National Marine Planning Framework FAQs

Prepared by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

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1. **What is the draft National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF)?**
   The draft NMPF is the Government’s proposed approach to managing Ireland’s marine activities and ensuring sustainable use of marine resources to 2040. The draft framework, bringing together all marine-based human activities, articulates the Government’s vision, objectives and planning policies for each activity. It outlines how they will interact with each other in an ocean space that is under increasing spatial pressure. The Government is now consulting on the draft NMPF until 28 February 2020.

2. **What is the purpose of the framework?**
   The finalised NMPF will be the key decision-making tool for Government departments, State agencies, regulatory authorities and policy makers for decisions on marine activities. Decisions will include planning applications as well as policies, projects and strategies.

   The finalised framework will be a parallel document to the National Planning Framework, which provides a high-level guide to terrestrial planning and development over the next 20 years.

3. **What are the benefits of producing a framework?**
   Effective management of marine resources: Long-term forward planning for Ireland’s maritime area will contribute to the effective management of marine activities and more sustainable use of our marine resources.

   Clarification of objectives and priorities for maritime area: The framework will provide a clear direction for managing our seas, clarifying objectives and priorities. It will direct decision-makers, users and stakeholders towards more strategic and efficient use of marine resources. It will inform decisions about the current and future development of the maritime area, aiming to integrate needs.

   Coordinated planning decisions: The finalised framework will ensure coordinated planning decisions, consistent with the Government’s vision and objectives. Marine users, including regulators, applicants for consent and interested persons, should find that the reformed marine planning system will
reduce the regulatory burden on them by giving them more certainty regarding what can happen and where, thereby speeding up the licensing process.

Marine users should also feel more confident that decisions made on applications for projects will be robust in the face of challenge, provided they are made in accordance with the policy framework set out in the framework.

4. What activities does the framework cover?
The document sets out sectoral objectives and planning policies relating to 16 different sectors/activities:

- Aquaculture
- Defence and security
- Energy – Carbon Capture and Storage
- Energy – Offshore Gas Storage
- Energy – Transmission
- Energy – Petroleum
- Energy – Offshore Renewable Energy
- Fisheries
- Marine Aggregates and Mining
- Ports, Harbours and Shipping
- Safety at Sea
- Seaweed Harvesting
- Sport and Recreation
- Telecommunications
- Tourism
- Waste Water Treatment and Disposal

5. What geographical area does the framework cover?
The framework will cover Ireland’s maritime area, including internal waters (sea area), territorial seas, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf. It comprises approximately 490,000 km² and extends from mean high water mark at the coast seaward to in excess of 200 nautical miles in parts.
Ireland’s maritime area is seven times the size of its landmass. When the seabed is included, Ireland is one of the largest EU countries. Its 7,500km of coastline is longer than that of most EU countries. Seventy-five per cent of Ireland’s population live in coastal counties. In 2018, Ireland’s ocean economy had a turnover of €6.2 billion. It provided employment for 34,132 full-time equivalents and saw a 13% increase in employment on 2016 figures.

6. **What timespan will the framework cover?**

The finalised framework, due to be adopted in late 2020, will outline the Government’s approach to managing Ireland’s marine activities and ensuring sustainable use of marine resources to 2040.

Part 5 of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2018 provides that a maritime spatial plan (that is, the framework) is to be reviewed at least once every six years.

7. **Will there be regional, sub-national or local plans?**

Yes. The draft framework contains a commitment to regional or sub-national plans in future planning cycles. These will be more localised and will potentially be more empowering for coastal communities throughout Ireland. At least three regional plans will be developed.

8. **What planning, consents and development management systems are envisaged under the framework and associated legislation?**

The forthcoming Marine Planning and Development Management Bill, due to be published shortly, will aim to modernise elements of the marine development management and enforcement systems. It will provide for:

- a single State consent system for the entire maritime area, replacing foreshore leases and licenses, which are limited to the territorial sea
- statutory marine planning guidelines and an enhanced statutory basis for marine forward planning
• elimination of unnecessary duplication of development management processes (including environmental assessments) for activities or developments that are currently assessed under both the foreshore and planning regimes

• a single development management process for the maritime area for activities and developments - to be administered by An Bord Pleanála/local authorities, as appropriate - to development type and location

• provision for strengthened enforcement and compliance of State consents and development management

9. **How does the draft framework support Ireland in taking climate action and meeting its renewable energy targets?**

The draft framework contains a number of Overarching Marine Planning Policies aimed at requiring marine regulators and decision-makers to take account of climate action when considering any proposal for marine use or activity (including, for example, ports development, aquaculture, shipping etc.).

Among the draft framework's planning policies is that preference be given to proposals for offshore wind farms (including enabling projects and infrastructure) in areas identified as designated zones for offshore wind. This zoning process will be set out in the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill.

The draft NMPF reiterates the Government’s Climate Action Plan’s commitment to a major shift away from oil combustion within heat and transport sectors towards renewables in the coming decade.
10. **With the framework stating the Government’s policy of supporting offshore renewables development, what is the future of offshore petroleum (oil and gas) exploration in Ireland?**

Recently, the Minister of State for Community Development, Natural Resources and Digital Development Seán Canney, T.D., confirmed the following principles in relation to petroleum exploration in the Irish Offshore:

1. All future licencing rounds in the currently closed area offshore (Atlantic Margin - 80%) will be for natural gas only and not oil.
2. All new licence applications in the currently open area (Celtic Sea, Irish Sea, coastal areas - 20%) will be for natural gas only and not oil, applicable from the day of the Taoiseach and Minister Bruton’s announcement on 23 September 2019 that Ireland will cease new exploration for oil offshore Ireland.
3. All applications and authorisations in place before the announcement was made will not be affected by the decision.

11. **How will the framework be implemented?**

All public bodies that have a role in making policies, plans or programmes relevant to the maritime area, or have a role in regulating activity or development in the maritime area, are statutorily obliged to support and implement the objectives and policies of the NMPF (when adopted).

This means in practice that in assessing and deciding on any application for a lease, license or consent, a public body must ensure consistency with the NMPF’s objectives. It also means that where a public body is introducing a new policy proposal or plan (e.g. a sectoral marine action plan) that policy document must also contribute to the achievement of the NMPF’s objectives and policies.

Chapter 2 of the draft framework sets out how the NMPF will interact with terrestrial forward plans at national, regional and county level. The chapters on Overarching Marine Planning Policies and Sectoral Marine Planning Policies contain extensive referencing and signposting on how the NMPF should be
implemented, who will implement it and how it interacts with other strategic plans, policies and development management processes.

12. **What are the details of the public consultation?**

The draft NMPF and associated environmental reports can be found at [www.marineplan.gov.ie](http://www.marineplan.gov.ie).

People can give their views by email to: [msp@housing.gov.ie](mailto:msp@housing.gov.ie)  
or by post to:  
Draft NMPF Submissions  
Marine Planning Section  
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government  
Newtown Road  
Wexford Y35 AP90

Responses will be accepted until **28 February 2020**. The finalised NMPF is expected to be adopted in late 2020.

Public meetings on the draft framework will take place in the following locations:

- **21/11/2019**  Greenhills Hotel, Limerick (2pm to 4pm; 6pm to 8pm)
- **26/11/2019**  Town Hall, Westport (2pm to 4pm; 6pm to 8pm)
- **02/12/2019**  Connacht Hotel, Galway (2pm to 4pm; 6pm to 8pm)
- **10/12/2019**  Meadowlands Hotel, Tralee (2pm to 4pm; 6pm to 8pm)

More meetings will take place in early 2020 and full details will be available on [www.marineplan.gov.ie](http://www.marineplan.gov.ie).

13. **When is the finalised framework expected to be published?**

The finalised framework is expected to be adopted in late 2020.

14. **What is the policy context of the framework?**

While some countries have had systems of maritime planning for a couple of decades, marine spatial planning is a relatively new approach across most of the EU. The Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive 2014/89/EU established
a framework for maritime spatial planning. It was adopted in July 2014. The Directive obliges all coastal member states to establish maritime spatial plans by 2021.

The Directive requires member states to use their maritime spatial plans to contribute to the sustainable development of energy sectors at sea, of maritime transport, and of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and to the preservation, protection and improvement of the environment, including resilience to climate change impacts. However, it also allows member states to pursue other objectives such as the promotion of sustainable tourism and the sustainable extraction of raw materials.