

# The Irish Sea Network

## The Network's 2030 vision for the Irish Sea

- A healthy and resilient Irish Sea, enabled by collaborative, cross-national action; where marine wildlife and blue carbon habitats thrive, supporting multiple environmental, social and economic benefits.

The Irish Sea Network is an innovative new partnership comprising of conservation organisations surrounding the Irish Sea that have come together to improve our collective impact for nature. Established in September 2020, through funding provided by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the John Ellerman Foundation, the Network's membership includes representatives from: Manx Wildlife Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust, the North West Wildlife Trusts, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Sustainable Water Network (Ireland), The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales and Ulster Wildlife.

Responding to the urgent need for greater cross-national collaboration and knowledge sharing, the Network's aim is to improve understanding of marine conservation activities and pressures across the Irish Sea, and to provide a forum for communication, co-operation and greater advocacy for better management of the Irish Sea. This document has been formed from the evidence base set out in The Irish Sea Network's review of the current state of the Irish Sea.

EMILY BAXTER

The Irish Sea Network members:



Manx  
Wildlife Trust  
Treisht Bea-Feie  
Vannin



Ymddiriedolaeth Natur  
Gogledd Cymru  
North Wales  
Wildlife Trust



North West  
Wildlife Trusts



Scottish  
Wildlife  
Trust



Esmée  
Fairbairn  
FOUNDATION

John Ellerman  
Foundation



Sustainable Water Network  
SWAN



Ymddiriedolaeth Natur  
De a Gorllewin Cymru  
Wildlife Trust of  
South & West Wales



Ulster  
Wildlife

Funding partners:

Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future

## Summary: The Irish Sea Network's joint position statements

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### ■ Marine planning

The Irish Sea Network believes that strategic and effective regional marine spatial planning that takes an ecosystem-based approach with cross-national collaboration, would reduce the impact upon, and enhance, sensitive wildlife habitats and carbon stores, caused by multi-sectoral pressures.

### ■ Marine Protected Areas

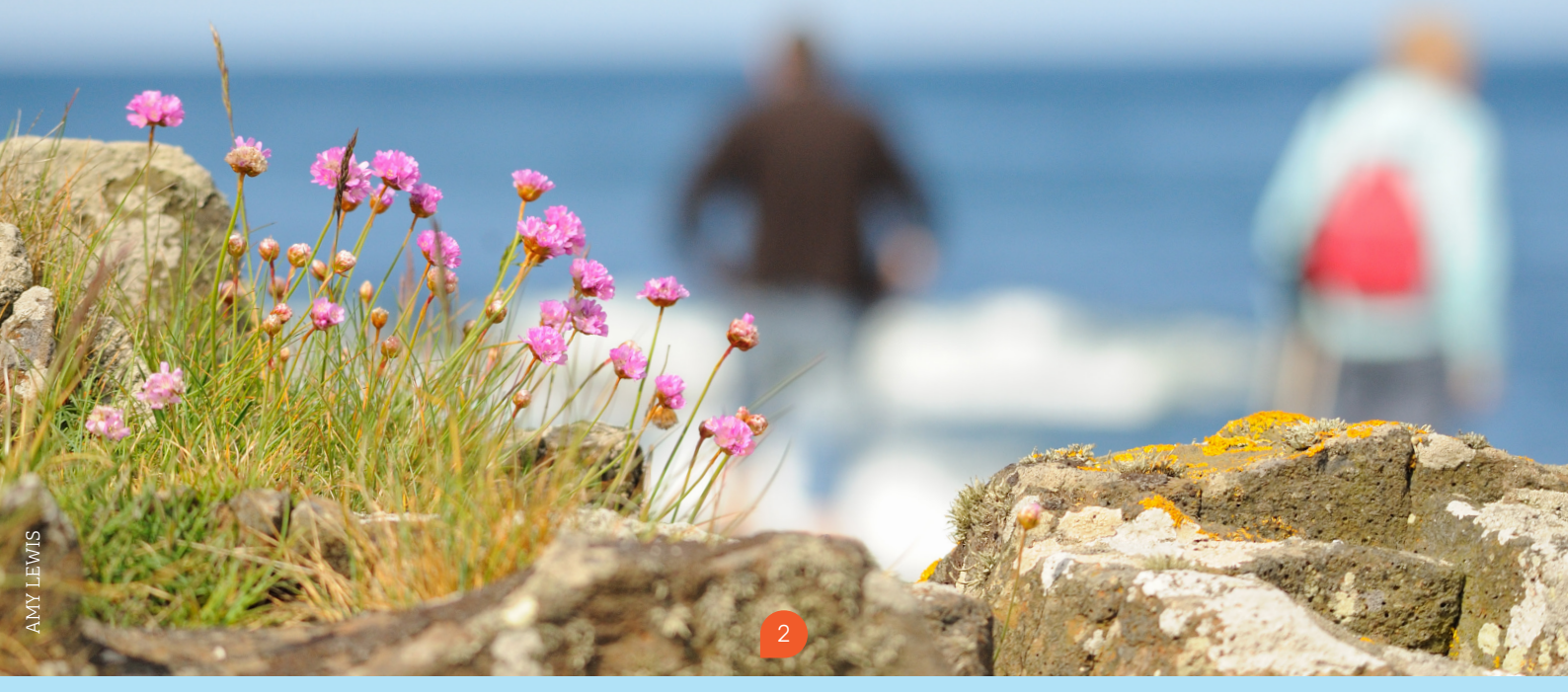
The Irish Sea Network considers the completion of a well-managed and ecologically-coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) across the Irish Sea as critical to the protection and restoration of the marine environment.

### ■ Sustainable fisheries

Sustainable fisheries have the potential to benefit fishing communities, wider society and marine life. The Irish Sea Network, in partnership with the fishing industry, communities and decision-makers, will work towards securing sustainable fisheries.

### ■ Nature-based solutions

The Irish Sea Network recognises that nature-based solutions are vital in addressing the challenges facing society, particularly the impacts of climate change, amongst others including coastal erosion, storm surges and flooding. The Network believes that working with nature can deliver benefits for people and biodiversity.



# The Irish Sea Network's joint position statements

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## ■ Marine planning

The Irish Sea Network believes that strategic and effective regional marine spatial planning that takes an ecosystem-based approach with cross-national collaboration, would reduce the impact upon, and enhance, sensitive wildlife habitats and carbon stores, caused by multi-sectoral pressures. The Network believes that effective marine management should:

### ■ Take an ecosystem-based approach to marine management and planning, prioritising space for nature's recovery

Achieving or maintaining Good Environmental Status of the marine environment should take priority in order to ensure its protection and to prevent further deterioration. In the absence of sufficient data relevant to the Irish Sea, all human activities must adhere to the precautionary principle.

### ■ Take strategic action to minimise the impact on the environment

Developments at sea should be nature positive, taking a strategic and coordinated approach to reduce their environmental impacts at a project level as well as cumulatively across the ecosystems.

### ■ Ensure that renewable energy development uses the most appropriate technology, in the most appropriate location

Marine renewable energy developments should be nature positive, specified at project inception, and used in conjunction with other technologies and actions (e.g. other decarbonisation efforts and behaviour changes) to achieve Net Zero Targets.

### ■ Consider cumulative and in-combination effects at an Irish Sea scale

The volume of current and emerging pressures presents a significant risk to mobile species, key wildlife habitats, and blue carbon stores in the Irish Sea. Cumulative impact assessments should be undertaken and spatially explicit, ecosystem-based Marine Spatial Planning should be used as a tool to support this.

### ■ Promote transnational communication and cooperation

Using and improving existing mechanisms to work transnationally to communicate and work collaboratively on the management of the Irish Sea as a whole. Statutory and non-statutory fora provide an important platform for cross-national co-operation that should be employed more widely.

### ■ Marine Protected Areas

The Irish Sea Network considers the completion of a well-managed and ecologically-coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) across the Irish Sea as critical to the protection and restoration of the marine environment. The Irish Sea Network believes that:

- **A minimum of 30% of the Irish Sea should be effectively designated and managed for nature's recovery by 2030**  
Actions taken within territorial seas should ensure that this target is achieved at a regional sea level with input from all nations. This target cannot be met by the process of designation alone. Effective condition monitoring and management plans must be implemented as a matter of urgency in order to inform progress against the target.
- **Effective management measures need to be implemented throughout all existing and future MPAs within the Irish Sea**  
The effective management of existing offshore sites should be prioritised. Damaging activities (relative to the designated features) should be acknowledged as incompatible with MPAs. It should be recognised that MPAs without appropriate management do not achieve the ecological or social objectives of protection.
- **The MPA network in the Irish Sea should include areas that are fully protected from extractive, destructive and depositional uses**  
Fully protected areas<sup>1</sup>, in the form of Highly Protected Marine Areas<sup>2</sup> or other designations, should be used to achieve biodiversity, climate and social objectives. A whole site approach should be taken when implementing fully protected areas. Areas containing the most regionally important, rare or threatened species, habitats, or foraging areas, should be prioritised.
- **Strategic monitoring programmes and collaborative research must be used to inform baselines and assess the effectiveness of management measures**  
Survey and monitoring programmes that improve knowledge and data sharing across governments, institutions and industry will underpin efforts to establish the effectiveness of MPA management. The delivery of cross-national projects and species-specific collaborative conservation efforts should be prioritised.
- **The design and designation of new MPAs in the Irish Sea should strengthen, complement and fill gaps in the current network for maximum impact**  
Where gaps remain in the MPA network (e.g. for marine species and seabirds) or new designations are put forward, co-ordination between nations will help to add value by increasing the size and improving connectivity and representativity of existing designated areas.

<sup>1</sup> Definition from MPA Guide: <https://mpa-guide.protectedplanet.net/>

<sup>2</sup> Benyon Review into Highly Protected Marine Areas, Final Report, June 2020

### ■ Sustainable fisheries

Sustainable fisheries have the potential to benefit fishing communities, wider society and marine life. The Irish Sea Network, in partnership with the fishing industry, communities and decision-makers, will work towards securing sustainable fisheries that:

#### ■ Take an ecosystem-based approach, placing the recovery of the marine environment at the core of decision making

Ecosystem-based fisheries management and marine conservation need integrating to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem function. Assessing the impacts of fishing activities and making decisions on fisheries management must get conducted at an Irish Sea ecosystem level.

#### ■ Recognise the importance of Marine Protected Areas to maintaining fish populations

Effective Marine Protected Area management will require restrictions on damaging fishing methods that prevent sites from achieving their conservation objectives. Effective management will also have long-term benefits for fisheries and the wider marine environment.

#### ■ Adhere to the best-available scientific evidence and use best-available technology

Leading regional, national and international fisheries management advice in conjunction with local stakeholder input will inform good decision-making. Commitments are required to allocate funding to support collaborative fisheries research and technological innovations to reduce bycatch and damage to habitats and ecosystems.

#### ■ Demonstrate full accountability for fishing taking place in the Irish Sea

The mandatory use of Remote Electronic Monitoring and iVMS for all vessels operating in the Irish Sea will improve the data, information and knowledge available to help make better enforcement and management decisions for the Irish Sea.

#### ■ Contribute to addressing the biodiversity and climate crises

Transparent and objective criteria should be used to allocate fishing opportunities and quota to fishing practices that: are least damaging to vital wildlife and blue carbon habitats; reduce fleet carbon emissions; and deliver the greatest social benefits, e.g. local-small scale coastal fishing fleets using selective practices. Fleet capacity should be managed to ensure that the maximum effort of all fishing is set within ecological limits.

#### ■ Ensure co-operation between nations in the Irish Sea

Cross-national collaboration among all six nations of the Irish Sea will support the development and delivery of multi-jurisdictional fisheries management plans. These should have clear timebound objectives to recover and maintain healthy fish populations.



### ■ Nature-based solutions

The Irish Sea Network recognises that nature-based solutions are vital in addressing the challenges facing society, particularly the impacts of climate change, amongst others including coastal erosion, storm surges and flooding. The Network believes that working with nature can deliver benefits for people and biodiversity.

### ■ Identify, protect and restore important blue carbon habitats within the Irish Sea to increase carbon sequestration and biodiversity

Important blue carbon sinks and sources should be identified within and beyond the MPA network to avoid the loss of previously sequestered carbon and to protect and restore vital blue carbon habitats. Focus should be placed on reducing activities that threaten blue carbon stores through physical disturbance and coastal land management.

### ■ Identify and invest in opportunities to develop nature-based solutions

Adaptation should take place alongside mitigation, embedding nature-based solutions to deal with the climate crisis. Focus should be placed on managed coastal realignment and restoration of key habitats including saltmarsh, seagrass, sand dunes, shellfish beds, and coastal wetland.

### ■ Design, implement, manage and monitor nature-based solutions for current and future generations, with societal engagement at the core

Raise awareness and champion the shared benefits of environmental restoration by working collaboratively with industry, authorities, local communities, and sea users locally, regionally, and across nations in the Irish Sea.

### ■ Embed nature-based solutions within climate adaptation to tackle the climate crisis

Nature-based solutions, natural capital and ecosystem services should be incorporated as core components of marine planning decisions and management strategies, sector plans, and policies, including how nations will adapt to deal with the climate crisis at an Irish Sea scale. Government incentives, legal frameworks and financial commitments to implement resilient nature-based solutions are required across all nations, with practical action taken to lower the risk that climate change poses to our environment and communities.