



## Aim

The aim of this project was to understand whether the geography of the east marine plan areas was suitable for supporting different sectors and to visualise any potential policy trade-offs.

## Introduction and methodology

In 2020 and 2023 the [Three-Yearly Reports](#) for the East Marine Plans concluded that the context within which the plans sit had changed significantly since adoption: UK exit from the European Union; national plans and strategies such as the UK Marine Strategy (2019), the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution (2020), and the Net Zero Strategy (2020), have changed national priorities and the regulatory landscape; along with changes in how the marine plan areas are used with more marine protected areas and increased offshore wind development, which has implications for other marine users.

Eleven focus sectors in the inshore and offshore east marine plan areas were analysed for their spatial requirements, opportunities and barriers to meet these requirements. These sectors were selected due to their relevance to national priorities, their spatial specificity and compatibility (or not), with other sectors and their relevance to the east marine plan areas.

The sectors were: energy production (renewables – with a focus on offshore wind); energy production (oil and gas); carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS); dredging and disposal; aggregate extraction; ports and shipping; aquaculture; tourism and recreation; coastal change and flooding; fisheries and the environment.

The project involved an assessment of national priorities and considerations for how these can be met in the east marine plan areas via an analysis of spatial constraints, barriers between sectors, trade-off implications and opportunities for co-existence against other interacting sectors as identified in the UK [Marine Policy Statement](#).

## Results

The outputs included spatial maps of the focus sectors and their interactions, identification of policy interventions and further evidence gaps.

The key finding from the spatial assessment identified that the impact of the changing policy landscape will have an impact on the current spatial allocation for the majority of sectors studied. Specifically, the shift to net zero and focus on security and sustainability of energy supply and food stock is creating an impetus for change in the east marine plan areas. It was identified that in the east marine plan areas that offshore wind, fisheries, aquaculture and environment sectors **compete for space**, however it was recognised that **co-existence opportunities exist** between a number of the sectors and further research is required to identify policy interventions that can support this.



## Conclusions and recommendations

The outputs will be used to explore the values and weighting given to national priorities at the east marine plan areas scale and where appropriate support spatial choices regarding activity location to inform amended East Marine Plan vision, objectives and prescriptive policy development.

Identification of future evidence requirements include:

- identifying the potential constraints of offshore wind farm expansion on other sectors
- research to explore the co-location opportunities of offshore wind and aquaculture
- research to explore the co-location opportunities of offshore wind and fisheries
- understand the co-existence ability of aquaculture and fisheries
- consideration of which sectors are most likely to be negatively impacted by climate change

Recommendations include creating an effective platform for engagement and facilitating dialogue between spatially competitive sectors to better understand spatial constraints and co-location opportunities (underway nationally by the Defra led Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme).

National priorities apply to all locations and it was recommended that to help identify the national spatial carrying capacity and determine how to best meet priorities the MMO conducts further spatial mapping exercises across all marine plan areas to get a true picture of trade-offs. The MMO will feed into the Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme including modelling work that will help determine how best to meet national priorities.

It was recognised that Government bodies research should feed in marine natural capital evidence to improve decision making and include consideration of the environment sector as a national priority.

The MMO will use the findings of this evidence project to develop a better understanding of the cumulative impacts on the east marine plan areas including economic impacts and wider environmental, social and governance considerations.

## MMO comments

The project map layers and report are valuable in the development of an evidence base for the east marine plan.

It was initially hoped that this project would help to contribute towards understanding the carrying capacity of the east marine plan areas, this is a huge topic which remains undefined at present. It is felt that in time a marine natural capital approach will enable the evidence to begin to assess the environmental carrying capacity of certain habitats or species more effectively. The specification of this project was adjusted to focus on the spatial carrying capacity of the east marine plan areas.

## Further information

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