

## Call for Evidence - Review of Drivers and Pressures Affecting the UK Marine Environment

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) is inviting interested parties to submit evidence to support a review of drivers, pressures and data gaps affecting the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) in UK marine waters as part of our scrutiny of government's plans and environmental targets.

The UK has committed to ensuring that:

- by 2030 at least 30 per cent of coastal and marine areas, are effectively conserved and managed through protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.
- by 2030 at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration.

These commitments are backed by the Environment Act target to ensure the features of marine protected areas in England are in favourable condition or recovering and the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 which require action to be taken to achieve or maintain GES of marine waters by 2020.

The approach to achieving GES is set out in the UK Marine Strategy. In England GES is also a key target and commitment in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 and is included in the draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

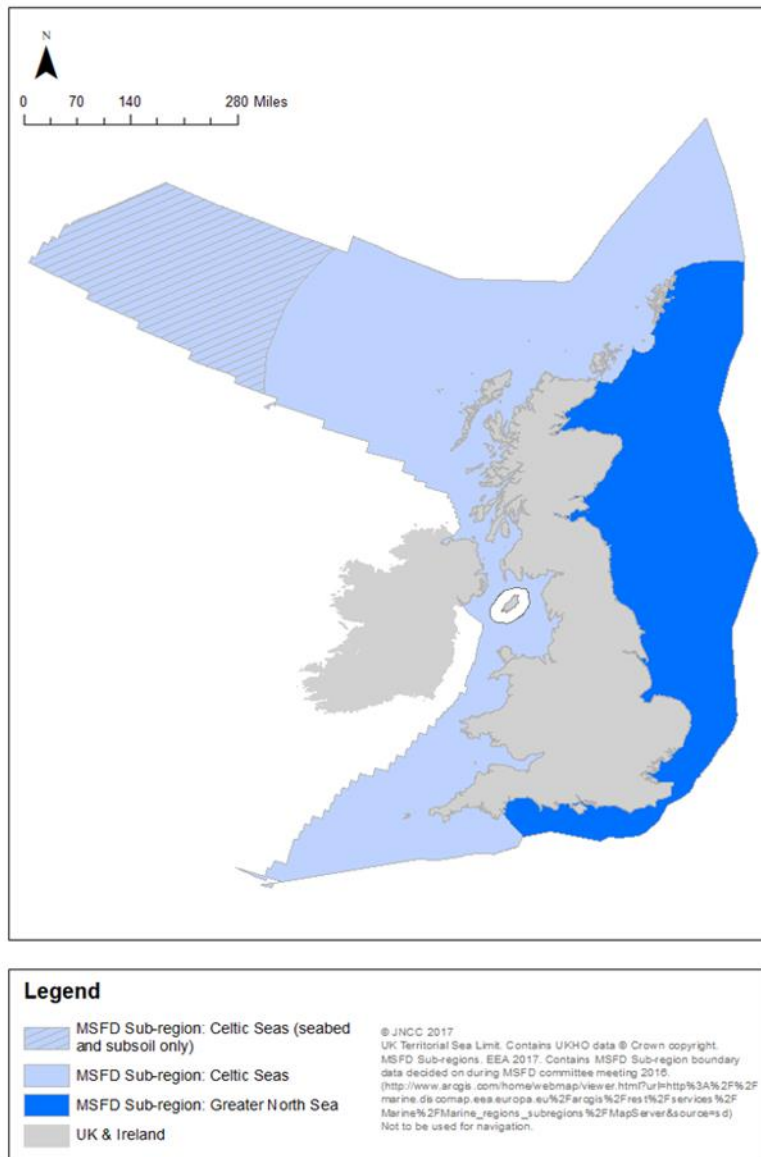
The next UK Marine strategy assessment will be published in 2024, it will set out whether the UK has achieved GES and will set new targets for the next cycle of the strategy. Targets for the next cycle must be realistic and drive action to deliver and maintain GES, with this call, we are seeking evidence to support our assessment of the range and importance of drivers, and pressures, impacting upon the achievement of GES; the steps which should be included in the next cycle of the UK Marine Strategy to achieve GES; and the data needed to enable those steps to be implemented and effectively monitored.

### Background

The UK Marine Strategy provides the framework for assessing, monitoring, and delivering actions to achieve or maintain GES of the marine environment. It is also the foundation for the basin scale actions taken with other countries of the north-east Atlantic through the OSPAR (Oslo-Paris) regional seas convention.

The UK Marine Strategy covers the marine waters over which the UK exercises jurisdiction. This area extends from Mean High-Water Springs to the outer limit of the UK Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). It also includes the seabed in the area of the continental shelf beyond the EEZ over which the UK exercises jurisdiction on the basis of a submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

Figure 1. Area covered by the UK Marine Strategy



Source: UK Marine Online Assessment Tool 2019. Available at <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/>

The strategy is formed of 3 parts (each reviewed on a 6-yearly cycle):

- Part one, which assesses the status of UK seas and sets objectives and targets for GES
- Part two, which sets out the UK marine monitoring programmes.
- Part three, which sets out the programme of measures to achieve GES.

Between December 2012 and December 2015, the publication of the UK Marine Strategy Parts 1-3 was intended to mark a significant step towards achieving GES; designed to set out a framework for assessing, monitoring and taking action across UK seas. Despite this, evidence shows limited progress to date, with only four of fifteen GES descriptors achieved according to Defra's 2019 update. There are also

concerns surrounding the sufficiency of available data, limiting the ability to draw firm conclusions about the state of the marine environment in many areas.

The proposed changes to the UK Marine strategy included in the Nature Recovery Green Paper consultation were to:

- Replace the 6-yearly publication of our monitoring framework (part two) with a live online repository.
- Refine monitoring programmes to develop an understanding of the efficacy of measures put in place.
- Integrate the details of measures being taken to improve the marine environment (part three) with the assessment and target setting (part one) to create a stronger link between them.
- Split the high-level GES target into individual descriptor level GES targets and to assign specific timelines for achieving GES for each component.

In our response to the consultation, the OEP supported the proposal to streamline and integrate the three parts of the UK Marine Strategy delivery programme. We recognised the value in focusing more on progress across each individual component of GES and supported the suggestion to bolster this with clear, timebound commitments. However, we advised against splitting the fifteen descriptors of GES into individual targets as this would risk undermining a joined-up approach which recognises and takes account of the interdependence between each descriptor.

### **Call for evidence**

To inform the development of our work in this area, we are calling for evidence linking drivers, pressures, and data gaps in UK marine waters to the lack of progress in achieving GES. By drivers and pressures, we mean:

- Drivers: Social, economic and demographic influences (e.g. dredging & extraction, fisheries, offshore infrastructure and industrial activities) and natural conditions that impact upon the environment. These can include direct and indirect drivers.
- Pressures: The stresses that arise from a driver that cause a decline in the natural environment (e.g. gaseous emissions, noise pollution, damage to seabed).

We are also interested in establishing whether government's plans and programme of measures mean they are on a trajectory to achieve GES. To inform our assessment, we are calling for evidence relating to the type, scale, and pace of interventions required to achieve GES.

Evidence can include relevant existing written material (for example, reports and academic literature). When your views are provided, please reference the evidence that informs them.

### **Why your views matter**

The evidence submitted will help inform the OEP's work to drive positive change on critical issues impacting the marine environment. We are particularly interested in the following questions:

1. What are the key drivers and pressures affecting the achievement of GES in UK marine waters?
  - a. How should drivers and pressures be prioritised? For example, by the scale of impact. What evidence supports any such prioritisation?
  - b. Over what period (short <5yrs, medium 5-15yrs, long term 15+yrs) and spatial area do these pressures and drivers have their affect?
  - c. How many of these drivers and pressures are transboundary?
2. What actions are needed to deliver GES in UK marine waters?
  - a. What are the trade-offs that need to be taken into consideration, or opportunity for synergistic actions, and how long would it take to deliver them?
3. What are the barriers and opportunities to addressing pressures and drivers through these actions?
  - a. What pressures will not be or only partially addressed through these actions?
4. Where are the gaps in the available data and evidence that need to be filled to ensure achievement of GES can be monitored and actions are effectively identified, and implemented?
  - a. What evidence is available to identify those gaps?
  - b. What aspects of existing monitoring programmes undertaken by the UK administrations are working well to fill those gaps, and what aspects could be improved?
5. What additional actions are required to fill any data gaps and how long would it take to deliver them?
  - a. What are the barriers and opportunities to addressing data gaps through said actions?
  - b. What evidence supports these actions?

In addition to the above, you are welcome to provide any other information you consider is relevant to this review.

**We would appreciate evidence to be submitted to [Marine@theoep.org.uk](mailto:Marine@theoep.org.uk) by 31 January 2024 to best inform the review.**

The evidence submitted will help inform the OEP's work to drive positive change on critical issues impacting the marine environment.

### **Submission Guidelines**

- Evidence includes submissions written specifically for this Call for Evidence.

- We ask that written submissions are kept to a **maximum of 20 pages**, which are fully referenced with supporting evidence, and where possible links are provided for the relevant documents and data.
- Evidence also includes existing academic literature and reports, audits, consultation responses, and grey literature. Preferably all documents should already be in the public domain or made available if requested.
- While we welcome submissions from all sectors / persons we emphasise the need for submissions that are **supported by strong evidence** based on natural, economic, or social sciences that are empirically based, case study based, or based on comprehensive literature reviews / audits, and / or expert opinion.
- If raw data is referred to in your submission, we ask that you provide a description of the dataset and who is the custodian / owner. **We do not wish you to submit raw data as evidence.**
- Where there are gaps in evidence, your response should make this clear and where appropriate, detail why such gaps exist.

We may contact you for further information on your submission.

### How we will use your information

Evidence received will be treated with the utmost care and attention to inform our review. Information will not be quoted and attributed to individuals or organisations for official publication without their prior permission to do so.

However, we may publish or disclose the information you provide, including personal data, in accordance with the access to information regimes. These are primarily the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). We have obligations, mainly under the EIRs, FOIA and DPA, to disclose information to particular recipients or to the public in certain circumstances.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that as the OEP is bound by FOIA and the EIRs we may be obliged to disclose all or some of the information you provide. In view of this, it would be helpful if you could explain why, you regard the information you have provided to be confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation. However, we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

We will hold and process any personal data you provide in accordance with the privacy notice on [our website](#).

### Public authorities

Information that we receive from public authorities under their duty of cooperation with the OEP (section 27 Environment Act 2021) will be treated as confidential unless an exemption under section 43 applies. For this reason, if you are responding on behalf of a public authority, please confirm that consent is given for the OEP to disclose your information in any future report.

## Reference material

1. [Introduction to UK Marine Strategy](#)
2. [Marine Strategy Part One: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status](#)
3. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1125641/uk-marine-strategy-part-two-monitoring-programmes-2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1125641/uk-marine-strategy-part-two-monitoring-programmes-2021.pdf) Consultation on UK Marine Strategy Part Three: Programme of Measures
4. [Nature recovery green paper: protected sites and species](#)
5. [OEP response to Government on Nature Recovery Green Paper](#)
6. [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023](#)