

# Marine Spatial Planning Advisory Group

## Terms of Reference

### Background

The development of an overarching national marine spatial plan is identified as a Government policy objective in Ireland's Integrated Marine Plan, *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth* (HOOW) (2012). A clear framework for marine spatial planning (MSP) has the potential to deliver a wide range of benefits for Ireland including:

- lower transaction costs for maritime businesses and improved competitiveness for our marine sectors;
- improved certainty and predictability for private investments;
- enhanced environmental management of marine areas;
- improved certainty in obtaining financing for offshore investments;
- improved use of sea space and the best possible coexistence of uses in coastal zones and marine waters;
- improved attractiveness of coastal regions;
- reduced co-ordination costs for public authorities;
- greater development of innovation and research; and
- enhanced and integrated data and information.

HOOW predates EU Directive 2014/89/EU which established an EU-wide framework for MSP and was adopted in July 2014. The directive established a framework for MSP, defined as "a process by which the relevant Member State's authorities analyse and organise human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives". The Directive details the main goals and minimum requirements for Member States as follows:

- balanced and sustainable territorial development of marine waters and coastal zones;
- optimised development of maritime activities and business climate;
- better adaptation to risks; and
- resource-efficient and integrated coastal and maritime development.

Ireland transposed the Directive through the European Union (Framework for Maritime Spatial Planning) Regulations 2016, signed into law on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The regulations establish the legal basis and broad framework for Ireland to implement MSP through the development of a maritime spatial plan (or plans) on a 10 year cycle. Under the Regulations, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (now the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government) is the competent authority for the purposes of the Directive and, by extension, for purposes of preparing Ireland's first maritime spatial plan.

### **Plan Hierarchy**

In line with the sort of framework envisaged in HOOW, a Marine Spatial Plan for Ireland will sit at the top of the hierarchy of plans and sectoral policies for the marine area. The plan will be informed by existing sectoral plans and will, in turn, be used to inform future cycles of those plans in an on-going feedback loop. It will provide a coherent framework in which those sectoral policies and objectives can be realised. It will become a decision making tool for regulatory authorities and policy makers into the future in a number of ways including, decisions on individual consent applications which will have to have regard to the provisions of the plan in the same way that terrestrial plans form part of the decision making tool-kit in the on-land planning process. It will also form a key input to the development of future sectoral policies.

### **Roadmap**

The process of plan-making for Ireland's first marine spatial plan was formally initiated in December 2017 with the publication of [\*Towards a Marine Spatial Plan for Ireland\*](#) – a roadmap for the development of Ireland's first marine spatial plan setting out the overall plan-making process, the various milestones, opportunities for stakeholder engagement and the timeframes for development of the plan.

### **Organisational Structures**

A dedicated new MSP Section within the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) has been established and is now operational. DHPLG has concluded a service level agreement with the Marine Institute for the provision of scientific and technical support to the MSP process.

An **Inter Departmental Group on MSP**, which will be the main vehicle for the development of the plan(s), has been established and recently held its first meeting. The Group is chaired by DHPLG and, reflecting the whole of Government approach, is composed of senior representatives from eight Departments whose policies and functions are relevant to MSP, and a representative each from the County and City Management Association and the Marine Institute.

### **Public and Stakeholder Participation**

It is considered that marine spatial plans should be strategic, concise and informed by effective public and stakeholder participation to ensure buy-in with regard to implementation. Therefore, a core objective of the MSP process will be to ensure that, as well as the wider public, all relevant stakeholders are consulted and encouraged to contribute to the process of plan preparation. Participation processes will be designed and structured to ensure meaningful, informed and timely engagement with the plan-making process.

### **Advisory Group**

As outlined in the Roadmap it is proposed to establish an Advisory Group to facilitate participation in the MSP process by all relevant stakeholders from the economic, environmental and social pillars. The purpose of the Advisory Group is to harness the potential and capacity of a broad range of sectors including representation from the public sector, business, environmental, social and knowledge based sectors to guide strategic thinking and decision-making in the preparation of marine spatial plans. The Advisory Group will also inform the work of the Inter Departmental MSP Group and provide updates, reports or recommendations as required.

### **Role of Advisory Group**

The role of the Group is to:

- Utilise professional and business acumen to provide advice on the strategic direction of marine spatial plans and consider issues in a national context;
- Provide a platform in which to develop, test, review and refine ideas, scenarios and policy which will inform MSP and expected outcomes;
- Make recommendations and provide feedback to assist in shaping the preparation, content and implementation of MSP;

- Utilise expertise, resources and relationships of representatives and to provide data and material, where relevant, to inform discussions and ideas in the preparation of marine spatial plans; and
- Assist and advise on alignment and linkages with other relevant initiatives/sectors and legislative requirements.

### **Membership and Representation**

The Advisory Group will be chaired by Mr. Damien English TD, Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development. In addition to the Chairperson, the Group will be composed of individual representatives of various relevant sectoral interests. The Group comprises a significant number of people to ensure effective representation of a broad range of sectors who are considered to have the capacity to contribute in a significant way to the preparation and implementation of MSP.

The Chairperson will preside at the meetings of the Advisory Group. In the Chairperson's absence meetings will be chaired by the Vice-Chairperson from DHPLG.

The Group will meet 2-3 times per year and may convene extra meetings as required. The Inception Meeting of the Advisory Group will take place on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018 and it will remain in place until a final draft of marine spatial plans is completed. Following approval of marine spatial plans by the Oireachtas, the role, function and requirements of the Advisory Group will be reviewed by the Minister/Inter Departmental MSP Group.

### **Secretariat**

Secretariat services for the Advisory Group will be provided by the Marine Spatial Planning Section of the Department.

In order to conduct its business efficiently and to minimise costs, the Advisory Group will seek to operate through electronic means to the greatest extent possible.

### **Responsibilities of the Advisory Group**

The Advisory Group will be:

- Provided with meaningful information in a timely manner in advance of meetings;
- Given reasonable time to make recommendations; and

- Expected to operate on the basis of a collective approach to the MSP process and, whilst appointment to the Group is on the basis of knowledge, interest or representation of a sector, and this may shape input to the process, individual interests shall not supersede the role of the Advisory Group.

The members of the Advisory Group will commit to:

- Attending all scheduled Advisory Group meetings and where this is not possible, to arrange for an alternate;
- Sharing relevant information and communicating with other Advisory Group members;
- Making timely recommendations and take action so as to assist with the expedient preparation and delivery of marine spatial plans;
- Working with the Department in relation to particular areas of analysis or research required;
- Keeping confidential all matters relating to the internal workings of the Advisory Group as part of the MSP process, or matters identified by other members as sensitive or not to be disclosed by any member, directly or indirectly, to any person or entity outside of membership of the Advisory Group and the organisations they represent.

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