

# Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative

## Sound of Mull Pilot Project



## Questions and Answers

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## **1. What is a marine spatial plan?**

It is generally regarded as a strategic plan for managing the marine environment that aims to deliver sustainable development by allocating space and accounting for economic, social and environmental needs. A marine spatial plan uses information on activities, features and resources to make decisions on how to minimise conflicts between interests and negative cumulative effects of activities. It involves identifying and prioritising different locations for various interests and activities. The output can be a plan or series of plans that give recommendations on:

- Areas appropriate for the various activities and areas with development potential and any appropriate management recommendations.
- Areas where developments and activities need managed and any appropriate management recommendations.
- Areas where there should be a presumption against further types of development or use.
- Areas where important assets need protected.

At the moment plans are developed without any legislative support. Their implementation is currently made possible through the adoption of the recommendations by local marine users, organisations and authorities. However, there is potential for certain elements e.g. aquaculture to be incorporated into policy guidance for local authorities and regulating bodies e.g. SEPA, SNH.

## **2. Why do we need marine spatial planning?**

- There is currently no planning system in place for the sea like we have for the land. Developments and activities are regulated and occur on a sectoral basis, which often means little consideration of other users or the cumulative effects of multiple activities on the environment. As development and activities increase there is a need for a more integrated management approach to account for the needs of different stakeholders, manage competing needs for space and to allow us to use our marine environment more sustainably.
- It enables stakeholders to work together to identify suitable areas for development and use, allowing more effective forward planning. It can also be used to identify sites which need protecting or require better management.

## **3. Doesn't SSMEI just duplicate the lessons learned from other areas and projects ?**

Whilst there are examples in the UK and worldwide of marine spatial planning, the emergence of marine spatial plans is still relatively recent and a lot of plans are still in the early phases of implementation. Examples include regional and more localised plans such as:

- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Zoning Plan
- Eastern Scotian Shelf Management Initiative in Nova Scotia
- South East Regional Marine Plan, Australia
- Fijian Local Marine Management Areas;
- Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.
- Proposed Irish Sea Marine Spatial plan
- Lundy and Skomer

Further details of these are available from the Marine Spatial Planning Literature Review produced as part of the Irish Sea Pilot project and available on the SSMEI Sound of Mull website.

The marine spatial plans produced under the SSMEI project aim to provide integrated policies and recommendations for all sectors making these plans wider reaching than some plans that have previously concentrated on a sector or protecting a particular habitat/species of conservation interest or a sector.

The Sound of Mull project will utilise the experience gained from engaging stakeholders to develop management plans from other projects e.g. Argyll Marine SAC Management plans, Coastal Framework Plans in Highland, and the ICZM plans for Loch Fyne and Wester Ross. However, there is also the opportunity for the working group to trial out different mechanisms of management which might be more appropriate to the Sound of Mull.

#### **4. What are the benefits of marine spatial planning for various sectors?**

*Fisheries:* marine spatial planning allows areas important to fisheries to be taken into account at the start of planning new developments such as aquaculture

*Aquaculture:* marine spatial planning can inform industry of potential development sites that do not compromise the activities of other stakeholders resulting in a reduced application timeframe and a greater likelihood of a development going ahead with support from stakeholders.

*Recreation:* marine spatial planning allows the economic and social importance of marine and coastal recreation to be considered.

*Conservation:* to properly manage the impact of activities on marine ecosystems it is necessary to have an overview of all activities occurring in an area and locations of conservation importance so that cumulative impacts can be considered easier. Marine spatial planning allows stakeholders to select the most appropriate areas for development and uses and to identify sites where assets need safeguarding.

## 5. What will be the benefits from the SSMEI Sound of Mull project for locals?

In addition to the benefits outlined in the previous question the Sound of Mull project hopes to bring the following benefits to locals:

- *Those involved in marine activities are given a chance to influence future national and local policy.*

The SSMEI pilots will be followed up and will be looked at closely by the Scottish Executive. The project will help to identify which management techniques work and those that do not work as effectively with particular reference to stakeholder involvement. This will not only influence future policy from the Scottish Executive but also the other bodies that are involved in the project: The Crown Estate, Scottish Natural Heritage, SEPA, and local authorities. It is a great opportunity for the users of the Sound of Mull to contribute to the development of Scotland's overall policy for Integrated Coastal Zone Management and marine spatial planning. Marine spatial planning is also a fundamental component of the proposed Scottish Marine Bill and recommendations from the SSMEI pilots could also feed into this.

The project also allows locals and marine users of the Sound of Mull to have a say in the development of local authority policy in relation to aquaculture and coastal infrastructure development in the area. The policy recommendations in the ICZM Loch Fyne project and Wester Ross project are to be used as guidance for local authority planners and developers on the most suitable locations for the development of aquaculture and coastal infrastructure. There will also be scope in the Sound of Mull plan to provide recommendations to other bodies e.g. SNH, SEPA and the Inshore Fishery Group for the area when it is established. As these representatives from bodies should be part of the working group, it is hoped that any recommendations made could be agreed and taken on board where possible.

- *Identification of development potential*

The environmental capacity study, socio-economic study and working group meetings will provide an opportunity for communities and stakeholders to identify how they would like to see the area develop. The process could also identify what additional support is needed to assist existing activities and further development. The work may also identify projects or areas that would be suitable for further development and investment. This information and the plan could be used as strong justification for funding applications. During the project it may also be possible to access some funding for localised projects of relevance to the plan.

- *Co-operation leads to better understanding between sectors and better understanding of local stakeholder needs by legislative bodies*

By taking part in the working group all the sectors and interests have a chance to work together, to put across their individual point of view and to influence the project. This can

lead to increased understanding and co-operation between sectors and reduce and mitigate any current or future conflicts in the area through the plan.

- *Attention brought to existing good practice*

There may be a number of informal agreements that help differing sea users to co-exist effectively within the area. This project could help identify and increase the awareness of statutory and environmental bodies to these practices.

- *Environmental capacity study*

It is proposed that the capacity study looks at various elements, as described in the Project Brief which will provide information on each sector's potential for development. However, the project officers are keen to get input from the working group on what they feel is required.

- *Socio-economic study*

A socio-economic evaluation of each marine sector will be undertaken as part of this project as described in the Project Brief. This study will highlight the social and economic contributions of the sectors to the local economy and will be of great benefit to sectors whose importance to the area is often undervalued or misrepresented.

## **6. What activities will be considered?**

Any activity occurring in the marine area of the Sound of Mull or land-based activity that has potential to affect the marine and coastal environment.

## **7. How will this impinge on my existing activities?**

The Sound of Mull marine spatial plan is hoped to provide a mechanism to improve co-operation, resolve issues and benefit the groups involved. Therefore, if there are negative interactions between interests in certain areas the plan could look to develop local agreements between parties. The plan will make recommendations and policy guidance for stakeholders and regulatory bodies e.g. SEPA, Scottish Executive, SNH and Local Authorities. For aquaculture and coastal infrastructure, it is anticipated that the policies developed in the plan will become material consideration for planners considering applications.

## **8. Will the project's outputs create added bureaucracy?**

The project does not aim to add any additional layers of bureaucracy that activities or businesses would need to deal with, but instead provide guidance and policy recommendations that can be used by regulators and statutory authorities so that better decisions are made accounting for the needs of all users of the area. For example, for aquaculture any recommendations made regarding more preferred locations for development would be presented to the local authorities for inclusion in material guidance when

considering a planning application. Recommendations that may suggest new or improvements to local management agreements e.g. between two sectors would have to be approved by them first through the working group, before they would be asked to implement them.

### **9. How can communities and business stakeholders contribute to the process?**

One of the fundamental aims of the Sound of Mull project is to show how community involvement can influence the development of a marine spatial plan and the project will involve the community from the start. Communities and businesses will be engaged through two main mechanisms:

- *Sound of Mull Working Group*: This will be made up of around 20-25 relevant representatives of regulators and users of the marine environment and local communities. However, this number is flexible to ensure all relevant interests and both sides of the Sound of Mull are given fair representation.
- *Sound of Mull Liaison Network*: In addition to the working group, community meetings and publicity will be used to establish a wider network of contacts. This list of contacts and community meetings will be used to keep interested parties informed of the project. The wider community will be able to feed into the process through a suitable representative on the working group, at community meetings and/or by contacting the project officers. Individuals are encouraged to contact the officers at any time regarding views and issues in the Sound of Mull relating to the marine and coastal environment.