



Opportunities for improved social sustainability in marine governance

A University of Exeter and Marine Management Organisation collaboration



Marine
Management
Organisation



University
of Exeter

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a knowledge-exchange between the University of Exeter and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

The purpose of the project was to explore areas of opportunity in England's marine governance to deliver social sustainability.

The report introduces social impact and social sustainability in the context of marine planning and decision-making. It presents the findings of the collaborative project and a series of recommendations.

Methods

A workshop held in June 2023 brought together MMO representatives, social scientists, and marine and coastal practitioners. Participants exchanged knowledge and deliberated on processes and practices of marine governance delivered by MMO.

Findings

The workshop identified three key areas of opportunity to effectively deliver social sustainability in marine decision-making in England:

1. Knowledge – expand the *knowledge accepted as relevant/legitimate*; increase information exchange *relating to the marine context specifically*, particularly across agencies, local authorities, and other organisations.
2. Planning processes – reflect *recognition and representation* dimensions of social justice in consultation processes; integrate marine planning within the wider planning profession.
3. Institutional culture – explore *ownership of governance; siloed working and knowledge management*; and *institutional culture* on risk-taking, which can limit the capacity for innovation.



Photo: Pamela Buchan

Recommendations

The report provides a series of recommendations aimed at making the most of these opportunities to improve social sustainability.

Recommendations for MMO	Who	Time frame
Develop a shared vision and language of governance that includes social sustainability with definitions of key terms.	Evidence & Evaluation Organisational review	Short term
Review consultation processes for efficacy, particularly in reaching under-represented communities and stakeholder groups and the timing of their involvement (representation).	Planners with input from Evidence & Evaluation and others	Medium term
Create a social policy within the marine planning framework that places new requirements upon developers to improve delivery on social impact.	Planners	Medium term
Review the scope of the SPP to ensure better stakeholder representation of the social pillar i.e., communities and local people (recognition).	Planners	Medium term
Use partnerships more, and more strategically to leverage external expertise and data.	All	Medium term
Establish a social impact data management system to underpin decision-making.	Evidence & Evaluation with input for usability by the organisation	Long term
Encourage a culture of continuous improvement and ambition by embracing an adaptive approach that includes trialling new approaches to support the evolution of marine plans using an evaluation-innovation case study approach.	All	Medium term
Design a MMO Decision-Making Framework to mainstream social sustainability.	Evidence & Evaluation Input from teams	Medium term
Map where social impacts need to be considered and included in current marine planning decision-making, incorporating the wide range of datasets collected regularly by Local Authorities and other organisations.	Planning Input from marine Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment	Medium term
Using evidence from different knowledge types in evidence gathering and its use in decision-making (Plurality).	All	Short term
Skill development around relationship-building and knowledge diversity.	All	Medium term
Recommendations for the planning sector		
Professionalisation of marine planning.		
Recommendations for national and local government		
Re-prioritisation and resourcing of marine planning by Local Authorities.		
Strengthen and formalise relationships between the Marine Planning team and Local Authorities.		

1. Introduction and background

1.1. Context

The overuse of the marine environment for industry and resources is a pressing concern as exponential growth of activity – the ‘blue acceleration’¹ – is seen across all marine sectors, alongside extensive commitments on conservation, such as 30x30², and interest in marine ecosystems for carbon capture³. UK territorial seas are no exception to this trend. For example, the UK Government has committed to support net zero targets with 50GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030, including up to 5GW floating offshore wind⁴ and recently made its first designations of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs)⁵.

Radical and rapid changes in marine use inevitably come with conflict. It is through marine governance, the processes and procedures of decision-making of marine and coastal environments, that prioritisations and trade-offs are made⁶. Marine governance processes and decisions have multi-dimensional implications ranging from the individual to global scale, and across the three pillars of sustainable development: environmental, economic and social. The social impacts of marine decisions are particularly felt by coastal communities^{7–9}, yet their ability to influence marine decisions is often very limited¹⁰.

In the UK, marine and coastal decision-making is divided between numerous bodies, determined by scale, location and type of activity or development. These include Government, the Planning Inspectorate, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), The Crown Estate (TCE), Inshore Fisheries and

Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), and Local Authorities (LAs). Broadly, decisions are undertaken through formal strategic decision-making processes for nationally significant infrastructure projects, marine and terrestrial planning, licensing and permitting, and seabed leasing. Each process and decision-making authority have a range of standard procedures for evidence gathering, consultation and decision-making.

In response to the potential social impact of the rapidly changing marine agenda, the University of Exeter and MMO have collaborated on a short knowledge exchange and translation project to examine the opportunities, barriers, and levers for change within England’s marine governance, with a focus on marine planning and social sustainability, as recognised in MMO’s statutory purpose.

1.1. Social impact, social sustainability, and the coastal community

Social sustainability requires the identification of social impact, which can be defined as the positive and negative, intended and unintended social consequences of interventions, such as policies and plans¹¹. The scope of social impact is daunting, which may be why social sustainability is the least well-established sustainability pillar¹² compared to the more easily quantifiable economic and environmental impacts. However, both businesses and governments ultimately depend upon permission from society to conduct operations,

therefore delivering on social sustainability is a necessity.

Interventions in marine and coastal settings have the added complexity of fluid and dynamic ecosystems, distance from social communities both geographically and politically, and complex regulatory and legislative frameworks¹³. However, the physical qualities of marine environments are intrinsically connected to individual and social relationships with marine places¹⁴. People have livelihoods, cultures and identities that are based upon their relationship with the marine environment, and which can shape their response to marine developments¹⁵, whether visible to them or not. Each marine decision therefore ultimately has a social impact for coastal communities that is underpinned by their connection to the sea whether cultural, political or economic¹².

Effective and socially sustainable marine governance must consider who it recognises as a stakeholder, and how their knowledges and experiences are represented in the decision-making process. It must also aim for equitable distribution of resources with careful mitigation where equity is not possible. *Recognition, representation, and distribution* are the cornerstones of equity and social justice and can be mapped to civil, political, and social rights respectively. Processes, such as marine spatial planning more broadly, and marine planning in England, have the potential to deliver on social sustainability by responding to these equity pillars. Table 1 describes the types of questions MMO could consider to ensure they are delivering fair, transparent and equitable marine decision-making.

The National Planning Policy Framework and Local Plans are legal frameworks for decisions about land-use in England, and have consultation processes built in. However, these processes face criticism, particularly in relation to pressing net-zero aspirations, such as public participation needing to come in earlier and be more meaningful; that developers are better resourced than planners; a lack of integration of sustainability targets; and a need for smaller-scale plans¹⁸. Enacted through the Marine and Coastal Access Act, Marine planning is a key, formal process for public participation in marine decision-making. The Marine Policy Statement sets out the framework for the production of marine plans, setting out the high-level policy direction for sectors and activities as well as the direction of travel for licensing and other authorisation decisions. As a relatively new planning discipline, it has the potential to replicate the best of land-use governance and to improve on its weaknesses.

Over the last 12 years, MMO has developed a marine planning process while also delivering marine plans for multiple marine plan areas. It has learned much from the terrestrial system while recognising the more fluid and complex nature of the marine environment. The effort to get marine plans ‘off the ground’ has been significant and it is important that is recognised, particularly when considering the terrestrial system is 80+ years ahead in terms of experience and understanding. There are many organisations and bodies with a ‘stake’ in marine planning and to have all marine plans adopted by 2021 without formal challenge is a significant achievement.

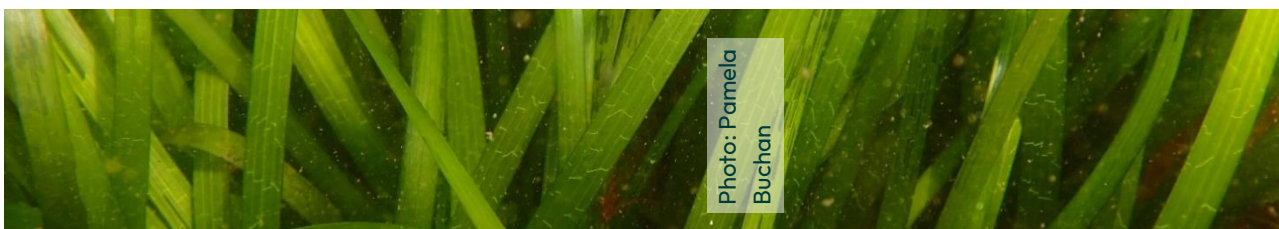


Table 1: Framing social impact, justice, and sustainability in marine decision-making.

Categories and application to Marine Spatial Planning after Saunders et al., 2020¹²; rights framework after Marshall, 1950¹⁶; additional evidence from Buchan et al, 2023¹⁷

Recognition: socio-cultural diversity, group identity, rights, needs, livelihoods, lifestyles, and knowledge.

Civil rights: Liberty, freedom of thought, property ownership, justice.

- Which groups / communities have claims to marine space and resources?
- How are stakeholders differentiated in the process – statutory and non-statutory?
- Are some stakeholders not recognised as legitimate, why?
- What relevant legislation, policy, and court decisions might impact recognition?
- Can excluded groups be better recognised to increase legitimacy, trust, compliance, system stability?

Representation: Who is included / excluded; how and when included in decision-making process.

Political rights: Participation in the exercise of political power.

- How do procedures translate recognition into participation?
- Do stakeholders know they are stakeholders and how do processes seek to maximise participation?
- How does the decision-maker partner with other organisations to increase representation?
- At what point are different stakeholders brought into the decision-making process and does this influence how able they are to influence the decision?
- Is the scale of the decision-making process appropriate for the nature of the development, noting local processes are more accessible and visible?
- Do processes seek to mitigate existing imbalances in distribution that alter the ability to be represented?
- Have the environmental participatory rights of the Aarhus Convention been considered? (Access to environmental information, participation in environmental decision-making, environmental justice.)

Distribution of goods and bads: Risks, benefits, pollutants, capacities, resource/experiential access.

Social rights: Welfare, security, share in social heritage and standards of society.

- How equitable is the decision-making process and the outcome? (Equity acknowledges that individuals and social groups start from different places, histories, inheritances, social status, worldviews, social resources and capital, positions of discrimination, power, marginalization, advantage, and so on.)
- Good marine governance means balancing planning outcomes fairly.
- How are trade-off decisions made?
- How are 'bads' mitigated or compensated against and how are affected groups prioritised in the process to ensure the mitigation is appropriate and adequate?

However, research indicates that even the most active marine citizens are largely unaware of the processes of marine decision-making and of their environmental participatory rights¹⁷. It also shows that individuals feel disempowered and that the larger the scale of the process, the less accessible and transparent it is to marine citizens (people who are already engaged in exercising their right to participate in the transformation of the human-ocean relationship). One reason for this might be the

importance of local place to communities, where people's identities and emotional attachments are directly at play and they hold key local knowledge^{14,19}.

Internationally, marine plans tend to focus on national and regional scale²⁰, reducing the connection between local people and the plan from the outset. They rarely set social targets and social foci are primarily on familiar wellbeing outcomes such as health and

employment, with justice and resilience often coming last²⁰. Consultation and participatory processes are hampered by different stakeholder groups being afforded different statuses, giving some early and therefore more powerful participation in the process, than others^{21,19}. Siloed people, data, and information, and prioritisation of shorter-term, growth-based economic outcomes makes integration and achieving a balanced decision more challenging¹⁹. However, marine planning research indicates that there are levers for change both through legislative reform and through practitioner strategies²¹.

1.2.MMO purpose and roles in marine governance

MMO was created in 2009 by the Marine and Coastal Access Act (MACAA). Sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), MMO is an executive non-departmental public body that aims to protect and enhance our precious marine environment and support UK economic activity by enabling sustainable marine activities and development.

As well as producing marine plans for England's waters to set priorities and direction for future development, MMO licences marine activities and development; manages fisheries through quota management; undertakes vessel licensing and fisheries inspections; and manages activities within Marine Protected Areas through byelaws and management measures. This is achieved by working closely with stakeholders to understand their needs and perspectives.

MMO uses a wealth of evidence (including data, information, statistics, scientific evidence,



Photo: Ben Barden Photography Ltd

stakeholder views and professional opinion) to inform decision-making, working closely with other organisations and delivery partners.

Marine plans overlap with or are adjacent to other plans, such as Local Authority land-use plans, **therefore it is important that marine and terrestrial plans take account of one-another**. Marine developments will have an impact on land and in most cases, the benefits of marine activities are only realised when they come ashore, which is where they particularly impact local communities. The need to engage local communities in decision-making that will directly affect them is important to deliver societal benefits.

MMO has developed a set of aspirational goals to deliver its vision for a prosperous future for England's seas, coasts and communities. Two of the Goals (2 and 4) direct MMO to provide the opportunities for people to contribute to the

marine planning process and improve social impacts for communities²². **Goal 2 recognises the importance of ownership and the need for integration at the land/sea interface.** It focuses on a framework that is the focal point for decision-making for delivering sustainability. This provides for an equal emphasis on the social pillar of sustainability (see 1.3), which has been challenging to date. If a marine planning framework is to be put at the heart of all decision-making, and thus have a far more wide-reaching impact as goal 2 states, the need for local communities to participate is an important part of its success. This is supported by **Goal 4 which focuses on transforming regulation to deliver co-management.** That provides scope for identifying mechanisms for enhanced democratic governance, which in turn can drive better social impacts for communities.

Marine plans span significant areas, akin to a region in size. **The nature of marine plans at**

such scale mean it is more challenging for local communities to understand the relevance and significance to them. Significant work has been undertaken by the marine planning team to engage stakeholders in the plan-making process. Workshops, consultations and bi-lateral meetings at every stage of the planning process have occurred, as set out in the Statement of Public Participation²³.

These have focused on sector or activity related stakeholders as well as delivery partners and local authorities and partnerships. This, coupled with greater expertise, understanding, and access to evidence related to the environmental and economic pillars, has meant communities have not been able to meaningfully engage with and influence the process and outcomes. To deliver equally against all three pillars of sustainability, delivering social impact through marine plans should engage the participation of local communities.



Photo: MMO marine planning team participating in MSP

MMO undertakes significant training with external decision makers on the use of marine plans, ultimately to support plan implementation. MMO provides ongoing support to decision makers through regular training sessions and guidance documentation.

However, in a recent evaluation commissioned by MMO on marine plan use (MMO1333) it was noted that the experience of some decision makers is that **the scale of marine plans and broad nature of marine plan policies result in generic training methods, creating a barrier to using the plans confidently**. In some cases, stakeholders find engagement to be too general and lacking the clarity they need on policy interpretation in a local scenario. For instance, some decision makers cited the need for definition of a “significant loss of priority

habitat” in one plan policy. A relatively small national team of Marine Planners, in comparison to terrestrial planning authorities, covers the entire English coastline. They have the task of supporting decision-makers in understanding and using the marine plans but cannot advise on how to address or respond to specific policies.

The expectation of marine planning to deliver outcomes for society, the economy and the environment can be difficult to achieve in practice because of the need to balance sometimes conflicting agendas. **The approach to marine policy in practice, and research on this topic highlights that the economy is consistently put ahead of environmental and social factors limiting any sustainable outcomes, even if they are policy goals**¹⁹.



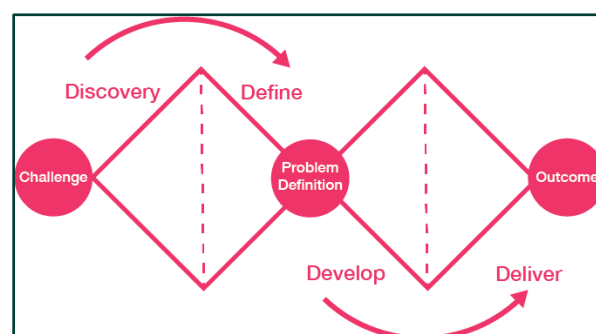
Photo: Pamela Buchan

- 1) Introduce social impact and participatory decision-making academic and practice-based evidence; and
- 2) Collaboratively identify levers for improved recognition of social impact:
 - a. Within the current marine planning framework, and
 - b. Where regulatory revision is required for delivery.

Speakers were invited to give provocations to facilitate workshop discussion and were drawn from both academia and practice:

- Professor Patrick Devine-Wright, University of Exeter: *Place based approaches to the siting of marine energy infrastructures*
- Helen Elphick, The Crown Estate: *Reform for Better Governance: Knowledge Exchange Workshop*
- Rebecca MacDonald-Lofts, Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group: *Considerations from a coastal community perspective*

The workshop used the Design Council's Double Diamond process²⁴, which uses a two-stage process of divergent and convergent thinking to identify problems and find creative solutions. Application of the Co-design Oracle Deck, created by artist Hannah Mumby and the University of Exeter²⁵, enabled deeper discussion and analysis of barriers, enablers, and levers for change in current practice.

Design Council's 'Double Diamond' process²⁴

Using these tools and the knowledge exchanged, the participants, speakers and facilitators collaboratively worked through a step-by-step process to respond to the project objectives, the outcomes of which are discussed in the following sections.



3. Findings

The deliberations from the workshop identified three key areas where innovation in marine governance could lead to improved social sustainability. These were i) knowledge capacity and exchange within and beyond MMO; ii) wider planning procedure; and iii) internal MMO practices and culture. These three areas are discussed in turn, highlighting some barriers and opportunities.

3.1. Knowledge

3.1.1. Barriers

Knowledge barriers broadly fell into two themes: narrowness in knowledge accepted as relevant/legitimate and challenges relating to the marine context specifically, particularly across agencies and organisations.


Marine and environmental decision-making has roots in technological, economic, and ecological disciplines, with decisions primarily informed by largely quantitative, natural/physical scientific evidence. The challenge of social sustainability however requires social evidence, both scientific and context specific. The workshop speakers highlighted the importance of drawing on a range of types of knowledge for effective marine governance. However, participants identified a culture where the knowledge of 'the man on the beach' is delegitimised creating knowledge/evidence hierarchies which place divergent value on different knowledge types within the decision-making process. Although there is a need for a pragmatic approach to the resources and time invested in marine decision-making, social sustainability cannot be delivered on when

governance treats developments as technical problems rather than social ones.

Developing a more plural approach to evidence gathering may feel particularly challenging given the lack of ocean literacy in general. Marine knowledge is essential for effective planning of coastal and marine developments that meet the needs of future generations. A lack of knowledge of Marine Plans and marine planning processes hinders the efficiency of interpretation and implementation of marine plans in the local context. This was identified as being the result of three main factors: Lack of Local Authority resource; siloed working; marine planning being excluded from wider planning as a profession.

LAs are under-resourced in marine expertise inhibiting their capacity to make best use of the marine plans with local stakeholders. For example, London has 48 LAs with only one or two marine planners between them. Although MMO has delivered implementation training to LA planners, more commitment is needed from LAs to ensure this knowledge is embedded within LA structures.

Fragmented and siloed working exists both within MMO and in LA partners. A recurring theme was the **need for more collaboration between organisations in the marine/coastal space to collectively identify and solve problems**. There was a sense that there have been numerous attempts to improve cross-administrative working at the coast, such as through the Coastal Concordat, LGA Coastal SIG, Environment Agency Championing Coastal Coordination 3Cs project, Coastal Partnerships Network, The Crown Estate, and Natural



England. The government clearly values marine and coastal partnership innovation, as evidenced by centrally funded research, projects and initiatives targeting the marine space. However, there is **a lack of consistency and strategic co-ordination, leading to duplication of work, and a lack of sustained investment**. In the case of the Coastal Concordat, there has been difficulty in bringing LAs on board. In a complex decision-making context, such local and trusted groups could have a more explicit role in the network of marine governance and decision-making.

3.1.2. Solutions

1. Plurality in knowledge and evidence gathering and its use in decision-making.

The use of lay, indigenous, anecdotal, scientific, technological, social information requires **innovation in the evidence gathering and consultation processes**. The first step is clarity on how evidence from different knowledge types is weighed and used in decision-making.

2. Re-prioritisation and resourcing of marine planning by Local Authorities.

As a key democratic interface where marine and terrestrial planning meet, **LAs need full resourcing to support ocean democracy and deliver fair and sustainable outcomes from marine decision-making**. Collaboration is a strategic solution to internal capacity limitations and can improve access to communities and knowledge held by others to help address issues of representation and knowledge diversity. Effective partnership working is an important strategy to compensate for under-resourcing in central and local government, which could be supported through a MMO liaison officer role within local organisations.

3. Strengthen and formalise relationships between the Marine Planning team and LAs.

Marine Planners are a key interface between the LA and MMO and can play a fundamental role in disseminating knowledge to LAs that will support them in their own planning and decision-making. MMO could deliver a 'train the trainer' programme to develop marine planning skills in town planners. LAs would benefit from a dedicated marine planning officer who understands Marine Plans and Shoreline Management Plans.

4. Use partnerships more, and more strategically, to leverage external expertise and data.

Expertise around Marine Plan implementation, public engagement strategies, and Social Impact Assessment, exist not just within different MMO teams but also with external stakeholders such as the LGA Coastal SIG, Natural England, the Environment Agency, and The Crown Estate. Expertise could be brought in to deliver training from MMO, using examples of innovative policy practice already delivered. Better partnership working and data-sharing agreements could also help to avoid duplication of work and improve access to data to make informed decisions more efficient and effective. For example:

5. Use of the wide range of datasets collected regularly by LAs in MMO consultations.

New academic partnerships such as the new ACCESS Network, provides access to environmental social scientists and research datasets, and enables opportunity for co-funded research. Such partnerships could facilitate more social impact research to be undertaken.

6. Skill development around relationship-building and knowledge diversity.

Capacity building that supports MMO to identify and effectively engage with partners, stakeholders and communities, and grows understanding of the evidence and knowledge that can be developed through such activities.



Photo: Ben Barden
Photography Ltd

3.2. Planning processes

3.2.1. Barriers

Workshop participants also identified a range of challenges associated with the consultation process concerning robustness and equitability in delivering justice for all affected stakeholders. These broadly group into the social justice elements of recognition and representation.

Recognition

MMO, drawing on the Statement of Public Participation (SPP)²³, determines who to consult. Groups are categorised according to industry/sector and though local communities are mentioned (alongside elected members), it's not clear from consultation documents that communities always participate. (See for example, the Draft North East, North West, South East and South West Marine Plans: Consultation Summary 2020²⁶ where the word "community" does not appear.)

It was emphasised that the Planning Team exceed their statutory duties in breadth of

stakeholders consulted, however, what constitutes a 'must' and 'might' within legislation limits the extent to which those broader views are sought and responded to. Concern was raised that by starting with the SPP some members of the public may be overlooked from the outset if not explicitly recognised within the SPP. Exclusions and differential outcomes are therefore embedded in the consultation process by design.

Conversations explored whether current processes deliver accessible, equitable consultations. Key issues raised included: how equity is ensured in the consultation process; who is included; whose voice is loudest in consultations; barriers to citizen engagement e.g., literacy issues, accessibility (when/where/how consultations are held); prioritising 'informed' stakeholders over local citizens and the tendency to use sectoral representatives as 'go to'/default consultees, which raises questions about legitimate consultees.

The language used in consultation documents is instrumental in securing fair stakeholder engagement, as it determines which stakeholders identify-with, respond to, and participate in consultation processes. The terminology used can pose an unintended barrier to recruitment of affected stakeholders, for example, the terms 'marine', 'coastal' and 'estuarine' can unwittingly alienate relevant stakeholders from engaging in consultations if the term used is perceived by them as irrelevant to their context (e.g., an 'estuarine' community may not identify with a 'marine' development). This requires careful thought and planning to ensure that communications reach the right audiences.

Representation

There is currently a low level of public participation in consultations that needs to be addressed for confidence in the process. Disengagement may reflect low ocean literacy and/or low civic literacy (e.g., lack of awareness of the environmental participatory rights conferred by the Aarhus Convention), and lack of an associated sense of duty/right to participate in marine governance. It also reflects a wider culture of democratic disengagement across the UK²⁷. Government initiatives to embed the principle of *subsidiarity* in decision-making via devolution (e.g., the Localism Act 2011) are an attempt to reinvigorate a local sense of democratic responsibility. Subsidiarity is relevant to MMO decision-making^{28,29}: making decisions at the lowest level of involvement, close to the communities most affected. This would require better integration of terrestrial and marine planning processes, to ensure local councils and communities are engaged with effectively.


Participants have observed a notable disparity in participation between the more robust consultation processes for larger and transformative initiatives (e.g., offshore wind) and smaller more localised developments (e.g., aquaculture), which raises questions of scale and equity. At the strategic scale, where marine development impacts through the global commons rather than on the basis of coastal geography, lack of public participation risks the legitimacy of decision-making. For example, the 2022 UK Offshore Energy Strategic Environmental Assessment consultation elicited only two public responses³⁰. Such participation currently comes at policy-making stages within and external to MMO and a concern was raised that consultation is limited in the case of



strategic transformation projects to minimise opposition to proposals.

At the local scale, social impacts are often only realised when new marine developments hit land and affect coastal communities (seascape changes, affected sense of place, wellbeing, operational presence, job creation, educational opportunities, and unintended consequences). This may be why social impact is not given sufficient attention in the marine planning stage – at the development stage, the main actor and beneficiary is usually the developer. There is a tendency for developers to view social policies as an ‘add on’, including basic community engagement, such as information boards, into the plan without any consultation with what a community needs. Such mitigation approaches make no headway towards real-life infrastructure and facilities needs of coastal communities.

Timelines for engagement embed specific audiences in the process of consultation at specified points. Those engaged earlier having more power to affect the plan. It is possible that



other non-prescribed publics may be affected at moments beyond the specific consultation points, yet there is minimal process for post-consent monitoring of social impact. Marine planning monitors the impact of policies at a broader scale and not case-by-case. MMO carries out marine licensing inspections as well as receiving post-consent returns, where a development is checked against the conditions granted by the license. While these ensure, for example, that any mitigation requirements have been fulfilled, they do not check whether statements in the original application, e.g., job creation, have been met. This inherently overlooks the social impacts that may occur through the entire lifecycle of marine development, beyond the consultation points and initial implementation phase.

The marine planning team are flexible in their approach to consultations and are always keen to learn and improve the process to ensure it is smooth and accessible for stakeholders. Decisions such as the minimum length of the consultation, when consultation during the planning process occurs and the principles that guide them are set out in legislation, however the planning team regularly consult for longer periods and more regularly than required as they recognise the benefit of it.

The consultation process is a cornerstone procedure for securing blue democracy and social justice and MMO plays a key role in delivering this agenda. The workshop cast doubt on the effectiveness of the current process in terms of breadth of evidence gathering. Statutory consultation processes are not sufficiently robust enough for confidence that all affected/concerned stakeholders participate, and they are inequitable in their approach towards differing scales of

developments and the different complexities these projects entail.

In addition to problems within consultation practices, the workshop also exposed fundamental structural problems within the planning system. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the regulatory basis for planning in England³¹. The NPPF states that strategic policy-making authorities should engage with MMO; requires that planning policies and decisions in coastal areas take account of the UK Marine Policy Statement and marine plans; promotes Integrated Coastal Zone Management; and has stipulations to preserve the integrity of certain designated marine protected areas. Yet workshop participants identified a lack of inclusion of marine planning within wider town planning as a key barrier to implementation of marine planning. This was attributed in part to the planning professionalisation which may reflect the relatively recent arrival of marine planning.

Although Masters degrees can be obtained in marine planning, there is limited marine planning content in undergraduate town planning degrees and associations such as Royal Town Planning Institute have not yet accredited any marine planning qualifications³². Professionals without an accredited degree face a longer pathway to become a Chartered Planner³³. The result is that professional skills, knowledge, and career opportunities are more limited for marine geographies, in turn limiting marine expertise and presence in Local Authority planning teams.

3.2.2. Solutions

1. Review the scope of the SPP to ensure better stakeholder representation of the social pillar (recognition).



Carefully review the procedures identifying who is deemed a valuable/credible stakeholder within current legislation; the processes regarding the selection of and weighting given to stakeholders' views, e.g., self-selected appointment, official representatives, self-excluding cohorts; and explore tools for ensuring equitable benefits are accrued to different stakeholder groups (distribution).

2. Review consultation processes for efficacy, particularly in reaching under-represented communities and stakeholder groups and the timing of their involvement (representation).

Leverage resources from partners, such as the LGA Coastal SIG who have used innovative methods in consultations, to explore the best channels and methods to engage publics (representation and engagement). Early, effective and continuous engagement builds trust with local communities. Local developments and plans should first start with place knowledge, which would help to anticipate what problems could be posed in terms of community engagement and who to engage with in the vicinity. Previous examples, such as Seascape Planning, might be a good starting point for this work. Participants suggested a first step of consultation would be to gather focus groups of similar people, e.g., fishers, to ascertain their view, then do a round where participants are mixed to compare/contrast and find allyship across groups. In addition, to develop trust, results of consultations should be communicated directly to the stakeholder groups in an appropriate manner/format. The MMO engagement toolkit could provide some guidance on this.

3. Create a social policy within the marine planning framework that places new requirements upon developers.

Developers could be given more explicit

requirements for local community and citizen engagement. Social impact of developments would be improved/mitigated through more co-design of developments to meet locally-identified needs as well as national strategic priorities. Communities should be approached *a priori* and not informed *post-hoc* by the developer of options already selected. As well as improving social sustainability, this would also be more economically efficient as it would prevent late-stage development cancellations. Policy changes can be supported through external mechanisms, such as the Coastal Communities All Party Parliamentary Group which could be used as a forum for input to and feedback on policy reform, such as Social Impact Assessment in the marine planning process.

4. Design a MMO Decision-Making Framework to mainstream social sustainability.

Part of fulfilling Goal 2 is consideration of social impact in project development processes and throughout its lifecycle. This could include a mechanism for prioritising stakeholders who need to participate in consultation, with clear guidance on weighting of stakeholder importance. This would give communities and members of the public an equal footing in consultation and engagement activities, regardless of whether or not they themselves are aware of the potential impacts upon them and their need to get involved. As an emerging area of knowledge, decision-makers should embrace the growing body of social scientific research through future research collaborations and implementation of evidence-based tools, such as the Marine Planning Trade-off Analysis (MaPTA) tool being piloted through the Resilience of Coastal Communities (ROCC) project³⁴.

5. Professionalisation of marine planning.

Improved status and resourcing of Marine Planning at local level and in the Civil Service could be achieved in the intermediate term through the profile raising and professionalisation of Marine Planning. This might be achieved by integrating marine planning into formal town planning degrees; supporting RTPI accreditation of Marine

Planning degrees; or establishing a framework of professionalisation solely for marine planning that raises the status of marine planning within the wider planning sector more generally. MMO works with the RTPI to raise the profile of marine planning, and further action by the RTPI will respond to the growing need of marine planning expertise.



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3.3. Institutional culture

3.3.1. Barriers

Several organisational cultures were identified that may impact upon capability for innovation: *ownership of governance, siloed working and*

knowledge management, and institutional culture on risk-taking.

The current working paradigm and institutional culture centres technocratic and environmental approaches to decision-making. Whilst the Marine Planning team do integrate social



impact thinking into their consultations, exceeding the statutory remit, there is currently a level of ambiguity regarding the consideration of social impact across MMO teams. A shared understanding and ownership of key terminology including 'governance' and 'social impact' is important for these to be embedded *in the work of* MMO. A shared narrative could articulate the importance of the social sustainability pillar in marine management and contribute to achieving MMO's strategic goals.

Concerns were raised about the implications of the siloed nature of working across sectors and processes. It was expressed that this could end up with the 'pooling' of key information, and it residing with key individuals and teams. An impact of the siloed working model is the tendency to deploy mono-disciplinary problem solving for challenges that could benefit from multi-disciplinary perspectives. For many of the challenges facing MMO, having better join-up and a multi-disciplinary approach to problem-solving and decision-making could greatly improve the outcome. Social impacts and their implications for people could be better considered and addressed if groups worked as one system.

It was noted in the workshop that a fragmented ownership of *process knowledge* exists (e.g. licensing processes, planning protocols, management procedures) and that *useful data for decision making* is not always easily accessible. This was identified as a key obstacle to efficient organisational delivery of *governance for social impact* because a coherent understanding of who is responsible to deliver on this vision is unclear, the mechanisms for integrating it into workflow are not specified, and tools for managing data associated with its activity is to be determined.

There was some discussion at the workshop about the wealth of knowledge and information

gleaned from stakeholder meetings and the challenge in using it, across MMO, to inform work. MMO do some work to track and link-up engagement and stakeholder activity so there is some oversight at a broader level, however, there is a need for a more visible knowledge management policy and system, which would unlock the power of data, enhance collaboration, and prevent digital wastage.

These issues will need to be addressed for MMO to achieve its Goals 2 and 7. MMO's Goal 2 has set an ambition for MMO to manage a responsive and widely owned Marine Planning framework that sets out the strategic priorities for using and managing our seas, integrating terrestrial planning policies across the range of marine sectors. MMO's Goal 7 is to maximise value from evidence and data while ensuring effective specification, capture, integration and sharing of marine data and information.

Participants felt that the opportunities to trial different methods and processes of implementation can be limited by the need to deliver value for public money, compete with multiple policy areas, make the most of limited resources, meet statutory deadlines, and use embedded approaches. This can create a culture averse to risk taking. Innovation relies upon failure being an option so that lessons can be learned, therefore culture can prevent the freedom to implement new approaches in some cases. Where new methods are received poorly, it stifles the willingness of people to similarly innovate and take risks in future.

The absence of a clear vision, terminology, and roadmap to advance governance for better social impact prevents effective multi-disciplinary effort required for testing how to deliver social sustainability. The lack of opportunities to develop and improve participatory practice in the local implementation of marine plans is obstructive

to the inclusion of a wider spectrum of local voices in the decision-making process.

3.3.2. Solutions

1. Develop a shared vision and language of governance that includes social sustainability with definitions of key terms.

There is an opportunity for the Marine Planning team to act as “guardians of governance for social impact”, due to their role at the interfaces of MMO, government departments, and Local Authorities, with the requisite relationships and evidence base. To achieve this, there is a need to champion and put into practice a robust decision-making system that ensures people are at the centre of decision making that drives positive outcomes for nature, climate and communities.

Clarification and clear communication of the key terms ‘governance’ and ‘social impact’ within teams, across departments, and with external stakeholders will facilitate shared understanding, collective delivery of strategic goals, and enable productive conversations on new operational requirements to mainstream social impact considerations. There are current opportunities as the fisheries management teams begin to incorporate thinking on good governance, participation, and social impact into their operational practices.

2. Establish a common knowledge/data management system to underpin decision-making related to social impact.

Marine plans aim to be available and accessible to local users, requiring user-centric systems of support and advice which rely on robust data being provided in the right place, at the right time. Achieving this for social information too would enable Social Impact Assessments to be more effectively used and integrated. The

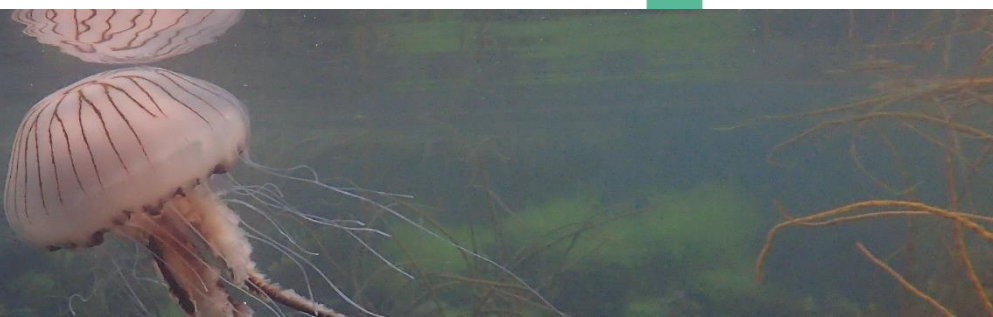
fragmentation of siloed knowledge and data processing, storage and management could be solved with a centralised and democratised repository of social and other data to enable an integrated flow of information, linked to all three sustainability pillars, to support a systems-based analysis of the information across Marine Planning processes and thus fulfil Goals 2 and 7.

3. Application of systems thinking in Marine Plan implementation.

Systems thinking explores how individual constituent parts of a system (processes, actions, decisions) dynamically interact with and impact the entirety of the system; cross-cutting scales, sectors and actors across multiple timeframes. This dynamic and responsive framework would enable integration of social sustainability through mapping where social impacts are currently accounted for in MMO’s system and where decisions have social impacts. As many social impacts are felt locally, in a place-based manner, a systematic approach at relevant scales makes visible the social elements of marine decision-making, enabling incorporation into the overall Marine Planning framework.

4. Encourage a culture of continuous improvement and ambition.

Enabling risk-taking, embracing the learning that comes from failure, and communicating this honestly, could lead to the uptake of more innovative approaches that champion governance for social impact. It was felt that honesty about failures in projects or innovation should be discussed without fear and that this would ultimately lead to trust being built within and across marine-facing organisations, enabling MMO to become agile, adaptive, and resilient as new challenges evolve.



4. Reflections and Recommendations

The barriers and solutions identified through the workshop represent a starting point for MMO-led marine governance that effectively considers social sustainability. Throughout the workshop, it was clear that the thinking around social impact was strongly influenced by the role of MMO as an executive non-departmental government body, sponsored by Defra. The context of MMO operation, culture and practices must be in line with the statutory remit of MMO conferred in MaCAA and it was important to the research team to identify recommendations within the marine governance ecosystem where MMO has the power to make changes.

The workshop brought to the fore key issues with planning and national and local government institutions that pose a barrier to the development of effective marine planning in general, and specifically its ability to deliver on social sustainability. It is beyond the authority of MMO to influence government priorities for marine governance, though these heavily influence strategic visions for English coastal and marine waters. There was a sense in the workshop that there are not always the opportunities for more innovative testing, and some of the solutions presented in this report were identified as mitigation against gaps in political goals or resources.

Within MMO powers, priority areas for delivering on social sustainability were centred on planning processes, institutional culture, and knowledge and evidence-gathering capabilities. There was a common thread throughout these areas of the need for more plurality and stronger relationships within MMO and between it and others, be they partners or affected communities.

Of the social sustainability pillars, recognition and representation were most highly discussed in the workshop, particularly in relation to consultation processes. It is notable that distribution was a less familiar concept to the workshop participants. It is beyond the scope of this report to speculate as to why this was the case, but it does suggest that the role of MMO stops short of having the kinds of strategic oversight of marine governance that can consciously influence patterns of distribution of marine use and its impacts.

Drawing from the workshop we have brought together a set of recommendations for action within MMO and for external government and planning authorities. We have organised the recommendations according to who has the power to enact them and have categorised them according to their deliverability and importance.

Key recommendations of the 'Opportunities for improved social sustainability in marine governance' project.

Recommendations for MMO	Who	Time frame
Develop a shared vision and language of governance that includes social sustainability with definitions of key terms.	Evidence & Evaluation Organisational review	Short term
Review consultation processes for efficacy, particularly in reaching under-represented communities and stakeholder groups and the timing of their involvement (representation).	Planners with input from Evidence & Evaluation and others	Medium term
Create a social policy within the marine planning framework that places new requirements upon developers to improve delivery on social impact.	Planners	Medium term
Review the scope of the SPP to ensure better stakeholder representation of the social pillar i.e., communities and local people (recognition).	Planners	Medium term
Use partnerships more, and more strategically to leverage external expertise and data.	All	Medium term
Establish a social impact data management system to underpin decision-making.	Evidence & Evaluation with input for usability by the organisation	Long term
Encourage a culture of continuous improvement and ambition by embracing an adaptive approach that includes trialling new approaches to support the evolution of marine plans using an evaluation-innovation case study approach.	All	Medium term
Design a MMO Decision-Making Framework to mainstream social sustainability.	Evidence & Evaluation Input from teams	Medium term
Map where social impacts need to be considered and included in current marine planning decision-making, incorporating the wide range of datasets collected regularly by LAs and other organisations.	Planning Input from mNCEA	Medium term
Using evidence from different knowledge types in evidence gathering and its use in decision-making (Plurality).	All	Short term
Skill development around relationship-building and knowledge diversity.	All	Medium term
Recommendations for the planning sector		
Professionalisation of marine planning.		
Recommendations for national and local government		
Re-prioritisation and resourcing of marine planning by Local Authorities.		
Strengthen and formalise relationships between the Marine Planning team and LAs.		

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