



Aim

To review the current approach to the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of marine plans and support the Marine Management Organisation's (MMO) Marine Planning Team to better understand the effects and effectiveness of marine plan policies. Where practicable, suggest methodological improvements to the evaluation aspect of the framework.

Introduction and methodology

Marine plans and associated policies serve as tools for managing marine activities and balancing competing demands on marine space. The requirements for the MMO to monitor and periodically report on marine plans is set out in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 under Section 54 'duty to keep relevant matters under review' and Section 61 'monitoring of, and periodic reporting on, implementation'. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of the effects and effectiveness of marine plan policies is an important part of how marine plans can be reported on, improved upon and adapted over time.

M&E develops understanding of the marine plan policies' contribution towards the marine plan vision and objectives, the High Level Marine Objectives (HLMOs), and other government commitments, which are all set within changing contextual factors, such as climate change and socio-political changes.

This project involved a comprehensive review of marine planning documents and legislation, academic and grey literature, and three workshops with MMO colleagues to develop recommendations for a revised approach to M&E.

Results

The review identified several strengths and weaknesses of the current approach. Strengths include the use of logic models, alignment with legal requirements and government policy, and a robust indicator system for tracking policy outcomes. However, the current framework primarily focuses on monitoring rather than M&E however, making it difficult to draw high-confidence conclusions about policy effects and effectiveness, and to understand interactions across scales and different policy areas.

Conclusions and recommendations

The report outlines the development and application of a revised 'Approach to the Monitoring and Evaluation' framework for marine plans. The proposed framework seeks to address the complexities of marine social-ecological-economic systems and improve the assessment of marine plan policy effects and effectiveness.

The revised approach includes contextual factors alongside outcome indicators, and an improved evaluation framework including evaluation objectives, questions, and a systems-based contribution analysis. The framework is designed to more effectively focus resource and evidence to the extent to which marine plan policies are impacting target outcomes.



The framework can be applied retrospectively to existing marine plans to enhance the understanding of policy impacts despite data limitations. Integrating the framework into new marine plan development, encourages the creation of SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) setting a stronger foundation for future evaluations.

Adopting the recommended approach will generate broader evidence to strengthen the role of marine plans in supporting sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, and the resilience of coastal and marine communities, helping to safeguard marine environments for future generations.

MMO comments

The evidence from this project on adopting a systems-based approach to M&E will support the MMO Marine Planning Team move from a monitoring approach to a monitoring, evaluation and learning approach. The revised approach will enhance the understanding of the effects and effectiveness of marine plan policies. It will benefit both existing marine plans as well as the replacement of the East Marine Plan, providing a more robust framework for the next generation of marine plans.

Further information

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