



Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action

8 March 2022

Introduction

The State has undergone the most comprehensive review and overhaul of marine legislation and governance since its formation. The two primary pillars of this reform are the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) which was launched by the Taoiseach on 01 July 2021 and the Maritime Area Planning Act which was passed by these Houses and subsequently promulgated by the President on 23 December 2021.

The NMPF is the long-term forward plan for Ireland's Maritime Area to ensure the effective management of marine activities and more sustainable use of our marine resources and to support the introduction of Offshore Renewable Energy into our Maritime Area.

The Maritime Area Planning Act will be the cornerstone of the new marine planning system in Ireland and brings together and creates the legal foundation for forward planning and streamlined development management and enforcement. All future offshore renewable energy applications will be consented through this Act.

The Act will also establish a new Agency, the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority, or MARA, whose role it will be to govern the occupation of the Maritime Area.

With these initiatives, and guided by the National Marine Planning Framework, our marine planning system will move towards being a plan-led process rather



than the developer-led system it currently is. The NMPF itself is a parallel document to the National Planning Framework (NPF). Both of these spatial plans are concerned with the long-term future of our land and sea area, identifying opportunities for protection, growth and development so that our land and marine areas can be managed in the best interests of the Public.

The NPF recognises the importance of integration and co-ordination with the land planning regime at national, regional and local levels. In future it will be equally important in turn that national, regional and local terrestrial plans are consistent with the NMPF – and they will be required to do so under the MAP Act.

The Act also provides for Designated Maritime Area Plans – that is a management plan for a localised area of our Sea - to be developed and any Minister or relevant Public body can bring forward a DMAP proposal for a geographic area or sector which will be subject to public participation, environmental assessment and Oireachtas decision. Once approved, the DMAP becomes part of the NMPF. This ensures a joined-up approach to marine forward planning with binding considerations for decision makers. I fully expect that the enduring ORE system will be led and supported by DMAPs and manoeuvre the system away from developer-led and towards State-led.

That concludes my statement, I thank the Committee Members for their interest and am happy to answer your questions.

Conor McCabe

Principal, Marine Planning Policy and Legislation