

Consultation questions

Question 1

Has the management of Welsh seas received sufficient resource and strategic direction to enable sustainable management that supports the well-being of current and future generations? (250 words)

No

Unless there is more joined up thinking for overall or local area management of Welsh seas, the marine environment of Wales will inevitably continue to be degraded. Illegal fishing incursions into existing MPAs, unquantified pressures from many marine activities and continued multiple small developments being carried out without a full appreciation of their cumulative effect mean that sustainable management that supports the well-being of future generations is not possible.

Whilst there has been some consideration given to the strategic direction for management of Welsh seas over past years and some resourcing of related work, this has been relatively small compared to similar work on land (despite the fact that operating in the marine environment inevitably involves a higher level of costs due to the nature of the environment). So there are comparatively few resources (staff and funding) directed at management of Welsh Seas, whether in the public or private sector.

Although there are strategy documents for management of Welsh seas, there are no easily understood, clear and meaningful stated outcomes defined in terms of what state we actually want the Welsh marine environment to be in, in order for it to support either our current or future needs or aspirations. This is essential if we are to set the parameters regarding what we mean (and what future generations may mean) by 'sustainable'. It's all very well to have an aspiration of joined up, integrated natural resource management, but it is the targets and the detail which define the outcome that are crucial. Without those, how are we to know what we want and whether we have achieved it?

Short-term gain still appears to dominate decision making and consequently funding too, and decision-making is still predominantly sectoral. Decisions are often made on the basis of which sectors lobby hardest or have greatest sway as opposed to which are most relevant to the best outcome. In the absence of clear, specific environmental outcomes that we are seeking to achieve, it is too easy for biased decisions to be made. This can often be the case when issues are dealt with solely on a case-by-case basis without reference to overall cumulative impact and achievement of specified environmental goals as an integral part of the decision-making process.

There is much we don't know (and perhaps will never know) about the marine environment, all its species and how it functions. This lack of understanding should not be used as an excuse for not making sound, objective decisions supporting environmental protection based on best available information including expert judgement.



Question 2

How should Area Statements, to be developed by Natural Resources Wales, cover Welsh seas? (*For example should the sea adjoining each Welsh Local Authority be included in its Area Statement, or should the marine environment be considered separately in one or more marine Area Statements?*) (250 words)

Area Statements should encompass the sea area adjoining the land area that the Area Statement covers. As said in response to question 1, organisations and individuals are inherently sectoral in how they work and behave; most organisations function on a sectoral basis around work streams and funding. If Area Statements are to provide a framework for decision making to achieve integrated resource management, they have to encompass the interactions between the land and sea. Activities on land can have significant influence on the coast and sea and vice versa and many Welsh coastal communities rely on both land and sea for their livelihoods and wellbeing. Not integrating sea areas into Area Statements will reinforce the division between management of land and sea and how organisations and individuals operate.



Question 3

How well are Wales' MPAs currently being managed?

(This can include aspects such as the condition of sites, staffing to deliver management, surveillance and enforcement activities and the data on the extent of activities taking place in MPAs) (250 words)

Poorly, or not at all in some cases, with an almost total absence of 'on the ground' personnel in place to manage them. This isn't to say that there haven't been good efforts to manage MPAs, but overall Wales is not managing its MPAs very well at all.

Wales does not appear to value or celebrate its MPAs as the national assets they are. MPAs should not just be put in place to meet a legislative requirement but should be celebrated and promoted as having a positive role for society as a whole.

Some good work on MPA management has been carried out in Wales with innovative projects that have worked with, and continue to work with, local people, visitors and interest groups to deliver management action. Although little of this seems to have been recognised or used to help develop how future MPA management should be taken forward. For the past 15 years or so there has been no joined-up programme for MPA management in Wales. Both funding and staffing have been sporadic and inconsistent and this has affected the continuity of management delivery and, therefore, what has, or can be achieved and is a wasteful approach to using limited resources. Staffing for MPA management has been minimal, way below that in public sector working on land management.

There are many areas where MPA management in Wales is not working well:

- There is no overall programme for MPA management in Wales - only parts of a programme as rather disconnected pieces of work. There is no clear, integrated programme which is easy to understand from either outside or even inside the 'system'.
- There is a fundamental lack of appreciation for Wales' marine environment and its wildlife. Out of sight is out of mind. A healthy marine environment is an essential component for our future well being but the idea of protecting something we can't see, or don't even know much about, needs serious championing.
- There is a serious lack of staff on the ground delivering MPA management as their prime role.
- There is a lack of continuity of funding for MPA management. Reliance on securing short-term, disparate grant funding for management delivery means priorities have had to change to fit available funding, undermining continuity and security of management delivery.
- Far too much effort is put into process and structure rather than on the ground delivery.
- There is no clear and easily available information on the condition of Wales' MPAs that explains our current knowledge and understanding.
- Reductions in monitoring and surveillance of MPAs have impaired our understanding of whether management is being effective. There is a lack of support for the importance of maintaining time-series of data to provide long-term datasets that will improve understanding of the marine environment and help inform future decision making.
- Lack of integration between different organisations to work to deliver MPA management. There have been some good and effective initiatives established around individual MPAs, but this has been more by historical chance rather than part of an overall prescribed approach to MPA management.



- Lack of recourse if public bodies fail to deliver their responsibilities towards MPAs and their management.
- Lack of policing and enforcement. Actual and alleged incidences of illegal activities within MPAs are not seen as a serious enough issue, and penalties for infringement are inadequate to act as a deterrent against future breaches.



Question 4

What are the key issues affecting the effective management of multi-use MPAs? (250 words)

Effective management of multi-use MPAs is about balancing multi-faceted human use and aspirations with clearly defined environmental protection objectives for the marine environment within and supporting MPAs.

This is complex and requires:

- Clearly defined objectives for the MPA, its habitats, species and supporting environmental systems, and political support to achieve them
- MPA managers on the ground who know their area and can work closely with other statutory bodies, local communities, user groups, the public, visitors etc to identify and implement management actions.
- Effective and timely decision-making.
- Effective mechanisms to resolve disputes that do not undermine achievement of overall objectives.
- Political and organisational support for the programmes of work being delivered.
- Mandatory buy-in from all statutory organisations involved.
- A clear lead to take the work forward.

Management needs to evolve to take into account shifting requirements as new issues arise, and should be based on extensive practical experience and not a virtual, theoretical set of parameters and conceptual studies.

Effective management of multi-use MPAs requires sustained support for local MPA management delivery (e.g. clear programme, staffing, funding), which has been lacking in Wales as identified in response to earlier questions.

There need to be site-focussed, practical management plans for MPAs, developed in conjunction with stakeholders and the general public (whose overall aspirations can often be ignored by the desire to satisfy particular interest groups).

MPAs exist within a wider social and economic context of local, regional and national areas and the management of multi-use MPAs needs to integrate into this bigger picture. There are mutual benefits to be gained from good management of MPAs but this too often is not recognised or highlighted, e.g. management to protect habitats and species for biodiversity purposes can help support commercial fisheries by protecting nursery areas and restoring depleted fisheries stocks; accreditation schemes for wildlife watching boats to reduce disturbance to marine mammals can be used to promote responsible tourism.

A sectoral focus on MPA management as currently exists does not help support integrated management which is essential for multi-use MPAs.

In other countries, multi-use MPA management approaches make far more use of zoning plans to partition use and provide specific degrees of protection (e.g. allowing or restricting certain activities in different areas). We have made little use of such an approach in Wales. Issues around lack of information about the state of habitats and species within an MPA and levels of activity etc are also relevant.



Question 5

Do existing Welsh MPAs currently provide the right protection for the conservation of Welsh marine biodiversity? (250 words)

No. Whilst spatial coverage for some habitats and species is probably sufficient, in practice the protection afforded through existing MPAs is undermined for most of the reasons already given in response to the questions above, summarised as follows:

- a lack of clear, specific outcomes which we aspire to achieve
 - a lack of understanding of the current state of MPAs and whether they are better or worse than they were and if worse, how this might be rectified
 - insufficient monitoring / surveillance
 - inadequate political support and direction to achieve desired protection
 - a lack of a clear programme of MPA management
 - a lack of sustained resourcing of MPA management
 - a lack of enforcement
- etc

The repercussions of illegal activity are not a sufficient deterrent.

We do not have any stated aspiration for restoration or recovery of marine biodiversity in Wales. If we accept that marine biodiversity has been degraded, and there is clearly evidence to this effect, we should have clear restoration targets/outcomes for habitats and species.

We do not address the issue of carrying capacity of Wales' MPAs for particular activities. Fundamental to determining sustainable use in the long-term.

There are likely to still be gaps in the coverage of MPAs for particular habitats / species, e.g. horse mussel reef, Risso's dolphin. These should not be forgotten about. Knowledge of Wales' offshore marine habitats is still limited.



Question 6

What lessons can be learnt from current MPA management activity in Wales (including designation, implementation and enforcement)? (250 words)

Need readily accessible information about MPAs and their management.

Need to continue to raise awareness about the beauty, diversity and importance of Welsh seas. Most people will never directly see the undersea world for themselves, and that has a huge influence on how much consideration people give to it and its wellbeing. Designation processes are bureaucratic processes that have necessary attention to detail but which, as a result, fail to celebrate the wonder of the marine environment.

Be pro-active about MPAs and MPA management rather than reluctant. “We want to” rather than “We have to”.

Need to clearly state what needs to be achieved in terms of environmental protection – in specific terms rather than generalised statements such as ‘good condition’.

Have a clear programme of MPA management that links up management, monitoring/surveillance, assessment of condition, review, management etc.

Standardise the timelines for reporting on condition for different designations. Ensure that sufficient resources are given to reporting on MPAs and that the results are publicised for people to see. Establish a process and stick to it so not continually re-inventing the wheel.

Celebrate successes and be up front about failures.

Support continuity of management delivery of MPAs. Constant shifting of grant fund requirements means that management projects have to continually be for something new, rather than building on and embedding current initiatives.

Need to put time and effort into working with people to develop and implement management action. Need people on the ground who can develop and maintain positive working relationships and build trust between different interest groups in the interests of finding ways to address management issues. People are generally proud of the natural areas that they care about and want to see them looked after, and are interested in helping develop local solutions. None of this happens overnight and trust can be easily undermined or destroyed.

Not all MPA management measures can be identified or implemented by consensus.

Difficult decisions shouldn't be avoided. Conflict in management of multi-use MPAs is inevitable. It is how that conflict is dealt with and the solutions that are identified that matter.

Illegal activities need a prompt and effective enforcement response. Illegal activities that affect seabed habitats should be given prompt and strong recognition rather than being left ‘out of sight, out of mind’.

Enforcement in the marine environment needs to be delivered in a more joined up way – current re-



sourcing of marine resource enforcement is minimal.

Practical situations need practical solutions. Policy has its place but once defined should only be modified when required and not constantly updated (a diversion of limited resources).

Incomplete information is not a basis for avoiding decision making and inaction.

Question 7

Are there MPA examples or practices elsewhere that Wales can learn from? (250 words)

There are numerous examples of effective MPAs and good management from around the world:

California – high degrees of protection in heavily used areas, apparently effective resourcing of enforcement and sufficiently robust deterrents for illegal activity

Zoning of activities within an area – many examples world wide. Zoning of some activities in some Scottish MPAs. La Restinga in El Hierro in the Canary Islands has total exclusion zones and intermediate and lightly controlled zones. Well signed up to and with high levels of local people involved.

Local solutions for local issues – working with local communities. Again, many examples world wide.

Reference areas / reserves with little or no human activity that are enforced – New Zealand, Canary Islands.

Many MPAs are seen not only as protective areas but also as assets which bring visitors in and drive parts of the economy - something we need to learn from; (some such examples in Wales but in the minority).



Question 8

The majority of Wales' MPAs are designated under the EU Habitats Directive. How should the Welsh Government's approach to MPA management take account of the UK's decision to leave the European Union? (250 words)

Any approach taken must be better what has taken place while we have operated under the umbrella of the EU. To do anything else would be unacceptable as the decision to leave the EU is one aimed at being free to make independent and better national decisions as to how we are governed. These decision need to provide a better outcome for the country. So environmental protection needs to be more effective than it was under the EU, and any changes in legislation need to take this into account and be real rather than bureaucratic. Failure to provide a better approach would undermine the concept of self-determination which has driven us to where we are.

So the Welsh Government's approach to MPA management needs to be better than that provided under the EU Habitats Directive and provide greater and more appropriate protection for marine habitats and species. There should be increased levels of protection afforded to areas/habitats/species and approaches to MPA management could be more integrated and be designed to satisfy both local, national and international (wider than EU) aspirations and commitments for a better environment.

A regionalised area approach operating within an overall MPA management programme could support more considered on the ground work to develop and implement MPA management, if properly supported.

There need to be clear procedures relating to assessment of activities and developments that may affect MPAs that have environmental protection at their core. Wales failed to meet the 2010 biodiversity targets and we will continue to fail to meet them and national aspirations for sustainability, if we do not take clear steps to halt and reverse degradation of the Welsh environment, its habitats and species. This is not anti-development; it is about developing a national understanding of the fundamental importance of the natural environment to all of us and the duty we have to prevent further damage and loss.

Do not seek to go through a massive re-designation process for MPAs – this is time, resource consuming and wasteful. Build on what exists in the most efficient way.



Question 9

If you had to make one recommendation to the Welsh Government from all the points you have made, what would that recommendation be? (250 words)

Value Wales' marine environment for the wealth of life it supports as well as the goods and services it provides. There needs to be an over-riding desire to protect and enhance the Welsh marine environment for the future and for this to drive establishment of effective management systems for MPAs (and the wider Welsh marine environment) that are appropriately resourced.

Put into place and resource practical and effective management systems for MPAs based on 'on the ground' personnel to interacting directly with the people and deliver practical management.

Whilst short termism inevitably has high demands, there are long-term aims which will benefit us all and our environment; achieving these requires resolution on behalf of government to achieve them.

In times of change (such as leaving the EU) it is essential that we know that there are worthy, long-term goals to which both government and the Welsh people all subscribe to.

Question 10

Do you have any other comments or issues you wish to raise that have not been covered by the specific questions? (250 words)

The consultation questions are seeking simple answers to complex issues. This has made it very difficult to provide a meaningful response in few words; attempting to be prescriptive in limiting the number of words undermines the process. It is not clear how the committee will use the responses it receives to consider such a wide-ranging topic.

There is much that could be done to disseminate and embed the learning from what we do know, including work commissioned and undertaken by public bodies, universities and research bodies and Welsh government. There is a constant drive for new information but we don't take time to really learn from what we already know. A clear and effective reporting process for MPAs that brings this information together at a point in time would help provide us with a collective understanding of where we are with the condition of MPAs (and the marine environment) and where we need to go. This work needs to be sufficiently resourced.

