to ensure that the MMO's social research is created and used according to best practice, in particular in seeking independent peer review, and is validated by external and independent authorities as far as possible.

As well as establishing a strong culture of quality assurance and drawing on external validation opportunities, the MMO Social Research Action Plan should include the way that social research will be supported by the MMO's Science Advisory Community (SciAC). Ideally the community should include social scientists with knowledge and experience of at least one of the key research themes identified above and the operation of the SciAC should allow for sufficient involvement of its members to provide additional support to developing social research activity during the first two years of the plan. The MMO's Chief Scientific Advisor should oversee and ensure that this is an effective

²² www.marinemanagement.org.uk

means of external support and validation. Where necessary, advice could also be sought from Defra's Chief Scientific Advisor, the Chief Social Researcher and members of Defra's Scientific Advisory Committee. It may also be appropriate to establish a marine social science advisory group to provide additional external validation to the MMO's approach.

10. Engagement

The SRS is designed to provide evidence for all the functions being undertaken by the MMO. Therefore, officers from teams across the organisation have been involved with its development and implementation. The EDKM Team will lead this development activity and full internal engagement will ensure the relevance and full use of the evidence that is secured throughout the process. There are already regular evidence meetings with the marine planning, licensing and other teams and these should be extended to other main operational teams in the organisation. The social research workshop, held on 30 August 2012 with Defra social researchers can provide a foundation for this internal engagement activity.

An initial consultation on the draft strategy was undertaken and comments and ideas incorporated into the final version of the strategy document. This will be published on the MMO's website with an open invitation to comment, so that the strategy can be a dynamic document, that can be refreshed periodically, benefitting from the wider contribution of the marine community.

The stakeholders invited to comment on the initial draft were:

- Defra Marine Programme Evidence and Strategy Team
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Joint National Conservation Committee
- The Crown Estate
- Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquatic Science
- Natural Environment Research Council
- Wildlife Countryside Link
- National Trust
- British Marine Federation
- Academic experts at University College London, Plymouth and Newcastle

11. Priorities and projects

As stated above, marine planning is the initial focus for the MMO's social research activity but the action plan should include processes for developing social research to support the MMO's other functions of licensing, fisheries management and conservation.

As the organisation is keen to deliver customer service excellence and to engage effectively with stakeholders and the wider public it is also important that social research methods are used to underpin the MMO's approach to this activity.

Discussion with MMO staff in the marine planning team has identified that projects on the following topics would be immediately useful for the MMO:

- social impact of changing employment patterns in coastal areas
- social benefits of developing new knowledge and skills in fishing communities
- public attitudes regarding marine and coastal resources
- geographical identification of significant social assets around the coast, including important recreation sites.

All these projects could be commissioned once the MMO framework is in place.

12. Timeline for future Social Research Programme

