

Written evidence from Marine Management Organisation (PAE0018)

What is the MMO's latest assessment of the current environmental state of the protected areas in England at sea which might be included in the commitment to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030, across the different protected areas designations?

1. MMO does not undertake environmental assessments of this kind, but we do work closely with the statutory nature conservation bodies (SNCB), which are Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). These organisations provide a package of advice for each marine protected area (MPAs). Natural England lead on advice for MPAs in inshore waters within 12 nautical miles (nm) from the coast. JNCC provide advice for MPAs in offshore waters, between 12nm and the extent of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Advice packages contain information on the conservation status of each feature designated within an MPA, and a conservation objective. Features considered to be in "unfavourable" condition, will need to have management in place to improve or "restore" their conservation status. MMO's role is to ensure that activities that we manage, do not undermine the attainment of conservation objectives of MPAs and sites are assessed on a case by case basis.

What are the existing monitoring methods used to assess environmental condition in the different protected areas designations at sea, what gaps in monitoring and data exist with regards to the '30 by 30' target, and what improvements could be made to monitoring?

2. Environmental monitoring of England's MPA network to determine environmental condition is led by Natural England and JNCC. MMO does undertake monitoring of activity, such as fishing (for example) through vessel monitoring systems (VMS). This activity monitoring can inform pressures on MPA features and be used as a proxy indication on the condition of features. VMS devices are fitted to vessels above 12m in length, and report location and speed (which can indicate whether vessels are engaged in fishing activities). A programme to introduce requirements for vessels less than 12m in length to have trackers (inshore vessel monitoring systems – I-VMS) is currently being managed by the MMO. This will improve coverage and further our understanding of where fishing activities are taking place, in order to better determine pressure and state of MPA features.

What in the MMO’s view are the main factors affecting the environmental state of England’s protected areas at sea, including stressors and positive management practices?

3. The seas in England are subject to a range of pressures and threats from anthropogenic activity and climate change. These are well documented in other reports, such as the recent “state of the environment: the coastal and marine environment” by Environment Agency (2023)¹ and the UK assessment of good environmental status (Defra 2019)². Key stressors include commercial fishing, development, and pollution (including plastics).
4. One of the key stressors in determining environmental state of MPAs is commercial fishing. This is particularly the case where seabed features are exposed to bottom-contacting fishing techniques (such as trawling and dredging). The successful implementation of management of these activities will have a significant impact on the environmental state of MPAs in England.
5. MMO’s role is to manage activities in order to ensure that any risks posed to MPA features are mitigated, or in some cases, compensated for. Activities (such as aggregate dredging and development) require a marine licence and will be subject to a strict process of environmental assessment and determination, using licence conditions to manage risks. The marine licencing process will ensure that MPAs do not degrade as a result of these activities.
6. MMO has byelaw making powers to help manage activities in MPAs that fall outside of the marine licencing process. Successful implementation of these management measures will reduce or minimise stressors and facilitate attainment of Government targets.

Of the delivery tools or mechanisms which the MMO has some involvement in, which do you see to be key mechanisms for contributing to the UK’s ‘30 by 30’ target, and how will this contribution be realised?

7. 40% of England’s marine waters are in MPAs. The key delivery tools in reaching the 30 by 30 target which MMO lead on are through marine licencing and development of bylaws to manage fisheries and other non-licensable activities. MMO is leading a project to assess the impacts of commercial fishing in 40 offshore MPAs and have appropriate management in place by end of 2024. This is being implemented to reach the Government’s target of having 70% of designated features in MPAs to be in favourable condition by 2042 with the remainder in recovering condition. Another project is assessing other non-licensable activities (such as recreation) in inshore MPAs. Successful implementation of these projects – which includes compliance with any resulting regulatory

¹ [State of the environment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

² [Marine Strategy Part One: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

restrictions, will be MMO's key contribution to meeting the 30 by 30 target, and will also contribute to MMO's strategic goal (1) to *Work with partners to restore functioning marine ecosystems introducing increased levels of protection and improvement to our marine environment.*

Beyond the Government and other statutory bodies, who are the key actors that the MMO works with for each type of marine protected area designation, and are there any plans to develop engagement strategies for working with them to deliver '30by30'?

8. MMO works closely with the fishing industry, marine developers, and environmental groups, to inform our decision making. For example we have established stakeholder groups for UK fishing industry representatives, non-UK fishing industry representatives, and environmental groups as part of our work to manage fishing in offshore MPAs. For management of non-licensable activities in inshore MPAs we also work with local groups and interested parties such as the National Trust and they Royal Yachting Association. The different strands of our work in MPAs are underpinned by a communication and engagement plan tailored to the specific stakeholders and issues.