



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Three-year report on the South Inshore and South Offshore Marine Plan

For the period 17 July 2018 to 16 July 2021

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

Date: July 2021

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy 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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# 1. Background and purpose

1. Marine planning guides decision making in the marine area, making sure the right activities are carried out in the right place and at the right time. It enables sustainable economic growth while protecting the natural and historic environment, recognising the needs of all.
2. Marine plans form a part of the government's long-term vision for the environment, providing confidence for decisions in the marine area. They support transparent and streamlined decision making, providing certainty for developers, while safeguarding the environment. For marine developments, marine plans will reduce the time from concept to consent, helping to operationalise investments sooner so they can make an earlier contribution to the economy.
3. There are 6 marine plans covering 11 marine plan areas for England and national plans for Scotland and Wales. The plan for Northern Ireland will be published in due course.
4. The South Marine Plan (the plan) was adopted in July 2018. It covers the inshore and offshore marine plan areas from Folkestone in Kent to the river Dart in Devon and to the international boundary with France and the Channel Islands. It is one of the busiest shipping channels in the world, as well as hosting almost two thirds of Royal Navy ships at Portsmouth. This activity takes place alongside more than 50 marine protected areas, including 31 marine conservation zones and a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage site. It is one of the most complex and used areas of the English coastline.
5. The plan includes 12 plan objectives supported by 53 plan policies which helps to deliver the government's vision and high level marine objectives (HLMOs). As with all marine plans, the plan will be kept under review and reports will be published every 3 years following adoption. The review assesses the effectiveness and effects of the plan policies and the wider changes in context since adopted.
6. This is the first report on the plan but there is a [full technical report](#) on GOV.UK for more information.

## 2. Method

7. The review was carried out looking at 3 aspects. These were:
  - Context monitoring - an assessment of the legislative or regulatory changes that may affect the relevance of the plan
  - Process monitoring - an assessment of how and if the plan and its policies are being used appropriately by marine licensing applicants, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) marine licensing function and other decision-makers
  - Outcome monitoring - an assessment of the plan's effects and its effectiveness in progressing towards achieving its objectives, as well as contributing towards relevant HLMOs

8. Indicators were used to inform the evaluation of the plan. These indicators were underpinned by qualitative and quantitative data derived from a range of sources, including other ongoing environmental, social and economic monitoring programmes as well as primary data generated by the MMO.
9. Examples of data sourced from other ongoing monitoring programmes included designated site condition assessments undertaken and collated by Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, heritage assets registers held by Historic England, and business data produced by the Office for National Statistics.
10. MMO generated data included locations and types of consented activity as well as decision-making audit trails, detailed in MMO systems. Alongside this, stakeholder views and feedback were gathered via annual surveys. The MMO received 92 complete surveys between 2018 and 2021 from applicants, decision-makers and other interested parties, offering insight into the use of the plan and its policies.
11. The impact of the plan and its policies was assessed using indicators to evidence where policy use was clear and policy intent was achieved.

### 3. Main findings

12. Context monitoring identified matters that had either decreased the relevance of the plan or highlighted areas where parts of the plan might better align with evolving national priorities. Following the UK's exit from the European Union (EU), parts of the plan that reference EU legislation have declining relevance but do not currently undermine implementation. National policies relevant to the plan, that were found to be of increasing importance, included climate change, renewable energy, air quality and the forthcoming Environment Act.
13. Despite these contextual developments, the main uses of the marine area have not significantly changed since its adoption. The plan also remains broadly aligned with local authorities' priorities and with bordering international marine plans for France and the Channel Islands.
14. Process monitoring found the plan to have been used by both decision-makers and marine licence applicants in the 3 years since its adoption.
15. Use of the plan by marine licence applicants during the first reporting period increased to 94%. However, marine licence applications often did not provide full consideration of all relevant policies, resulting in marine licence decisions requiring additional information from applicants and consultees. Such requirements may increase administration costs and application processing times.
16. Marine licence decisions consistently evidenced detailed consideration of the plan. Evidence of policy use highlighted the need for continued training to support plan use. For example, findings suggested that the marine protected area (MPA) boundary change policy (S-MPA-3) is often misinterpreted, resulting in the policy being considered unnecessarily in marine licence decisions.
17. Decision-makers external to the MMO, including local authorities and delivery bodies, used the plan to inform a range of consenting and planning decisions, including

granting planning applications, drafting byelaws and sub-national policy documents, and providing consultation advice.

18. Process monitoring evidence shows that the plan is becoming an influential part of planning and consenting processes. However, some limitations in the use of the plan by decision-makers and marine licence applicants were identified. Further engagement and promotion of available marine planning products, such as [explore marine plans](#) (EMP) and the [using marine plans](#) guidance, will help to fully embed the plan within decision-making and proposal development processes.
19. Outcome monitoring found that the plan has had a positive effect on:
  - promoting coexistence by facilitating effective use of marine space and minimising conflict, ensuring proposals avoid or reduce any negative impacts on other activities
  - supporting provision of new infrastructure through the decision-making process
  - enabling protection of marine biodiversity and ecosystem services, through appropriate consideration and mitigation of impacts, such as for herring spawning.
  - reducing impacts on seascape through the provision of an evidence base to support proposals siting themselves appropriately
  - supporting our assessment of Good Environmental Status by increasing applicant submissions to the Marine Noise Registry
20. While progress is being made towards 10 of the 11 plan objectives, there remains some gaps in data, and many of the policies which underpin the objectives had inconclusive results, mostly due to the short time that has passed since the plan was adopted.
21. Evidence of plan use has been important in underpinning the assessment of progress being made towards objectives. Higher confidence can be placed in the findings which can be observed and influenced by the plan over a shorter time period, such as those for spatially specific policies. Some objectives with longer-term aims may take longer for monitoring data to be available and attributable to effects of the policies.
22. The only objective where progress was inconclusive overall was in the identification and conservation of heritage assets. There is not yet sufficient evidence to show whether the policies supporting the objective are effective in delivering the objective, and further monitoring is required
23. The plan represents a successful step towards progressing all HLMOs, including promoting good governance and using sound science responsibly.
24. In summary, although positive progress is being made towards achieving almost all its objectives, it is too soon to determine the effectiveness of many of the policies in securing plan objectives.

## 4. Conclusion and next steps

25. Although there has been significant change to the policy landscape since 2018, the plan remains relevant and broadly aligned with national and local priorities. Of the changes identified, improved engagement and amendments to supporting tools, such as EMP, could be addressed rather than amending the Plan itself.
26. Positive progress has been made towards embedding the plan within the decision-making process. Similarly, the plan is demonstrating positive progress towards achieving almost all its objectives.

However, further improvements can be made to reduce data gaps and improve the accuracy of reporting and further embed the plan in decision-making.

27. The MMO and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) are currently considering the needs of future marine plans. The outcome does not have a bearing on the conclusion of this report. In the future, it may be relevant to consider the conclusions of this report again in line with a future scope of marine plan preparation.
28. Based on the conclusions of this report the MMO has recommended that the plan is retained and not amended at this time.