
National Assembly for Wales's Environment and Sustainability Committee – Inquiry into Marine Policy in Wales

The Crown Estate: Progress made on recommendations

February, 2015

1. General Comments

- The Crown Estate welcomes the continued engagement in the Environment and Sustainability Committee's inquiry into Marine Policy in Wales. We are grateful for the opportunity to provide these comments in the context of our interests and responsibilities of almost the entire seabed.
- Since January 2013, when the recommendations were provided on marine policy in Wales, we have continued to engage with the Welsh Government and have summarised the progress made to date on areas relevant to our role and responsibilities.

2. Introduction

The statements contained in this response are in the context of The Crown Estate's interests and responsibilities over almost the entire seabed. The Crown Estate can bring to bear a high level of knowledge and expertise on issues relating to the management of the foreshore, the territorial seabed and continental shelf, and we are committed to working with the UK and Devolved Governments and all stakeholders on issues that affect these areas. Our Welsh portfolio is diverse, including on our rural estate; substantial areas of common land, agricultural holdings and a range of mineral interests. Our marine estate takes in around half of the foreshore and the seabed, where we undertake a key role in enabling developers to realise the potential for renewable energy, particularly through offshore wind farms and marine renewable energy installations. In managing our Welsh estates we aim to work in partnership with government and local communities for mutual benefit. We have good working relationships with the Welsh Government, the National Assembly for Wales, local councils, Natural Resources Wales, communities and our own customers.

Based on the specific recommendations published by the Committee in January 2013 and our initial response from January 2014, please see below for some comments related to the progress made against the recommendations in the context our role and responsibilities: -

3. Recommendations 1, 2 and 3

- The Crown Estate is continuing to contribute to the development of legislation and policy emerging from the Welsh Government with respect to the marine environment. We welcome the pragmatic approach being promoted by the Welsh Government, to integrate policy making to enable sustainable development of the marine environment.

- We continue to work with the Welsh Government, along with the UK Government and other Devolved Governments in the development of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) target of achieving Good Environmental Status (GES) by 2020. The Welsh Government plays an active part in steering the development of MSFD for the UK and coordinates a consistent approach for Welsh stakeholders to engage in the process. The imminent planned public consultation on the programme of measures for achieving GES will see simultaneous consultations produced by all Devolved Governments and UK Government in order for stakeholders to input to this development.

- We welcome the progress that has been made by the Welsh Government in marine planning and their early stage and continued engagement with us to assist in achieving their target of publishing a Welsh National Marine Plan for the Inshore and Offshore areas by the end of 2015;
 - Early engagement has occurred throughout the Welsh Government's Marine Transition Programme and includes discussion of; MSFD, Marine Planning, Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Protected Area development.
 - We welcome our inclusion in the relevant marine planning stakeholder groups which enable us to engage with a range of organisations stakeholders.
 - We also note the continued commitment by Welsh Government to provide dedicated resources to the plan making process.
 - Since the inquiry in February 2014, the Welsh Government has released the Statement of Public Participation, the draft Vision and Objectives and the Strategic Scoping Exercise for public consultation and we have contributed to all of these.
 - We continue to have a fortnightly meeting with the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales to discuss the development of the marine planning process.

- The Welsh Government has continued to strengthen links between natural resource management and the development of the marine planning process through a coordinated framework. The development of the State of Natural Resources Reports will provide evidence that underpins both the national Marine Plan and National Natural Resources Policy and enable integrated resource management.

4. Recommendations 4 and 5

- Since our previous contribution to the inquiry, the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive has been adopted (2014/89/EU) providing a framework for marine planning. Through the representations made by Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the UK (as a member state) we are aware the Welsh Government provided contributions to ensure its development enhanced the work that the UK was undertaking towards marine planning. We believe Member States supported the notion that marine planning holistically provides a mechanism for considering Integrated Coastal (Zone) Management as part of the marine planning process and we support the Welsh Government's efforts in embedding these principles in the development of their national Marine Plan.

- With respect to the Welsh Government's efforts in identifying existing data sources to underpin marine planning; as stated in our previous response, the Welsh Government has a Memorandum of Understanding with The Crown Estate which sets a framework to illustrate how the two bodies can work

together for the benefit of marine planning and Wales. We also recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Natural Resources Wales in which we are both parties committed to work in partnership to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably managed. With both organisations we have an open and transparent working arrangement to share new and existing data sources.

5. Recommendations 7, 8 and 9

- Following on from the Marine and Fisheries Strategic Action Plan that sets out the Welsh Government's intentions to engage extending Special Protection Areas (SPAs) we saw the approval of the three marine SPA extensions in October 2014; Grassholm, Skomer and Skokholm and Bardsey, which were consulted on earlier in the year. We welcome the development of the Marine Protected Area (MPAs) Management Steering Group established to agree priorities for improvement and ensure consistency across Wales. The Crown Estate joined this group in 2014 and welcomes the strategic approach the group is taking to assessing the approach to managing of the marine protected area network as a whole and identify whether there is a need for subsequent MPAs.

6. Recommendation 12 and 13

- Since the marine licensing function moved to Natural Resources Wales, we have developed a good working relationship with the marine licensing team and have regular liaison. We believe the team works well with the resource they have, but as with many operational units, they are resource constrained and have high workloads to manage.
- Natural Resources Wales website has useful pages on marine licensing with easy to navigate areas that enable applicants and other interested parties to find out more about licence applications that have been received and their stage in determination.

7. Conclusion

We trust that you will find these comments constructive. We would be very willing to provide additional information on any of the points we have raised above and be very pleased to discuss these matters with you further. Through the Energy & Infrastructure's Policy, Planning and Consenting team, we are ready to engage in further discussions on these and other points relevant to our ownership or which our expertise may be brought to bear. All of this response may be put into the public domain and there is no part of it that should be treated as confidential.

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