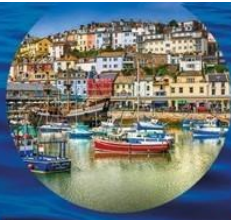




Marine
Management
Organisation

East Marine Plan Issues with Supporting Evidence Engagement Summary



...ambitious for our seas and coasts

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Executive summary

This report is a summary of stakeholder insights on the core issues facing the east marine plan areas over the next 20 years gathered during the Issues with Supporting Evidence stage for the replacement East Marine Plan (see Figure 1). The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) invited all interested stakeholders including representatives from local planning authorities, industry, NGOs, other MMO teams and other organisations to provide issues with supporting evidence in an engagement period that ran from 7 October 2024 to 10 January 2025. Over the course of the engagement period, a total of 2,220 issues supported by 1,596 evidence items were gathered.

A marine planning issue is categorised as a challenge or an opportunity that may impact the marine plan areas within the lifetime of the marine plan, which is the next 20 years. The issues have been analysed and categorised into six themes (see Section 2.0): marine environment, marine management, climate change, economic development, social benefits, and coastal communities. The six themes are based on the high-level marine objectives set out in the UK Marine Policy Statement, and will inform future stages of East Marine Plan preparation.

Issues raised by stakeholders verified and improved our understanding of challenges and opportunities encountered in the east marine plan areas. The marine environment theme recorded the largest number of issues (nearly 700) raised, ranging from climate change to the impacts from underwater noise. Other concerns included tackling non-native species, and the cumulative effects on habitats and restoration. Coastal erosion is a challenge being felt across the inshore marine plan area. A strong theme throughout the engagement was the management of co-existence, especially in the context of a potential shift towards more spatially prescriptive marine plans.

In relation to economic and marine management themes, the ports and shipping sector highlighted concerns regarding the boundary between the east and the south east marine plan areas. This is an existing issue that we will continue to work on closely with the ports sector throughout the preparation of the plan. Other issues included emerging new technologies, such as carbon capture and storage, desalination of sea water, and hydrogen. These issues have arisen since the publication of the first East Marine Plans in 2014 and highlight the speed at which marine industries are evolving. Opportunities raised included the potential for marine industries to provide employment opportunities for local communities from offshore wind, port development, the development of Sizewell C, aquaculture, and the potential establishment of desalination plants. Other opportunities included addressing skills gaps and upskilling local communities, which would help to ensure employment opportunities from offshore developments are retained locally.

Regarding coastal communities and social themes, increased data sharing amongst marine industries was considered an opportunity to manage the impacts of development on ecosystems. More complete data collection was presented as a potential opportunity for the heritage sector to prevent potential damage from other marine activities.

The outputs from this Issues with Supporting Evidence stage will feed into the subsequent stages of the East Marine Plan replacement, including vision, objectives and options.

The East Marine Plan development timeline can be found in the [Statement of Public Participation \(SPP\)](#), which was published in April 2024. Figure 1 on page 7 details the marine planning process and there will be further opportunities for stakeholders' involvement throughout the preparation of the East Marine Plan. The MMO will be in contact over the next year to request your involvement. Please follow this link if you would like to [sign up to our newsletter](#).

1.0. Introduction

This report summarises the findings from the Issues with Supporting Evidence stage of the MMO's East Marine Plan development. It details the key issues that were raised both internally at the MMO and by stakeholders over the course of the engagement period, and details how this information will be used in the preparation of the East Marine Plan.

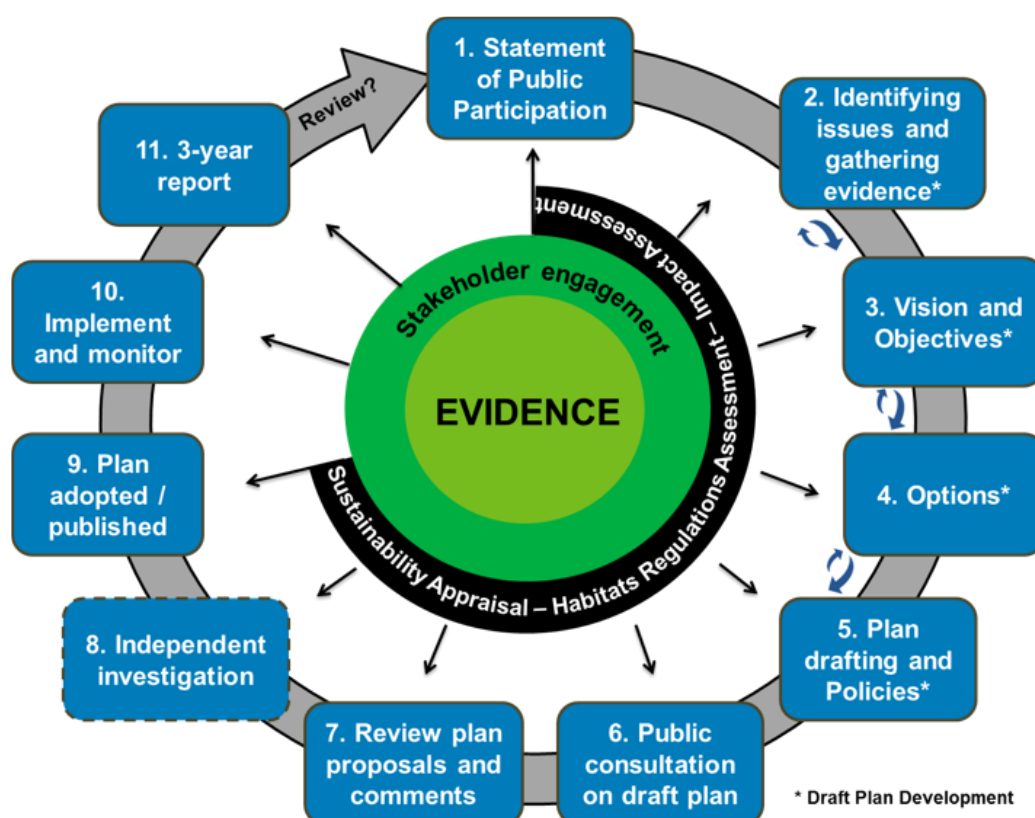
1.1. Background

Adopted in 2014, the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans were the first of England's six marine plans to be prepared and adopted by the MMO.

In 2023, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs agreed with the MMO recommendation to replace the East Marine Plans. A decision was made to replace the plans due to the changing context of the east marine plan areas; advances in marine planning process and policy development; changing government priorities and legislation; and increased evidence to underpin opportunities for new activities and technologies.

The process of preparing the East Marine Plan began with the [Statement of Public Participation \(SPP\)](#) which was published in April 2024. Following the publication of the SPP, the MMO initiated the second stage of the marine planning process, Issues with Supporting Evidence. This involved gathering stakeholder insights on issues, as well as supporting evidence, in the east marine plan areas. Figure 1 below details the stages of the marine planning process. It should be noted that marine plan development is iterative, therefore if new issues and evidence are raised they can be incorporated into the planning process at later stages.

Figure 1: The marine planning process.



1.2. Purpose and approach

Understanding the issues and evidence assists the development of the marine plan and is essential to the preparation of effective marine plans and policies. A marine planning issue is either a challenge or an opportunity that exists within or impacts upon the marine plan areas over the lifetime of a marine plan (20 years). For an issue to be a marine planning issue, it must be something that a marine plan, at least in part, has the ability to address. Supporting evidence is evidence which underpins and supports any of the issues raised. Evidence includes social, economic and environmental spatial data, academic research, government legislation and policy, plans and strategies, and expert opinion. Information has been collated from a wide range of sources to gain an in-depth understanding of issues in the east marine plan areas. These sources of information are presented below in Figure 2. All evidence is quality assured by the MMO before it is used in the marine plan development process.

1.3. Engagement

Stakeholder input and collaboration is important through all stages of developing and shaping the new East Marine Plan. For the Issues with Supporting Evidence stage of the process the MMO conducted three in-person events in Norwich, Peterborough, and Hull, and three online events. The events took place in the period from 6th of

November until 5th of December 2024. The events focussed on re-visiting the historic issues identified during the preparation of the East Marine Plans, published in 2014, to understand whether they were still valid or whether the situation has changed. Current and future issues facing the east marine plan areas were then explored for social, environmental and economic themes. In addition to the face to face and digital meetings, stakeholders were also invited to provide comments via the online platform [Citizen Space](#). Figure 3 below summarises our engagement and the outputs. Over the course of the engagement period, a total of 2,220 issues supported by 1,596 pieces of evidence were received.

Figure 2: Sources of information that feed into issues with supporting evidence.

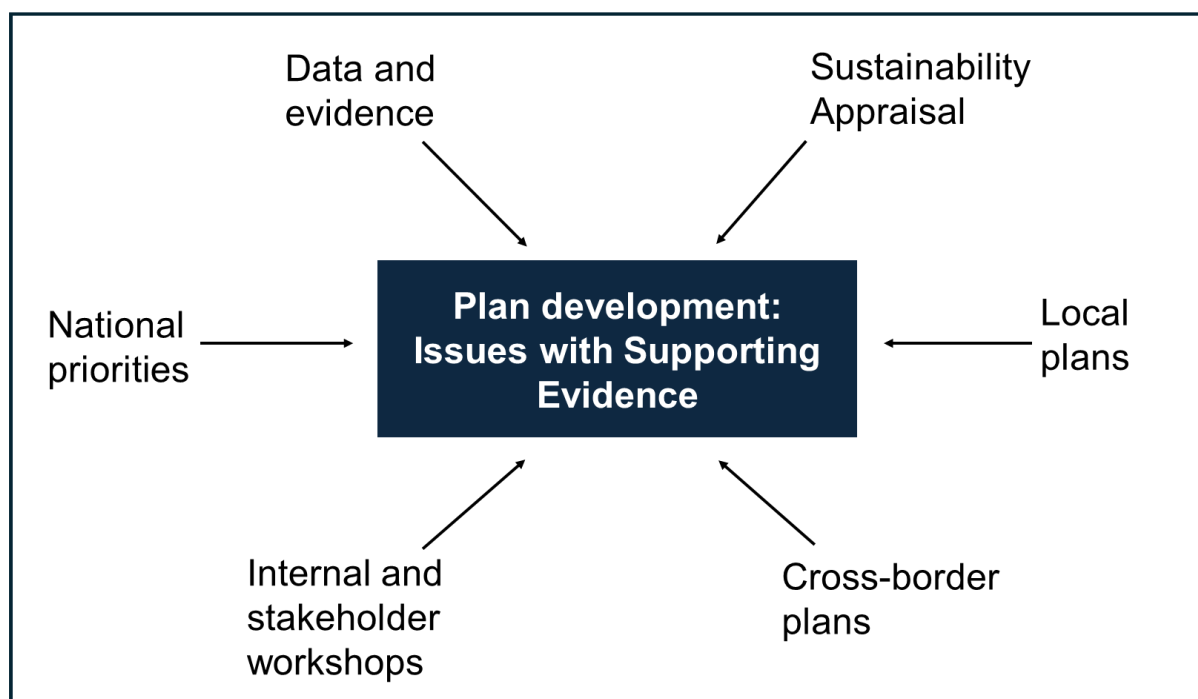
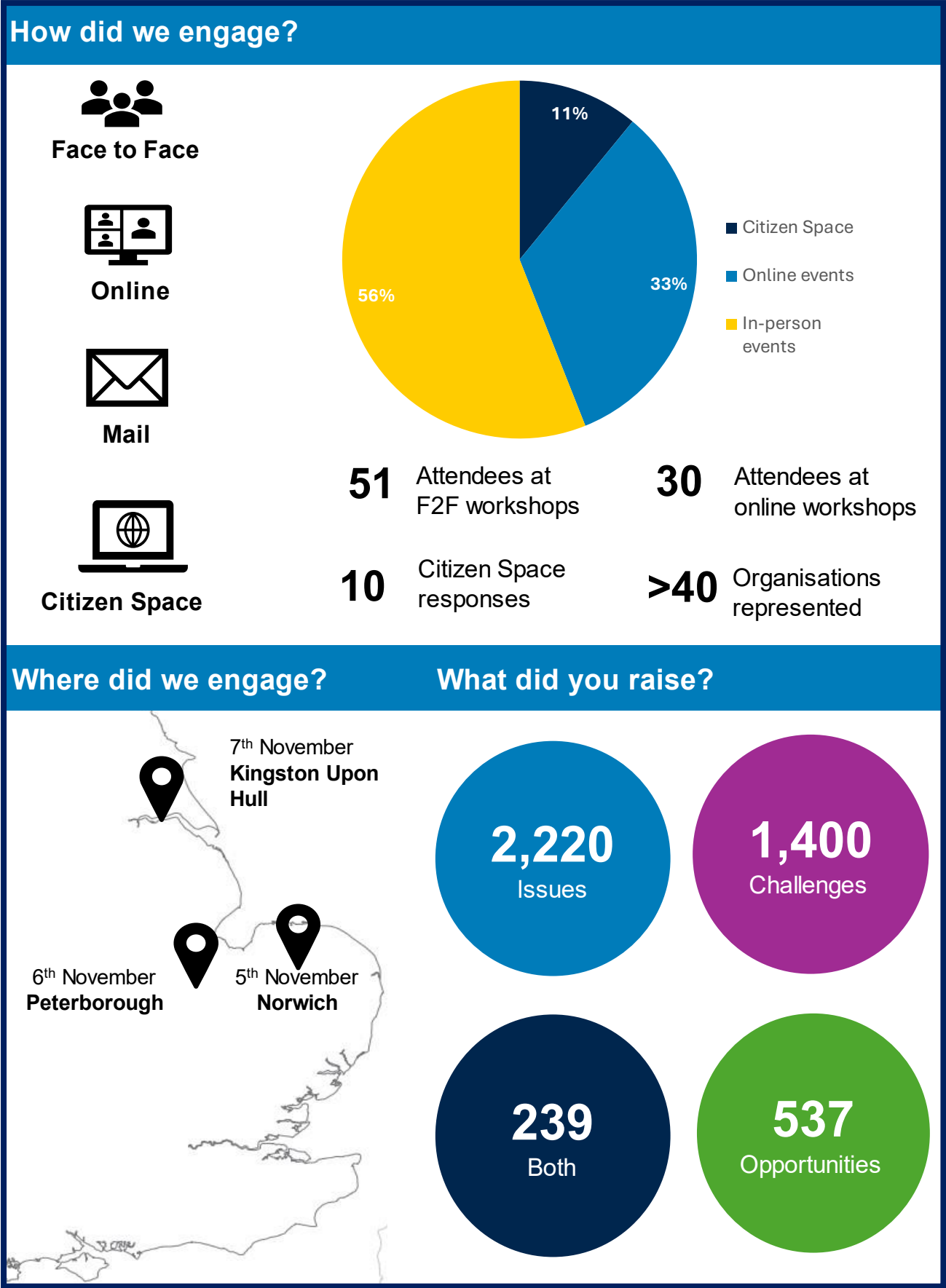


Figure 3: Engagement summary.



2.0. Core themes

Of the 2,220 issues identified, 65% were challenges, 24% were opportunities, and 11% were both, shown in Figure 4. Key topics have been assembled into a word cloud (Figure 5). A word cloud orders qualitative data based on repetition of words, with words that appear most frequently in the database depicted as larger words, and words that appear less frequently depicted as smaller words.

Stakeholders raised challenges centred around, for example, decommissioning of offshore wind farms, increase in underwater noise in the east marine plan areas, and disturbance issues from recreational activities. Stakeholders put forward several opportunities for the east marine plan areas, including the potential to repurpose oil and gas infrastructure, and the potential for aquaculture to improve water quality.

The issues have been analysed and categorised into six core themes (Figure 6). The themes are listed in order based on the number of issues assigned to them, with theme one containing the highest number of issues, a total of 695, and themes five and six assigned the lowest number of issues, a total of 165 issues each.

Figure 4: Issues classified as a challenge, opportunity or both.

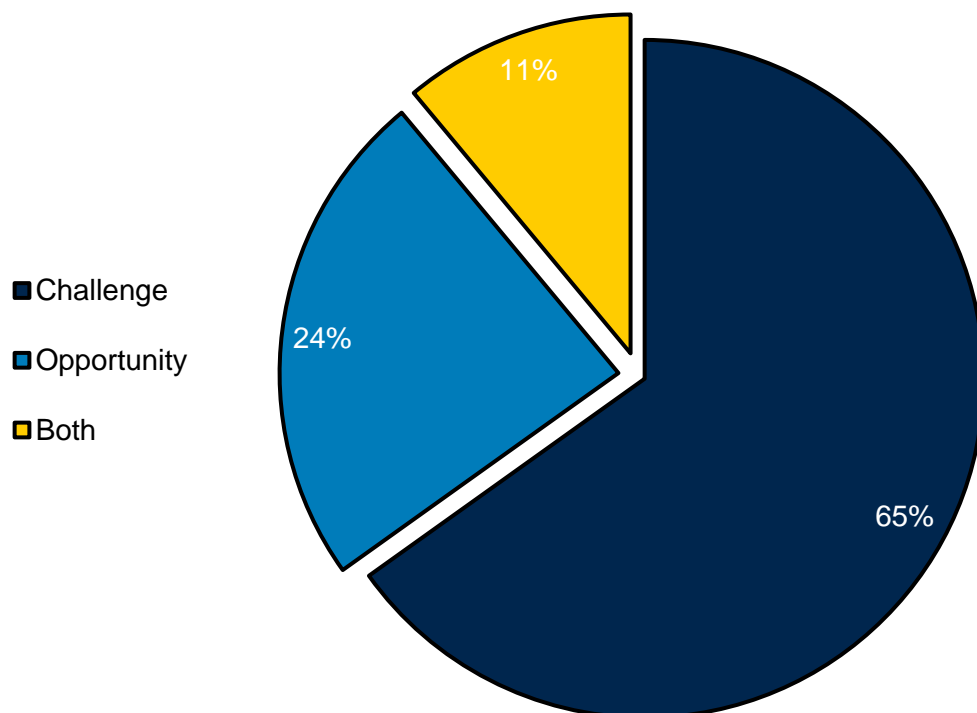


Figure 5: Shows the most prevalent topics discussed throughout the engagement process.

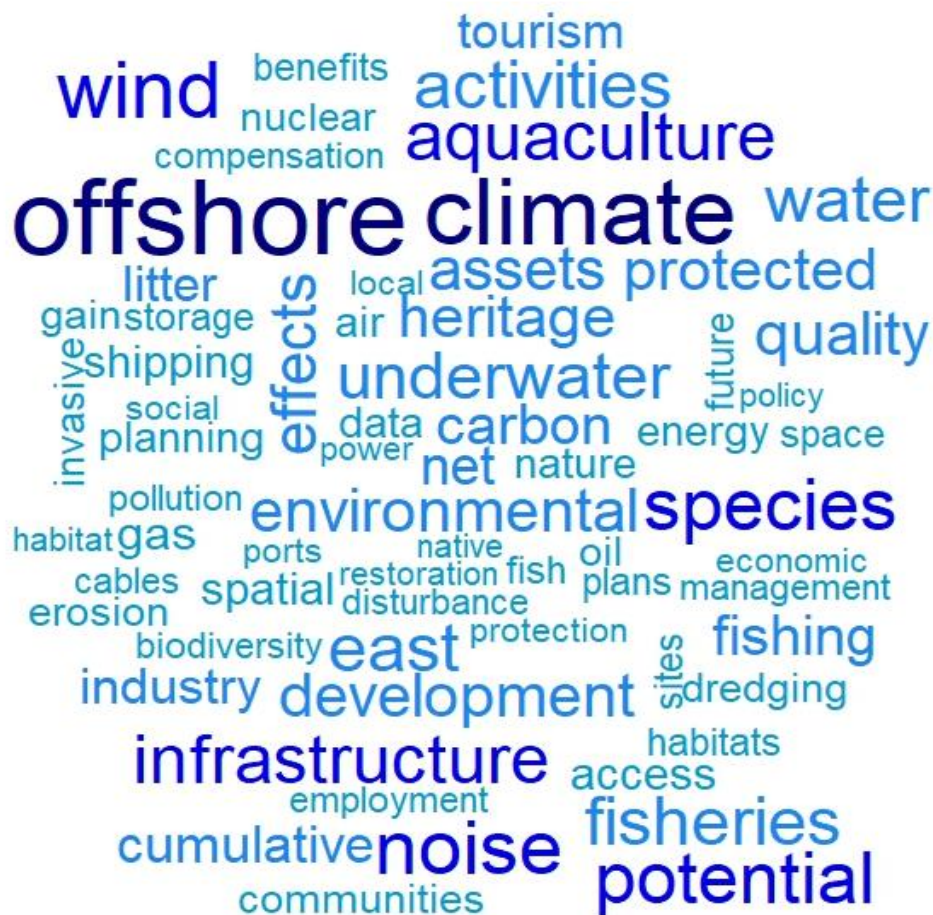


Figure 6: Core themes categorising the issues identified (in order of number of issue)

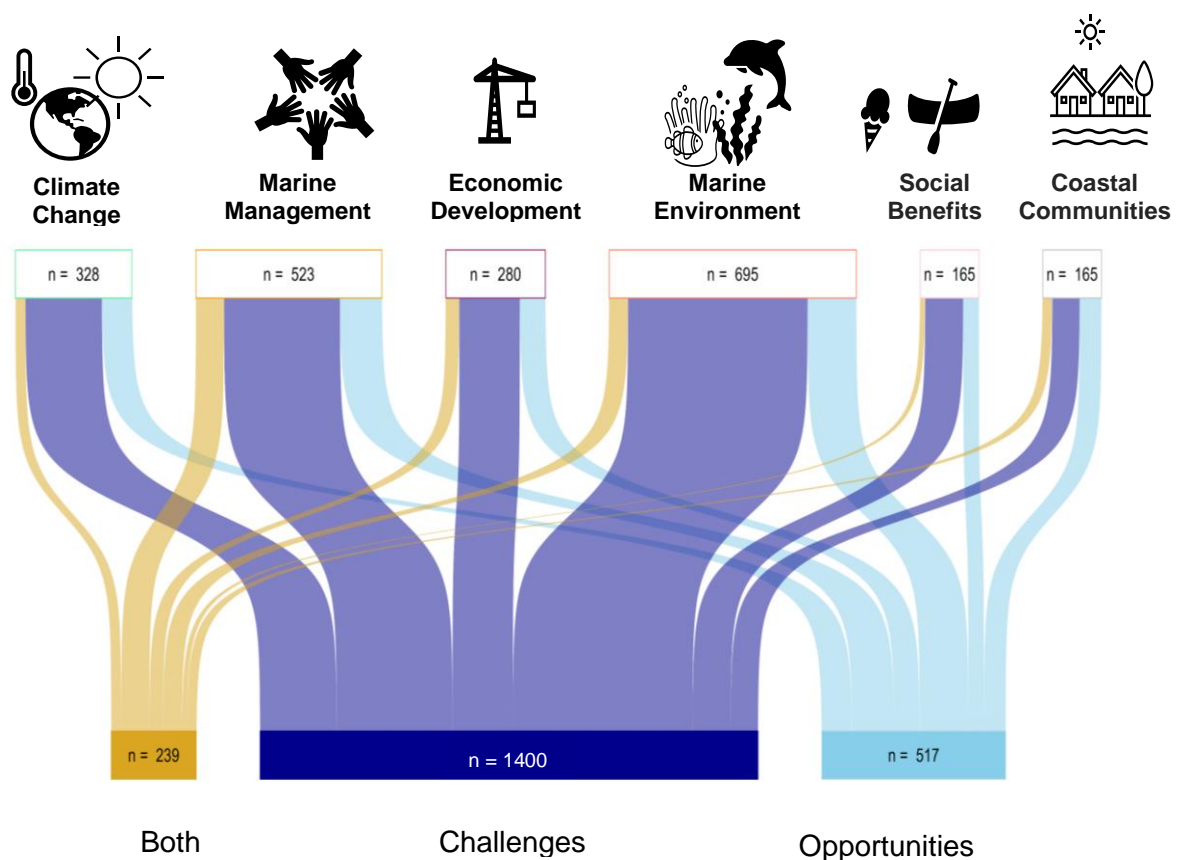
1. Enable the protection, recovery of the natural **marine environment**
2. Enable evidence led, holistic and coordinated approach to **marine management**, strategic considerations and governance.
3. Contribute to **climate change** mitigation and / or adaptation
4. Enable and promote sustainable **economic development**
5. Maintain and enhance the **social benefits** associated with the marine area
6. Support **coastal communities** and create opportunities for sustainable local employment, investment and regeneration

The six core themes are based around the High-Level Marine Objectives set out in the [UK Marine Policy Statement](#). This enabled us to group the issues in line with the overarching objectives for all UK marine plans.

All themes consist of more challenges than opportunities. Figure 7 below shows the number of issues allocated to each of the six core themes, and the split of these issues across challenges, opportunities or both. Issues that were identified as either not related to marine planning or which could not be addressed through the planning process were analysed separately. Non-planning issues that were identified as being relevant to other MMO teams, or delivery partners across government, will be passed on for consideration in due course.

It is important to note that the issues detailed in the theme sections below represent broad, unfiltered stakeholder opinion on the challenges and opportunities in the east marine plan areas. All issues, along with their supporting evidence, will be analysed further when marine plan policies are developed.

Figure 7: Sankey diagram displaying the total number of issues* (separated into challenges, opportunities or both) collected during the issues and evidence gathering stage. The issues have been categorised into the six broad outcome themes. *n* = number of issues.



**All issues that were collected and tagged as not relevant to marine planning have been removed for this analysis as theme classification for these issues was not always possible*

2.1. Core theme 1. Enable the protection, recovery and / or restoration of the natural marine environment

The marine environment theme contains the most issues categorised as challenges relative to opportunities (see Figure 8). The word cloud depicted in Figure 9 illustrates the most prevalent topics raised by stakeholders. Key challenge raised include cumulative underwater noise levels and the potential impact of a rise in invasive non-native species populations on marine ecosystems.

Examples of opportunities raised include the potential for passive acoustic monitoring to help us better understand how to best manage high levels of underwater noise, and potential mitigation measures to prevent harm to cetaceans. Other opportunities raised included the potential to incorporate planning to tackle invasive non-native species across all marine industries. As shown by these examples, some challenges were presented with possible opportunities for addressing them.

Certain issues put forward by stakeholders were classed as both challenges and opportunities, including for example, improving the evidence base for the impacts of underwater noise. Evidence collection is a challenge because impacts on species remains uncertain, and it is difficult to determine the extent of protection required.

The potential for environmental gains through initiatives such as net-zero and the probable introduction of marine net gain were suggested as opportunities to be reflected in the new East Marine Plan.

Figure 8: Percentage of marine environment issues.

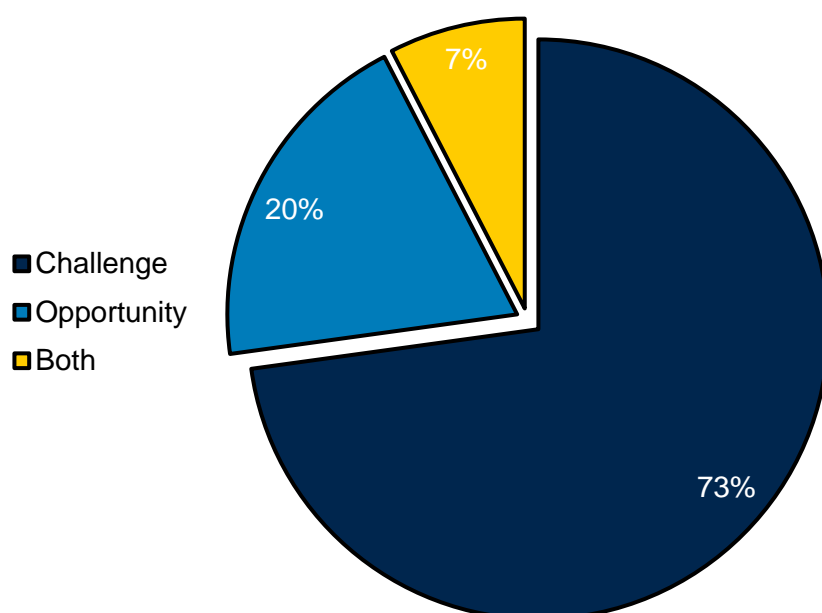
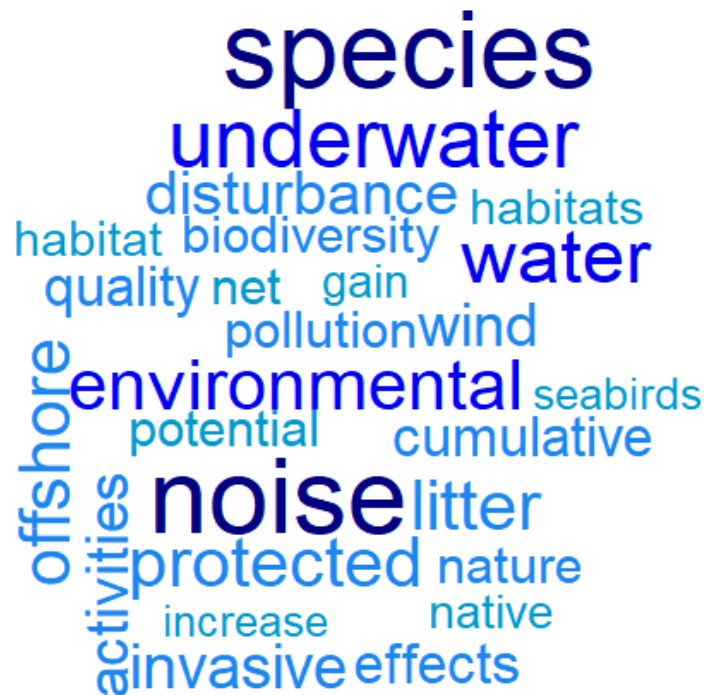


Figure 9: Word cloud displaying the most prevalent topics for the marine environment theme.

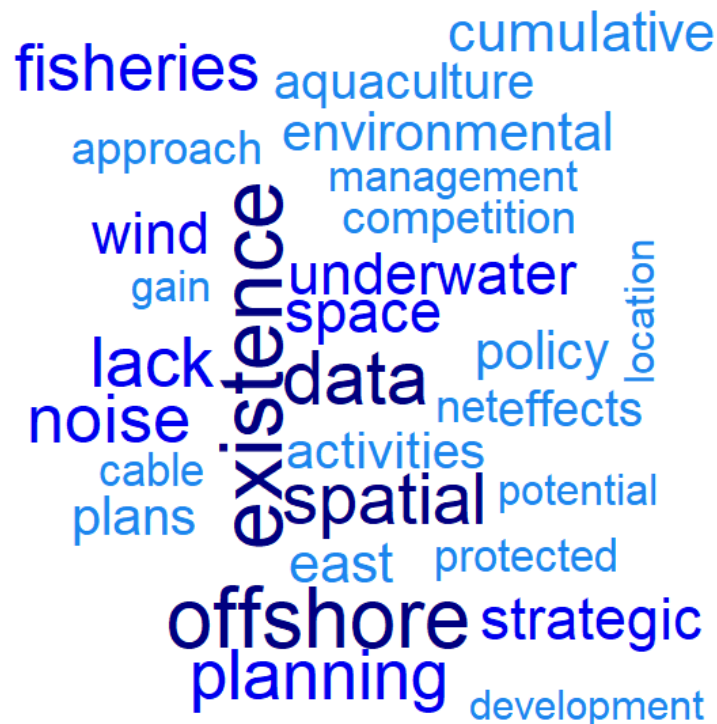


2.2. Core theme 2. Enable evidence led, holistic and coordinated approach to marine management, strategic considerations and governance.

Co-existence, spatial squeeze, offshore wind, fisheries, and spatial data were the key issues raised in this theme, show in Figure 10 below. A key challenge raised for marine management was the need for strategic co-ordination of co-existence between different sectors to manage the competition for space. A linked opportunity therefore was the potential for the new East Marine Plan to facilitate co-existence more overtly than previously.

The issue of co-existence with regard to fisheries was raised, as stakeholders are concerned that increased infrastructure such as cables on the seabed increases the risk of fisher interactions with such hazards. The challenge of ensuring key areas remain open for fisheries was also raised. Future opportunities for fisheries include the potential for co-location (aquaculture) with offshore wind under particular circumstances, although it was acknowledged that this opportunity also presents associated challenges.

Figure 10: Word cloud displaying the most prevalent topics for the marine management theme.



The issue of the boundaries of the east marine plan areas was raised by the ports sector. For example, the approaches to the port of Harwich (south-east plan area) lie within the east marine plan area, which introduces a singular issue centred on ensuring compatibility between management of adjacent marine plan areas.

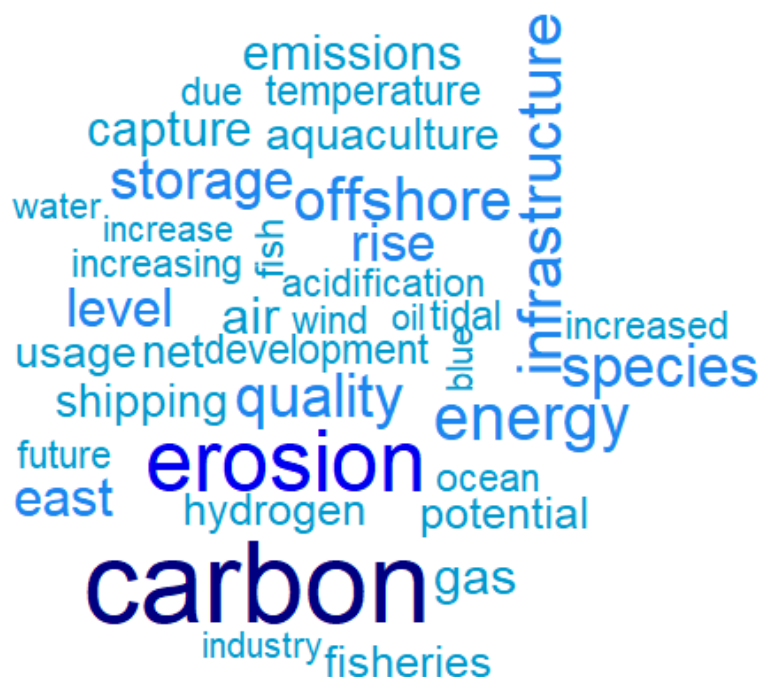
Stakeholders raised challenges for marine management around data, including the need for better co-ordination between projects to share environmental data relevant to the marine area. Data-sharing was also presented as an opportunity, for example, it was mentioned that platforms such as the Marine Data Exchange enable the sharing of data and evidence.

2.3. Core theme 3. Contribute to climate change mitigation and/or adaptation

Key issues raised for the climate change theme include opportunities provided through potential carbon capture and storage, and the challenges of increased coastal erosion. Figure 11 depicts the most prevalent topics raised by stakeholders for the climate change theme.

Stakeholders presented the challenge of protecting communities from increased coastal erosion along the coastline of the whole plan area. Stakeholders discussed the impact of new coastal developments on coastal erosion, and the risk of coastal protection on one section of the coastline causing increased erosion at other sections if not considered holistically.

Figure 11: Word cloud displaying the most prevalent topics for the climate change theme.



Opportunities for carbon capture and storage (CCUS) were noted by stakeholders, including the potential for CCUS to help meet net zero 2050 targets, potential employment opportunities from CCUS development, and opportunities for decommissioned oil and gas fields to be used for carbon capture and storage. However, some stakeholders acknowledged that CCUS may have negative environmental impacts. Other opportunities are centred on the potential growth of aquaculture, and the probability of hydrogen as a new fuel source, both of which will have the added benefit of increasing employment opportunities within the east marine plan areas.

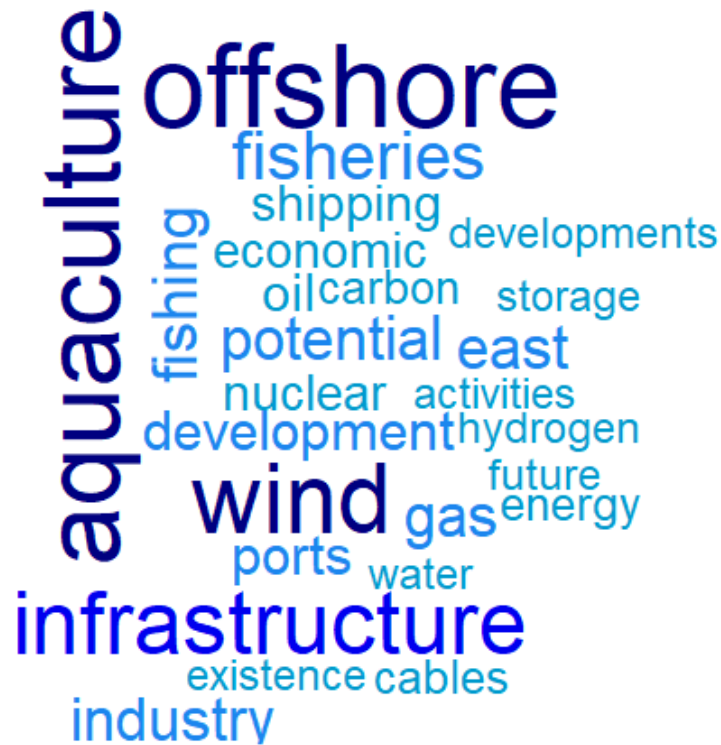
A new and emerging sector is the potential for desalination plants to be established along the east coast, as the hinterland of East Anglia has the lowest average rainfall in the UK.

2.4. Core theme 4. Enable and promote sustainable economic development

Offshore wind and aquaculture infrastructure were the key economic development issues raised by stakeholders (Figure 12).

Opportunities provided by the continued growth of the offshore wind sector included the positive contribution the sector makes to decarbonisation and opportunities for ports to support the offshore wind supply chain. It was also noted that there are potential opportunities for offshore wind to co-exist and co-locate with fisheries in certain circumstances, but that the opportunities for co-existence can vary depending on location and activity.

Figure 12: Word cloud displaying the most prevalent topics for the economic development theme.



Co-existence issues for aquaculture were also raised by stakeholders, including opportunities for seaweed aquaculture to co-exist with offshore wind developments, and potentially with the ports and shipping industry. On the other hand, the risk of safety to navigation from aquaculture projects was presented as a challenge, indicating that co-existence opportunities need to be managed carefully.

2.5. Core theme 5. Maintain and enhance the social benefits associated with the marine area

Key issues that emerged in the social theme are related to the preservation of heritage assets, ensuring coastal access for all, and the benefits of tourism and recreation (Figure 13).

An opportunity for the heritage sector centred on the availability of more spatial data, leading to improved recognition of historic assets within the marine environment, a better understanding of their cultural significance, and the importance of ensuring future preservation.

Challenges around access to marine and coastal areas were raised by stakeholders, which could restrict the potential to increase public knowledge and understanding. It was suggested that completion of the Charles III coastal path would help to improve access to the coastline.

Figure 13: Word cloud displaying the most prevalent topics for the social benefits theme.



2.6. Core theme 6. Support coastal communities and create opportunities for sustainable local employment, investment and regeneration

Of the six core themes, coastal communities had the most issues classed as opportunities relative to challenges. Figure 14 shows the split across coastal communities issues characterised as challenges, opportunities and both. The key issues for this theme include local employment, community benefits, tourism, fisheries, and access (Figure 15).

A range of opportunities for employment were noted by stakeholders, including local employment opportunities from port development, the development of Sizewell C, aquaculture and seafood processing. Stakeholders highlighted the need to ensure employment benefits of offshore wind are felt by local communities. It was suggested that addressing skills gaps and upskilling local communities would help to ensure employment opportunities from offshore developments are retained locally.

Figure 14: Number of issues (classified as challenges, opportunities or both) for the coastal communities theme.

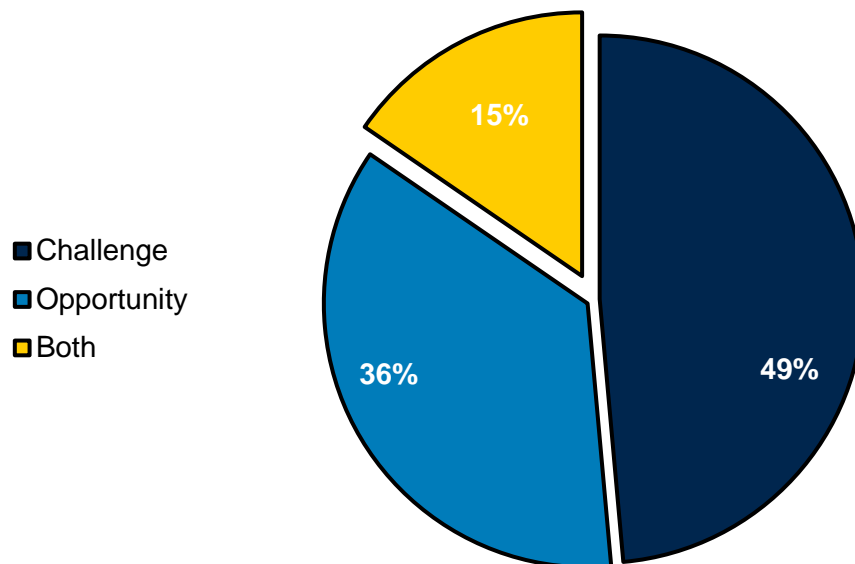


Figure 15: Word cloud displaying the most prevalent topics for the coastal communities theme.



3.0. Evidence

A total of 1,596 items of supporting evidence were submitted in support of issues through the engagement process. All supporting evidence has been collated and quality assured, and will be utilised to inform the next stages of the preparation of the East Marine Plan.

The MMO's quality assurance process assesses whether evidence sources are sound and ensures that any limitations of evidence sources are factored into consideration when the evidence is being used. Details of the MMO's quality assurance process can be found [here](#). This process ensures that we use quality evidence to support the development of the East Marine Plan, in line with the [Marine Policy Statement's](#) High Level Marine Objective 'Using sound science responsibly'.

The MMO are in the process of assessing the evidence gaps which emerged through the issues gathering process. We will continue to seek to fill these gaps through our evidence collection processes.

4.0. Wider context

The latest three-year [progress report](#) (2020-2023) for the East Marine Plans concluded that the national context had significantly changed since their adoption. The UK exited the European Union, and national priorities had changed through the introduction of national plans and strategies such as the UK Marine Strategy (2019), the Net Zero Strategy (2020), and the British Energy Security Strategy (2022). The number of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), offshore wind farms, and other marine activities have significantly increased in the east marine plan areas, which has implications for all marine users. The MMO seeks to reflect this changed context in the development of the new East Marine Plan. The sections below detail some key national strategies that need be accounted for in plan preparation.

4.1. Defra's Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme (MSPri)

Defra's Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme is a cross-government initiative designed to ensure a more holistic approach to the use of the English seas is taken and to maximise co-location possibilities.

4.2. [NESO's Strategic Spatial Energy Plan \(SSEP\)](#)

The Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP) will forecast energy supply and demand and establish potential locations for energy infrastructure. The SSEP will consider electricity and hydrogen supply types, locations, capacities and timings, in the context of supply and demand, as well as environmental, community and other spatial interests. The development of the SSEP will inform wider government policy and will be reflected in the preparation of the new East Marine Plan.

4.3. The Crown Estate's 'Whole of Seabed Approach'

The 'Whole of Seabed Approach' uses geospatial tools to optimise the cost, location and impact of development in England's marine area and identifies potential interactions between different sectors. This information is used to model how future demands on the seabed, net zero targets, and marine recovery can be achieved under different scenarios. The 'Whole of Seabed Approach' evidence base will be utilised in marine planning and across the wider government.

The MMO will develop the new East Marine Plan in line with these changed national priorities and strategies. We will aim to develop more prescriptive and spatial marine plan policies.

5.0. Conclusions and next steps

The purpose of the issues with supporting evidence process was to understand new and existing issues in the east marine plan areas, raised by stakeholders over the course of the engagement period.

A wide range of issues were raised through the engagement, with a greater number of challenges than opportunities. Many of the issues raised were interlinked, presenting a complex picture for the east marine plan areas. An example of these interlinkages is managing co-existence between different industries, such as offshore wind and fisheries, aquaculture and shipping, and carbon capture and storage and oil and gas. Further interlinkages include employment opportunities presented by new and emerging technologies, and the impacts of offshore industries on marine species, such as underwater noise.

Many of the challenges raised by stakeholders also had opportunities linked to them. For example, the potential to repurpose oil and gas infrastructure, and for aquaculture to improve water quality. Stakeholders also presented the opportunity to increase data sharing amongst marine industries to help mitigate some of the impacts of development on the east marine ecosystems.

The issues identified as part of this process will feed into the preparation of the Vision and Objectives stage for the new East Marine Plan. The vision and objectives will inform the Options stage of plan development. We will assess how the East Marine Plan can best address the issues raised throughout the next stages of the marine planning process. Following the Options stage, we will begin the process of drafting marine plan policies.

We would like to thank all stakeholders who provided comments through the engagement process. The MMO will take all comments into consideration, and there will be further opportunities for stakeholder involvement throughout the preparation of the East Marine Plan.

Please follow this link if you would like to [sign up to our newsletter](#). For further information relating to marine plan development please see our [guidance note](#) and the [East Marine Plan Statement of Public Participation](#).