

Wildlife and Countryside Link's Position on Coastal Partnerships

Link would support the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) utilising Coastal Partnerships, where appropriate, to support the marine planning process. Many of these bottom-up engagement initiatives have 15-20 years experience working with local coastal stakeholders, many of whom will need to be involved in marine planning. We should avoid establishing new engagement mechanisms for marine planning which re-invent the wheel, instead we should utilise their experience to identify the most efficient approach to stakeholder involvement in the marine planning process.

We recognise that there is huge diversity and variety of experience between Coastal Partnerships across England, Wales and Scotland, each with their strengths and weaknesses. However, we are keen to see these community based initiatives strengthened (and modified where appropriate) to help support or provide strong engagement mechanisms for coastal communities in marine planning.

Marine Plan Area Advisory Groups

It is suggested in the consultation document that each Marine Plan area will have one (or more) Marine Plan Advisory Groups (MPAGs) (§5.16) which we strongly welcome. This should be made up of representatives of statutory bodies and on a case-by-case basis, selected representatives of non-statutory groups and local users. We also support the proposal made at the most recent SFG meeting (7th Sept) that there should be at least one MPAG per marine plan area.

Coastal Partnerships are well placed to advise the MMO on the current stakeholder engagement mechanisms in operation within a marine plan area, their effectiveness, and the most efficient approach to forming the new MPAG(s). Overall, the formation of a new stakeholder engagement mechanism at the regional (sub-national) level¹ is welcomed, and has the potential to add significant value to the existing work of Coastal Partnerships engaging coastal communities at the more local level. The MMO would benefit from tapping into the existing Coastal Partnership engagement mechanisms to inform and publicise the marine planning process, whilst identifying the most appropriate stakeholders to sit on the new MPAG(s).

We believe that the MPAG would have a separate statutory function to the wider and generally non-statutory engagement platforms offered by the Coastal Partnership. Where Coastal Partnerships are able to co-ordinate at the marine plan area level, they could provide the secretariat for the MPAG. Utilising the Secretariat services of the existing Coastal Partnership(s) in any one marine plan area, will allow wider awareness and engagement between the MPAG and other engagement services provided by the Coastal Partnership(s).

Coastal Partnerships will also be well placed to give advice on membership of sector specific working groups that may already exist or be required to resolve specific areas of conflict in the marine plan process. However, we emphasise the importance of ensuring that the MPAGs provide fair and equitable involvement for stakeholders and if the Coastal Partnerships can not provide this service, the MPAG(s) must look to additional sources or further afield.

¹ With the exception of the NW Coastal Forum where a regional engagement platform already exists.

National Engagement in Marine Planning

To date, Coastal Partnership activity has emerged from the local level, typically from the smaller ecosystem scale, e.g. estuary/coastal cell. In a few areas of England there are also county level coastal/marine fora (e.g. Dorset Coast Forum, Devon Maritime Forum) and in one case an existing regional engagement mechanism (North West Coastal Forum). Both Wales and Scotland have national coastal/marine fora (Wales Coastal & Maritime Partnership; Scottish Coastal Forum) both supported significantly by government. There is no similar mechanism at the national level in England.

As the MMO progresses the first marine plans, it would be beneficial to learn from the early plans and keep up the momentum towards full plan coverage by engaging stakeholders (such as the NGOs in the Link coalition) in a national forum. We have seen the need for a national MPA Forum evolve alongside delivery of the regional MCZ projects. For similar reasons, we would like to see the role of the existing (Defra) Marine Planning Stakeholder Focus Group continue, and/or another mechanism for engagement at the national level be provided.

The Importance of Neutral Co-ordination Mechanisms

The ideal mechanism to support stakeholder engagement is a neutral co-ordinating support team that aims to bring sectors together in an equitable manner, to share information and exchange views to inform the wider planning process. With around 15 years experience, Coastal Partnerships are well placed to provide neutral co-ordination mechanisms required for marine planning: such as data sharing; hosting and facilitating meetings; and reporting to committees/advisory groups to make decisions on an ongoing basis.

The marine plan process should be fully accessible for stakeholders from all sectors with the common aim to ensure sustainable use and management of marine resources.

We recognise that the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) regional projects have initiated and continue to support significant stakeholder engagement processes to advise on the selection of MCZs. It was necessary that this process got underway before marine planning in order to meet the international targets for MPAs by 2012. However, this has meant engagement of many stakeholders in this process prior to marine planning. The substantial resources invested in this engagement process should not be lost – we would like to see continuity of knowledge and expertise gained from the staff supporting this process feeding into the marine planning process. However, the MCZ projects are working towards a specific outcome from a single perspective (i.e. MPA site selection) that should be strongly led by scientific evidence and advice (rather than stakeholders' vested interests). It will therefore be helpful if the marine planning process gets underway quickly to provide the longer term platform for wider cross-sector engagement (through MPAG and sector-specific sub-groups). This will enable the MCZ projects to concentrate on the specific outcome of identifying an ecologically coherent network of MPAs.

Our support for the MMO using Coastal Partnerships in the facilitation role for marine planning is based on our assumption that they will provide the neutral co-ordination mechanisms required. Link recognises that the MMO could potentially put the development of marine plans out to tender leaving stakeholder engagement processes open to a short term project focus led by consultants. We would much prefer to see the MMO build on existing experience, strengthen the mechanisms that

have evolved from the local level and have the greater opportunity to encourage longer term stewardship of marine resources.

Land-Sea Integration

Whilst Coastal Partnerships have traditionally focused on the coastal zone (supported through PPG/PPS 20 on coastal planning) and worked with terrestrial planning authorities, the Marine & Coastal Access Act offers new opportunities to utilise Coastal Partnerships to support integration. Where they are involved in both terrestrial and marine planning, Coastal Partnerships should be able to help increase awareness of marine issues in the terrestrial planning process and vice versa. The geographical overlap between terrestrial and marine plans will not guarantee co-ordinated effort alone. A clear advantage of utilising Coastal Partnerships' services for marine planning will therefore be the ability to link straight into the terrestrial planning initiatives co-ordinated by Coastal Partnerships. Whilst Coastal Partnerships have traditionally focused on the coast (rather than wider marine space), they are still well positioned to facilitate the MMO in meeting requirements for stakeholder engagement in marine planning. However, should they take on a facilitation role, they would need to evolve to meet the full marine requirements of that role.

Examples of Coastal Partnerships providing services with a specific focus include: supporting the Environment Agency to prepare River Basin Management Plans (freshwater integrated plans) and Shoreline Management Plans (co-ordinating multiple local authorities towards a common outcome); and co-ordinating Steering Groups for competent authorities to monitor the condition of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC)/Special Protection Area (SPA).

Coastal Partnerships Network

Utilisation of Coastal Partnerships to provide engagement mechanisms to support marine planning should offer a cost effective solution for the MMO to meet its engagement requirements through the Statements of Public Participation. The Coastal Partnerships Network offers a useful conduit for the MMO to arrange a co-ordinated approach to how individual partnerships can support the marine planning process. Since 2006, the Coastal Partnerships Network has been working towards strengthening the role of Coastal Partnerships (encouraging exchange of experience and professional development) to improve the level of service. This is the only mechanism co-ordinating Coastal Partnership effort, promoting a bottom-up and 'big society' approach to integrated management, which we recommend the MMO utilise to help identify engagement mechanisms for marine planning in England.

Many Coastal Partnerships are providing best practice on how to achieve sustainability through generating local ownership over resources. We should aim to avoid diversion of resources from existing engagement mechanisms to the regional (sub-national) level to support marine planning, rather utilise the resources now assigned to marine planning to maximise benefits from the local engagement mechanisms already in existence.

Recommendations regarding Coastal Partnerships:

1. Effective local Coastal Partnerships are utilised to provide services and where appropriate the secretariat to Marine Plan Area Advisory Groups and sector specific sub-groups.
2. Seek to build on existing experience both within and outwith Coastal Partnerships of facilitating stakeholder engagement at regional and local levels, but seek to clarify to stakeholders the important difference between engagement with subject specific groups (such as the MCZ Regional Projects, etc,) compared to the neutral co-ordination engagement mechanisms now needed for the longer term (ongoing) marine planning process.

This position is supported by the following organisations:

- Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- Marine Conservation Society
- Open Spaces Society
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- The Wildlife Trusts
- WWF-UK

**Wildlife and Countryside Link
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