

Natural England Standard

Marine: why we do what we do



1:0 An introduction

Strategic standards for 'why we do what we do'

We have a set of standards for 'why we do what we do' for each of the main areas of our work where we help deliver environmental outcomes. These are: Access, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Ecosystem Approach, Engagement, Landscape, Land Management, Land use and Marine. They describe the relevant legislation and Government policy, our role, and the principles that we apply to our work.

The standards are for all our staff and will provide:

- a common framework to help us work more consistently
- a coherent picture of our role, Government policy and how we deliver for the natural environment, people and places
- a clearer and shared understanding of our role as a science-led, impartial delivery body
- our customers with a better understanding of what we do and why.

A number of common themes are listed below which run through the principles in the standards. As such they illustrate key attributes that will be evident across our work and our contribution to national and local priorities.

1. Gathering, interpreting and providing evidence and information that those making decisions and choices need.
2. Practical advice that helps secure a high quality and diverse natural environment, which provides services of benefit to people and the economy and is resilient to climate change.
3. Enabling and supporting people to act for and engage with the natural environment.
4. Ensuring that the natural environment contributes to green growth and quality of life.
5. Working with and through others.
6. Responsive to local circumstances and customer needs.

2:0 Marine strategic standard - definition and scope

In England, the sea covers 25% of the country's area out to 12 nautical miles. Our seas are extremely diverse, with a variety of seascapes and underwater landscapes and the widest range of marine habitats in Europe. Our seas are also home to a variety of species, including many types of fish of economic importance.

The marine environment contributes substantially to our economic and social well-being, supporting many industrial and recreational activities such as aggregates, energy generation, yachting and fishing. It provides a range of ecosystem services including an important role in climate regulation and the detoxification of wastes. Our use of the sea has led to a decline in quality of the marine ecosystem that threatens the wildlife, habitats and ecosystems, as well as the marine goods and services they provide. Effective management of the sea is needed to halt, and reverse this decline. This means managing ecological networks and the wider ecosystem together.

At the coast there is a close relationship between the land and the sea. Here marine usually refers to those areas and ecosystems which lie seaward of the Mean High Water mark.

3:0 Government policy and statutory context

The marine legislative and policy drivers have changed dramatically over the last few years and there is a range of international and national legislation and policy that drives the management of the sea including:

- **The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1993)** which sets an objective of establishing representative networks of **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** globally by 2012. More recently, this has been re-stated as an objective to conserve 10% of coastal and marine areas through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures by 2020 (Aichi Biodiversity Target number 11) (CBD 2010).
- **The OSPAR Convention (1992)** which sets out obligations on signatories for the prevention and elimination of pollution, for assessing the quality of the marine environment and for the protection and conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity. It also includes an objective of establishing a network of MPAs in the OSPAR maritime area that should be ecologically coherent by 2012 and well managed by 2016 (OSPAR 2010).
- **The EU Birds Directive (1979) and EU Habitats Directive (1992)**, apply to UK territorial waters, and contain obligations upon the UK government to establish and conserve protected areas (Special Protection Areas - for birds; Special Areas of Conservation - for habitats and other species); maintain the favourable conservation status of habitats and species; enhance connectivity between sites and licence the exploitation of species.
- **The European Landscape Convention (ELC) (2000)** which aims for the physical, natural heritage and cultural qualities of all landscapes to be fully recognised and integrated into policies and decision making and for people to have a greater democratic role in the future management of landscapes in which they live. The ELC applies to land, inland water and marine areas (our seascapes).

- **The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) (2008)** sets out a range of objectives and measures for the achievement of good environmental status of Europe's seas by 2020, based on application of an ecosystem approach to deliver measures including the development of marine strategies for the sustainable management of marine areas and a coherent and representative network of MPAs with management in place by 2016.
- **The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)** which establishes a duty for the Secretary of State to publish a list of the habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity and to ensure that measures are taken to further their conservation.
- **UK Government's High Level Marine Objectives (2009)** for achieving Government's vision for clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.
- **The Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009)** that establishes a range of measures for the sustainable management of England's seas, including establishment of a marine planning system and a duty to designate a network of marine protected areas.
- **The UK Marine Policy Statement (2011)** which sets out the framework for achieving Government's key marine objectives.

More recently the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP), [The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature](#) sets out Government's commitment to achieving Good Environmental Status of England's seas to deliver our commitments under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. In addition the White Paper and the England Biodiversity Strategy, [Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services](#) set out the rationale for a more integrated approach to conservation of marine biodiversity, including the establishment of a well-managed network of MPAs that contains in excess of 25% of England's seas by 2016; sustainable management and harvesting of fish by 2020; the development of Marine Plans covering the whole of England's marine area by 2022; and targeted action for some marine species.

In both the White Paper and *Biodiversity 2020* there is considerable emphasis upon the management of ecosystems for the full range of benefits they deliver and the engagement of local communities and the public more generally in the future of the natural environment.

4:0 Natural England's role

Natural England has a vital and distinct role in ensuring that the many benefits we derive from our seas are sustained, and that the biodiversity which underpins them is maintained and/or recovered for current and future generations. We do this working alongside other bodies, including the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Environment Agency, Marine Management Organisation and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities. Our role in

the marine environment is primarily advisory, providing decision makers, developers and regulators with advice on a range of issues, and we work through others to deliver agreed objectives for our seas.

Our broad remit means we have a wide range of expertise relating to the scientific, technical and practical aspects of marine management. This includes expertise in marine ecosystems, marine water quality, marine survey and monitoring, marine protected areas, seascape and the application of environmental legislation. We have access to a wide range of marine (including coastal) evidence, including that which we collect ourselves, as well as knowledge from the practical experience of others and ourselves. We use our knowledge of local areas and build relationships with marine managers and sea users to develop, and increase, our understanding of marine industries and sea users and of the wider marine context. This enables us to translate our evidence into practical advice for others to use.

Specific aspects of our role are:

- supporting and advising government on the selection of England's contribution to the UK Marine Protected Area (MPA) network.
- notifying and protecting Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs) in the marine environment.
- providing conservation advice to marine regulators on conservation objectives and activities likely to impact the features of MPAs to inform the development, implementation and regulation of MPA management measures.
- providing advice to Defra on a wide range of marine issues and legislation, supporting the implementation of Government policy and the achievement of international commitments.
- providing advice to other government departments, marine regulators and developers and other sea users on marine planning, licensing and consenting.
- we are the Government's adviser on landscape (including seascape) and we have a lead role in the implementation of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in England on behalf of Defra.
- working in close collaboration with other bodies, we have a lead role in monitoring and reporting on the state of MPAs in English waters as part of UK reporting on the wider marine environment. We are also an active contributor to delivery of the UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy.
- working with, and through, the range of sea users, interest groups and communities, providing them with the information and tools to understand the marine habitats and species in their local area as well as collaborating, where appropriate, to share resources and expertise.

5:0 The principles we apply to our work

M1 Shared understanding at the heart of marine delivery

We will listen and work to understand the needs and experiences of our partners, customers and stakeholders. We combine this knowledge with the evidence and experience we have in our own areas of expertise to provide information and advice to others in ways that meet their and our needs. We will be practical, helpful, impartial and trustworthy with a strong emphasis on listening to others. We will ensure, wherever possible, that stakeholders are positively engaged and understand Natural England's work relating to the marine environment. We will work with stakeholders to make best use of resources and to share information and data in order to deliver benefits for the marine environment.

M2 Implementing an ecosystem approach to management of the marine environment

An ecosystem approach places people at the heart of decision making. It recognises the need to exploit ecosystems sustainably, so the goods and services ecosystems provide are available for present and future generations. To help use of the approach we will translate our evidence and practical experience into information and advice that local communities, marine users, managers and other stakeholders can use to make decisions and take practical action which deliver international objectives of *clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas* in line with government policy.

M3 Improving the status of marine habitats and species to ensure a healthy marine environment

The marine environment has declined over a long period of time due to the impact of pollutants from land, abstraction of natural resources, increased development at the coast and offshore and other drivers. We will provide advice, and take action where we have a role, so that others, including coastal communities and those who use our seas, can take action for the protection and enhancement of marine habitats and species, prevent further declines and ensure recovery. This is especially important for rare and threatened habitats and species, and those habitats that are representative, because these support a wide range of biodiversity important for delivery of ecosystem services.

M4 Providing advice based on the best available evidence

We use ecological, social and economic evidence on the marine environment from a variety of sources, including from scientific literature and from the practical experience of others and ourselves. By translating this material into practical advice others can trust, understand and use, we will help them in acting to protect and enhance the marine environment. We will be impartial in our use of evidence. We will be clear about the sources of evidence we use, the confidence we have in that evidence and why we have, or have not, used particular pieces of evidence in our advice and we will do this in accordance with our Evidence Standards. We will work with partners to communicate uncertainty around evidence in ways that allow them to make more informed decisions. We will take a proportionate approach to application of the precautionary principle in line with the principles of good governance.

M5 Building the evidence base to improve the advice we provide and decision making by others in the marine environment

The evidence about the marine environment is variable in quality and we sometimes have to rely on evidence that is sparse or absent. When evidence does exist, we sometimes rely on modelled data, expert opinion and the practical experience of others and ourselves, especially when scientific or appropriate methodological studies are lacking. In particular, good empirical evidence on the social and economic benefits of protecting the marine environment is limited. By working with the range of users and managers to collect and share information we will continue to increase the marine evidence base as efficiently and effectively as possible. We will also work to synthesise evidence and identify knowledge gaps so that resources are targeted at the most pressing needs. This is so that we can use and interpret that evidence to provide robust conservation advice to others on delivering Government's vision for our oceans and seas.

M6 Taking an adaptive approach

The marine environment is highly dynamic and is changing as a result of climate change. As a result, it is not always possible to predict the consequences of the interventions we make. Adaptive management enables initial planning based on best available evidence followed by regular review and revision to ensure that new evidence, for example from monitoring, and practical experience influence long term management. It also involves a preference for choices which do not close off future options. We will aim to remain practical and helpful and open to new or innovative approaches. In order to adopt this approach we will keep our advice and our methods under review and make appropriate changes when new evidence or practical experience becomes available or there is a change in understanding of existing evidence.

Quick reference	
Type of standard	Strategic standard
Purpose:	Explains why we do what we do across our main work areas and sets out the principles that all staff are expected to apply to their work
Sign-off:	Natural England Directors and Heads of Profession
Publication:	Publication catalogue - external
Review date:	March 2014
Issue number:	Final v1.0
Updated:	May 2015 – version updated to current template