

Marine Spatial Planning Stakeholder Advisory Group

Report of Tenth Meeting held virtually 22nd September 2020

1. Welcome and Introduction

Conor McCabe welcomed members to the tenth Meeting of the MSP Advisory Group meeting. He welcomed Minister Burke to his first meeting of the Group and thanked the Minister for taking on the role of Chair.

The ninth meeting took place on 26th May 2020. The meeting was the first online meeting of the Advisory Group due to restrictions relating to Covid-19.

Minister Burke noted the process the NMPF has taken to date. On 12th November 2019 the public consultation on the draft NMPF was launched on behalf of Government. It was a lengthy consultation process which included eleven regional events and an online event. Since the last meeting of the group in May the Marine Planning Policy and Development (MPPD) team have been analysing in-depth, all submissions received for the public consultation.

He thanked the members of the Group for their contribution both to the consultation and to the development of the NMPF to date. He noted that the pace has been relentless and that pace will see us through to having the Framework complete by March. Along with the MPDM Bill, this will change the landscape, or seascape, of marine planning more than at any other time since the formation of the State.

Minister Burke then welcomed new members:

- Tom Enright replaces Peter Hynes as the representative of the County and City Managers Association (CCMA)
- John Doran is joining the group representing the Bryden Centre LYIT and Queens University

Minister Burke noted the alternative attendees on the day and apologies from members who were unable to attend the meeting.

2. Overview of draft NMPF Consultation

Martin O'Meara gave an overview of the 225 submissions received during the draft NMPF consultation process and the main points raised. He outlined the variance between submissions in complexity and length. All the submissions and overview are published on the Department's website. A summary by chapter will be available in the coming weeks.

Tom Woolley gave an overview of the SEA and AA and the position on updating maps and data. Changes include new maps setting out Harbour limits and Pilotage Districts based upon Marine Institute work with ports around Ireland. There has been a positive response from ports in relation to development of the map and it will represent the addition of new and very useful information to the NMPF.

Tom confirmed work is continuing with RPS on integrating mitigation measures proposed through the SEA Report and Natura Impact Statements that were published alongside the draft NMPF.

Martin outlined other focusses of the NMPF:

- Work progressing on the digital tool
- Enforcement
- Marine Planning Guidelines – post publication
- Engagement with LGMA for LA's training and professional development
- Ore & Fisheries – to set up a working group
- Timelines of the NMPF

In the discussion that followed the following points arose:

- In the development of the plan would there be a role for the Defence Forces/Air Corp? It was confirmed they would play a role but that this Department do not have a say in their resources or funding.
- Acknowledgement was given on the amount of work done to date but upskilling to support the new marine planning system is very important.
- It appears Ireland has gone from nothing to a full move towards renewables. Is the ban on the licensing of gas premature? It was confirmed this was for the remit of our climate change colleagues and an invitation would be given for them to come to the next meeting.
- Will development guidelines be launched along with the NMPF? The scoping out of guidelines will be carried out in the coming months however the MPDM Bill will need to be in place first so the guidelines will not be in place for the introduction of the NMPF. They will be developed during 2021/22.

3. Marine Protected Areas

Richard Cronin gave an update to the group on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs); covering what an MPA actually is and Ireland's current MPA network. He outlined that the newly Government has commitments to MPAs and reaching the 30% target by 2030. Also it was noted that there is no definition of what an MPA is in Irish legislation. A new technical group for MPAs was formed in December 2019. This group acknowledged that stakeholder consultation on MPA's needs to be wide and effective. An online survey was launched on 18th August. The findings will be summarised in detail in the coming weeks.

In the discussion that followed the following points arose:

- The long term vision of Ireland's marine environment was raised. It was outlined that the key is to achieving an expanded and effective network of MPAs in Ireland and having an appropriate way of managing and monitoring MPAs.
- A concern was raised in what will happen in the NMPF before MPAs are designated. A list of habitats recognised as requiring protection are

in the Birds and Habitats legislation. Sectors are also aware of the effect that activities can have on habitats. OPAP published a list of commitments to action, monitoring and protecting habitats. The NMPF digital tool will be continuously updated with new data/designations as they become available and both Marine Environment and NMPF teams work very closely with each other.

- It was recommended that perhaps the Department could look to other countries who are already doing this and learn from them.
- There was concern that consideration should also be given to inshore activities for e.g. waste and slurry and on the enforcement of them. It was confirmed that these are already covered in water division legislation and LAs have an enhanced role in these.

4. Marine Spatial Planning Platform Tool

Juliet Fitzpatrick and Tom Woolley gave a demonstration of upcoming MSP decision-making tool. It covered why it was needed, who might use it and what government initiatives it supports. There will be 4 user types for the tool:

- Casual
- Informed
- Applicant
- Decision Maker

It is vital that users get the information they require to use the NMPF. At present the project team on the tool are Marine Planning (DHLGH), Geographic Information Systems (DHLGH), Marine Institute and Esri (specialists in gathering, managing and analysing data with the aim of creating maps). Its functionality will be based on a website and a map based environment. It will be located at www.marineplan.ie. The digital tool will be an ongoing project to keep all data up to date and to expand its capabilities.

In the discussion that followed the following points arose:

- There was positive feedback from the group with regard to the need for this tool.
- Questions were asked about interpretation for zoning and weighting. Zoning, as set out in the MPDM Bill (in development), will be included in the tool in due course but the first step is to inform people what is out there and included in the NMPF when it's published. The intention is to make the tool as adaptable as possible so that, where possible, data can be extracted to user's own systems so that they can determine weighting in their procedures and decision-making.
- There were concerns raised that some of the linkages between activities e.g. more data required on aquaculture. The Department confirmed that the Marine Institute is separately working with DAFM on aquaculture in addition to working on this tool. The link between the two will come more to the fore in phase two of the NMPF digital project.
- A separate discussion arose regarding Aquaculture licencing and the MPDM Bill. It was confirmed that although aquaculture is not covered in the bill all Departments and sectors are obliged to meet the objectives of the NMPF. There has been a commitment from Government, conveyed in the Programme for Government, to implement recommendations in the Aquaculture Report.

5. Next Meeting

The next meeting date will be circulated when it has been confirmed.

Minister Burke thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.