



Marine Plan for Northern Ireland - Sustainability Appraisal

Volume 1: Non-technical Summary of Sustainability Appraisal

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1 Introduction

This report provides a summary of the results of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland (the Marine Plan). The Marine Plan Authority¹ has prepared the Marine Plan and has appointed AECOM and ABPmer to complete the SA, which is required by legislation.

The SA considers the potential social, economic and environmental effects of the Marine Plan, and incorporates a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The SA has been undertaken in tandem with the preparation of the Marine Plan in order that the Marine Plan is informed by relevant environmental and socio-economic information. The SA provides an opportunity for the public to consider relevant social, economic and environmental information and use it to inform their views on the Marine Plan.

2 The Northern Ireland Marine Plan

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 require the Marine Plan Authority, to prepare Marine Plans for the better management of the Northern Ireland marine area, which will facilitate its sustainable development. The Marine Plan consists of two plans in one document; one for the inshore region and one for the offshore region which together form the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland. A map of the Northern Ireland marine area is shown on Figure 1 below.

Northern Ireland's Vision for the marine area is for *"A healthy marine area which is managed sustainably for the economic, environmental and social prosperity of present and future generations"*. The Marine Plan reflects the unique character of the Northern Ireland marine area and the needs of its users. It will ensure that decisions taken in relation to the marine area, contribute to the delivery of national and regional policy objectives. It is a living document that will continue to evolve as the effectiveness of its policies are monitored and reviewed and the evidence base develops.

The Marine Plan presents policies that reflect, clarify and signpost current policy measures and practices from the UK Marine Policy Statement (UK MPS) and across Northern Ireland and UK Government Departments. The Marine Plan and the NI Marine Mapviewer:

¹ Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

- Promote sustainable development of the Northern Ireland marine area by supporting key activities and uses;
- Apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development in decision making, in line with the UK MPS;
- Promote the co-existence of multiple use of the Northern Ireland marine area, in line with the UK MPS;
- Advocate an ecosystem-based approach to decision making, in line with the UK MPS;
- Guide and inform proposers and public authorities about the most suitable locations for different activities and uses by providing information on the current uses, activities, resources, constraints and designations in the marine area;
- Provide a single reference source for public authorities, marine users and stakeholders;
- Provide greater clarity over the range of policies and legislation that relate to the Northern Ireland marine area using language that is clear and accessible to a wide audience; and,
- Promote a holistic approach to decision making that considers all of the benefits and impacts of the current and future uses and activities in the Northern Ireland marine area.

Marine planning sits alongside and interacts with the existing terrestrial planning regime. In the development of the Marine Plan, the Marine Planning Authority had regard to the Regional Development Strategy, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement and Planning Policy Statements, to ensure the two regimes complement each other.

The Marine Plan Authority, in consultation with other Departments and those with an interest in the marine area, developed eight integrated and crosscutting objectives for the Marine Plan, reflecting the full range of the UK's High Level Marine Objectives. The Marine Plan objectives are set out below:

Objective 1: To promote the sustainable development of productive activities, which support employment at all skill levels while fully considering the requirements of other marine interests.

- Objective 2:** To help realise the potential of energy resources and energy storage within the marine area, while fully considering the requirements of other marine interests.
- Objective 3:** To promote the development of vibrant, accessible and sustainable coastal communities.
- Objective 4:** To promote the marine resource, its recreational value and its wider economic, environmental and social benefits to all.
- Objective 5:** To promote the preservation and enjoyment of marine related heritage assets.
- Objective 6:** To promote a healthy, resilient and adaptable marine ecosystem and ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas.
- Objective 7:** To contribute towards climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.
- Objective 8:** To continue to develop a sound marine evidence base in a co-ordinated manner, to increase understanding and to support the development, monitoring and review of marine plans.

The Marine Plan contains two categories of policies:

- **Core Policies** that cover the general issues to be considered by public authorities, on all proposals; and,
- **Key Activity Policies** that support or safeguard a particular activity without undue impact on the marine area, its ecosystem services and the users that rely on them.

All the policies in the Marine Plan will contribute in some way to meeting all of the Objectives and to achieving the Vision.

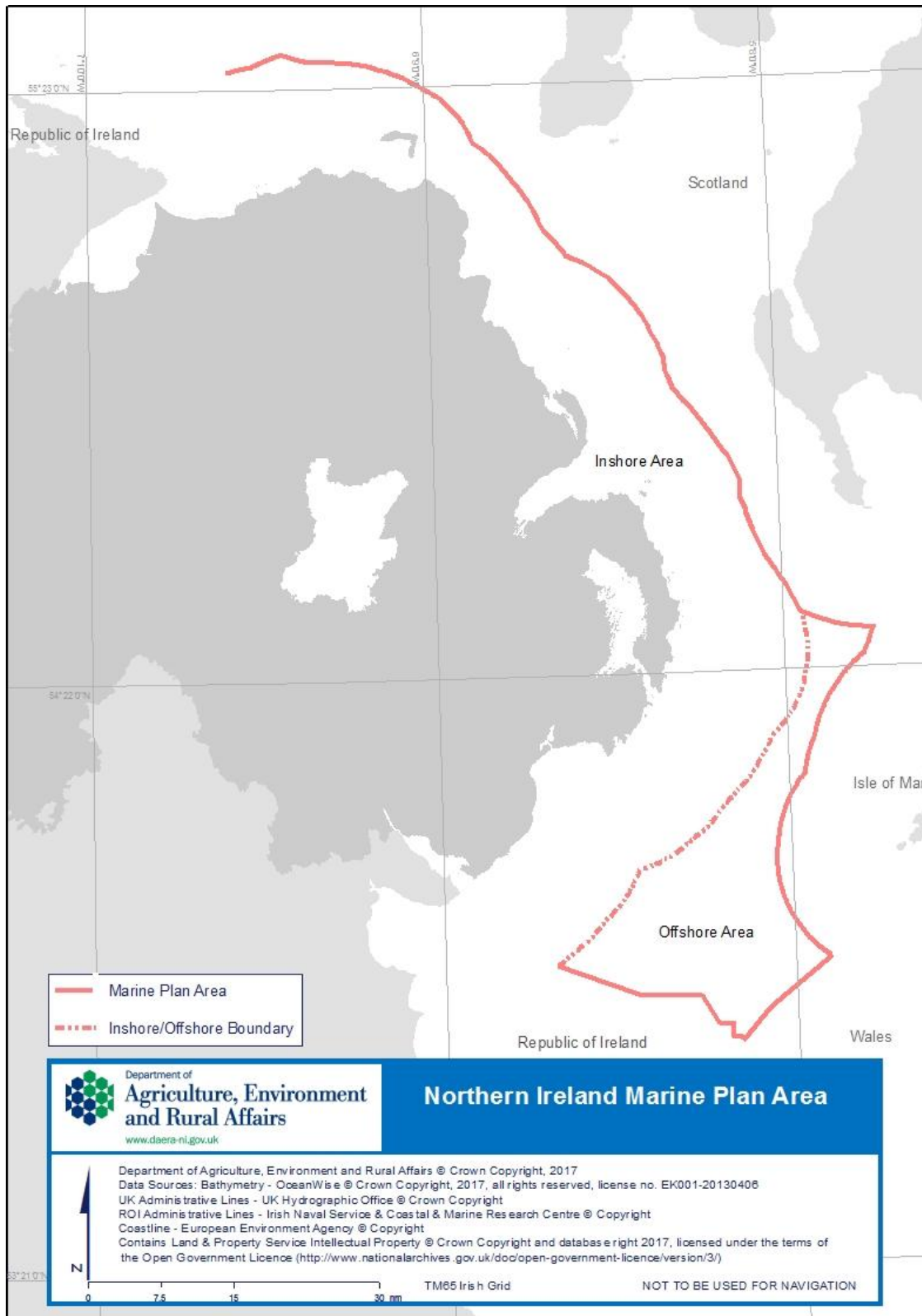
Core Policies

- Stakeholder Engagement
- Air Quality
- Climate Change
- Coastal Processes
- Co-Existence
- Cumulative Impacts
- Heritage Assets
- Invasive Alien Species
- Land and Sea Interaction
- Marine Litter
- Marine Noise
- Natural Heritage
- Seascape
- Use of Evidence
- Water Quality

Key Activity Policies

- Aquaculture
- Carbon Capture and Storage
- Commercial Fishing
- Defence and National Security
- Dredging
- Energy
- Marine Aggregates
- Ports, Harbours and Shipping
- Telecommunications Cabling
- Tourism and Recreation

Figure 1: Northern Ireland Marine Plan Area ²



² The Northern Ireland marine area comprises both an inshore and an offshore region. The marine area comprises all marine waters including sea bed, subsoil, sea loughs and tidal rivers so far as the tide flows at Mean High Water Spring Tide. The inshore region extends from the Mean High Water Spring Tide mark out to, at most, 12 nautical miles (nm) and includes tidal rivers and sea loughs. The offshore region is the area that extends south-eastwardly from the 12nm territorial limit to the outer boundary of the Northern Ireland marine area. The Northern Ireland marine area abuts the marine areas of Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.

3 Plan Alternatives Considered

Initial consideration was given to developing a Marine Plan or not developing a Marine Plan. As a Marine Plan is required by legislation the do nothing option was discounted as an unreasonable alternative.

In developing the Marine Plan, the Marine Plan Authority engaged with the relevant departments to assist in determining which of two options should be developed. These are:

- A strategic level plan; or,
- A detailed zoning plan.

During ongoing engagement on the development of the Marine Plan at this time, the majority of stakeholders favoured a strategic level plan. This approach was viewed as the optimum route to help ensure the sustainable development of the marine area. It would be flexible enough to incorporate specific spatial elements where they are known such as renewable energy zones and designated areas.

Early engagement had also indicated that there were two main directions that stakeholders thought the Marine Plan could take and this was confirmed at a stakeholder engagement event in November 2013. These included:

- Providing additional determining weight to economic considerations, where appropriate; and,
- Providing additional determining weight to environmental considerations, where appropriate.

Following consideration of each direction, it was concluded that the best method for contributing to the sustainable development of the marine area would be a balanced consideration of the economic, environmental and social aspects of the decision making process.

It was deemed reasonable to develop a strategic plan with spatial elements included and where appropriate, to guide the users of the Marine Plan to apply a balanced approach in considering the relative weight of any economic, environmental or social considerations in the exercise of their functions.

4 Approach to the Sustainability Appraisal

4.1 Main Stages and Tasks

A SA is required under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The environmental component is also required under the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive/Regulations³. The main stages and tasks followed in completing the SA are set out in Table 1 below. All stages up to and including the publication of this report have been completed.

³ The process of SEA was introduced under the European Directive 2001/42/EC 'the assessment of certain plans and programmes on the environment', commonly referred to as the 'SEA Directive'. The SEA Directive was transposed into domestic law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 (S.R. 280/2004). The objectives of the SEA Directive, as set out in Article 1, are "to provide a high level of protection to the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development".

Table 1: SA Stages and Tasks

SA Stages	Description of main tasks
Setting the Context, Establishing the Baseline and Deciding the Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Identification of spatial and temporal scope of assessment. · Collection and summary of baseline data. · Identification of key environmental, social and economic issues/problems. · Identification of relevant plans, programmes and their associated environmental, social and economic protection objectives to characterise the existing legislative and policy environment. · Development of a method for assessing potential environmental, social and economic effects. · Consultation with statutory authorities with environmental, social and economic responsibilities on scope of SA and transboundary consultations with bordering countries and devolved administrations. · Assessment by the Marine Plan Authority of the strategic alternatives which are available at this stage of the Marine Plan development process.
Assessing Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Identification of the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the Marine Plan. · Use significance criteria to evaluate the predicted effects (positive, negative, cumulative and transboundary). · Outlining the potential measures to mitigate environmental, social and economic effects. · Proposal of measures to monitor the environmental, social and economic effects throughout the implementation of the Marine Plan.
Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Preparation of the SA Report, presenting the findings of the SA of the Marine Plan; and, · Preparation of a Non-Technical Summary of the results of the SA.
Consultation and Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Publish SA Report with draft Marine Plan for consultation. · Consultation with the public, community groups, authorities with marine responsibilities and/or interests. Transboundary consultation. · Incorporate comments received from consultation and findings of the SA into development of the Marine Plan. · Issue a statement on how the findings of the SA and responses from consultation were incorporated into the Marine Plan.
Monitoring Implementation of the Marine Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop aims and methods for monitoring the Marine Plan's implementation; and, · Respond to adverse effects.

4.2 Scope of the SA and Baseline Information

The SA Scoping Report was published in August 2014. The SA Scoping Report set out the main objectives and deliverables of the SA, the approach to the assessment, the SA topics

that were to be covered in the assessment, the baseline data sources proposed and the consultation approach. The Scoping Consultation Report was produced in October 2014⁴.

The scope of the SA covers environmental, social and economic issues. As shown on Table 2 below there is considerable overlap between environmental, social and economic issues. For the purpose of this assessment environmental issues are represented by the SEA Directive topics, social issues are represented under socio-demographics, and economic issues are represented under socio-demographics, uses and activities and material assets.

For each of the SA topics baseline data was summarised in the SA Report. The baseline summary also includes a statement on key issues, problems and trends for each SA topic.

⁴ The Marine Plan SA Scoping Report and Summary of Responses can be found at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/marine-plan-scoping-and-scoping-consultation-reports>

Table 2: SA Topics Covered in this Assessment and Alignment with SEA Directive Topics

SEA Directive and SA Topics	Topic covered in this SA
Biodiversity, flora and fauna*	Biodiversity, flora and fauna
Water*	Water and Soils
Soil*	Water and Soils
Air*	Air Quality
Climate Factors*	Climate Factors
Human Health*	Socio-Demographics
Population*	Socio-Demographics
Economic Interests	Uses and Activities, Material Assets, Socio-Demographics
Material Assets*	Material Assets
Cultural Heritage*	Cultural Heritage
Landscape*	Landscape and Seascape

*SEA Directive Topic

5 Results of Sustainability Appraisal

A stepped approach has been used to assess the effects of the Marine Plan, consisting of:

- An individual assessment of the Core and Key Activity policies contained in the Marine Plan;
- An assessment of all screened-in policies in-combination for each SA topic;
- An ecosystems services assessment of all screened-in policies; and,
- A statement on cumulative and transboundary effects.

The conclusions of each stage is summarised below.

5.1 Individual Policy Assessment

The assessment of the core and key activity policies followed a two stage approach, as follows:

Stage 1: A screening review was undertaken of all Marine Plan policies against existing policy to identify which of the policies would augment or change existing policy. Policies considered to augment or change existing policy were taken forward for further assessment. Policies that fully reflect existing policy, and would therefore not result in changes to baseline conditions, were not subject to further assessment. The results are shown in Table 3 below.

Stage 2: Each policy screened-in was subject to assessment against all of the SA topics (as set out in Table 2 above). For each policy the following were addressed:

- i. What is the potential effect of the policy subject area on the SA topic/subtopic?
- ii. What does the policy do in addition to existing policy provision/commitments?
- iii. What is the resulting effect of the change in existing policy on the SA topic/subtopic?
- iv. What is the likely effect on the baseline conditions of the SA topic/subtopic and why?

The results of Stage 2 of the individual policy assessment are shown in Table 4 below. For all assessed policies the results are either that no effect will occur, typically because the subject the policy covers will not have an influence on baseline conditions (e.g. marine litter does not influence the baseline conditions of local air quality) or that the effect will be negligible. Negligible effects are where the change in baseline conditions will be indiscernible from other influences such as other policies or legislation, economic conditions or natural changes.

Several SA topics consist of numerous subtopics and more than one assessment score has been assigned where relevant e.g. the aquaculture policy is predicted to have negligible effects on all uses and activities with the exception of the subtopic aviation where no effect will occur.

Table 3: Summary Review of Individual Plan Policies against Existing Policy

Plan Policy	Outcome of review
Presumption in favour of sustainable development	No change
Stakeholder Engagement	Minor
Air Quality	No change
Climate Change	No change
Climate Change <i>Climate Change Mitigation</i>	No change
Climate Change <i>Climate Change Adaptation</i>	No change
Coastal Processes	No change
Coastal Processes <i>Resilience to Coastal Processes</i>	No change
Co-existence	Minor
Cumulative Impacts	No change
Natural Heritage <i>International and National Designated Sites and Protected Species</i>	No change
Natural Heritage <i>Other Habitats, Species or Features of Importance</i>	No change
Heritage Assets	No change
Heritage Assets <i>Designated Heritage Assets</i>	No change
Heritage Assets <i>Undesignated Heritage Assets</i>	No change
Invasive Alien Species	Minor
Land and Sea Interaction	Minor
Marine Litter	Minor
Marine Noise	Minor
Seascape	Minor
Use of Evidence	Minor
Water Quality	No change
Aquaculture	Minor
Commercial Fishing	Minor
Defence and National Security	No change
Dredging	Minor
Energy	No change
Marine Aggregates	No change
Ports, Harbours and Shipping <i>Proposals with the potential to impact on navigational safety</i>	No change
Ports, Harbours and Shipping <i>Proposals with the potential to impact on shipping</i>	Minor
Ports, Harbours and Shipping <i>Ports and Harbours</i>	No change
Telecommunications Cabling	Minor
Tourism and Recreation	No change

Table 4: Summary of Assessment of Screened-in Policies (for all other Marine Plan policies there would be no effect as determined in Stage 1)

Plan Policy	Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	Water and Soils	Air Quality	Climate Factors	Socio-Demographics	Uses and Activities	Material Assets	Cultural Heritage	Landscape and Seascape
Stakeholder Engagement	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Co-existence	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	No effect	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Invasive Alien Species	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	No effect	No effect	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible	No effect	No effect
Land and Sea Interaction	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Marine Litter	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	No effect	No effect	No effect	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Marine Noise	Negligible	No effect	No effect	No effect	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible	No effect	Negligible
Seascape	Negligible	Negligible	No effect	No effect	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Use of Evidence	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Aquaculture	Negligible	Negligible	No effect	No effect	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Commercial Fishing	Negligible	Negligible	No effect	No effect	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible	No effect	No effect
Dredging	Negligible	Negligible	No effect	Negligible	No effect	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible	No effect
Ports, Harbours and Shipping	Negligible	Negligible	No effect	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible/ No effect	No effect	No effect
Telecommunications Cabling	Negligible	Negligible	No effect	No effect	Negligible	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible/ No effect	Negligible	Negligible

5.2 In Combination Policy Assessment

Based on the results of the individual policy assessments the overall effect of all the screened-in policies, in-combination, was assessed.

For all SA topics the overall effect of the Marine Plan is predicted to be negligible. Policies in the Marine Plan reflect existing commitments and decision making processes. Policies also require that proposals avoid, minimise and/or mitigate potential adverse impacts.

For many of the policy areas (such as subsea telecommunication cables), having a policy (including any specific provisions) presented in a written form for the first time may help to ensure that due consideration is given to the SA topics, in the concept, planning and design of proposals and in decision making processes. This may help prevent or reduce any potential adverse impacts and for some uses and activities and material assets provide opportunities for synergies.

The policies also clarify the evidence requirements of decision making processes. This may lead to more effective and efficient decision making, thus reducing the risk of uncertainty and increasing the potential for a positive outcome.

Key activity policies that include additional spatial guidance/direction will also help limit any potential adverse impacts.

In addition, the Marine Mapviewer presents for the first time marine related data, covering a wide range of topics, uses and activities in a publicly accessible web-based form for the Northern Ireland marine area. This will improve access to up-to-date evidence and may improve the concept, planning and design of proposals and decision making processes.

5.3 Ecosystem Services Assessment

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) has developed a framework for considering marine ecosystem services. The framework has been used to carry out a high level assessment of the impact of the Marine Plan policies on the benefits that humans derive from marine ecosystem services.

The assessment identifies likely changes in the levels of marine ecosystem services specifically associated with the implementation of the Marine Plan compared to the baseline of not having a plan. As the Marine Plan will reinforce existing policies (which would continue in the absence of a Marine Plan), the impacts on the level of marine ecosystem services relative to the baseline are considered to be negligible.

5.4 Cumulative and Transboundary Effects

Cumulative effects are those effects that could occur as a result of the Marine Plan together with the effects of other plans or programmes. The Marine Plan supports, complements, or otherwise takes into account of a wide range of existing plans, policies and strategies. The Marine Plan will therefore not result in any cumulative effects.

Transboundary effects are effects that could occur in other jurisdictions as a result of the Marine Plan. The Northern Ireland marine area abuts the marine areas of Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland. As the effects within the Marine Plan area are predicted to be negligible, the effects on other jurisdictions are also predicted to be negligible.

5.5 Mitigation of Effects

The Marine Plan has been prepared following an ecosystem based approach and promotes the sustainable development of the Northern Ireland marine area. Measures to prevent or reduce any significant adverse effects have been built into both the core and key activity policies of the Marine Plan. The conclusion of the assessment is that the effects of the Marine Plan will be no higher than negligible. No further mitigation is therefore required.

6 Monitoring Effects of the Marine Plan

Given that this assessment has not identified any significant adverse effects arising from the Marine Plan the focus of monitoring will be on unanticipated environmental, social or economic effects. The Marine Plan contains a Chapter on Monitoring and Review which states that monitoring will consist of two elements:

- How well the content of the Marine Plan has been taken forward through decision-making processes; and,
- The effects and effectiveness of the policies within the Marine Plan in securing objectives.

Monitoring the decision-making process will provide the Marine Plan Authority with information on general awareness of the Marine Plan; whether the Marine Plan is being implemented as intended; and whether policies need to be refined or new ones developed.

7 Next Steps and How to Respond

The SA and Marine Plan will be available for consultation. All comments received on the Marine Plan and SA will then be reviewed and addressed where appropriate prior to adoption of the Marine Plan. An SA Statement will be published once the Marine Plan is adopted. This will set out how the findings from the SA and comments from public consultation have been addressed.

7.1 Further Information

Further information, including details on how to respond, will be available on the DAERA website.

The Marine Plan, all volumes of the SA, and other reports and assessments (including the Habitats Regulation Assessment Screening Report) will be published on the following website: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations>.