



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Three-year report on the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans

For the period 2 April 2020 to 1 April 2023

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Sections 54 and  
61 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009

March 2023

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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# Three-year report on the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans

## 1 Background and introduction

### 1.1 Overview of the East Inshore and Offshore Marine Plans

The [East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans](#) ('the plans') were prepared by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on behalf of the government and adopted in April 2014 by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The plans cover an area of approximately 55,000 square kilometres, stretching from Flamborough Head in Yorkshire to Felixstowe in Suffolk and extending from the mean high spring tide limit out to the UK's international maritime boundaries with Belgium, France, and the Netherlands.

The east marine plan areas are some of the most used and therefore complex of England's marine plan areas. For example, the east marine plan areas support over 50% of England's current offshore wind capacity. Offshore wind energy production occurs alongside 29 marine protected area designations, including 6 marine conservation zones and a proposed highly protected marine area. The east marine plan areas are also important for aggregates and fisheries, as well as for ports and shipping.

The plans contain 11 objectives, which are supported by 38 plan policies. Both the policies and objectives of the plans were developed to help deliver the government's vision and high-level marine objectives (HLMOs), as set out in the [UK Marine Policy Statement](#).

### 1.2 Purpose of report

Sections 54 and 61 of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#) ('the act') require the plans to be kept under review and reports published every 3 years following their adoption.

The MMO's approach to monitoring marine plans is available on [GOV.UK](#).

The reports cover:

- **context monitoring:** an assessment of legislative and regulatory changes that may affect the relevance of the plans
- **process monitoring:** an assessment of if, and how, the plans and their policies are being used
- **outcome monitoring:** an assessment of the effects and effectiveness of the plans, policies and of the progress made towards securing the relevant objectives and HLMOs

This is the third three-year report on the plans. The previous 2 three-year reports on the plans are available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

## 1.3 Overview of past findings and progress made since the previous report

The second three-year report on the plans (covering 2 April 2017 to 1 April 2020) was published on 26 March 2020. The report found numerous changes to the legislative and policy landscape since the adoption of the plans. Examples of the key context changes found include shifts in national priorities to support the expansion of offshore wind development, as well as the delivery of the government's net zero targets and goals for improving the environment.

Policy gaps were also found in the plans when compared to other, more recently adopted, English marine plans.

Based on the findings of the second three-year report, the MMO recommended that the plans be amended or replaced. This recommendation was agreed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. As the recommendation from the second three-year report is still to be acted upon, this report has been informed by a high-level assessment of the plans.

Since April 2020, the MMO has refined its marine planning approach through the development and adoption of four new marine plans covering the north-east, north-west, south-east and south-west marine plan areas. Following the adoption of these marine plans, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) established the Marine Spatial Prioritisation (MSPri) programme. The outputs of the MSPri programme will evolve the marine planning approach and inform the development of the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans.

# 2 Main findings for the 2 April 2020 to 1 April 2023 reporting period

## 2.1 Context monitoring

Context monitoring found further legislative and policy changes since the second three-year report on the plans.

Key policy changes included the adoption of the [North East](#), [North West](#), [South East](#), and [South West](#) Marine Plans by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in June 2021. These more recent marine plans were developed using an evolved marine planning process and captured changes in legislation and national strategic objectives since the adoption of the plans. Differences in policy wording between marine plans may make it difficult for users to interpret and apply policies when operating across multiple plan areas.

More recently, the [British Energy Security Strategy](#) was published in April 2022. The strategy builds on the [10 point plan for a green industrial revolution](#) (published 18 November 2020) and [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#) (published 19 October 2021). Together, the strategies set out the government's long-term vision for energy development and security, as well as how it intends to meet its net zero targets. The legislative mechanism for realising the aims of the British Energy Security Strategy and Net Zero Strategy will be delivered by the [Energy Bill](#), which was introduced in July 2022.

Alongside offshore wind, oil, gas, and carbon capture usage and storage industries are expected to help meet the UK's energy demands and net zero targets. The role of these industries in driving North Sea energy transition is regulated by the North Sea Transmission Authority, which was vested in March 2022.

The [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill](#) (introduced in May 2022) represents another legislative change and makes provisions for setting levelling-up missions. Together with other future planned changes to national policy, the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill has implications for the integration of marine and terrestrial planning systems.

## 2.2 Process monitoring

Process monitoring findings suggest that use of the plans has embedded within marine licence decision-making processes.

The percentage of marine licence applications showing consideration of the plans by the MMO's marine licensing function increased to 99% from 94% in the previous reporting period. The delivery of improved internal plan-led decision-making processes and implementation training during the third reporting period likely explains the increase. The positive effects of improved MMO processes and training are also demonstrated through a

13% decline in granted marine licence applications with incomplete or missing policy level assessments.

Beyond marine licensing processes, responses to the 2021 to 2022 voluntary stakeholder survey confirmed that a range of advisory bodies are using the plans. Responses also confirmed that decision-makers external to the MMO (for example, Local Planning Authorities) are using the plans to make authorisation and enforcement decisions, as well as other planning decisions (for example, local plan development).

Low numbers of responses to the stakeholder survey prevented a more detailed analysis. The MMO has been working to review and update its survey design and promotion techniques to increase survey response rates.

The MMO has also strengthened the use of the plans by external decision-makers (for example, the Planning Inspectorate) as part of its external implementation training activities. Most recently, the MMO delivered a total of 24 training sessions to over 400 participants from 102 different authorities between December 2022 and January 2023.

To further support integration of the plans with terrestrial planning systems, the MMO has:

- arranged to undertake a full policy review of statutory and non-statutory sub-national plans
- engaged with local decision-makers across a range of activities
- recruited a Marine and Terrestrial Planner within its marine planning function

Efforts to further develop and promote the [Explore Marine Plans](#) digital service and [Using Marine Plans](#) guidance will also help to support marine plan use.

## 2.3 Outcome monitoring

Outcome monitoring found the plans to have a positive effect on promoting coexistence by requiring proposals to demonstrate how they will avoid, or reduce, negative impacts on other activities. Specifically, positive outcomes were found for 8 spatial policies, providing direct evidence of progress made towards securing 7 plan objectives and relevant HLMOs. Low sample sizes made it difficult to assess the outcomes of the remaining 3 spatial policies.

Progress towards securing all plan objectives and HLMOs was also concluded from process monitoring findings. Notably, investigation of the policy-level decisions made for 69 licensed marine activities found that all plan policies had been considered during the decision-making process over the third three-year reporting period.

Findings also showed how often policies had been used to inform marine licence decisions. Insights gained from trends in policy use will help to shape future policy development and implementation activities.

### 3 Conclusions and next steps

Overall, positive progress towards embedding the plans within decision-making processes was made during the third three-year reporting period. Positive progress towards securing plan objectives and the relevant HLMOs has also been made.

Despite the progress made, wider legislative and policy changes since the adoption of the plans means that their intended outcomes are no longer aligned to the UK's national priorities.

The findings of this report continue to support and strengthen the initial recommendation of the second three-year report on the plans. Based on this conclusion, the MMO recommends that the plans be replaced.

Since the second three-year report on the plans and the completion of England's integrated marine planning framework in 2021, Defra and the MMO have been working to understand how the next generation of marine plans can best meet the changing and increasing uses of England's marine environment. The outputs of this work will inform the development of the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans.

The MMO is now readying itself for replacing the plans. This process will formally begin with the publication of a statement of public participation in time to ensure the adoption of a replaced East Marine Plan by 2027.

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