The Irish Sea Network

Ecological Considerations for Marine Spatial Planning in the Irish Sea

Giving nature a voice in the marine spatial planning process

Summary document

A healthy and thriving Irish Sea (Figure 1) underpins the economy, society and human well-being through the provision of essential goods and services.

However, significant and widespread anthropogenic pressures mean that marine ecosystems in the Irish Sea are degraded. The scale of future activities and growing demand for sea space only add to these pressures. To reach net zero targets, large scale renewable energy developments will need to be installed in the Irish Sea. Alongside this, each nation has committed to protecting and effectively managing 30% of its seas by 2030 (CBD, 2022). While marine protected areas are designated across the Irish Sea, the protection that these sites actually afford is limited, with the majority having little to no management in place (Irish Sea Network, 2022a; Schere, et al., 2020). To address the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, it is crucial that we meet both net zero targets and marine ecosystem protection and recovery targets.

As the Irish Sea Network, representatives for each of the six nations' Wildlife Trusts and partner organisations $^{\rm 1}$ have come

together to agree our position on key issues in the Irish Sea and give nature a voice in the marine spatial planning process. We need policy makers and stakeholders to come together to create aligned plans that benefit all wildlife and communities around the Irish Sea. Many marine plans are currently being reviewed or developed which provides a unique time to influence marine planning. Due to the interconnections between marine ecosystems and large-scale changes forecast, all six nations must work together to tackle the crossboundary pressures that are impacting the Irish Sea.

The Irish Sea Network believes that strategic and effective regional marine spatial planning that takes an ecosystem-based approach with cross-national collaboration, would reduce the impact upon, and enhance, sensitive wildlife habitats and carbon stores, caused by multi-sectoral pressures.

Irish Sea Network (2022b)

References

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1 The Irish Sea Network is a partnership of 10 Wildlife Trusts from around the Irish Sea*, Northern Ireland Marine Task Force, Irish Wildlife Trust, and the Sustainable Water Network (SWAN).

* Manx Wildlife Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust, North West Wildlife Trusts (Cumbria, Lancashire and Cheshire), Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Ulster Wildlife, Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales and Wildlife Trusts Wales.



Marine Spatial Prioritisation (MSPri) offers an opportunity to create marine plans that have nature's recovery and achieving net zero at their core. Plans must be strategic, effective and aligned, taking into account the cumulative impacts of activities on an Irish Sea scale, with collaboration from all nations around the Irish Sea.

The Irish Sea Network recommends that the next Marine Spatial Plans in the Irish Sea must:

- 1. **Ensure transboundary collaboration** during the marine planning process to align plans across the Irish Sea and ensure all six nations are working towards the same goals of nature recovery and achieving net zero.
- 2. **Prioritise nature**, ensuring that it is a golden thread throughout, without this the sustainability of all other marine activities will be compromised.
- 3. Make plans spatially explicit. Develop a process to prioritise and strategically plan what activities can occur in what location. This can be achieved by calculating the current and projected demands on the Irish Sea, calculating the Irish Sea's carrying capacity and conducting sensitivity mapping and scenario planning.
- 4. **Contain a plan for nature's recovery** in order to achieve 30 by 30. For MPAs to count towards 30 by 30, they must have plans to strengthen and implement management measures and plans to monitor and enforce these measures. There must be recognition of the need for stricter marine protection across whole sites and areas set aside for habitat restoration.
- 5. **Prioritise achieving net zero** in tandem with nature's recovery. This can be achieved through plans to reduce energy consumption and improve energy efficiency, developing sustainable marine renewable energy in the right location, at the right scale and with the right technology and implementing nature-based solutions.
- 6. **Consider climate change scenarios** and build long term resilience of marine ecosystems and marine activities.
- 7. **Include a plan for achieving a just transition** for sea users and coastal communities and include them at all stages of the planning process.



Figure 1: Irish Sea boundary (Charting Progress 2, 2010). Activities occurring in the Irish Sea and Marine Protected Areas in the Irish Sea.

