

INITIAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING ASSESSMENTS TO SUPPORT REGIONAL MARINE PLANS

Introduction

1. Guidance for the preparation of regional marine plans will evolve in time. This document starts developing the **principles** under which the initial **regional assessments** will be prepared as the first step in the regional marine planning process. These will need to be **reviewed** in light of experience with the first assessments being undertaken by the Clyde and Shetland emerging Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs). Other subjects, such as monitoring the effectiveness of the plan over time, will be considered in more detail at a later stage.
2. The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 requires an assessment of the condition of the marine area (region or national) at the time of the plan's preparation and a summary of the significant pressures and the impact of human activity on the area. '**Scotland's Marine Atlas: Information for the national marine plan**' supports the 1st draft National Marine Plan (NMP) with its overall assessment. In light of this statutory linkage, regional assessments need to look to the Atlas overall assessment approach.
3. The next draft of the NMP will offer some guidance on topics that should be considered by regional planners.
4. Identifying **data gaps** is often highlighted. The regional assessment process needs to identify gaps that would be prudent to fill for the assessment and would be useful for planning, not just identifying gaps and assuming these should be filled *per se*. The next draft of the NMP will highlight the following considerations for planners and which are useful in evaluating data sufficiency and gaps in each SMR:
 - Better understanding of the current status and the vision for their area.
 - Local strategic and sectoral objectives.
 - Understanding local opportunities and challenges in terms of sustainable development and use and the need to manage conflict.
 - Deriving general and specific policies which align with those in this Plan and the Marine Policy Statement, but are sensitive to local circumstances.
 - Further research to understand the local ecosystem and the impacts and pressures upon it.
 - Consistency with local and strategic development plans and other relevant local plans.
5. Other aspects to consider will be for data to
 - support social, economic and environmental objectives and drivers
 - inform spatial policies
 - feed into impact assessment/sustainability appraisal
 - monitor the region
 - support possible sections of the final plan covering
 - background and context

- supporting economically productive activities
 - interactions with other users
 - living within environmental limits
 - planning policies
 - the future
6. In assessing the suitability of data layers for uploading to NMPi, the following criteria (already adopted for considering national data sets) should be considered:
- data quality
 - geographical coverage and resolution
 - currency
 - relevance to regional marine planning

Initial principles for the development of regional assessments

A. Maximising efficiency / managing resource requirements / minimising effort duplication, etc.

7. Scotland's Marine Atlas (2011) was developed collaboratively and specifically for the NMP. Its overall assessment was consistent with other reporting at the time and was used to develop the Initial Assessment to support Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) implementation. Evolving the Atlas OA approach to regional assessment makes efficient use of the processes developed to date and provides for ease of stakeholder understanding, notwithstanding there are resource challenges to developing a different approach. The full suite of (11) regional assessments will be developed to different timescales but they can draw on the latest national assessment and help inform the next one and other possible assessments. The MPPs should consider:
- a) building on the Atlas data now presented in NMPi.
 - b) drawing on other assessments, e.g. Water Framework Directive (WFD), for context and data and to save effort.
 - c) collaborating with other MPPs.

B. Consistency / inter-operability

8. The NMP will set out national level objectives to be translated into regional policy. Consistency across the MPPs will be necessary to demonstrate linkages to the NMP, provide a consistent story across boundaries (SMR/national) and for using regional assessments to inform national assessments. There is a two-way flow of data. The MPPs should consider:
- a) using the NMPi platform for data presentation.
 - b) relating data to strategic / wider assessments.
 - c) resolving any inconsistencies between MPPs and national datasets. Consistency needs to be considered both within and between MPPs.
 - d) consistency in approach to common issues (for example, developing methodologies) and working together to address them.
 - e) necessary agreed standards for data inter-operability e.g. MEDIN / INSPIRE.

C. Accessibility

9. Marine planning takes an inclusive approach to involve all stakeholders. Making the underlying data on which policies are developed available for all to see is an important underlying principle. NMPi has been developed at the national level to do this. NMPi is available to display regional data sets and so continue the open approach and provide a platform where stakeholders can access all data in a central location. The MPPs should consider:

- a) being open in approach to collection and collation of data.
- b) presenting data layers for external viewing / use / comment in an established and consistent platform. NMPi is available for this.
- c) archiving data (where appropriate to do so) in MEDIN accredited Data Archive Centres (DACs).

D. Data quality control

10. Confidence in the quality of data and knowing the source are key. The types of data required to create the wide ranging analyses for a marine assessment vary. Some data, for example for chemical analyses, are subject to very strict QA processes and laboratories are inspected regularly. Other data, for example tonnage of fish caught or salmon farmed, are subject to their own well established processes but without the same type of formal QA involved in other data. The resulting assessment is a blend of many data types. It is important to cite data source and where appropriate the nature of the QA used. The MPPs should consider:

- a) transparency in data and approach / cite data sources (use metadata).
- b) maintaining a list of data sources, metadata and references.
- c) undertaking 'common sense' checks.
- d) sharing quality checking with other MPPs and MS.
- e) meeting necessary agreed standards for data e.g. MEDIN / *INSPIRE*.
- f) adopting a data quality assessment processes (being developed).

E. Data use/ filling data gaps / data collection / monitoring activities

11. Planning is more than 'data' – see introduction above about identifying data gaps. Data are fundamental to guiding good decision making but are one, albeit important, part of a complex process. Decisions might not rely on something which can be clearly evidenced through the type of data that can be collected. They equally rely on expert judgement and policy and local context. The MPPs should consider:

- a) consistency in approach to targets / limits i.e. adopting legislative thresholds where relevant, for example, bathing water quality standards are set by legislation.
- b) using a resolution at a regional level that will contribute to regionally relevant policy, recognising that regional issues might only receive a brief (or no) mention at national level due to the differing scale of the assessment.

- c) seeking to fill appropriate data gaps.
- d) ensuring that data are used with appropriate recognition of quality issues, uncertainties, etc.
- e) identifying appropriate monitoring and data collection.
- f) seeking a rationalised and cost-effective approach to data collection, highlighting collaborative potential.
- g) sharing experience with each other and MS on issues identified. The MS group established to oversee these initial assessments will be a suitable forum for this.

F. Stakeholder engagement

12. This is a key part of the regional planning process and the full range of stakeholders need to be involved in the assessment process.

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