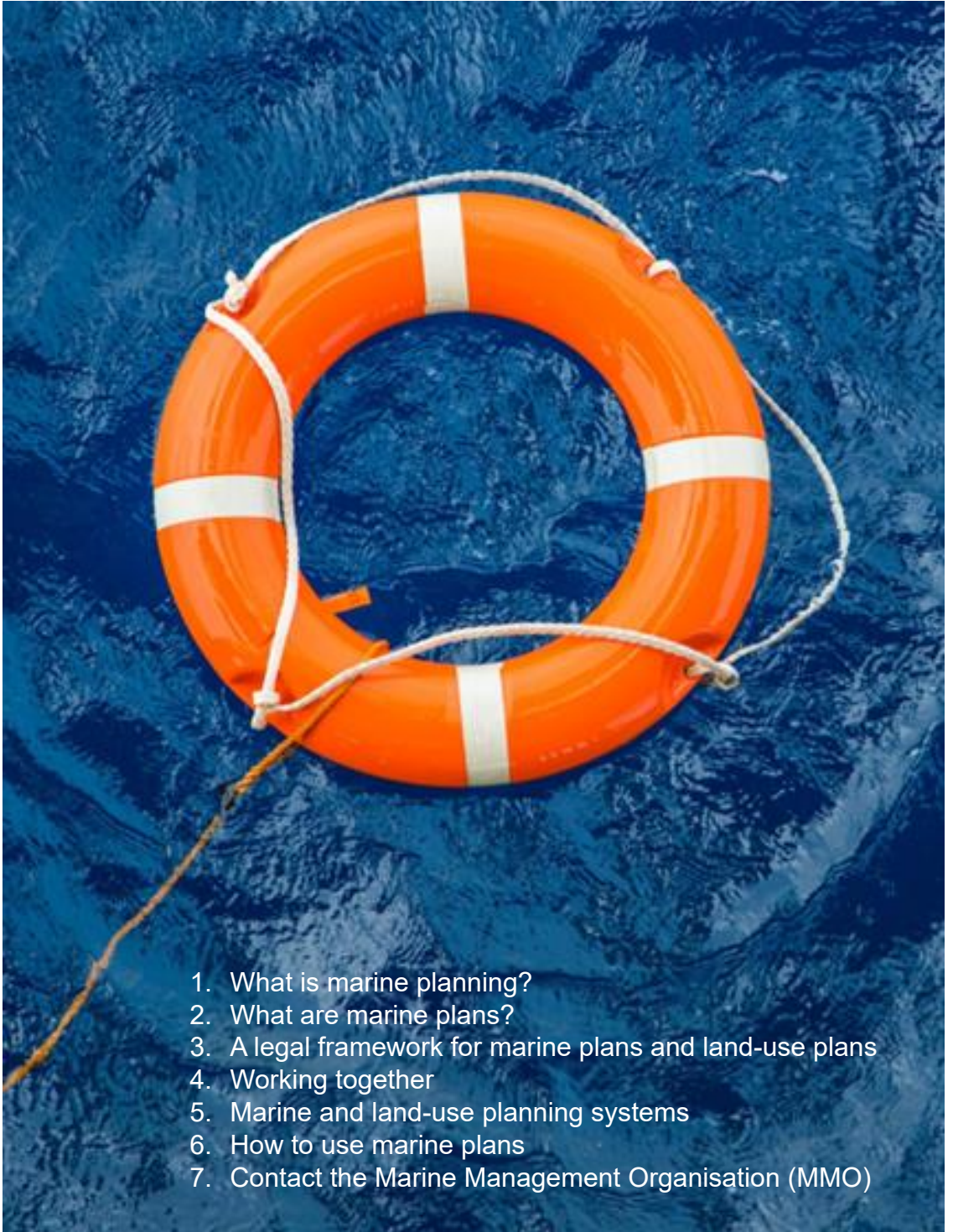


# **Marine Planning: A Practical Guide for Local Authorities**



Marine  
Management  
Organisation

[www.gov.uk/MMO](http://www.gov.uk/MMO)



1. What is marine planning?
2. What are marine plans?
3. A legal framework for marine plans and land-use plans
4. Working together
5. Marine and land-use planning systems
6. How to use marine plans
7. Contact the Marine Management Organisation (MMO)

# 1. What is Marine Planning

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The [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#) set out the basis for marine planning in England, and supports the UK's vision for "clean, healthy, safe, productive, and biologically diverse oceans and seas." Marine plans guide the sustainable use and development of our seas, providing a framework to balance the economic, social and environmental needs of the marine environment. Each marine plan has a 20-year horizon to ensure that different activities, such as renewable energy, ports and shipping and other activities are carried out in a way that does not create conflict and ensure benefits now, do not compromise future need, and contribute to long-term sustainability.

Marine plans operate alongside land-use planning systems to ensure a holistic approach to managing the coastal and marine environments. The land-sea interface including the coast, estuaries and tidal waters (which sometimes extend a long distance inland) together with ports and coastal developments that impact on these areas, requires policies and decisions that are aligned across both marine and land-use planning systems.





## 2. What are marine plans?

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There are [11 marine plan areas in England](#), covering inshore waters (up to 12 nautical miles from the coast) and offshore waters (from 12 to 200 nautical miles). These areas extend up to the mean high water spring mark and include the tidal reaches of estuaries. In contrast, land-use plans cover areas down to the mean low water spring mark, creating an overlap that ensures alignment between marine and land-use planning efforts. Marine plans for England's part of the UK Marine Area are developed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Each marine plan is designed to address the specific characteristics and issues unique to its region, while also considering the interconnected nature of marine ecosystems across boundaries.

England has six marine plans, each includes the inshore and offshore areas, with the exception of the [South East](#) that has a single plan due to its size:

- [East Marine Plans](#)
- [North East Marine Plans](#)
- [North West Marine Plans](#)
- [South Marine Plans](#)
- [South East Marine Plan](#)
- [South West Marine Plans](#)

Marine plans set out specific policies to inform decision-making for any activity or development which is in, or impacts on, a marine area.

The link between marine and land-use planning is essential for sustainable development in coastal regions, ensuring activities are well coordinated across the land-sea boundary.

Marine plans are supported by a sustainability appraisal that provides an independent assessment of marine plans at each stage of their development.

Whilst the marine plans are 20-year plans, there is the opportunity to assess and respond to changes in the marine plan areas. Each plan is monitored with three yearly reviews to allow enough time to see their impact and allow them to be responsive to local and national change.



### 3. A legal framework for marine plans and land-use plans

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Marine and land-use planning are governed by statutory plans and policies on what activities can and cannot take place and under what conditions.

Marine plans are guided by the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#) and the [UK Marine Policy Statement](#), which provides an overarching policy framework for all UK marine areas. Land-use planning is governed primarily by the [Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#) and the [National Planning Policy Framework](#). The Framework also requires local authorities and other public bodies (including the MMO) to work together on planning issues under a duty to cooperate.

Marine and land-use planning should work closely to align policies, ensuring that land-based activities consider marine impacts and vice versa, for example, port development should be considered across both domains.

Stakeholder engagement is at the centre of both marine and land-use plan development, which should reflect the diverse range of interests and address any potential conflicts.



## 4. Working together

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The MMO is a statutory consultee for land-use plans. This means local authorities are encouraged to take specific actions to ensure the integration of marine and land-use plans. This includes consultation through the development management process prior to determination of applications where they are likely to impact on the marine area (even if located far away from it). Similarly, councils<sup>1</sup> are a key stakeholder for marine planning.

Actions to support integration include:

- consulting the MMO on matters that affect the marine environment or activities within the marine area.
- ensuring that relevant marine and land-use plan policies align and feedback through consultation is considered

As required by the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#), the MMO must take all reasonable steps to ensure marine plans are compatible with land-use plans. Early engagement is essential to align cross-boundary planning policies and support cohesive decision-making.

Marine and land-use planners should involve one another in the development process to ensure integration and alignment of policies across their borders. This will help manage activities that cross the land-sea interface, such as infrastructure for renewable energy production at sea.

The [Coastal Concordat](#) is a framework designed to streamline the regulatory process for coastal developments and provides a coordinated approach to the consenting and licensing of coastal projects that require multiple approvals from different public authorities, this includes marine and land-use bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> Councils refer to county council, district, borough or city councils; unitary authorities; London boroughs; metropolitan boroughs; Parish, community and town council

Local authorities can use the concordat to coordinate their activities and avoid duplication of effort that helps deliver more timely decision-making.

The [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#) does not distinguish between local authorities that have boundaries facing the sea and those that do not. Land-locked authorities may have tidal reaches of estuaries that join the sea many miles away.





## 5. Marine and land-use planning systems in practice

Although the focus for marine and land-use plans is sustainable development that involves balancing economic growth, environmental protection and social well-being, they differ in terms of scope, governance and approach.

### Land-use and marine planning systems in practice

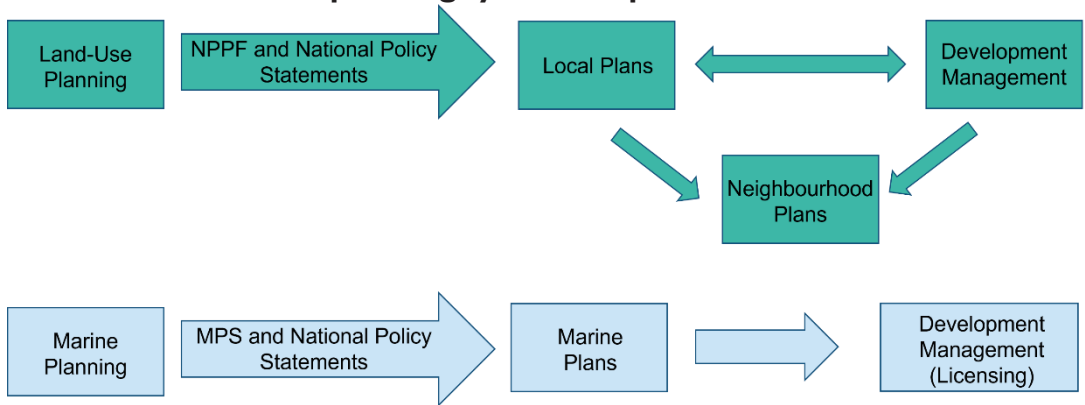


Image of the land-use and marine planning systems

Marine plans focus on the management of the marine environment, which includes the surface of the sea, the seabed and water column and up to 200 nautical miles or the exclusive economic zone and must account for the dynamic and fluid environment where activities overlap spatially and temporally, and where multiple activities can co-exist in the same location.

Land-use plans manage land use, covering urban and rural areas, agriculture, infrastructure and housing. The environment is static compared to the marine environment and boundaries are well defined. Land ownership issues are more complex on land than in the marine area, as most of the seabed around the UK, extending out to 12 nautical miles (the territorial limit), is owned by The Crown Estate.

The focus for marine planning is to balance the multiple users of the marine space for example fishing, navigation, and conservation. While the focus for land-use planning is more well defined and concerned with the development and use of land. Marine plans are concerned with licensable and non-licensable activities and are not target driven, for example, land-use plans generally include housing allocations.

Marine plans, like land-use plans, are evidence-based, though may be limited in scope due to data available. Nonetheless, equal weighting is given to all policy areas.

Under section 61 of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#), the MMO, is required to monitor the effects of the marine plan policies (on behalf of the Secretary of State) and assess their effectiveness in achieving their intended objectives. Regular monitoring helps evaluate policy performance and is used to inform the MMO's three-yearly reports to parliament.



## 6. How to use marine plans

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Marine plans provide guidance on how activities may impact the marine environment and offer policy direction to support decision-making. Decision-makers must take authorisation and enforcement decisions, on activities that affect the marine area, in accordance with the relevant marine plans (under Section 58(1) of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#)).

Local authorities must, therefore, integrate marine plan policies into their regulatory and decision-making processes to ensure that all decisions affecting the marine area contribute to sustainable development. They must ensure that decisions to adopt local plans and policies have regard to the relevant marine plans (under Section 58(3) of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#)). It is important that all marine plan policies are considered collectively and are not applied in isolation.

[Explore Marine Plans \(EMP\)](#) is an online tool designed to support the implementation of England's marine plans. This service provides easy access to spatial data and policy information specific to the English marine area. EMP can help you:

- **Align with Marine Policies:** Encourages proposals to, and ensures decisions, comply with relevant marine plan policies.
- **Review Policies by Area:** Assess marine plan policies relevant to your area.
- **Customise the Service:** Tailor EMP to your needs, focusing on geographical area, policies, or activities.
- **Consider Key Factors:** Understand the factors that may impact your decisions and identify stakeholders you may need to engage with.

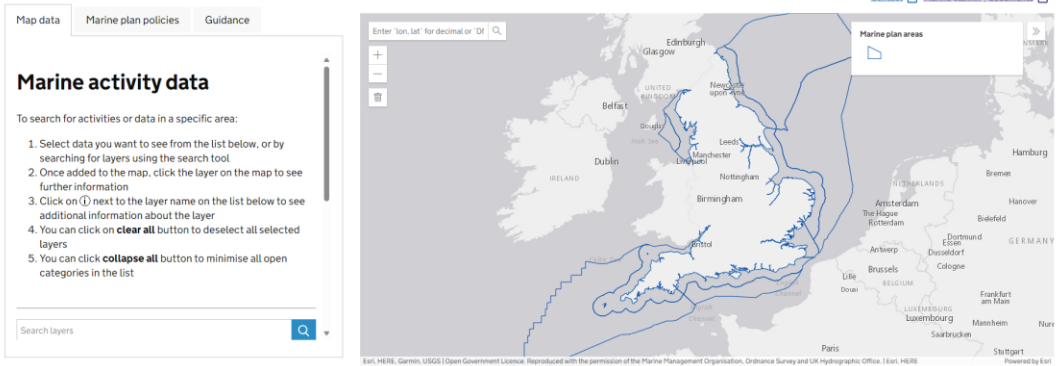


Image of the landing page of Explore Marine Plans tool

The MMO has created [hypothetical examples to show how marine plans](#) can be used for decision-making under Section 58(1) and Section 58(3) of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#).



## 7. Contact the Marine Management Organisation

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If you need guidance on how England's marine plans apply to your work and how to effectively use them, please contact the Marine Planning team.

- Phone: 0208 0265 325
- Mail: Lancaster House, Hampshire Court, Newcastle Business Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 7YH
- Email: [planning@marinemanagement.org.uk](mailto:planning@marinemanagement.org.uk)

You can also contact your local MMO [marine planning officer](#) who can provide tailored support on the use of marine plans in your area.

The MMO has created a [short animation to explain marine planning](#).

You can stay up to date with MMO's latest activities and initiatives by following us on social media

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