



Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

Three-year report on the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans

For the period 2 April 2023 to 1 April 2026

July 2026



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

July 2026

We are responsible for improving and protecting the environment. We aim to grow a green economy and sustain thriving rural communities. We also support our world-leading food, farming and fishing industries.

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Three-year report on the East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans

1. Background and introduction

1.1 Overview of the East Inshore and Offshore Marine Plans

The [East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans](#) (the ‘plans’) were prepared by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on behalf of the government and adopted in April 2014 by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. These plans were the first English marine plans to be published by the MMO.

The plans cover an area of approximately 55,000 square kilometres, stretching from Flamborough Head in Yorkshire to Felixstowe in Suffolk and extending from the mean high spring tide limit out to the UK’s international maritime boundaries with Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

This area is one of the most used and therefore complex of England’s marine plan areas. For example, the area supports over 50% of England’s current offshore wind capacity and contains 29 marine protected area designations, including six marine conservation zones. It is also important for aggregates, fisheries, ports and shipping.

The plans contain 11 objectives, supported by 38 plan policies. These were developed to contribute towards delivery of the government’s vision and high-level marine objectives (HLMOs), as set out in the [UK Marine Policy Statement](#).

1.2 Purpose of the report

Sections 54 and 61 of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#) require the plans to be kept under review and reports published every three years following their adoption.

The MMO’s monitoring approach is available at [East Marine Plans Implementation and Monitoring Plan on GOV.UK](#).

The reports cover:

- context monitoring - an assessment of legislative and regulatory changes that may affect the relevance of the plans
- process monitoring - an assessment of if, and how, the plans and associated policies are being used
- outcome monitoring - an assessment of the effects and effectiveness of the plans, policies and of the progress made towards securing the relevant objectives and HLMOs

This is the fourth three-year report on the plans. It covers the period 2 April 2023 to 1 April 2026. The previous [three-year progress reports are also available on GOV.UK](#).

1.3 Overview of past findings and progress made since the previous report

The third three-year report, covering 2 April 2020 to 1 April 2023, was published in March 2023 and recommended that the plans be replaced. Its findings supported and strengthened the earlier recommendation of the second report to consider updating the plans due to changes to the legislative and policy context since the plans were adopted.

Based on the findings of these reports, the MMO recommended that the plans be replaced. This was agreed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The MMO began the formal replacement process with the publication of a [Statement of Public Participation](#) (SPP) on 22 April 2024.

The replacement plan will be the first time the UK government has replaced a marine plan for English waters, and the document will be referred to as the East Marine Plan. Work has since been ongoing to develop the plan, and feedback from stakeholders continues to support this process. Further information and any associated publications can be found at [East Marine Plans on GOV.UK](#).

As the recommendation to replace the plans is still being enacted, a high-level assessment has been used to inform this fourth report.

2. Main findings for the 2 April 2023 to 1 April 2026 reporting period

2.1 Context monitoring

Since the publication of the third three-year report on the plans in 2023, context monitoring has found further legislative and policy changes. In 2024, the UK government set out its national priorities structured around five 'national missions'. These are to:

- kickstart economic growth
- build an NHS fit for the future
- create safer streets by reducing crime
- breakdown the barrier to opportunity
- make Britain a clean energy superpower

The [Planning and Infrastructure Act](#) (the Act), which received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025, introduced major reforms to the planning system through new legislation, amendments to existing legislation and provisions for secondary legislation. The Act will facilitate the delivery of the government's mission to kickstart economic growth, and identify, develop and deliver key national infrastructure.

A key element of the Act is the introduction of Spatial Development Strategies, plans designed to inform local planning and identify pathways to deliver nationally important infrastructure and nature restoration across local authority boundaries.

The Act also introduces the creation of Environmental Delivery Plans and a Nature Restoration Fund. Environmental Delivery Plans aim to streamline and strengthen environmental protection, including within the marine environment.

Overall, the Act has implications for the integration of marine and terrestrial planning systems. The replacement plan will be the first time the UK government are replacing a marine plan, and it will need to factor in the new contextual planning framework.

The UK government's renewed emphasis on energy security is reflected in the fifth mission, to [make Britain a clean energy superpower](#). This reinforces government commitments to expanding clean energy generation capacity and improving national energy resilience, considerations to be reflected in the replacement East Marine Plan.

The [Energy Act 2023](#), which received Royal Assent in October 2023, established new provisions for energy production, security and energy market regulations. It introduced frameworks for carbon capture, offshore wind and nuclear energy, and created the National Energy System Operator.

The UK, Scottish and Welsh governments jointly commissioned the National Energy System Operator to create a [Strategic Spatial Energy Plan](#) for the energy system, land and sea, across Great Britain. The Strategic Spatial Energy Plan is intended to support a more strategic, integrated approach to energy deployment, considering marine and terrestrial constraints and opportunities at a system-wide scale.

The [Government's Clean Power Action Plan](#), published in December 2024, sets out a pathway to a clean power system by 2030. It includes a commitment to deliver an Offshore Wind Environmental Improvement Package to de-risk and accelerate offshore wind consenting while protecting the marine environment. The package includes taking steps to deliver environmental compensation measures across multiple projects, bringing forward reforms to deliver a more flexible approach to environmental compensation measures. This is to be achieved through legislation and guidance, establishing a Marine Recovery Fund as a voluntary delivery mechanism, setting Offshore Wind Environmental Standards, and putting in place a strategic monitoring framework.

The [Marine Recovery Fund](#) was launched in December 2025 and the Statutory Instrument to reform environmental compensatory measures for offshore wind was laid in parliament in February 2026.

Together with the government's renewed emphasis on energy security and clean energy, the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan, the Energy Act, and the Clean Power Action Plan have implications for the marine planning system. These emerging contextual factors will need to be considered and incorporated in the replacement East Marine Plan.

2.2 Process monitoring

Process monitoring findings suggest that use of the plans has continued to embed within marine licence decision-making processes. Findings across the 2023 to 2026 reporting period show consistent integration of marine plans within both applicant consideration and the MMO's marine licensing decision-making.

Applicant consideration of the plans was present, with all sampled assessments showing policy consideration across the three years. The proportion of high-quality applicant policy consideration increased from 18% in the period 2023 to 2024 to 36% in 2024 to 2025. It returned to 16% in the period 2025 to 2026. The delivery of external implementation training in the second reporting period likely explains the increase seen in 2024 to 2025, with no programmed training carried out in the third reporting period, 2025 to 2026.

The percentage of marine licence applications showing high consideration of the plans by MMO's marine licensing function increased from 28% in 2023 to 2024 to 60% in the 2024 to 2025 reporting period. This increase reflects the focus on internal plan-led decision making, through targeted internal implementation training, during the 2024 to 2025 reporting period. The percentage of high consideration of plan policies by the MMO's marine licensing function then remained high in the 2025 to 2026 period at 49%.

Overall, all three years recorded full compliance, with no instances where applicants and the MMO's marine licensing function failed to consider applicable marine plan policies.

Beyond marine licensing processes, responses to the 2024 to 2025 voluntary stakeholder survey confirmed that a range of advisory bodies and decision-makers are using the plans. Responses also confirmed that decision-makers external to the MMO are using the plans to make authorisation and enforcement decisions. For other decisions taken (for example, decisions taken when developing a local minerals and aggregates plan) over half of the respondents indicated they had referred to marine plans.

The MMO has also strengthened the use of the plans by internal and external decision-makers through its internal and external implementation training activities. In early 2024, the MMO delivered 13 internal training sessions to over 186 colleagues within the MMO. Externally, in 2024, the MMO delivered a total of 41 external implementation training activities, to over 700 participants, including representatives from industry, local authorities, regulators and non-government organisations.

Efforts to further develop and promote the [Explore Marine Plans](#) digital service and [Using Marine Plans](#) guidance will also help to support marine plan use.

2.3 Outcome monitoring

A high-level assessment of outcome monitoring found the plans continue to have a positive effect on promoting coexistence by requiring proposals to demonstrate how they will avoid or reduce negative impacts on other activities.

Continued progress towards securing all plan objectives and HLMOs was also evidenced from process monitoring findings (see section 2.2). Insights gained from trends in policy use will help to shape future policy development and implementation activities.

The MMO began the formal process of replacing the plans with the publication of a [Statement of Public Participation](#) on 22 April 2024. During the pre-election period for the July 2024 General Election, and for a short period thereafter, activities were paused. Work resumed in November 2024, including stakeholder engagement to gather issues and evidence relating to the east marine plan areas, and views on ongoing plan policy development. Engagement indicated that stakeholder appetite for replacing the plans remained unchanged. Through draft plan policy engagement workshops, stakeholders were shown 71 draft east plan policies and asked to rate each one as either: agree, amendments are required or disagree. Feedback received showed 57% agreed with the policy wording, 40% suggested changes and 3% disagreed. The comments and feedback received will be considered in future rounds of policy drafting in this plan replacement process.

Work on replacing the plan is ongoing, and feedback from stakeholders continues to support and complements the requirement to replace the plans.

3. Conclusions and next steps

No new evidence has emerged that would alter the previous recommendation and decision to replace the existing East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans. The findings of this fourth report support the recommendations of the second and third three-year reports. Based on this conclusion, the MMO therefore recommends that work to replace the current plans with the new East Marine Plan continues.

Public consultation on the draft East Marine Plan and associated documents is due to be launched in late autumn 2026, with adoption and publication of the plan (and supporting documents) currently expected towards the end of 2027.

Further information on this process is available at [East Marine Plans on GOV.UK](#).

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