

This O.S was updated on 6/4 to include Marie & Tracey's name in the introduction

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage,

Opening Statement to the Joint Committee

National Marine Planning Framework

06 April 2021

Good morning everyone. Thank you for inviting the Department to meet with the Committee to discuss the National Marine Planning Framework. My name is Conor McCabe and I am the Principal in the Department's Marine Planning Policy and Legislation Unit. I am accompanied today, by other members of the Marine Planning team and also through video link: Tom Woolley, Marine Planning Advisor; Juliet Fitzpatrick, Assistant Principal; Martin O'Meara, Assistant Principal; Marie Duffin, Administrative Officer; and, Tracey O'Connor, Executive Officer.

Also joining us is Anne-Marie Clancy from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications; and, Caitriona Nic Aonghusa from the Marine Institute.

Overview

There has been a cross-Government programme over the last three and a half years to develop a Marine Spatial Plan for the State – what we call the National Marine Planning Framework, the NMPP.

The development of an overarching national marine spatial plan was first identified as a Government policy objective in Ireland's Integrated Marine Plan, Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth (HOOW). This plan identified that the organisation, regulation and protection of

marine-based activity in Irish waters was being carried out on a sectoral and demand-driven basis, without a strategic framework.

Marine spatial planning is also underpinned by EU legislation. The 2014 MSP Directive established an EU-wide framework for marine spatial planning and defined it as “a process by which the relevant Member State’s authorities analyse and organise human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives”. The Directive was transposed under EU Regulations into the 2018 Planning and Development Act and the NMPF now has the same legislative footing as the National Planning Framework.

It is our belief that marine plans should be strategic as well as instructional and informed by effective public and stakeholder participation. Therefore, a core objective has been to ensure that, as well as the wider public, all relevant stakeholders are consulted and encouraged to contribute.

This dialogue has been and will continue to be, facilitated in a number of ways. An Interdepartmental Group was established to aid the development of the plan - this is chaired by my Department and is made up of senior representatives from relevant Government Departments and agencies.

We have an Advisory Group, chaired by Minister Peter Burke, made up of key stakeholders from the economic, environmental and social pillars and we also have a parallel process of stakeholder engagement with a strong focus on coastal communities and unaligned stakeholders. This strand has been and remains critically important.

Public consultation on the NMPF began in 2018, beginning a lengthy process, during which the Marine Planning Policy and Legislation team attended at a large number of national and

international Marine Spatial Planning events, numbering over 150 in total. Over the course of the last 3 years, we have met with a wide variety of Marine stakeholders, including our European MSP counterparts, our UK neighbours, our Fisheries community, our regional Port authorities, Marine social scientists, Marine safety experts such as the Commissioners for Irish Lights, our Defence Forces who have responsibility for Sea Fisheries Protection, Aquaculture representatives, Environmental groups and Marine Industry representatives, particularly those involved in Offshore Renewable Energy and Electricity generation. Our record of attended events show that during these engagements, we visited 24 of 26 counties in Ireland during this period. A public consultation on the Baseline Report was open for three months from September to December 2018; during this time, 5 further regional events were held to launch the Baseline Report and promote awareness of the opportunity for public participation in the process. The output from this consultation informed the development of the draft NMPF.

We published the draft NMPF and launched a Public consultation on it in November 2019, with 7 coastal regional public meetings taking place between November 2019 and March 2020, we then moved the consultation online to react to public health guidelines relating to Covid-19. As outlined previously to this committee, we focused on coastal locations in order to maximise engagement opportunities for those citizens and stakeholders most impacted by the NMPF. Throughout the process, the Department endeavoured to promote awareness and understanding of the NMPF, and encouraged public participation in the planning process.

I am satisfied that the finalised NMPF will be fully informed by these consultations and can truly call itself a citizen-driven plan.

The Programme for Government accords an important priority to finalising the NMPF. The NMPF will set out Government's vision for all primary human activities in the maritime area and is informed by existing and emerging Government policies for those areas and will be the primary decision-making tool for those charged with making decisions on development applications for all marine activities. Policy and plan makers will also be obliged to meet the objectives of the Framework thus creating a joined-up approach to policies that to date have often been developed linearly.

If it suits the Chair my team and I can address implementation and governance arrangements, during today's session rather than in this opening statement.

Conclusion

The NMPF will ensure that there is a better planned and better managed maritime area, with a coordinated, inclusive and coherent approach to decision-making and governance, including the long-term vision for proper management, enforcement and environmental protection of our seas.

That concludes my statement on the National Marine Planning Framework. I thank the Committee Members for their interest and we are happy to answer your questions.