

MARINE NATURE CONSERVATION  
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

# The Irish Sea Pilot



REPORT TO DEFRA BY  
THE JOINT NATURE  
CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

**JOINT  
NATURE  
CONSERVATION  
COMMITTEE**

**defra**  
Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

  
**Isle of Man  
Government**  
*Kolligyn Eilan Ynnagh*

# **REVIEW OF MARINE NATURE CONSERVATION**

## **FINAL REPORT OF THE IRISH SEA PILOT**

### **STATEMENT OF ENDORSEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE IRISH SEA PILOT STEERING GROUP**

The Review of Marine Nature Conservation (RMNC) was established in 1999 in fulfilment of the Government's pledge to accompany the strengthening of protection for terrestrial wildlife sites with an examination of the effectiveness of the system for protecting nature conservation in the marine environment.

In March 2001, the Review's Working Group published an Interim Report (Defra, 2001) which set out a number of recommendations for further work. One of these was to test, through a pilot scheme, the regional seas approach to marine nature conservation management and to develop recommendations for a refined framework for marine nature conservation in UK waters.

On 1 May 2002, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced the Government's intention to proceed with the pilot scheme recommended in the Interim Report. On 21 May 2002, Defra and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) signed a Service Level Agreement which authorised JNCC to undertake the work agreed by the Review's Working Group. Work commenced on the pilot on 21 May 2002 and concluded on 3 March 2004. The pilot was supported by a Steering Group drawing on a wide range of interests.

This Report presents the conclusions of the Irish Sea Pilot. It was prepared by the Pilot's Project Team and was subject to detailed consideration by members of the Pilot's Steering Group.

The work was undertaken by JNCC through its Pilot Project Team and through work commissioned from a wide range of contractors with expertise in a variety of disciplines. The Report's findings were the subject of detailed consideration by the Steering Group during the course of the project and in the drawing up of the final Report.

The Project Team has endeavoured to reflect in the Report, a consensus opinion emerging from the project's findings and from the views expressed by the Steering Group. The conclusions are however those of the authors. The Steering Group acknowledges that the Report presents an accurate summary of the work undertaken through the Pilot project, and the lessons learned. The Steering Group is satisfied that the authors' conclusions are soundly based in that work, although they may not fully reflect the views of all members of the Group, some of whom may have reservations about specific aspects.

MARINE NATURE CONSERVATION  
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

# The Irish Sea Pilot

REPORT TO DEFRA BY  
THE JOINT NATURE  
CONSERVATION COMMITTEE



On 21 May 2002, Defra and JNCC signed a Service Level Agreement which authorised JNCC to undertake the work set out in the specification for the Regional Seas Pilot Scheme agreed by the Review of Marine Nature Conservation Working Group. This Agreement enabled JNCC to incur expenditure and enter into contractual arrangements, including the employment of staff to the Pilot's Project Team. The management of the Pilot's Project Team and implementation of its work programme was overseen by a Steering Group of interested stakeholders. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the Pilot's Project Team.

Funding for the Irish Sea Pilot was provided by Defra but additional funds were provided by the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment and Heritage Service, the Government of the Isle of Man and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Published by the  
Joint Nature Conservation Committee  
Monkstone House  
City Road  
Peterborough PE1 1JY  
United Kingdom

ISBN 1 86107 559 6

© Defra 2004

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

Vincent, M.A., Atkins, S.M., Lumb, C.M., Golding, N., Lieberknecht, L.M. and Webster, M. (2004). *Marine nature conservation and sustainable development - the Irish Sea Pilot*. Report to Defra by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Irish Sea Pilot team wishes to acknowledge all the contributions and advice received from Government Departments, Devolved Administrations, Agencies, Economic sector groups, Non-Governmental Organisations and users of the Irish Sea in the UK, Ireland and the Isle of Man. There have been so many individuals who have worked beyond their normal responsibilities to supply data, information, advice and comments on the Pilot's various outputs that we cannot list them all. Those who attended the 5 regional workshops provided very valuable advice and comment.

We wish to thank staff in the Government of Ireland, Isle of Man and Devolved Administrations who provided advice to the Pilot, comment on interim reports and assisted with the stakeholder workshops. Also thanks to the Departments, Agencies, Marine Institutes and Laboratories in Ireland and the Isle of Man who gave valuable time to provide data and advice.

The overall guidance to the Pilot was provided by the Steering Group (membership Appendix 1), under the chairmanship of Linda Smith (Defra). The Project Manager Dominic Whitmee provided helpful day to day advice with administrative support from Naomi Keeble, Martin Willcox and Christine Rumble. JNCC provided technical assistance to the Pilot in various ways (Appendix 2).

We are grateful to all the consultants (Appendix 3) who did research under contract often at short notice and within tight deadlines.

The Pilot team was hosted by English Nature's Cumbria Team at its Kendal office. Thanks to Team Manager Des O'Halloran for providing accommodation and helping us feel a part of the Cumbria Team. Our thanks also to all these individuals and groups who have collaborated to make the Pilot genuinely a team effort.

Malcolm Vincent, Project Director  
Steve Atkins, Team Leader  
Chris Lumb, Senior officer  
Karen Birleson, Administrator

January 2004

Maps in this publication are reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution. JNCC 100017955, 2004.

*The cover shows a scuba diver exploring the reefs off the coast of the Isle of Man. This biological community, just below the kelp zone, is dominated by sea urchins, plumose anemones and sponges. Scuba diving is a growing recreational activity in the UK. © John Gulland.*

---

**CONTENTS****EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. MARINE NATURE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	8
2. THE IRISH SEA PILOT	11
3. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY	14
4. DATA COLLATION AND MAPPING	17
5. THE WIDER SEA	23
6. THE REGIONAL SEA	26
7. MARINE LANDSCAPES	33
8. NATIONALLY-IMPORTANT MARINE FEATURES	43
9. NATIONALLY-IMPORTANT MARINE BIODIVERSITY AREAS	53
10. NATIONALLY-IMPORTANT MARINE EARTH HERITAGE AREAS	64
11. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES	97
12. INTEGRATING NATURE CONSERVATION WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	105
13. LEGISLATION - ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT STATE AND FUTURE NEEDS	122
14. ENFORCEMENT	135
15. GOVERNANCE	140
16. MARINE NATURE CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK	147
17. SPECIFICATION FOR FUTURE REGIONAL SEA PROJECTS	151
18. COMPLETING THE MARINE NATURE CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE IRISH SEA	155

**REFERENCES**

APPENDIX 1	IRISH SEA PILOT STEERING GROUP
APPENDIX 2	IRISH SEA PILOT - JNCC STAFF CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROJECT
APPENDIX 3	IRISH SEA PILOT - COMMISSIONED WORK
APPENDIX 4	REFINED CRITERIA FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF NATIONALLY-IMPORTANT MARINE FEATURES
APPENDIX 5	REFINED CRITERIA FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF NATIONALLY-IMPORTANT MARINE AREAS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. *Introduction.* The purpose of the Irish Sea Pilot was to help develop a strategy for marine nature conservation that could be applied to all UK waters and, with international collaboration, the adjacent waters of the north-east Atlantic. The work fulfils a commitment made by the UK Government in May 2002, at the launch of *Safeguarding our Seas*, and was funded primarily by Defra with contributions from other partners.
2. A proposed framework for marine nature conservation, developed as part of Defra's Review of Marine Nature Conservation, envisaged the need to take action at a range of scales. These scales were i) the Wider Sea, ii) the Regional Sea, iii) Marine Landscapes, and iv) Nationally-important habitats and species. The proposed framework anticipated that a range of measures would be needed to conserve marine biodiversity, including protected areas, spatial planning and other measures. The Pilot tested the practicality and potential method of operation of the proposed framework and the additional measures needed to put it into effect. This Report makes 64 recommendations. The work and its main findings are summarised below.
3. *Data and Information.* The appropriate management of the marine environment is dependent on adequate information and data. The Pilot collated geophysical, hydrographical, nature conservation, ecological and human use data and used GIS analysis. While intertidal and near-coast biological information was found to be satisfactory, data were sparse for most offshore localities to a degree which would constrain good decision-making. Furthermore, some survey data were not available to the Pilot, either because they were held in an inappropriate format or because the data owner was unable or unwilling to release it. The principal conclusions are:
  - a national marine information network should be established to which marine data should be contributed using agreed data standards;
  - all marine data collected with public funds, and environmental data collected by the private sector for the purpose of complying with a regulatory procedure, should be placed in the public domain within specified timescales;
  - improved co-ordination of data collection and research activities needs to be achieved, and there should be a greater degree of collaboration between survey organisations.
4. *The Wider Sea.* The seas make an important contribution to the economy and quality of life of the United Kingdom through their contribution to a wide range of human activities. The regulation of many of these activities is determined or influenced by international Conventions and by European Union legislation. The principal conclusions are:
  - there is a need to ensure that international and national policy, legislation and financial incentive measures support, and do not frustrate, the achievement of the strategic goals set for the marine environment;
  - human activity should be managed effectively at the national level to achieve the maintenance, or restoration, of good ecological conditions, and the conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment;
  - a national system of co-ordinated environmental monitoring, together with the monitoring of human activities, should be implemented.

5. *Regional Sea.* Boundaries for a series of UK Regional Seas are proposed, determined initially in terms of biogeography. They provide an appropriate scale at which to map and describe biodiversity and at which to manage human activities within the marine environment. The principal conclusions are:
  - a system of biogeographical Regional Seas should be developed for the north-east Atlantic;
  - these Regional Seas, their boundaries modified as necessary to facilitate human activity management, should be considered as a basis for marine strategic planning and management;
  - consideration should be given to the establishment of fora at the Regional Sea level to improve co-ordination and collaboration in management planning, data collection, survey and research.
  
6. *Marine Landscapes.* The Pilot tested the concept of 'Marine Landscapes' which is based on using geophysical and hydrographical data to identify habitat types in the absence of biological data. If reliable, such an approach would enable management measures for offshore areas to be developed with confidence in the absence of biological data, which is very expensive to obtain in offshore areas. The Pilot successfully applied this approach to the Irish Sea, identifying and mapping 18 coastal and seabed marine landscape types, and 4 water column marine landscape types. The principal conclusions are:
  - the marine landscape approach should be adopted as a key element for marine nature conservation, and utilised in spatial planning and the marine environment;
  - a list of internationally-agreed marine landscapes for the north-east Atlantic should be developed, and work to map these should be undertaken in collaboration with other countries.
  
7. *Nationally-important marine features.* A draft set of criteria for the identification of nationally-important marine landscapes, habitats and species was tested. The principal conclusions are:
  - the criteria, somewhat modified in the light of experience gained in the testing, could be adopted by the UK for the identification of nationally-important marine landscapes, habitats and species;
  - further work should be undertaken to determine which marine nationally-important features would benefit from specific Action Plans, and a unified process (incorporating the work undertaken under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan) should be operated.
  
8. *Nationally-important marine areas.* The Pilot investigated the concept of ecologically-coherent networks of important marine areas as envisaged under the EC Habitats Directive and under OSPAR, tested draft criteria for the identification of important marine areas, and investigated a range of methods to develop a network of areas for the Irish Sea. The principal conclusions are:
  - the identification and appropriate management of an ecologically-coherent network of important marine areas is a crucial element of the framework for marine nature conservation;
  - such a network, using the principles identified in the Report, should be identified at the Regional Sea level. The test criteria, slightly modified, are appropriate for the identification of areas within these Regional Sea networks;
  - appropriate measures should be taken to manage areas within the network, including, for selected examples of the main habitat types, measures which will ensure that the areas develop and sustain the full range of biodiversity characteristic of those habitats.

9. The Pilot also investigated means of identifying and conserving important marine geological and geomorphological areas, an aspect previously little considered in the UK or internationally.
10. *Conservation objectives.* Building on the vision and strategic goals set out in *Safeguarding our Seas* and *Seas of Change*, a generic series of high level conservation objectives and operational conservation objectives applicable to national waters was formulated. The principal conclusions are:
  - the conservation objectives identified should be integrated into a single, unified, set of national strategic goals and objectives for the marine environment and its sustainable development;
  - a process should be established to identify and set appropriate targets for each operational conservation objective which are consistent with the strategic goals and with achieving international and national commitments.
11. *Overarching Measures required.* Mechanisms by which the Regional Sea could be managed to achieve the conservation objectives at the various scales of the proposed framework for marine nature conservation were considered in relation to current measures and legislation. The principal conclusions are:
  - a statutory process of marine spatial planning involving national planning guidelines, strategic plans at the Regional Sea scale, and more detailed local plans should be introduced;
  - additional legislation is needed to ensure that an ecologically-coherent network of nationally-important areas can be established and conserved;
  - the European Commission should clarify the means of achieving the effective regulation of fishing in nationally-important areas, including European marine sites, beyond 6n miles;
  - national legislation should be introduced to control and reduce the killing, injury and disturbance of cetaceans and certain other vulnerable species, as a result of fishing and other activities;
  - fisheries decisions and activities should be brought within the scope of Strategic Environmental Assessment plans and programmes and also within the scope of plans and projects in relevant European Union legislation;
  - adequate conservation measures for non-quota commercial species should be developed at national and European levels. The Community action plan to reduce discarding should be implemented in full.
12. *Enforcement and Governance.* The Pilot reviewed existing enforcement measures and governance systems as they affect marine nature conservation. The principal conclusions are:
  - the responsibility for the enforcement of marine nature conservation should be made explicit;
  - the authority(ies) responsible for enforcing marine nature conservation should have, or have access to, the requisite powers and the necessary vessels and other resources necessary to carry out the enforcement effectively. Effective collaborative and co-ordination arrangements for enforcement agencies operating in the marine environment should be put in place;
  - a Cabinet committee or other cross-departmental authority should be established to take overall responsibility for strategic planning in the marine environment. Departmental and agency responsibilities for the marine environment should aim to achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness.

13. *Marine nature conservation framework and follow-up work.* From the experience gained during the project, the Pilot has revised the proposed Marine Nature Conservation Framework. The attached report provides a specification for applying the framework to other Regional Seas, and identifies further work in relation to the Irish Sea. Finally, the Pilot identified the work needed to develop a national marine strategic and spatial planning system. The principal conclusions are:
  - the revised marine nature conservation framework set out in the report should be adopted for the UK and promoted with other countries in the north-east Atlantic;
  - resources should be sought from relevant national jurisdictions and statutory agencies, and from the European Union, to complete the work to apply the marine nature conservation framework to the Irish Sea, and to develop detailed proposals for a comprehensive marine strategic and spatial planning framework following a trial of initial proposals on the Irish Sea.
14. *International working.* While the foregoing conclusions are intended to apply directly to the United Kingdom, one of the main conclusions of the Pilot was the importance of working closely with international Government partners and stakeholders. This will be crucial in the effective future management of the national seas and adjacent waters.
15. *Other outputs.* This report includes advice from 23 separate commissioned studies. Further reports will be produced including:
  - Communications with stakeholders
  - Data collation and mapping
  - Classification of marine landscapes
  - The identification of nationally-important habitats, species and areas
  - The development of conservation objectives
  - Marine legislation and enforcement
  - Applying spatial planning to the marine environment