



## Aim

This project aimed to gain a better understanding of decision-making using marine plans in England's marine plan areas. Investigations were carried out into who makes decisions using marine plans as defined by section 58(1) and 58(3) of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#). A better understanding of these bodies and the decisions they make will support plan use, collaboration and integration, informing marine plan implementation activity in England.

## Introduction and methodology

Marine plans, which set out a vision, objectives and policies to enable sustainable use of marine plan areas, take effect through decision-makers using the plans in their decisions. The decisions that should be informed by marine plans are set out in section 58(1) and 58(3) of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#). While these decisions are defined and many are known, to date there has not been a systematic identification of decisions and decision-makers. This project:

- confirms relevant decision-making parties and decisions related to England's marine plan areas
- identifies standardised process maps and suggests steps that can be taken to gain benefits of marine plan use in decisions
- suggests how marine plans can be applied effectively where decisions involve multiple bodies
- recommends a proposed approach to engaging bodies in joint-working

An initial desk study scoped the decisions and decision-makers thought to be encompassed under the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) definition of decisions to be informed by marine plans. Process maps were drafted to illustrate the steps and stakeholders involved in making a decision. This information guides the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and other decision makers about when marine plans could be used in the generic decision-making processes, and similarly when the decision-making process could inform the development and monitoring of marine plans.

To verify initial process maps, questionnaires were sent and interviews undertaken with a sample of decision-makers. Information collected from decision makers included respondent roles, legislation relevant to their decision-making, and policy outcomes for the decisions they make in accordance with marine plans. Information was also gathered about the respondents' awareness of marine plans and marine plan policies, and how marine plans are (or may be) used in decision-making. To support presentation of project findings, respondents were also asked for the preferred format and function for capturing decision-making responsibilities and processes of those using marine plans, and the preferred method to communicate the availability and function of process maps. Questionnaire and interview findings were used to revise content and shape outputs of the decision mapping.



## Results

The study identified a total of 29 government bodies, agencies and other public bodies, which cover 46 decisions that should be informed by marine plans (i.e. decisions set out in section 58(1) and 58(3) of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#)). The research also identifies where marine plan use may be relevant to advisory bodies and functions. Decisions identified ranged from marine licensing application approval to developing and delivering catchment flood management plans. However, most decisions fell within seven generic decision-making processes, and accordingly seven generic process maps were developed e.g. consenting and permitting. Process maps highlighted:

- the parties involved,
- actions that the relevant bodies take,
- which stages provide evidence of marine plan compliance (where applicable).

The project also explored three case studies to identify opportunities for marine plans to be used in a streamlined way. Cases focused on decisions made involving multiple parties, where marine plans could be applied through coordinated decision-making processes to manage issues between several marine space users. Case studies were i) use of the Coastal Concordat, ii) offshore wind resource planning, and iii) marine protected areas. Within each of these case studies the implementation of marine plans and management regimes were investigated along with challenges and opportunities which arise with each.

## Conclusions and recommendations

As a result of the findings a proposed approach to engaging parties in joint-working, in relation to marine plan development and implementation, was developed. Proposals included closer engagement with Government departments and advisors, clearer communication of consenting and permitting processes in relation to marine plans, and engaging with decision-making bodies that didn't participate in this study or where there has been limited communication to date. The recommendations and overall report content will aid the Marine Management Organisation in supporting implementation of marine plans in England.

## MMO comments

This report provides an overview of who makes decisions informed by marine plans in England, the processes by which these decisions are made and how these processes can incorporate marine plans. The report will be used by the MMO to inform the development and implementation of marine plans around England by taking into consideration the decision-makers and the decision-making processes they are involved in, demonstrated by the mapping exercise and generic process maps. The project's process maps may also be useful to external decision makers, to assist in identifying where marine plans can be incorporated into their decision-making processes and where evidence can be gathered to demonstrate compliance with marine plans around England.