

**RTPI**

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Email response sent to: [marine.planning@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:marine.planning@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION PAPER: Consultation on Marine Plan Areas within the English Inshore and English Offshore Marine Regions**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is a membership organisation representing over 22,000 spatial planners. It exists to advance the science and art of town planning for the benefit of the public.

This document responds to the *Consultation on Marine Plan Areas within the English Inshore and English Offshore Marine Regions*.

The response has been formed drawing on the expertise of members including the Water and Marine Spatial Planning Interest Group of the RTPI Environmental Planning and Protection Network.

In general, the RTPI welcomes the range of considerations that are required to be taken into account when determining marine plan areas, which we consider to be reasonable and sensible. As an overarching point, we suggest that for the regional sea marine plans to be consistent and effective in delivering national aspirations they need to be set within a strong and focused framework, i.e. the Marine Policy Statement. This statement will be the key to effective planning at all levels and must contain specific spatial planning objectives and establish a policy direction, including the identification of key areas to deliver objectives. It should establish regional priorities and distinguish regions according to their characteristics and their ability to deliver national objectives.

Our members have made a number of specific observations and comments in response to the questions provided in the consultation document. These are discussed in detail below.

If you require any further assistance, please contact please contact Rebecca Coates, Planning Policy Officer on 020 7929 9466 or email [england.policy@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:england.policy@rtpi.org.uk).

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Thomson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matt Thomson  
**Acting Director Policy and Partnerships**  
Enc.

**Question 1: Do you agree with this set of considerations? Are there any other considerations of which we should take account?**

The RTPI believes that the prime consideration should be 'is the area proposed at the appropriate scale for the level of planning proposed, and is it a coherent area?' We believe there is little value in creating separate areas for administrative convenience (from the local authority point of view) if this leads to unnecessary duplication in plan making.

**Question 2: Do you agree with this set of criteria with which to assess any identified plan areas? Are there any other criteria we should consider?**

As stated above, we believe that the most important criterion must be the coherence and appropriateness of the resulting plan area.

It is worth noting that whatever boundaries are chosen for marine areas, there is bound to be some disparity with both terrestrial and regional planning authorities. Some economic activities, such as marine dredging, occurs across many marine plan areas. Associated wharves for landing marine dredged aggregates are often in terrestrial planning authorities remote from the marine plan area in which the dredging occurs. Therefore communication and liaison between all those involved from the outset will be vital.

**Question 3: Do you agree with the plan areas identified?**

We believe that the division of plan areas into inshore and offshore is inappropriate and will lead to unnecessary duplication and waste of effort.

In the case of some areas, the remaining offshore area is too small and lacks separateness and coherence. For example, the offshore areas in the English Channel are insufficiently different in terms of issues and likely policies to justify separate consideration. Similarly the inshore areas are too small for marine planning purposes. We recommend the following action:

- Integration of the three southern inshore coast areas with the south offshore area as one marine plan region;
- Integration of the South West inshore and offshore regions as one marine plan area.

Whilst we find it refreshing that the document acknowledges up front the devolution settlement, we believe it is essential that the Severn Estuary is planned in an integrated way with Welsh waters. This is far more important than defining a separate English plan area. We further question how integrated management will take place; for example, how consultation arrangements for marine regions in different devolved nations bordering each other will be handled, and would emphasise the need to work with both the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Authorities where there are adjacent English/Welsh marine planning areas (West Inshore, NW Inshore, SW Inshore and Offshore), especially with regard to the median lines of the Dee and Severn estuaries.

Similarly, we believe it is essential that the Irish Sea is planned as an integrated whole with the other UK devolved administrations and the Isle of Man. Again, we believe this is far more important than the detail of the plan boundary.

We also question how issues concerning the interfaces with UK national boundaries and international boundaries will be approached.

**Question 4: Do any of the proposed areas create difficulties which may hinder the development or implementation of the plan or its integration with planning and management on land?**

There is a certain amount of concern amongst some of our members that the draft marine plan areas have apparently been partly fixed by the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009), and there has been a great deal of discussion, specifically with regard to Section 51(1) of the Act:

*'A marine plan authority may prepare a marine plan for an area (a "marine plan area") consisting of the whole or any part of its marine planning region.'*

Many of our members had interpreted this to mean 'consisting of the whole or any part of the areas for which it was the

responsible plan authority' on the basis that the Secretary of State is responsible for more than one marine planning region.

Our members consider that creating separate plans for inshore and offshore areas will create significant difficulties in implementing marine planning, and that this approach will hinder the best practice of marine planning. It was previously understood that Section 51 related to the jurisdiction of the relevant plan-making bodies; however we understand that this is not in fact the case.

We note the intention in the consultation document to prepare a single plan for the North West region which includes both inshore and offshore waters. However, we understand that Defra has clarified that the Act does indeed require separate plans for inshore and offshore areas in the North West; this is outlined in the consultation document as follows:

*"We consider, however, that the North West should, exceptionally, be treated as one area, comprising both inshore and offshore waters with one process producing two documents."*

We believe that the splitting of inshore and offshore may hinder development, as the interaction of far offshore developments such as renewable energy is highly dependent on inshore and coastal connections. Similarly fishing, navigation, and defence considerations require connectivity between the offshore and on-shore. Most importantly, we are concerned that it might also hinder appropriate environmental planning: Nature does not recognise such artificial boundaries.

We understand the MMO will be taking forward an extensive scoping exercise of the whole marine area (English) in order to decide how the plans are developed. We believe that the proposed work for the North West may need to be applied more widely.

#### **Question 5: Will the proposed inshore plan areas provide an effective scale for local authority and stakeholder involvement in the marine planning process?**

We believe that stakeholder and public involvement in marine planning is feasible regardless of the scale of the plan. The 12 mile limit is immaterial to participants who are far more concerned about the impact of activities than their precise location. For example the Round Three off-shore wind farms are likely to have major economic impacts on-shore but are mainly beyond the 12 mile boundary.

Until work commences on the preparation of the marine plans, it is difficult to determine whether the inshore plan areas provide an effective scale for local authority and stakeholder involvement. As such, it may be sensible to consider these areas to be somewhat 'provisional' at this stage. A mechanism to review these areas should be considered should any over-arching reasons for boundary changes be identified in the early stages of the plan making process, which may be a useful aid to the process.

#### **Question 6: Do you agree that these criteria should inform decisions on the order in which marine plans should be prepared?**

We believe that the considerations are relevant and reasonable, and the classifications appropriate. We consider both appropriate provision of resources and timing of plan preparation as crucial to effective delivery.

#### **Question 7: Are there any other criteria which should also be considered?**

We believe that international marine borders should be added to the list of considerations. Matching the landward borders to terrestrial planning authority borders is particularly important, to enable integration of terrestrial and marine planning.

We suggest that at the furthest limit of plan areas, similar consideration should be given to international borders. For example, marine plan borders in the North Sea should meet borders between the Belgian and Dutch sections of the North Sea, to enable integration with corresponding national marine plans.

We think that the issue of prioritisation will be important, and query which areas will be considered first in the development of the initial marine plans. In determining the order of plan preparation, consideration should be given to the workload on marine and coastal stakeholders resulting from implementation of other parts of the Marine & Coastal

Access Act 2009. In particular, the MMO will need to consider the intensive stakeholder engagement required by the four regional projects to deliver networks of MPAs in English waters.

It would be helpful if the issues mentioned in section 5.5 could be considered at an early stage so that marine plan timetables can be prepared and consulted upon, to ensure stakeholders are aware of the relevant consultation periods for their areas of interest at an early stage. We believe there is much to learn from the new terrestrial spatial planning system, especially the frustration caused by delay and uncertainty, which should not be replicated in the emerging marine planning system.