

REPORT OF CONSERVATION POLICY OFFICER

SUBJECT: MARINE PROTECTED AREAS AROUND THE PEMBROKESHIRE COAST

Purpose of Report

1. To describe the National Park Authority's responsibilities with regard to Marine Protected Areas around the Pembrokeshire Coast.

Background

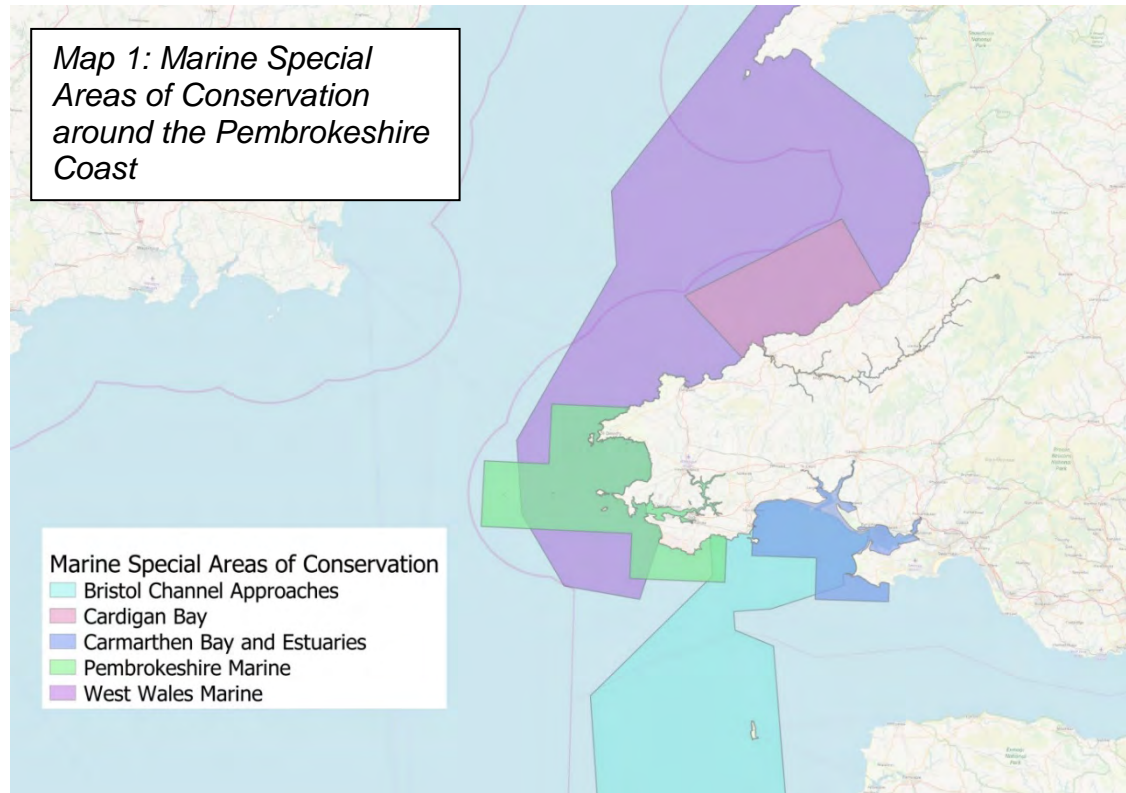
2. Marine Protected Areas in Wales consist of the following designations:
 - a) *Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas*. Designated under the provisions of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)¹. Sections 6 and 7 of the regulations identify the National Park Authority as a Relevant Authority and as a Competent Authority, i.e. as an authority with powers or functions which have, or could have, an impact on European Marine Sites.
 - b) *Marine Conservation Zones*. Designated under the provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The National Park Authority has a general duty in respect of Marine Conservation Zones to exercise its functions in order to further the stated conservation objectives for a Marine Conservation Zone. Skomer Marine Conservation Zone is currently the only Marine Conservation Zone in Wales.
 - c) *Ramsar sites*. Designated under the Convention of Wetlands of International Importance 1971. It is Welsh Government's policy to treat these sites in the same way as SACs and SPAs. Burry Inlet is a Ramsar Site (and part of the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Site).
 - d) *Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)*. Designated under the provisions of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Section 28 of the Act sets out a range of duties and powers to ensure the protection and management of SSSIs. Improved provisions for the protection and management of SSSIs were introduced by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.) About 80% of the length of the National Park coastline is included within SSSI designations².
 - e) *National Nature Reserves*. Designated under Section 35 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Ramsey, Skokholm, Skomer and Grassholm are island National Nature Reserves.

¹ One of the pieces of domestic law that transposed the land and marine aspects of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and parts of the Wild Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC).

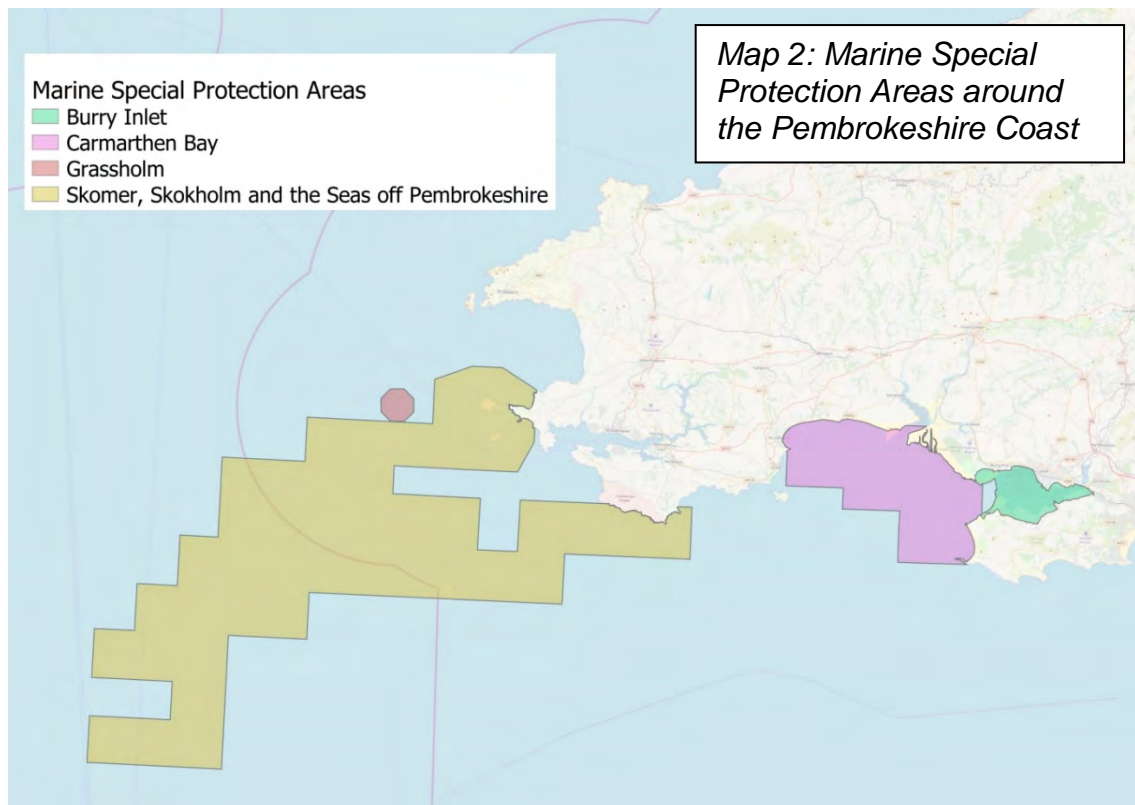
² Schedule 13 of the Marine and Coastal Act 2009 clarifies the normal seaward limits of SSSIs as being Lowest Astronomical Tide in Wales, or the seaward limits of estuarine waters, and sets out the circumstances in which SSSIs may extend beyond those limits into the subtidal zone.

The national site network

3. Prior to the UK's departure from the EU, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) were referred to as Natura 2000 sites. They are now referred to as the national site network.
4. SACs and SPAs designated primarily for their marine features lying within, partly within or adjacent to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park are shown on the maps below.



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Management arrangements for the marine SACs and SPAs

5. The National Park Authority is represented on and contributes funding to the Relevant Authority Group for each of the following:
 - Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation
 - Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation
 - Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Sites

6. Management schemes, under which the authorities' functions are to be exercised so as to secure compliance with the requirements of the regulations, are in place for each site. The principal delivery mechanism for management scheme delivery is the relevant European Marine Site Officer. The officers facilitate partnership working and project delivery within and between Relevant Authority groups and are a source of information on cross-Wales management issues. In promoting awareness and understanding of European Marine Sites they help recruit support for the sites' effective management.

7. European Marine Site officers are funded through contributions from the local Relevant Authority Group. Site officers are in post for each of the three sites for which the National Park Authority is a relevant authority. These posts are currently 2.9 days per week (Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation), 3 days per week (Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation) and 1 day per week (Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Sites).

8. Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia National Park Authorities support the Relevant Authorities Group model as a cost-effective way of fulfilling relevant

authorities' legal responsibilities and working with partners to add value. In those European Marine Sites in Wales where there has been a workable and predictable level of funding, European Marine Sites Officers consistently deliver a diverse range of imaginative and innovative projects and lever in additional finance³.

9. The Authority is represented on a number of other marine groups.

Marine Protected Area Management Steering Group⁴

10. This Group was established in 2014 by Welsh Government to develop and guide the implementation of a new management framework in Wales. The Group's purposes also include raising the profile of marine protected area management and increasing buy-in from management authorities and wider stakeholders across Wales.
11. The Group publishes an annual action plan of funded projects that complement management activity delivered at a local level and identified within individual management schemes where they exist. Projects are invited and funding determined on the basis of criteria which include spatial extent and strategic contribution to the integrity of the site network, potential for improvement in the management of key pressures, and contribution to understanding of factors affecting feature condition. A copy of the 2020-21 Action Plan is included as Annex A.

Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group⁵

12. The purpose of this Group is to bring together a broad range of strategic interest groups to ensure meaningful engagement in relation to the delivery of marine and fisheries divisional priorities and wider marine and fisheries work through collaborative working.

Marine Planning Decision Makers Group⁶

13. The Marine Planning Decision Makers Group helps public authorities understand and implement the Welsh National Marine Plan (adopted in 2019) in line with the obligations on relevant public authorities to take decisions in line with the plan, as set out in Section 58 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009). The Group provides a forum for resolving Plan implementation issues as they arise.

Skomer Marine Conservation Zone Advisory Committee

14. Skomer Marine Conservation Zone was established in 2014. Prior to this Skomer was Wales' only Marine Nature Reserve for 24 years. The National Park Authority is represented, by a Member and an Officer, on the Skomer Marine Conservation

³ The *Inquiry into Marine Protected Areas in Wales*, conducted by the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee in 2017, concluded that more money and staff were needed to protect wildlife and habitats in the waters around Wales, and that each area should have a dedicated officer. <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-05/letter-from-the-cabinet-secretary-about-managing-our-marine-protected-areas.pdf>

⁴ <https://gov.wales/marine-protected-area-management-steering-group> Membership consists of Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Local Government Association, The Crown Estate, Dŵr Cymru / Welsh Water, Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia National Park Authorities, Port and Harbour Authorities and a European Marine Sites officer advisor.

⁵ <https://gov.wales/wales-marine-action-and-advisory-group>

⁶ <https://gov.wales/marine-planning-decision-makers-group>

Zone Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee is made up of around 40 individuals and organisations with an interest in the area.

Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Monitoring Steering Group

15. The Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Monitoring Steering Group is a collaborative group of industry, statutory authorities and others with an interest in the environmental quality of the Milford Haven waterway. Part of the Group's purpose is *'to provide high quality environmental information...to contribute to the maintenance, enhancement and safeguard of the Waterway's rich and diverse marine environment'*.

Financial considerations

16. Financial contributions totalling £5,000 annually are made to the work of the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC, Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries European Marine Sites, and Cardigan Bay SAC Relevant Authority Groups on an approximately pro rata ('adjoining area') basis (£3,000, £1,500 and £500 respectively).
17. Occasionally, additional in-year funding becomes available. In 2019, the Authority helped to fund an infographic and accompanying factsheet, aimed at shipping and terminal crews, highlighting the effect that artificial lights can have on Manx shearwaters (Pembrokeshire Marine SAC), and a *Respect for Wildlife* marine animal behaviour leaflet aimed at boat operators (Cardigan Bay SAC). The total contribution was £3,000. A bid to Welsh Government by the Authority in 2020 helped fund a follow-on to the award-winning *Surveying the Waterway Environment for Pollution Threats* project, and a similar project in the Nyfer catchment – the *Catchment Level Environment Action Network*. The total award was around £5,500.
18. The Authority contributes to the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum Community Interest Company, helping to fund the Marine Code / Outdoor Charter, Sustainable Recreation Management Project and updates to Wales Activity Mapping. The total contribution is around £12,500 annually.
19. The Authority's contribution to the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Monitoring Steering Group is approximately £3,500 annually.
20. Officer time is contributed to attendance at Relevant Authority Group, Marine Protected Area Management Steering Group, Wales Marine Action and Advisory Group and Marine Planning Decision Makers Group meetings.

Legal considerations

21. In addition to the legal considerations relating to specific conservation designations noted above, the following are also of relevance.
22. Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 places a duty on public authorities to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of its functions, and in so doing to promote the resilience of ecosystems.
23. The Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act 2015 places a well-being duty on public bodies. This includes setting objectives to maximise the contribution to

the goal of maintaining and enhancing a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems.

Human Rights / Equality issues

24. None are identified in the scope of this report.

Biodiversity implications / Sustainability appraisal

25. Management schemes for European Marine Sites, and the Relevant Authority Groups which help deliver the schemes, are a key delivery mechanism for nature conservation in the marine environment. The approach helps ensure statutory compliance on species and habitats protection, and for achieving the UK's vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

Welsh Language implications

26. None are identified in the scope of this report.

Recommendation

That Members NOTE the report.

For further information please contact Michel Regelous, Conservation Policy Officer, michelr@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk

Officers Consulted: Tegryn Jones, Chief Executive; Senior Management Team; Nicola Gandy, Director of Planning and Park Direction; Sarah Mellor, Biodiversity Officer.

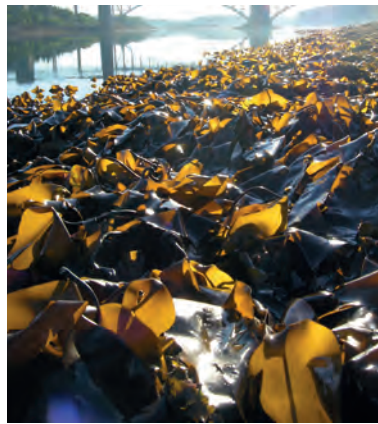
2020-2021



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management

ACTION PLAN FOR WALES





All cover images: © Natural Resources Wales

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Marine Protected Area Management (MPA) Steering Group selected and scored the following actions prior to the Covid-19 outbreak. Delivery of the actions may be subsequently restricted by current Welsh Government Covid-19 guidelines. This will be reflected in next year's MPA Annual Report.

Introduction

This is the third Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management Action Plan for Wales (2020-21), produced by the Wales MPA Management Steering Group. It sets out the priority network-level actions to improve MPA management and, therefore, improve or maintain condition of the network of MPAs in Wales. It complements management activity delivered at a local level which are identified within individual site action plans, where they exist.

The 2020-21 Action Plan sits alongside the **MPA Network Management Framework for Wales 2018–2023 (Framework)** and collectively they provide a steer for Management Authorities to guide delivery of the long-term vision for the management of the network:

The Welsh MPA network is under effective and consistent management which safeguards the marine wildlife and habitats of sites, and leads to site features achieving or maintaining favourable condition. Network management supports resilient marine ecosystems which in turn help to achieve clean, safe, healthy, sustainable, productive and biologically diverse Welsh seas. MPAs are valued for the long-term benefits they provide to the people of Wales through the protection of their rich natural and cultural heritage.

Publication of this 2020-21 Action Plan is accompanied by the publication of the **Wales MPA Network Management Annual Report 2019-20** which provides an update on delivery progress of actions prioritised in last year's Action Plan (2019-20).

The Actions

Each action within the 2020-21 Action Plan contributes to at least one of the Framework's five MPA management principles, to guide delivery of the vision and objectives for the management of the network:

MP1 Strategic Planning: Management should be guided by strategic planning processes at both a sectoral and all-Wales level. It supports sustainable use of the MPA network in ways which conserve and enhance condition, support resilience of marine ecosystems, support wellbeing and deliver sustainable management of natural resources.

MP2 Regulation, development consenting and assessment processes: Regulatory processes, consenting decisions and assessment processes should be delivered consistently and proportionately across the network, and proactively consider and support the maintenance or enhancement (where possible/appropriate) of the condition of relevant sites and features across the network.

MP3 Management advice and guidance: Decision-making and management operations should be supported by clear and consistent advice and guidance on MPAs including their conservation objectives.

MP4 Understanding the condition of, and pressures and threats on, sites and their features to inform management: management should be informed by, and consistently refer to, formal assessment and reporting on the health and condition of features, sites and the network as a whole. Assessment and reporting is informed by a prioritised monitoring programme that improves understanding of condition, change and impacts across aspects of the network where key pressures are identified.

MP5 Wider management: management operations on individual and multiple sites should be prioritised to ensure delivery of activity that has the potential for greatest improvement in the management of key pressures, and on condition across the network. Management activities may maintain or enhance feature condition, identify and address particular local issues and pressures, and raise awareness of MPAs through targeted interventions and engagement with members of the public.

Actions were proposed to the MPA Management Steering Group for assessment against a set of agreed prioritisation criteria, which are set out in the Annex. The Steering Group has agreed a list of 23 priority actions, this includes three new actions identified and added this year. The actions reflect the breadth of MPA management activity which takes place day in day out, as well as specific interventions and projects. Many of these projects and interventions cover the whole network but some are pilot projects carried out at the site level.

As with the 2019-20 Action Plan, many are investigatory in nature and it is anticipated they will result in the development of active interventions, which will be put forward for screening and prioritisation for future iterations of the Action Plan.

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Actions

Integrate sustainable management of the MPA network with the Area Statements Process and delivery

Description	Outcomes	
<p>The MPA Management Action Plan is embedded in the Area Statements, which was published in March 2020.</p> <p>Area statements delivery will focus on a range of actions relevant to the management of MPAs across Wales. Many of the relevant actions are already embedded in this action plan.</p> <p>The focus over the coming year will be on engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to agree collaborative action which we can take to deliver the actions in the identified themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature based solutions and adaptation in the coastal zone; • Supporting implementation of marine planning; and • Building the resilience of the marine environment. 	<p>Integration of marine planning and management processes and additional support for MPA network management delivery.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured

Ongoing

Natural Resources Wales
Management Authorities and
all other relevant stakeholders

Yes

Develop an approach to undertaking improved and periodic MPA condition assessments

Description	Outcomes	
<p>This EMFF funded project will develop indicators and a process for improving reporting on condition of features protected within the network of MPAs in Wales.</p> <p>The main activities of the project are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a series of reporting indicators, to allow the more efficient assessment and reporting of the condition of MPA features; • Development of agreed guidance describing how site condition assessments will be carried out on all our MPAs; and • Trial of the new methodology on MPA site(s)/feature(s) in Wales. 	<p>The main outcome of the project will be the ability to carry out timely site level condition assessments leading to a better understanding of the condition of our MPAs in Wales, which will better inform management and focus priorities.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured

Oct 2018 – June 2022

Natural Resources Wales

Yes

Further develop a risk based marine monitoring programme across the MPA network

Description		Outcomes
<p>Options for a programme of prioritised, risk-based marine biodiversity monitoring have been delivered at a country and UK-level and are currently under consideration.</p> <p>Whilst the new programme is being implemented, the current monitoring programme will continue to be delivered.</p>		<p>Improved evidence base to inform future assessments of MPA condition and appropriate management measures.</p> <p>In the long-term, this work will enable a greater understanding of the effectiveness of management measures.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
<p>Monitoring programme review completed and preferred options delivered at a UK-scale.</p> <p>Implementation of new programme of integrated marine biodiversity monitoring.</p>	<p>Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee</p> <p>Welsh Government</p>	<p>No</p>

MPA Network Condition Improvement Programme

Description		Outcomes
<p>This programme of work explores potential management actions, where required, to address identified pressures and threats for the MPA network.</p> <p>This year the programme will focus on working with local management officers to develop projects from existing and new actions and explore possible funding routes to deliver next year. Projects will prioritise actions which can deliver improvements to condition or improving understanding of key pressures and threats.</p>		<p>Focus of effort on priority management challenges, will continue to help develop and deliver those actions (1) with the greatest potential to improve (or maintain) the condition of features across the network, or (2) will improve understanding of links between activities and feature condition.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Natural Resources Wales</p>	<p>Yes</p>

Develop consistent and proportionate guidance to improve casework advice, and to support implementation of the Welsh National Marine Plan

Description		Outcomes
<p>The purpose of this work is to develop guidance to support consistent and proportionate assessment of the impacts of regulated activities on the protected features of MPAs in Wales.</p> <p>Guidance is being developed to support implementation of Welsh National Marine Plan policies in decision making e.g. marine licencing and policy specific guidance.</p>		<p>Consistent and proportionate guidance will support improved decision making which will help to improve the security of management and help to maintain the condition, and where appropriate, improve the features of our MPAs.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
Ongoing programme of relevant guidance production	Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee	Yes

Developing vulnerability assessment methodologies of network features using inshore vessel monitoring system (iVMS) data

Description		Outcomes
<p>Using existing, small scale, iVMS remote datasets feature interactions will be explored to determine suitability of such data (towed and static) for vulnerability assessments of network features. Work in this area is necessary to pre-empt the roll out of iVMS systems in Wales and future data analysis. Developing this knowledge base and processes now will allow for immediate benefits on MPA network vulnerabilities to fishing.</p>		<p>A report of data analysis methodologies describing which features it would be suitable to use for assessments of interaction pathways. Conclusions will include future recommendations and assessment gaps.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
2020-21	Welsh Government	Partial

Deliver MPA management through regulatory consenting and assessment processes		
Description	Outcomes	
The aim of this work is to make sure that regulatory consenting, assessment processes and activity enabling decision making processes take account of the potential impacts to the MPA network and include appropriate mitigation where necessary.	Decision making that reduces impact on the features of our MPA network.	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
Ongoing	All management authorities	Yes

Improve maps of the extent and distribution of Annex I marine habitats		
Description	Outcomes	
This work provides key evidence to support management of SACs (e.g. casework advice) and Article 17 reporting. This mainly involves collation of third party data (e.g. UKHO multibeam data) to update maps.	Improved maps will support management as well as assessment and reporting.	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
Ongoing (as new data becomes available)	Natural Resources Wales	Yes

Sustainable Management of Marine Natural Resources Project

Description		Outcomes
<p>This project is developing, and improving access to, the environmental evidence base to help identify opportunities and constraints in relation to potential future development of wave and tidal stream energy and aquaculture sectors in Welsh waters. It will create locational guidance and other tools to allow the consideration of environmental sensitivities and help to ensure compliance with the environmental policies in the WNMP.</p> <p>The second project phase currently underway, includes collection of new data and interpretation of existing evidence to deliver environmental constraints and opportunities mapping within resource areas. The final project outputs will be evidence packages to inform the planning, assessment and consenting of developments.</p>		<p>Improved access to relevant data and information, locational guidance and decision making tools will help to achieve better outcomes for the marine environment, including MPAs, and contribute towards the sustainable development of these sectors.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
December 2020	Natural Resources Wales Welsh Government	Yes

Maintain links between the MPA Network Management Action Plan and locally agreed actions, where they exist, and support exploration of funding opportunities

Description		Outcomes
<p>This action will highlight and link to local actions of relevance, including specific local actions in the annual Action Plan as appropriate.</p>		<p>Allows for the sharing of best practice from different sites to the MPA network, encourage cross-site working, as well as promoting the work done at the site level.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
Reports produced by EMSOs and collated by MPAMSG EMSO advisor by May 2021	Relevant Authority groups	Yes

Assessing the vulnerability of Annex 1 marine habitat features to climate change in Wales

Description		Outcomes
<p>The impacts of climate change pressures on Annex 1 features across Wales are currently poorly understood.</p> <p>This one-year desk-based study will further our understanding of climate change pressures on marine SAC features, and the potential impacts that may be experienced under various emission scenarios and management timeframes. The outputs will help identify any likely future changes in feature condition and / or extent resulting from climate change pressures, which in turn will feed into development of management and / or site adaptation options.</p>		<p>The outcomes of the project will help inform future climate-related management and adaptation options at feature, site and network levels as well as further our understanding of potential changes to ecosystem services.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
April 2020 – March 2021	Natural Resources Wales	Yes

Wales Non-Licensable Activities Project

Description		Outcomes
<p>The Wales Non-licensable Activities Project focuses on priority actions to improve understanding and implement management of the MPA network.</p> <p>For this year the project will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and appraising management options for bait digging on the Gann • Continuing to work to identify areas vulnerable to anchoring and mooring within the MPA network • Continuing to work with local management officers to identify new prioritised activities (linking to work under the MPA Network Condition Improvement Programme) 		<p>Improved evidence base for high priority activities.</p> <p>Prioritisation and implementation of management, where required, to improve (or maintain) condition of MPA features.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
March 2021	Natural Resources Wales	Yes

Address coastal squeeze impacts on MPAs

Description	Outcomes	
<p>This project will continue to gather evidence to understand the impacts of coastal squeeze on our MPA network including continued engagement with UK wide discussions and projects.</p> <p>Work will continue in Wales to progress habitat creation projects to provide compensatory coastal habitat for anticipated habitat loss arising from work associated with flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes.</p>	<p>Use new knowledge of coastal squeeze impacts to help maintain the integrity of the network.</p> <p>Compensation for loss of some coastal habitats due to climate change.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
Ongoing	Natural Resources Wales Welsh Government	Yes

Deliver the priority actions within the Marine Litter Action Plan where they provide benefit to the network of MPAs in Wales

Description	Outcomes	
<p>In 2019 the Wales Clean Seas Partnership (WCSP) undertook a review of the Marine Litter Action Plan (MLAP) for Wales.</p> <p>The Wales Clean Seas Partnership Marine Litter Action Plan for Wales will help tackle marine litter and seeks an overall reduction in marine litter.</p> <p>The WCSP encourage its partners to renew their pledges to the MLAP for 2020-21. These pledges will outline key objectives and measures they will endeavour to implement. The 2017–2020 Review has been produced capturing the progress.</p> <p>The WCSP closely aligns and supports work to address Single Use Plastics (SUP) in Wales. Measures including banning some SUP items are currently being considered by Welsh Government and the WCSP will continue to support and offer advice where necessary. By introducing measures to tackle litter at source, will ultimately benefit the sustainability of the MPA network in Wales.</p> <p>An EMFF grant funded project is entering stage two following on from delivering evidence-based actions from the MLAP. The second stage will involve engagement with secondary schools to investigate the feasibility of incorporating marine litter into their Eco-schools work.</p> <p>Accompanying this work the project will also work with the tourist industry to investigate the feasibility of an eco-award through a pilot scheme.</p>	<p>Improve understanding of and, where appropriate, reduce impacts of litter on the marine environment and MPAs if such measures are taken.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
December 2021	Wales Clean Seas Partnership Welsh Government	Yes

Community Litter Project

Description	Outcomes	
<p>This year the plan was to use the review of community litter projects from year 1 to deliver actions from EMS Management Schemes and the Clean Seas Partnership. Due to Covid 19 the second year of this project has been adapted to attempt to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on local litter picking groups and the impact of COVID on the amount and types of litter being found within the coastal fringe of the MPA's and across the country, alongside any behaviour changes, for example, increased use of single-use items like masks.</p> <p>Specific work outputs this year will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring data from the litter picks • An indication of best practice guidelines for litter picking groups whilst operating under COVID-19 circumstances. • An insight into the impact of COVID on marine litter and pollution • An insight into the impact of COVID on individual's behaviour in using single use items and littering. • Future work feasibility study including trialling the use of drones, AI and multispectral cameras to monitor litter and types of litter 	<p>Awareness raising of marine litter and support for projects to reduce plastic use. Reduction in the amount of plastic and other litter entering the marine environment locally.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
March 2021	PLAS RAG	Yes

Wales Native Oyster Restoration Project

Description	Outcomes	
<p>The focus of the EMFF funded Wales Native Oyster Restoration Project is the establishment and monitoring of a series of native oyster restoration plots in the Milford Haven waterway. The outputs of this exercise will address questions around the approach and feasibility of native oyster restoration in Wales, specifically related to oyster survivability, recruitment, stocking density, effects of the oyster disease <i>Bonamia</i> and the non-native species <i>Crepidula fornicata</i>, as well as monitoring potential positive effects including habitat enhancement and increased associated species composition.</p>	<p>The key outputs of the project will be the Wales Native Oyster Restoration Guidance report and a Native Oyster Action Plan which will outline the approach and 'next steps' for native oyster restoration in Wales. The key outcome will be clarity on whether native oyster can be restored in Wales and information on the best way to restore native oyster in Welsh waters.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
Feb 2020 – Mar 2023	Natural Resources Wales	Yes

A pilot project on saltmarsh grazing and water quality at Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries SAC

Description	Outcomes	
<p>Poor water quality was highlighted in NRW's indicative site condition reports (2018) as a major issue affecting feature condition across the network of MPAs in Wales. The objectives of this project are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve the evidence base for the impact pathway of sheep grazing To investigate management measures to improve the habitat feature condition of the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries SAC <p>Evidence generated by this project could be important for other sites where there is a combination of saltmarsh and mudflats and sandflats or estuary. These sites include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dee Estuary SAC Anglesey Coast: Saltmarsh SAC Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC Pembrokeshire Marine SAC The Severn Estuary SAC 	<p>Improved evidence base:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feature condition assessments and knowledge of management measures to help reach favourable condition The contribution of sheep faeces to marine water quality issues To inform saltmarsh grazing limits Information on potential management measures to improve water quality issues affecting the cockle fishery. 	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
September 2020	Natural Resources Wales	Yes

Reduce disturbance to marine mammals and birds

Description	Outcomes	
<p>This year the focus of this work will be on three main areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all generic county level codes are consistent and have the same noted distances. Produce a standard set of backing material to support the marine codes. This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance on various activities that may have an impact Leaflets and species ID guides to provide further information about the marine code and why they are necessary Review the effectiveness of the seal pup disturbance panels developed in Year 1 of the project <p>Working with Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum on the possible development of the marine code App.</p>	<p>Marine codes at key sites for highly mobile species are fit for purpose.</p> <p>Contribution to maintaining Grey Seal <i>Halichoerus grypus</i> in favourable condition.</p> <p>Marine users are aware of potential disturbance issues across Wales, and how this can affect vulnerable species.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
March 2021	PLAS RAG	Yes

Develop a bio-security plan for marine Invasive Non-Natives Species (INNS)

Description		Outcomes
<p>This EMFF funded pilot project will deliver a biosecurity plan for Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau (PLAS) SAC. It will also inform development and implementation of biosecurity planning across the MPA network.</p> <p>This will be achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with stakeholders to address the main pathways of introduction and spread of marine INNS, including working with local fishermen to identify how marine INNS may impact their fisheries; Developing techniques to assess and predict the effects of INNS on habitats and species; Building capacity to protect marine biodiversity and minimise risks to protected features. 		<p>Protection of features of the site by managing the key pathways by which marine INNS are introduced and spread at the site level through the use of good biosecurity.</p> <p>Lessons learned will inform biosecurity planning across the MPA network.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
April 2019 – March 2022	Natural Resources Wales, PLAS RAG	Yes

Develop a UK Dolphin and Harbour Porpoise Conservation Strategy

Description		Outcomes
<p>This work aims to develop a consistent, UK-wide approach to managing pressures and threats on nine of the most commonly-found dolphin, porpoise and small whale species in UK waters within and outside MPAs.</p>		<p>The strategy, in addition to existing legal obligations, will inform targeted management to improve understanding and conservation status of these species in UK waters.</p>
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
<p>Consultation in 2020</p> <p>Publication and implementation from 2021</p>	<p>Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee</p> <p>Welsh Government</p>	Yes

A Plan of Action to reduce the incidental bycatch of seabirds in UK waters		
Description	Outcomes	
<p>This UK-wide three-year project seeks to deliver a coherent approach to understand and where necessary reduce seabird bycatch in UK fisheries. The objectives of the project in 2019-20 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a programme of work to assist in decision-making for possible deployment of mitigation measures; and • Identify enhancements to existing monitoring and assessment. 	<p>Improving the evidence base and management tools to address bycatch in the marine environment will contribute to MPA management, including those sites for seabirds.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
March 2022	Natural Resources Wales Joint Nature Conservation Committee Welsh Government	Yes

Assess and where necessary manage the impact of commercial fishing activities on MPAs.		
Description	Outcomes	
<p>The aim of the project is to ensure that commercial fisheries management within European Marine Sites affords adequate protection to designated features, in line with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.</p> <p>The project is assessing interactions between species and habitats and different types of fisheries gear. These assessments are being used to inform whether future fisheries management measures are necessary.</p> <p>This year, project activities will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 marine mammal fixed net assessments (NRW); • 20 potting interaction assessments (NRW); 	<p>Improved evidence base on the pressures / threats from all relevant commercial fishing activities to inform whether management may be needed.</p> <p>Exploration and implementation of management interventions, where required, to improve or maintain the condition of features across the network.</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
Agreed assessments to be completed by March 2021. Management measures ongoing as necessary.	Welsh Government Natural Resources Wales	Yes

Operate a risk based approach to fisheries enforcement		
Description	Outcomes	
<p>This work, which includes enforcement and prosecution, within the Welsh zone and its MPAs, operates a risk-based and intelligence-led approach to marine enforcement, using technological improvements to maintain a focus on high-risk fisheries activities</p> <p>In serves to act as a strong deterrent to help prevent unlawful fishing activities and contribute towards the continued protection of MPA features and the overall condition of the network.</p>	<p>Approach will improve evidence base and support site management to protect designated features in MPAs</p>	
Timescale for Delivery	Key Management Authorities	Resources Secured
Ongoing	Welsh Government	Yes

Annex

Prioritisation guidance for screening and scoring actions to include in the MPA Network Management Action Plan

Introduction

The MPA Management Steering Group (the Steering Group) has developed an MPA Network Management Framework to aid Welsh management authorities to better manage the MPA network in Wales. Alongside this Framework is the MPA Network Management Action Plan (the action plan) which is updated and reported on an annual basis.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to explain the criteria for scoring potential actions which may be included in the MPA Network Management Action Plan. This guidance will help potential action owners to decide whether their actions are suitable for inclusion or to help them tailor their actions to make them more suitable for inclusion. Although potential action owners may not be involved in the scoring process it is useful to understand how the scoring system works.

Summary of process

Table 1 summarises the five prioritisation criteria, further detail to apply them is provided in the subsequent sections. Only actions that reach the threshold score (as laid out in Table 1) for all criteria will be included in the action plan.

Table 1: Threshold scores and maximum scores for each criterion

	Criterion	Threshold score
1	What is the spatial extent of the action?	2
2	What is the ability of the action to deliver improvements, or to improve our understanding of pressure/threats or their management?	2
3	Is the action consistent with the MPA management principles?	2*
4	What is the feasibility of the action?	2
5	How does implementing the action represent value for money?	N/A

* Against at least one of the management principles

The following more detailed guidance will help potential action owners to understand the criteria and how they are used when prioritising actions for inclusion in the action plan.

Criterion 1. What is the spatial extent of the action?

This criterion is focused on what area of the network the potential action covers, the scores will be allocated based on the scale of the impact of the action on the MPA network. This is a network action plan therefore the larger the area of the network covered or the greater the number of features (or a large proportion of the feature across the network) involved the higher the score. A potential action can be given a threshold score (2) if the action could be considered a demonstration project at a local scale which could be rolled out or implemented in other areas of the network.

Elements to consider: It is important to be clear what sites and/or features the action will benefit. If the action is a demonstration project, it is important to highlight other sites that would benefit in the longer term and if possible, how the project could be rolled out across the network.

Use the table below to understand how your potential action will be scored.

Criterion 2: Scoring table	
Explanation	Score
The action is on a single site only and has no wider application across the network*.	0
The action is for a small number of sites or a small proportion of the network.	1
<p>The action is for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiple sites or • a large proportion of the MPA network or • a large proportion of a feature across the network. <p>A score of two can also be awarded if the action is a demonstration project** with strong potential to be delivered across the network after a local pilot stage.</p>	2 (threshold score)
The action is for the network (e.g. whole feature and/or pressure wide).	3

*These actions should be prioritised through local action plans where they exist or the NRW Actions Database.

**A demonstration project would need to address an issue that is of concern across the network but suitable to be carried out at a single site level to prove the approach.

Criterion 2. What is the ability of the action to deliver improvements in condition, or to improve our understanding of pressure/threats or their management?

This criterion has been divided into two parts. Any potential action will only be assessed against one of these criteria (i.e. only 2a or 2b):

- If you have a project that will address one or more of the pressures or threats acting on one or more of the features of our MPA network, then you need to assess your project under criterion 2a.
- If, however, the potential action is related to the need to gain a better understanding of a specific pressure or threat then the action will be assessed against 3b. The 3b criterion will also be used if the potential action involves needing to better understand or trial a specific management approach.

In summary, if an action involves direct action 2a is the most suitable criterion. If it is an investigation project 2b is the most suitable criterion, please do not try to link a potential action to both, even if the action contains elements of both.

Both criteria can be used for pressures or threats, these are defined as follows:

- Pressure: something that currently has an adverse impact on one or more features
- Threat: something that is currently not a pressure but is considered likely to become a pressure in the near future unless action is taken.

Criterion 2a. What is the ability of the action to deliver improvements to, or maintenance of, feature condition?

This criterion relates to actions that will result in improvements to, or maintenance of, the condition of features of the MPA network usually by managing pressures/threats to the feature. The action could also be linked to management of activities affecting feature condition or the restoration of a feature.

Elements to consider: Be clear about which pressures the potential action is targeting and which features are impacted by the pressure and how. Explain precisely how the potential action will ameliorate the pressure targeted. It would be good to be clear here who will be involved and their roles.

Example actions that would need to be considered under 2a:

- An action to develop a network wide strategy to manage pressures on a feature e.g. UK Dolphin and Harbour Porpoise Conservation Strategy.
- An action to reduce nutrient inputs affecting a coastal feature as a pilot project
- An action to reduce the impact of boat disturbance (e.g code of conduct) on a whole feature

Use the table below to better understand how your potential action will be scored.

Criterion 2a: Scoring table	
Explanation	Score
The action is not targeted at a pressure or threat with a link to feature condition.	0
Threat*: The action will manage one or more of the suspected threats that could affect the condition of the MPA network features.	1
Pressure: The action will manage one or more of the known pressures affecting the condition of the features of the MPA network.	2
Threat: The action will manage one or more of the threats that could affect the condition of the features of the MPA network.	2
Pressure: The action will manage one or more of the known pressures significantly affecting the condition of the features of the MPA network, using a proven approach.	3
Threat: The action will manage one or more of the threats that could significantly affect the condition of the features of the MPA network using a proven approach.	3

*There is no score of 1 for pressures as to be prioritised for the action plan the pressure should be already known.

Criterion 2b. What is the ability of the action to improve our understanding of pressure/threats or their management?

This criterion is related to actions that will result in improving our understanding of the pressures or threats to the MPA network or improving our understanding of the different management measures that could be used to address these pressures or threats.

Elements to consider: It is important to be clear about which gap in understanding the potential action is trying to fill. Consider why it is a gap and how the potential action will fill it. If considering a new management approach (either to investigate or trial) be clear about exactly what the management measure is and the outcomes that will be achieved and if possible where the approach has been used successfully elsewhere. Use the table below to understand how your potential action will be scored.

Example actions that would need to be considered under 2b:

- An investigation into the impact of coastal squeeze on the MPA network features;
- An investigation into the impact of marine litter on our MPA features; or
- Trialling a new management approach to bait digging on a site (if it is also something that could be rolled out to other sites).

Criterion 2b: Scoring table

Explanation	Score
The action will not improve our understanding of a. pressures or threats; or b. the management measures needed to address them.	0
Threat: The action will partially improve our understanding of a. one of the threats which could affect the condition of the MPA network features; or b. the management measures needed to address this threat.	1
Pressure: The action will increase our understanding of a. one or more of the pressures and how they are affecting the condition of the features of the MPA network; or b. the management measures needed to manage those pressures. Threat: The action will improve our understanding of a. one or more of the threats that could affect the condition of the features of the MPA network; or b. the management measures needed to manage those threats.	2 (threshold score)
Pressure: The action will significantly increase our understanding of a. one or more of the pressures and how they are affecting the condition of the features of the MPA network; or b. the management measures needed to manage those pressures. Threat: The action will significantly improve our understanding of a. one or more of the threats that could significantly affect the condition of the features of the MPA network; or b. the management measures needed to manage those threats.	3

Criterion 3: Is the action consistent with the MPA Management Principles?

This first criterion is focussed on how well the potential action meets one or more of the five MPA network management principles. The potential action can be scored against any or all of the MPA management principles in Box 1. A potential action may not be relevant for all management principles and there is no need to try and make an action fit all criteria. Some guidance for potential action owners is provided under each management principle in italics.

If an action scores negatively against any management principle it should not be taken any further through the prioritisation process until these issues are addressed. Use the table below to understand how your potential action will be scored.

Criterion 3: Scoring table	
Explanation	Score
The action has inconsistencies with the management principle.	-3
The action is not relevant to the management principle.	0
The action is partially consistent with the management principle.	1
The action is consistent with the management principle	2*
The action is consistent with the management principle and will also bring about a positive change in ways of working.	3

*Threshold score – the potential action needs to score a 2 against at least one management principle

Box 1: MPA Management Principles

MP1 Strategic Planning: Management should be guided by strategic planning processes at both a sectoral and all-Wales level. It supports sustainable use of the MPA network in ways which conserve and enhance, and contributes towards resilient marine ecosystems, wellbeing and delivery of sustainable management of natural resources.

Does the potential action have a significant Wales wide planning aspect contributing to resilient marine ecosystems, wellbeing and delivery of sustainable management of natural resources?

MP2 Regulation, development consenting and assessment processes: Regulatory processes and consenting decisions are delivered consistently and proportionately across the network, and proactively consider and support the maintenance or enhancement (where possible/appropriate) of the condition of relevant sites and features across the network.

Does the potential action relate to the regulation, development consenting or assessment processes for MPAs in Wales?

MP3 Management advice and guidance: Decision-making and management operations is supported by clear and consistent advice and guidance on MPAs including their conservation objectives.

Does the potential action relate to the production of guidance to improve the management of our MPAs?

MP4 Understanding the condition of, and pressures and threats on, sites and their features to inform management: management is informed by formal assessment and reporting on the condition of features, sites and the network and the associated pressures. Assessment and reporting is informed by a prioritised evidence programme (including monitoring) which improves our understanding of the relationship between pressures and threats and condition.

Does the potential action improve our understanding of the pressures and/or threats on our MPAs?

MP5 Wider management: management activities across the network are prioritised towards those that have the potential for greatest improvement on condition and security of management. Common management challenges are address collectively across the network.

Does the potential action improve the management and therefore the condition of the network of MPAs in Wales?

Criterion 4. What is the feasibility of the action?

This criterion relates to the ability of the potential action owner to carry out the action. It is important under this criterion to consider how exactly the action will be carried out and if the methods proposed have been used successfully elsewhere.

Elements to consider: It is important to consider the technical feasibility of your project including practical, logistical and technical ability (including skills and expertise) needed to undertake the action. Consider appropriateness of the methodology for the site or context.

Use the table below understand how your potential action will be scored.

Criterion 4: Scoring table	
Explanation	Score
The action is not technically feasible, even if resources were available.	0
The technical feasibility of the action is currently unproven	1
There are no significant issues with technical feasibility / appropriateness	2
Technical feasibility is proven	3

Criterion 5. How does implementing the action represent value for money?

This criterion relates to the value for money of the action, the response is not scored but you need to consider in your answer how proportionate the cost is to the size of the project and the benefits it will deliver. Although there is no scoring associated with this criterion it is still important to be clear how the cost of the project was developed and the benefit of the project outcomes to the MPA network.

Elements to consider: It is important to consider the benefits of your project in relation to the cost of the project. Focus on the outcomes of the project. Please include the direct costs as well as other resources necessary to achieve the action and the expected outcomes of the project linked to improvements in condition or understanding of features of the network.