



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

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30th September 2008

Strategic Policy Team,
Defra Marine Programme,
Area 2E, Nobel House,
17 Smith Square,
London SW1P 3JR.

Email response sent to: mps@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Our Seas – a shared resource

The Royal Town Planning Institute is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this consultation, which sets out high level marine objectives and a vision for the marine environment.

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is the leading professional body for spatial planners in the United Kingdom. It is a charity with the purpose to develop the art and science of town planning for the benefit of the public as a whole. The RTPI has over 21,000 members who serve in government, local government and as advisors in the private sector. This consultation has been prepared in discussion with members of the RTPI's Marine Spatial Planning Task Group and with input from colleagues in the RTPI in Scotland.

In general, the Institute welcomes the development of high level objectives for UK marine areas as a whole, while taking account of the distinct circumstances and responsibilities of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations. In the Institute's response to Defra on the UK Marine Bill, we noted 'it is a matter of concern that the draft bill does not provide for a marine policy, plan making and licensing arrangement that are fully shared with Scotland and (in part) Northern Ireland.' Whilst domestic marine legislation in these jurisdictions is anticipated, better enabling provisions at the UK level could be included in the draft bill. This could be reinforced by an intergovernmental agreement on UK seas that could usefully engage sovereign nations with marine areas abutting the UK.

In a similar way, the Institute considers that a joint statement of high level marine objectives on behalf of the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations is needed to provide comprehensive guidance to drive marine policy in a coherent and consistent way.

Our detailed points in response to the questions raised in your letter of 30th June are set out below.

The scope of the high level objectives

The Institute supports the integrated approach taken in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy that reflects the five principles of the shared framework for sustainable development. The Institute supports the role of the objectives 'to steer Administrations and the wider public sector in their (joint) achievement of sustainable marine development'. We also consider that the objectives should 'enable the *engagement* of the public, business, voluntary and *community* sectors, and underpin the UK approach to negotiation and implementation of European and *wider* international marine policy'.

There is a clear need to link marine sustainable development objectives as per the EU Marine Policy with compatible objectives for integrated coastal zone management as per the EU Integrated Coastal Zone Management Recommendations and the principles set out in the Water Framework Directive. The possibility of attaining sustainable development will be strengthened by integration of policy objectives, management guidelines and plans of action that link terrestrial management with management of the marine environment.

The development of high level marine objectives based on sustainable development principles reflects approaches taken by European neighbours in the Baltic and Wadden Seas. The Institute notes the emphasis placed within the Vision and Strategies around the Baltic Sea on the need for sustainable, balanced and harmonious spatial development. We also note the ambitious programme of HELCOM (the Helsinki Commission - the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission) Baltic Sea Action Plan to restore the good ecological status of the Baltic marine environment by 2021. The new plan, takes an innovative approach based on a clear set of 'ecological objectives' defined to reflect a jointly agreed vision of 'a healthy marine environment, with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in a good ecological status and supporting a wide range of sustainable human activities'. Lessons may also be drawn from the experience in the Wadden Sea where the trilateral Wadden Sea plan involving Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands has the shared vision of 'A healthy environment which maintains the diversity of habitats and species, its ecological integrity and resilience as a global responsibility'.

The Guiding Principle of the trilateral Wadden Sea policy is "to achieve, as far as possible, a natural and sustainable ecosystem in which natural processes proceed in an undisturbed way". In addition, seven Management Principles have been adopted which are fundamental to decisions concerning the protection and management within the Wadden Sea Area. These are:

- the Principle of Careful Decision Making, i.e. to take decisions on the basis of the best available information;
- the Principle of Avoidance, i.e. activities which are potentially damaging to the Wadden Sea should be avoided;
- the Precautionary Principle, i.e. to take action to avoid activities which are assumed to have significant damaging impact on the environment, even where there is no sufficient scientific evidence to prove a causal link between activities and their impact;
- the Principle of Translocation, i.e. to translocate activities which are harmful to the Wadden Sea environment to areas where they will cause less environmental impact;
- the Principle of Compensation, i.e. that the harmful effect of activities which cannot be avoided, must be balanced by compensatory measures; in those parts of the Wadden Sea, where the Principle has not yet been implemented, compensatory measures will be aimed for;
- the Principle of Restoration, i.e. that, where possible, parts of the Wadden Sea should be restored if it can be demonstrated by reference studies that the actual situation is not optimal, and that the original state is likely to be re-established;
- the Principles of Best Available Techniques (the RTPI would advocate Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Costs) and Best Environmental Practice.

Unreasonable impairments of the interests of the local population and its traditional uses in the Wadden Sea Area have to be avoided. Any user interests have to be weighed on a fair and equitable basis in the light of the purpose of protection in general, and the particular case concerned

It is also worth noting that the Key Physical Planning decision (PKB) in the Netherlands sets out the principle of sustainable use of the Wadden Sea and its ecosystems and that all levels of government and the private sector must follow this principle. Similar links may be made in Scotland to the National Planning Framework and the Institute has long campaigned for a UK spatial strategy to provide such a framework. International experience suggests the need to adopt a precautionary principle with regard to the sustainable development of shared marine resources

The description of what success would look like

The Institute considers that it will be necessary to have some assessment of the current 'base-line' position from which to measure success and to establish clear and measurable objectives at an early stage. In the Wadden Sea example, objectives include clear water, an end to excessive algal blooms, and viable populations of species. Targets for 'good ecological status' are based on the best available scientific knowledge. The timeframe for reaching these targets is set through political consensus among the three Wadden Sea States. With the application of the ecosystem approach, the protection of the marine environment is no longer seen as an event-driven pollution reduction approach to be taken sector-by-sector. Instead, the starting point is the ecosystem itself, and a shared concept of a healthy sea with a good ecological status. This vision will determine the need for further reductions in pollution loads, as well as the extent of various human activities and will need to address appropriate management structures and legislative controls.

The HELCOM cross-sectoral plan identifies the actions needed to achieve agreed targets within a given timeframe for the main environmental priorities: combating eutrophication, curbing inputs of hazardous substances, ensuring maritime safety and response capacity to accidents at sea, and halting habitat destruction and the ongoing decline in biodiversity. The action plan distinguishes between measures that can be implemented at regional or national level, and measures that can only be implemented at EU level (e.g. Common Fisheries Policy, Common Agricultural Policy, controls over the marketing and use of chemicals) or globally (e.g. the shipping controls defined by the International Maritime Organization).

The coverage of objectives

The Institute considers that outcomes will need to be clear and measurable. It may help if these are developed at different levels of administration and in relation to the achievement of action plans. The objective of 'ensuring a strong, healthy and just society' for instance should include opportunities for the involvement of people in marine planning at local, regional and national levels. Similarly, the objective of 'living within environmental limits', should also give recognition to the importance of historical, and archaeological heritage. The objective of 'promoting good governance' should note the important links with terrestrial planning systems through Integrated Coastal Zone Management and River Basin Management and this objective will also need to recognise the need for the development of skills in marine spatial planning.

A paper copy of this consultation will also be sent by post. If you require any further assistance, please contact Anna Morecombe, Planning Policy Officer on 0207 929 9493 or email policy@rtpi.org.uk .

Yours sincerely,

Rynd Smith

Director Policy and Communications

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