



Aim

To update the seascape character assessment for the east marine plan areas and analyse change since the first assessment was carried out in 2012 (for the first [East Marine Plans](#), 2014).

Introduction and methodology

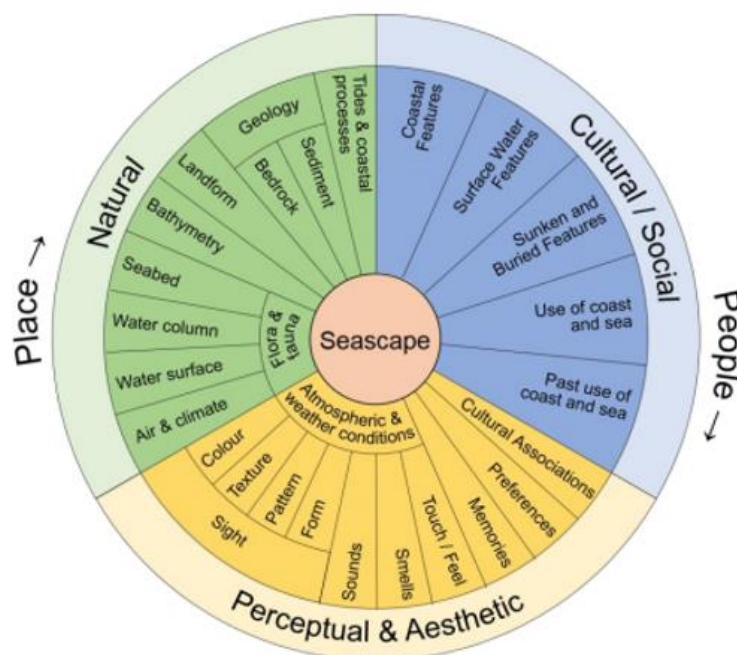
In 2023, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs agreed with MMO's recommendation to replace the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans. The adopted East Marine Plans will be replaced with a new plan which will be the first of a second generation of plans for English waters.

To assist MMO in addressing the seascape requirements set out in the Marine Policy Statement, two reports were commissioned to 1) prepare an updated seascape character assessment (SCA) for the east inshore and offshore marine plan areas and 2) analyse change in the period since the first plans were published.

The study used the Seascape Wheel (Figure 1) to organise data collected through field surveys and a desk-based study. Outputs were compared with the existing seascape evidence base to revise key characteristics of the ten marine character areas (MCAs) in the east marine plan areas.

Details of MCAs were discussed and validated in two external stakeholder engagement sessions held in early 2024. In addition to an updated set of spatial MCA data layers (for use in spatial data applications including but not limited to [Explore Marine Plans](#)), a qualitative analysis of change was undertaken and is provided as a standalone report to the main SCA.

Figure 1: The Seascape Wheel (adapted from Natural England, 2012¹)



¹ <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/2729852>



Results

An updated set of key characteristics was produced for MCAs in the east marine plan areas. At the north and south boundaries of the east marine plan areas, minor adjustments were made to reflect MCA boundaries for adjacent plan areas e.g. the boundary between MCA 5: Holderness Coastal Waters and MCA 21: North Yorkshire Coastal Waters was moved south of the marine plan boundary, so that the whole of Flamborough Head lies within MCA 5. There were no major changes to MCA boundaries. Seascape change is analysed using three themes: land use change along the coast; coastal change; and inshore and offshore change. Changes are discussed in terms of current and future marine plan policies. The report provides a narrative to understand how the seascape has changed, mapped to the vision for the east marine plan areas.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Seascape change tends to be incremental rather than wholesale. Continuous and more targeted monitoring (beyond existing high-level approach to monitoring) would be beneficial to understand the effects of seascape policy. The current seascape change analysis reflects two points in time which are 12 years apart.
- Current seascape policies may have influenced seascape character across the area, but they could be strengthened for instance by providing targeted mitigation measures (e.g. nature-based solutions like habitat restoration) and recognising cumulative effects of small-scale changes.
- Offshore windfarms (OWFs) are a prominent sight in the seascape which corresponds to the vision for the East Marine Plans (2014). The more recently consented OWFs demonstrate greater consideration of seascape as they are located further offshore and have less visual impact than older OWFs.
- Coastal processes could be better integrated by linking seascape policy to shoreline management plans (owned by local authorities) to address coastal erosion and managed realignment impacts on seascape character.
- Considering the socio-economic drivers of seascape character change (e.g. tourism decline) might highlight interactions with other marine plan policies.

MMO comments

Seascape Character Assessments (SCAs) are a required part of the evidence base for marine planning under the Marine Policy Statement. They support plan development and licensing decisions by adding a 'sense of place' to marine plans. This commission's reports, alongside other evidence such as the forthcoming East Futures report, will inform new seascape policy for the replacement East Marine Plan, building on existing policy effectiveness and considering future needs.

Further information

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