

Marine Spatial Planning Stakeholder Advisory Group

Report of Seventh Meeting held 16th July 2019

Attendance List Attached

1. Welcome and Introduction

Minister English welcomed members to the meeting.

2. Draft NMPF – General and Sectoral Marine Planning Policies

A discussion paper on development of General and Sectoral Marine Planning Policies had been circulated in advance and Padraic Dempsey made the attached presentation on the topic. In the discussion that followed the following points arose:

- For regional events to be held in the Autumn during the public consultation on the draft NMPF consideration should be given to developing explanatory materials that are accessible for the general public;
- Prioritisation between activities, interactions between activities, and avoidance/reduction/mitigation of conflicts will be achieved through a combination of measures, including:
 - **At plan level:** through public and stakeholder participation in the plan-making process, general and sector-specific coexistence policies to be included in the plan, spatial designations, and guidelines
 - **At project level:** through pre-application consultation involving all relevant stakeholders, good project design, and effective provision for public and stakeholder participation in consenting processes.
- The foregoing measures should reduce the need to resort to legal challenge as a method of resolving disputes;
- The legal underpinning for spatial designations will be provided in the Marine Planning and Development Management (MPDM) Bill;

- Owing to the likely timeline of the MPDM Bill and the preparatory work involved in making spatial designations, new designations are likely to be made after adoption of the NMPF;
- Provision will be made in the MPDM Bill for new spatial designations to be incorporated into the NMPF as amendments to the plan;
- Whilst spatial designations are intended to provide greater clarity and certainty for the planning process, members also advised that they should be grounded in the best available knowledge and evidence base;
- Spatial designations should therefore be regarded as part of the evolving marine planning landscape;
- NMPF objectives and policies will be designed to anticipate that new designations may emerge during the lifetime of the plan, and that new proposals need not be delayed to await the making of designations;
- The General Policy on Island Communities should be expanded to refer to Island **and Rural Coastal** Communities.

3. Marine Strategy Framework Directive/Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

Oliver Ó Cadhla from Marine Environment Section made the attached presentation. In the discussion that followed the following points arose:

- Some members were of the view that Ireland should proceed to designate at least 10% of its maritime area as MPAs, ideally by 2020, in accordance with targets established in various international conventions, EU legislation, and national action plans;
- The Marine Planning and Development Management (MPDM) Bill will provide a legislative basis for designating MPAs, including definitions and processes;
- Minister for HPLG will establish an MPA Advisory Group in Autumn 2019 with a view to reporting to MHPLG on process in 2020;
- The MPA Advisory Group will provide advice on process and final decisions on designations will be made either by the appropriate Minister or perhaps by a decision of Government;
- Some members were of the view that coldwater coral reefs should be an early priority for designation;
- In relation to conservation measures that may impact on fishing rights of other Member States under the Common Fisheries Policy, the complexity and difficulty of reaching agreement with up to 6 other Member States was highlighted;
- Members advised that designations must be based on science and best available evidence and data, and should not only be made according to spatial targets but also on the basis of conservation-driven targets;

- It was agreed that MPA designations should be accompanied by management plans, and ideally should not proceed until management plans are ready to be implemented;
- Ireland has reported 19 of its existing Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to the [OSPAR Commission](#) as [MPAs for marine habitats](#) (also attached).

4. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 15th October 11:00 – 13:00.