



Maritime Spatial Planning Country Profile

Ireland

Contact

MSP in general

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Last revision date

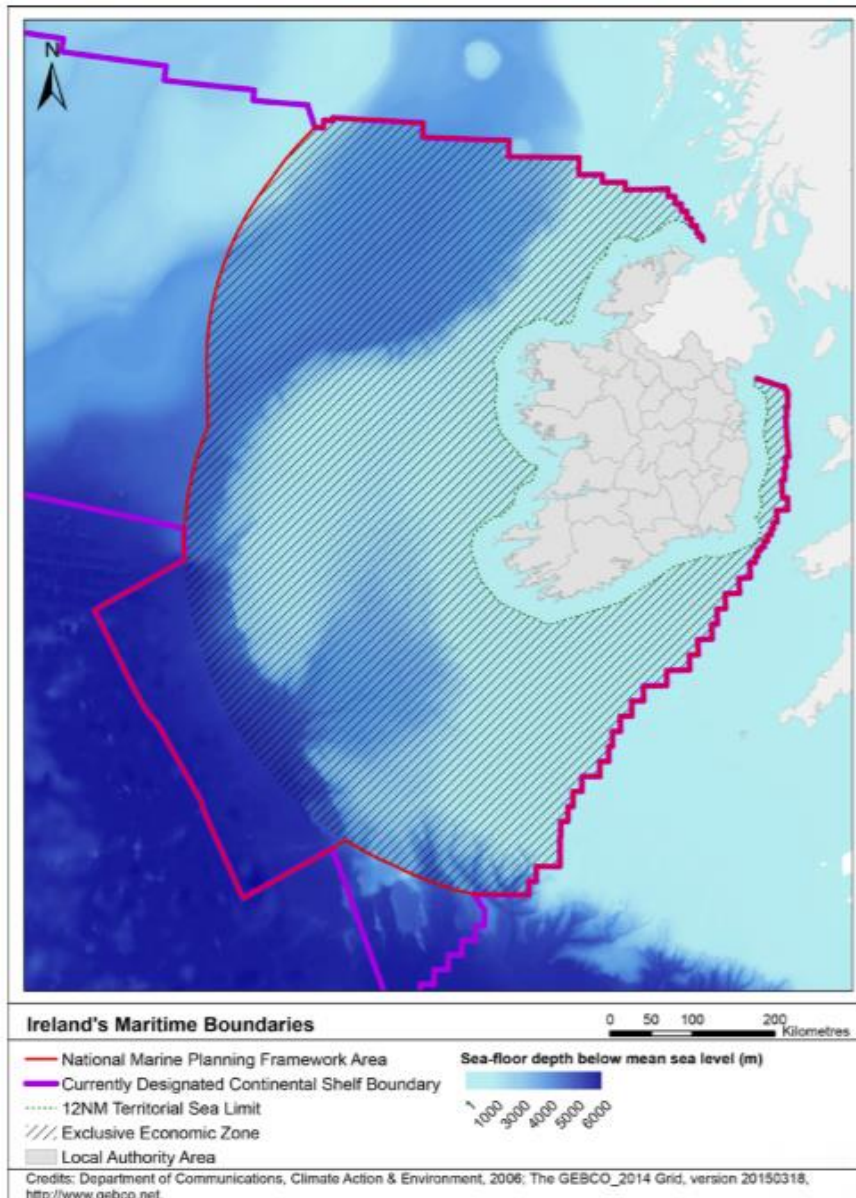
This version was last reviewed and updated (where necessary) by the European MSP Platform team in April 2024.

Funding attribution

The EU MSP Platform is financed by the EU Commission under the EMFAF. The EU MSP Platform is a result of the action MSP Assistance Mechanism implemented by CINEA on behalf of DG MARE.

Background Information

Basic facts on Marine Waters



Source: National Marine Planning Framework

The Irish maritime area extends over 490,000km² (approx. 7 times its terrestrial landmass) and comprises parts of the Irish and Celtic Seas, as well as the Atlantic Ocean and certain areas of the Continental Shelf, where Ireland has defined its EEZ. On 19 May 2006, Ireland submitted (jointly with France, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland -hereinafter referred to as the “four coastal States”), through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf information on the limits of the continental shelf pertaining to these four coastal States in the area of the Celtic Sea and the Bay of Biscay, lying beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the territorial seas are measured, in accordance with Article 76, paragraph 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) authorities and legislation

General

The marine plan will cover Ireland's maritime area, including internal waters (sea area), territorial seas, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf. A single plan will be prepared for the entire area initially, with the possibility of more detailed regional plans being made at a later date.

Planning at national level

The MSP Directive was originally transposed into national legislation by way of regulations made in 2016 (SI 352 of 2016). Since the regulations were made under the European Communities Act 1972, they were strictly limited to measures required to transpose the Directive. In October 2018, the regulations were repealed and replaced by Part 5 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018. Part 5 re-transposes the Directive in primary legislation and contains several measures that are additional to those required by the Directive, including:

- Adoption of the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) by both Houses of the Oireachtas
- Review and replacement of the NMPF every 6 years
- Obligation for marine regulatory bodies to secure the objectives of the NMPF when making policies, plans, or granting consents
- Enforcement powers for the Minister if the foregoing obligations are not being fulfilled.

National MSP authority

Ireland's national competent authority for maritime spatial planning is the Department for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (DHPLG). More information can be found at:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/maritime-spatial-planning/maritime-spatial-planning-directive/maritime-spatial-planning>.

Details

National level

[The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government](#) (DHPLG) is leading the preparation of marine spatial planning on behalf of the Government, with input from other relevant Departments and Agencies including Ireland's [Marine Institute](#). The DHPLG has been developing Ireland's National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF), which will be the overarching framework for decision making that is consistent, evidence-based and secures a sustainable future for the marine area. The NMPF will be Ireland's national marine plan.

In November 2019, Ireland's first Marine Planning Policy Statement was published, following public consultation until April 2020. It reflects the comprehensive updating and renewal of Ireland's marine planning system, which is currently underway, setting out core principles to inform evolving marine planning and the development management process. The Marine Planning Policy Statement published in November 2019:

- Describes the existing components of Ireland's marine planning system.
- Outlines a vision for the future development of the marine planning system.
- Sets out the overarching policies and principles that the Government expects marine planning bodies, and other public bodies that engage with the marine planning system, to observe (in terms, for example, of public engagement, transparency, governance, environmental assessment, climate action, and social and economic benefit).
- Sets out high-level priorities for the enhancement of the marine planning system in Ireland.

This Marine Planning Policy Statement is parallel to the 2015 Planning Policy Statement, which underpins the operation of the entire land-planning system in Ireland.

Regional level

During the public engagement phases undertaken by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, several stakeholders expressed the view that Ireland should also provide for Regional Marine Plans. The focus – in this first cycle of plan-making – has been on the preparation of a single National Marine Plan applying to Ireland's entire maritime area, including internal waters (sea area), territorial seas, Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf. However, the Government is committed to preparing regional or sub-national plans in future MSP cycles. These would have a more local character and could potentially be more empowering for coastal communities throughout Ireland. National and sub-national plans will be known collectively as the NMPF.

A first NMPF draft was published in November 2019 and was open for public consultation until the end of April 2020. A previous key step in the process was the publication of, and consultation on, an initial report setting out the context in which the NMPF is to be developed and which helped to identify the key issues that marine planning needs to address. The National Marine Planning Framework Baseline Report was published on 18 September 2018. A series of regional public and stakeholder events were held nationally throughout October 2018 to launch the report and to inform and support public and stakeholders' participation.

In 2019, Ireland reached significant milestones on the way to meeting the MSP Directive objectives. In November 2019, on the same day that the first Irish Marine Planning Policy Statement was published, the [draft National Marine Planning Framework](#) (NMPF) was launched for public consultation. There were over 3,500 comments to consider from 225 submissions including those provided by neighbouring states. As chapters were amended, relevant Government Departments were consulted to obtain approval for the updates being made.

A final version of the NMPF was submitted to the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) for consideration as required by the legislation underpinning marine spatial planning in Ireland. The plan was submitted and discussed by Dáil Éireann (Assembly of Ireland) on 29 March 2021. This publication was approved at Cabinet on 29 June 2021 and confirmed by An Taoiseach Michéal Martin TD on 1 July 2021, alongside Ministers Darragh O'Brien TD, Eamon Ryan TD and Peter Burke TD at the Commissioners for Irish Lights Headquarters in Dún Laoghaire.

The full text of the [Maritime Area Planning Bill 2021](#) and accompanying [Explanatory Memorandum](#) were published on 16 August 2021. On 17 December 2021, it passed through all the stages of the Oireachta.

The Maritime Area Planning Bill establishes in law a new marine planning system, underpinned by a statutory Marine Planning Policy Statement and guided by the National Marine Planning Framework. The objective of this legislation is to put in place a comprehensive and coherent planning system for the entire Maritime Area. This Bill legally underpins an entirely new marine planning system, which balances Irish offshore wind energy potential with the need to protect the marine environment. It introduces a new independent agency, MARA, which will be responsible for regulating development and activity in Ireland's maritime area.

MARA will be responsible for (i) the granting of all Maritime Area Consents, or MACs, for the maritime area; (ii) marine licencing for specified activities; (iii) compliance and enforcement of MACs, licences and offshore development consents; and (iv) administration of the Foreshore consent portfolio of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The new agency will have responsibility for assessing applications for Maritime Area Consents (MACs) which will be required before a planning application can be made by developers for projects in the maritime area (e.g. offshore energy, water and wastewater infrastructure, bridges, marinas, coastal protection works, flood relief works and undersea telecommunications' cables and power interconnectors); it will also be responsible for granting licences for certain activities in the maritime area. MARA will operate under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage but will be independent of the Department in the performance of its functions.

Maritime Spatial Plans

Existing Maritime Spatial Plans

Ireland has established its National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) in July 2021.

The Maritime Spatial Plan for Ireland is available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60e57-national-marine-planning-framework/>

The NMPF is to be the key consideration for decision makers on all marine authorisations. All applications for activity or development in Ireland's maritime area, including those made within the new development management system being provided for under the Maritime Area Planning Bill 2021, will be considered in terms of their consistency with the objectives of the plan. The NMPF will therefore create the overarching framework for decision making that is consistent, evidence-based and secures a sustainable future for the maritime area.

A [web map portal](#) was also launched to link planning within the Maritime area and the relevant policies for each marine sector or activity listed in the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF). The site has 2 main areas: Activities Map, Activities and Policies Map. The MSP information hub list all the Government Departments and Agencies with a role in the Maritime area and hosts the MSP newsletter which is published on quarterly basis.

Aspects of the MSP process

Sustainable development and growth in the maritime sector

'*Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth – an Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland*' ([HOOW](#)) was adopted in 2012. It sets out the Irish Government's vision, high-level goals and key enabling actions to put in place the appropriate policy, governance and business climate to enable Ireland's marine potential to be realised. HOOW sets out a comprehensive range of actions across a number of sectoral areas, with key objectives to:

- Double the value of Ireland's ocean wealth to 2.4% of GDP by 2030
- Increase the turnover from Ireland's ocean economy to exceed €6.4bn by 2020.

To enable this, HOOW included a policy objective identifying the need for development of an overarching national marine spatial plan, underpinned by an efficient and robust planning and licensing framework.



Ecosystem-based approach (EBA)

Marine planning policies related to environmental matters are wide ranging and linked to extensive work at the international, national and local levels. Each marine environmental concern is at a different point in terms of supporting knowledge, existing policy and management activity. Reflecting this, environmental policies in the NMPF have been split into nine categories largely aligned to the MSF GES descriptors as well as addressing air quality and climate change. In line with the MSFD, The NMPF recalls the importance natural assets and the need to ensure that cost benefit analyses are considered to promote Ecosystem-Based Adaptation options. This will increase the visibility of the importance of ecosystem services in cross-sectoral policy considerations. While the NMPF comes at a time of early thinking in relation to Natural Capital in Ireland, it is important that the concept be given a sound footing in regulation to enable the understanding it provides to play its part in an ecosystem approach to marine management. References to natural capital in this section relate to the Irish Government National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021, in which the concept of Natural Capital is embedded (see Chapter 1 and Actions 1.1.10-1.1.11 concerning Natural Capital). The Plan includes commitments to develop a natural capital asset register and national natural capital accounts, as well as the integration of these accounts into policy and decision-making. This work is being led by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) working with the Central Statistics Office Ireland (CSO), and Natural Capital Ireland. The Plan also commits to undertake natural capital accounting through sectoral and small-scale pilot studies. These initiatives represent an ongoing programme of work and should be referred to when applying natural capital related policy in the NMPF.



Resilience to climate change impacts

The Government published the [Action Plan to Tackle Climate Breakdown](#) in July 2019. The Plan sets out how the Irish Government will lead in responding to climate change by driving the delivery of policies to reduce emissions in all key sectors, including electricity, agriculture, transport, industry, buildings, and the public sector. The Action Plan builds on the activities already contained in the [National Mitigation Plan](#), the [National Adaptation Framework](#), the [National Development Plan](#), and the [Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan](#).

The Action Plan to Tackle Climate Breakdown features a strong focus on implementation, including clear timelines and the steps needed to achieve each action. The Action Plan also highlights the critical role of marine planning in the national climate action efforts in terms of, for example, meeting the renewable energy targets through planning for the delivery of offshore renewable energy (ORE), carbon capture and sequestration. The NMPF sets out the forward planning framework within which Ireland's ORE targets will be met, in conjunction with the new development management process for individual ORE projects. Climate action is also embedded as a key theme throughout the NMPF through the inclusion of a number of Overarching Marine Planning Policies (OMPPs) specifically aimed at ensuring that marine regulators and decision-makers take climate action into account when considering any proposal for marine use or activity.

In accordance with the NMPF, any proposals must demonstrate that they have considered available evidence and identified any significant adverse impacts on habitats that provide flood defence and / or carbon sequestration ecosystem services, including sediments. Proposals should identify and describe habitats within the immediate vicinity and determine whether those habitats provide carbon sequestration or flood defence ecosystem services. Proposals must demonstrate that they will, in order of preference, avoid, minimise or mitigate significant adverse impacts on habitats, including sediments, that provide a flood defence or carbon sequestration ecosystem service. Best available science should be used in relation to define significant adverse impacts in relation to a particular proposal. Where a proposal is required to carry out other / related assessments, such as producing an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), compliance with NMPF Climate Change policies should be integrated with this / these processes as appropriate



Land-sea interactions

The NMPF mutually recognises the importance of integration and coordination with the land planning regime at national, regional and local levels. Both the MSP Directive and the Planning and Development Act 2018 (the national legislation transposing the Directive) require that land-sea interactions be considered. In future, it will be equally important that national, regional and local terrestrial plans be consistent with the NMPF, as will be required under the Planning and Development Act 2018. As sub-national marine spatial planning develops in Ireland, it will be informed by transboundary considerations both in relation to land-based concerns and in relation to transboundary matters.



Stakeholder Involvement

As set out in the Government's marine plan roadmap, [Towards a Marine Plan for Ireland](#) (December 2017), the Marine Planning Policy and Development Section within the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has been carrying out extensive public and stakeholder engagement as the plan develops, including through the use of social media. The NMPF Stakeholder Advisory Group, chaired by the Minister of State with responsibility for Marine Planning, is the formal mechanism established to facilitate participation of relevant stakeholder groups, non-governmental organisations, professional bodies and technical experts in the planning process. Membership of the group is drawn from the economic, environmental and social pillars, and has been kept under review and updated to ensure that all interested sectors and stakeholders are represented. A list of those involved in the NMPF Stakeholder Advisory Group can be found in Appendix B of the [NMPF](#).



Co-existence of uses

The NMPF aims to support the optimal use of available space and requires consideration of the interaction of a proposal with other activities, either existing or planned. Proposals should demonstrate that they have considered how to optimise the use of space, including through consideration of opportunities for co-existence and/or cooperation with other activities, enhancing/supporting other activities where appropriate.



Transboundary cooperation

The MSP Directive and Planning and Development Act 2018 also obliges Ireland to consult and cooperate on a transboundary basis with neighbouring jurisdictions when developing marine plans. Transboundary consultation and cooperation took place on a mutual basis between Ireland and all of its neighbours in the North-East Atlantic Region: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, and France. The NMPF supports the objective of transboundary consultation and cooperation by requiring proposals that have transboundary impacts beyond the maritime area, either on the terrestrial environment or neighbouring international jurisdictions, to show evidence of consultation with the relevant public authorities, including terrestrial planning authorities and other country authorities.



Use of best available data

The Marine Institute, Ireland's national marine data centre, hosts [Ireland's Marine Atlas](#) which is the principal repository of marine-related data used in development of the NMPF and which may support evidence-based decision making under the NMPF framework by marine regulatory authorities. The Atlas has been developed as a publicly accessible reporting and investigative tool for Ireland's reporting on ocean conditions as required under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the MSP Directive, the Water Framework Directive and other relevant EU Directives. The Atlas includes marine data such as administrative boundaries, protected sites, oil and gas, ocean features, fisheries and aquaculture, marine monitoring, seabed habitats, tourism and leisure, transport, infrastructure, discharge point sources, International Maritime Organisation protected areas and current/historical disposal sites.

Coherence with other processes

Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)

The Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is also Ireland's national competent authority for implementing the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Ireland has completed the initial assessment of its marine waters, established targets and indicators, established a monitoring programme and submitted its programme of measures to the European Commission. Implementation of the measures and monitoring programme is ongoing. More information can be found at: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/marine-strategy/marine-strategy-framework-directive-msfd>.

In this context, while the NMPF is playing a role in Ireland's response to the MSFD's requirements, it should be viewed as a part of this wider picture.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

As part of the preparation of the Draft National Marine Planning Framework, a number of environmental assessments were carried out. These include a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and an Appropriate Assessment (AA) that can be found [within the NMPF](#). These assessments were undertaken so the high-level impact of the proposed Overarching Marine Planning Policies and Sectoral Marine Planning Policies on the environment can be evaluated and used to inform the direction of the NMPF to ensure that the national objectives and outcomes respond to the sensitivities and requirements of the wider natural environment, i.e. the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the future accommodation of development and how negative effects can be reduced, offset or avoided.

Sources

References

Official National MSP webpage :

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/maritime-spatial-planning/maritime-spatial-planning-directive/maritime-spatial-planning>

National Marine Planning Framework Baseline report (2018) :

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/national_marine_planning_framework_baseline_report_0.pdf

Towards a Marine Spatial Plan for Ireland:

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/towards_a_marine_spatial_plan_for_ireland.pdf

Enablers' Task Force on Marine Spatial Planning :

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/towards_a_marine_spatial_plan_for_ireland.pdf

Our Ocean Wealth: <https://www.ouroceanwealth.ie/>

Marine Atlas : <https://atlas.marine.ie/>

Consultation on draft Regulations to transpose the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive into Irish law (2016) :

<https://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/maritime-spatial-planning/consultation-draft-regulations-tranpose-msp-directive-irish-law>

Regulations to transpose the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive into Irish law (2016) - S.I No. 352 of 2016 :

https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/public-consultation/files/2016_07_06_pdf_352_of_2016_0.pdf

Specific Citations

National Marine Planning Framework

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60e57-national-marine-planning-framework/#>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a4a9a-national-marine-planning-framework/#nmpf-roadmap>