



## Aim

The aim of the project was to explore whether we could use a 5 capitals approach to understand the carrying capacity of the East marine plan areas and inform trade-off discussions and management of the marine area.

## Introduction and methodology

In 2023 the process to amend the east Marine Plans will begin. In doing so, increasing competition for space, driven by the accelerated rollout of offshore wind in line with the British Energy Security Strategy must be considered alongside the need to protect and restore biodiversity and maintain livelihoods.

We commissioned Howell Marine Consulting to explore whether a five capitals approach could provide more robust methods to help marine planners consider the carrying capacity of the east marine plan areas and the consequent trade-offs between competing sectors. As some of the most significant activities in the east plan areas, offshore wind, aggregates and fishing activity were the focus of the study.

The project involved a literature review, stakeholder workshop and interviews with experts to validate early thinking around the application of the 5 capitals in the marine planning process. Asset registers were developed for the 3 chosen sectors, collating data for each of the capitals and highlighting limitations and gaps. The data were presented in asset maps to illustrate the connections between the capitals and assets. Finally, an outline framework for the application of the 5 capitals in the marine planning process was developed.

## Results

Overall, it was concluded that applying a five capitals approach provides a new opportunity to deliver a transparent, robust and stakeholder-informed process that could be applied in complex situations. It suits a question-led approach which aims to solve a problem and provides a way to more fairly weigh-up competing demands. However, it also recognises that, initially, significant time and resource would need to be dedicated to move to this approach and it is not a silver bullet for understanding carrying capacity. The focus should be on using it to set limits and targets to improve trade-off decisions.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This project was an exploratory thought piece about using the 5 capitals to better understand and describe carrying capacity and inform trade-offs and marine management, with a focus on the east of England. Carrying capacity is a complex construct and has mostly focused on the ability of the natural environment to support human activities, through a natural capital lens more recently. Early on in the project we recognised that the five capitals approach would be too complex to help us describe the carrying capacity for the East, but the approach could support a number of other areas in the planning process. Introducing further capitals broadens the assets to be considered with the potential to create a more comprehensive framework for decision-making. We recognise



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## A pilot for using a five capitals approach for marine plan development in the East of England (MMO1336)

this will not come without significant complexity as well as time and resource. The MMO needs to consider how best to introduce, build on and test elements of the project over time, and it is likely this will be incremental and build on the work of the Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (mNCEA) programme; we must ensure the effort is balanced with value.

### **MMO comments**

We will discuss the ideas and approach set out in the report with colleagues and partner organisations to look for collaborative opportunities to take forward the recommendations and make links with other projects. It has taken decades to bring natural capital into decision-making and we need to build on the learning from the natural capital approach to carefully progress our understanding and the opportunities for a 5 capitals approach.

### **Further information**

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