



Regions to Boost
National Maritime
Spatial Planning



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An Roinn Comhshaoil,
Aeráide agus Cumarsáide
Department of the Environment,
Climate and Communications



REGINA-MSP

Communication brief

National Brief for Ireland

Ireland's approach to MSP



REGINA-MSP communication brief series

The REGINA-MSP project is a two-year project (2023-2024) that aims to greater integrate the regional and sub-regional needs, perspectives and stakeholders into the development and implementation of national Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). The project highlights potential challenges to this integration and opportunities to reduce them, building on a general analysis at the European level and an in-depth analysis in eight case study regions in five European countries, i.e., France, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain.

Based on various activities carried out within REGINA-MSP and further described in this communication brief (e.g., workshops, bibliographical analyses), a set of policy needs and recommendations has been identified at different levels (European, national, regional). This communication brief summarizes the main policy recommendations for the national level for the Irish case study, with its case study region of County Mayo. This brief is part of a series of communication briefs produced as part of REGINA-MSP, focusing on various topics related to MSP (such as ocean literacy or communities of practice) and on each case study region and country part of the project.

Characteristics of Ireland and Co. Mayo

With a maritime area that is seven times the size of its landmass, Ireland's relationship with the sea has helped define our nation's culture and history. As an island nation our seas have historically sustained us through the gathering of seafood and trade via our ports. Our cultural heritage and love of the sea has passed down generationally and many songs and poems as well as emigrants have made their way from Ireland to other nations.

County Mayo was chosen as our case study region and is situated in the North West Region of Ireland, bordering the Atlantic Ocean. It has the longest coastline in Ireland, at 1168 km, or approximately 21% of the total coastline of the State, stretching from Killary Harbour in the south to Killala Bay in the north. Mayo has a rich and diverse landscape with many Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Natural Heritage Areas (NHA).

Ireland's ocean economy has a turnover of €7.01 billion and employed over 33,000 people (FTEs) resulting in a GVA of €2.85 billion in 2022 (MI, 2023). The top five sectoral contributors to the economy, in order, were shipping and maritime transport, oil and gas exploration and production, tourism in marine and coastal areas, bioresources/seafood (including fisheries, aquaculture, processing, seaweed, blue bioeconomy) and marine commerce. Tourism in marine and coastal areas was the largest employer, followed by bioresources/seafood, and shipping and maritime transport.

The competent authority for Maritime Spatial Planning in Ireland is now the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, with marine planning functions having been transferred from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) in May 2024.

The Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive 2014/89 was transposed into Irish law through the Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Act, 2021 and is supported by the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS), National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) and Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs). These documents provide the legislative and policy framework for regulating and managing activities in the maritime area.

The MAP Act, 2021 provides the legal underpinning for an entirely new marine planning system. It enables, for the first time, regulation of Ireland's maritime area outside the 12 nautical miles. It provides a statutory basis for MSP, development management, licensing and enforcement in the maritime area. A new agency, the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) will oversee regulation of the maritime area. Its functions include assessing applications for Maritime Area Consents and licences for specified maritime activities (including environmental surveys) and ensuring robust compliance through enforcement measures. Development in these areas must then be applied for and authorised by either An Bord Pleanála or the relevant Coastal Planning Authority.

Ireland published its first national marine spatial plan (NMPF) in July 2021. The NMPF provides guidance on how MSP should be conducted but does not in itself, have a zoning component or contain priority objectives for specific sea areas, instead Designated Area Maritime Plans (DMAPs) provisioned under the MAP Act will cover this aspect. The NMPF outlines a number of Overarching Marine Planning Policies covering objectives relating to environmental, economic and social aspects. Those relating to the environment, for example, align with the provisions of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Those relating to the economy focus on co-existence and infrastructure, whereas those covering more social aspects relate to access, employment, heritage, seascape, and rural/island communities. In addition to the overarching policies, there are 16 Sectoral Marine Planning Policies, covering a range of activities including Offshore Renewable Energy.

Supporting regional development, Ireland has three Regional Assemblies, comprised of members who are elected by the local authorities in the region. The three regions are the Northern and Western region, the Eastern and Midlands region and the Southern region. The purpose of the Regional Assemblies is to coordinate, promote and support strategic planning and sustainable development and make local government and public services more effective. Their respective plans on how land and resources in their region should be used over a longer timeframe are contained in Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). The RSES for the Northern and Western Region, where the REGINA-MSP case study is located, re-iterates that there must be consistency between land-based and ocean-based planning which supports both the marine environment and the marine economy.

Activities conducted in Co. Mayo within REGINA-MSP

As part of the REGINA-MSP project two workshops were organised over two days and held in Co. Mayo to discuss how to develop a regional plan.

A Training Day was held in Co. Cork for regional stakeholders on MSP



Workshop for Killala Bay, Co Mayo.

The purpose of the workshop was to introduce local and regional stakeholders and authorities in the area to the national MSP process and how it might assist in developing their own Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) for sub-national planning in the Killala Bay area.

During the workshops participants were asked to discuss the following questions:

- What is the overall theme for Killala Bay - what is its unique identity, what are the activities in the bay that make it what it is currently?
- What are the immediate requirements for Killala Bay to enable development of this identity and to enable the current activities to be enhanced or improved?
- What effects are climate change having on Killala Bay and what will the impact of these effects be in the next 2-3 years?
- What should the future/long term plans be for Killala Bay - which activities are most important?
- Is there requirement for a DMAP for these needs - consider (a) national existing supports and (b) local regional/county plans?

The majority of the discussions focused on the immediate needs for the area such as development and repair of existing harbours, additional berths for pleasure boats (local and visiting), provision of toilets and facilities for less-abled people at the beaches. There are some localised erosion problems that might need further study with a subsequent plan on how to deal with this in the longer term.

The workshop represents a needed opportunity for local government representatives to shift their focus from terrestrial spatial planning to maritime spatial planning and helped to raise awareness of both the complexity and the fragmentation of the maritime space and the implications this might have for an area such as Killala, which already falls between two planning authorities and hosts marine activities and attractions that fall under various regulatory remits.

Workshop for Inishturk Island, Co Mayo.

The second workshop was held on Inishturk island, one of Mayo's inhabited offshore islands situated about 15 kilometres off the Mayo coast. The purpose was to explore the types of issues that arise on islands and how these might relate to current and future MSP with local residents, some of whom also had commercial enterprises on or related to the island.

In a similar approach to the first workshop, participants were asked to discuss:

- What is the overall theme for Inishturk: what is its unique identity, what are the activities that make it what it is currently?
- What are the main challenges facing the island(s)?
- What long-term plans would you have for the island and what is needed to achieve these ambitions?

Given their wild and scenic beauty, many of the islands host seasonal visitors during the summer months putting pressures on local infrastructure and services. Whilst MSP could contribute to addressing some of these needs, there are much more urgent and pressing needs for the island of Inishturk right now than a dedicated Maritime Spatial Plan.

Training Day in Co. Cork for MSP stakeholders

Given the possibility that the Regional Assemblies may have a more defined role in MSP in future, it was decided to organise and host a Maritime Spatial Planning Training event for regulators and regional assembly staff members under the auspices of the REGINA-MSP project.

This one-day event was held in the MaREI Centre, Environmental Research Institute at University College Cork and had participants from each of the three Regional Assemblies, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Irish Naval Service, and researchers from MaREI.

The Training Day commenced with an overview of research activities of relevance to MSP ongoing in MaREI and provided some context for the next stage of the day which was the interactive MSP Challenge Game. The participants were divided into three groups, representing fictional sovereign States, and asked to plan a specific amount of renewable energy for offshore wind and 30% MPAs (of which 10% were strictly protected) in their respective maritime areas on the board. This led to a lively and robust exchange of ideas and realisation of policy priorities between the neighbouring countries. It also helped to demonstrate the need for the experiences of different stakeholders to be embedded in MSP from the outset.

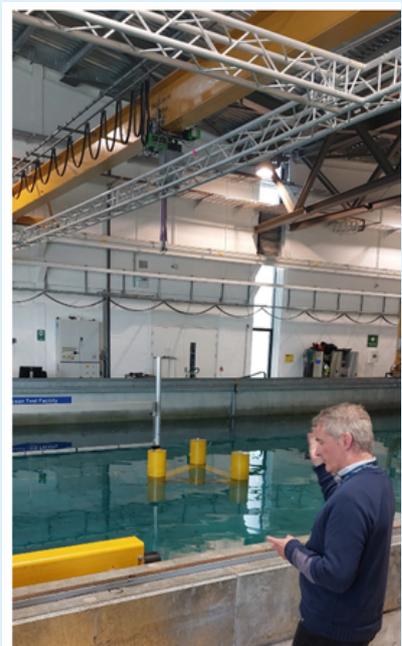


Participants engage in robust and lively negotiations during the MSP Challenge Game



The NMCI boasts one of the largest simulation suites in Europe

Dr. Jimmy Murphy shows a small-scale simulated offshore wind energy device in the Lir National Ocean Test Facility



Potential policy recommendations for the national level to greater integrate regional and sub-regional needs, perspectives and stakeholders

Legal aspects

- The Maritime Spatial Planning Directive has been transposed into Irish law through the Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Act, 2021 and is supported by the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS), National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF) and Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs). These documents should better reflect regional and local needs as sub-national plans develop.
- Under the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021 public bodies can be designated as authorities to create Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs). This presents an opportunity for local authorities such as Mayo County Council, the Regional Assemblies and National Government to reflect on the findings of the REGINA-MSP project in planning and developing future DMAPs for sub-national use.
- DMAP Guidelines - The provision to designate bodies for the creation of DMAPs is new and as yet only one DMAP is currently being developed, led by a Government Department. The DMAP Guidelines will detail how public bodies, including Local Authorities and Regional Assemblies, can engage with and advance the DMAP process.

Governance

- A new agency, the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) has been established to oversee regulation of the maritime area. MARA's functions include assessing applications for Maritime Area Consents and licences for specified maritime activities (including environmental surveys) and ensuring robust compliance through enforcement measures. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure good communication with Regional Assemblies and Coastal Planning/Local Authorities with this agency.
- To strengthen regional levels of governance, coastal planning authorities in Ireland require additional support and expertise to deal with maritime planning applications in the nearshore area. The MAP Act 2021 has increased their responsibility out to 3nm beyond the High Water Mark and additional resources will be needed to manage this. Training and education are vital to upskill land planners to become marine planners.
- An Bord Pleanála will have responsibility for decisions on strategic development and offshore renewable energy and all applications in the outer maritime space. To ensure coherence, mechanisms to interact with local and regional authorities should be explored.
- As a relatively new responsibility in DECC, the MSP units are being developed with additional expert staff needed and expected to be in posts before the end of this year. A dedicated team of specialists will be put in place to assist with future DMAP development.
- The MSP Advisory Group comprised of national, regional and sectoral representatives could provide additional expertise into the DMAP process and the review of the NMPF.

Resources

- Funding mechanisms for almost all types of development need to be found as, currently, there is no dedicated funding associated with implementation of MSP or marine infrastructure, in contrast to land-based planning which has a dedicated funding plan (through the National Development Plan).
- DMAPs - Whilst the DMAP for offshore energy on the south coast is still in the process of being finalised, this approach could act as a template or example for how to plan ORE on a regional basis elsewhere.
- Additional staffing is needed in many local authorities and across government more generally as a new and evolving approach to marine resource management.

Data and Knowledge

- Centralised: Effective decision making relies on the data that underpins it therefore all data regarding the marine needs to be centrally available so that Ireland can make evidence based, informed, effective decisions.
- Up-to-date: Data gaps exist for some sectors and environments, hence there is a need to continuously update our data and knowledge on these e.g. offshore renewable energy, cables, protected areas (including data on bird migration) and the marine environment outside currently designated areas. Advance knowledge of planned designations, such as Marine Protected Areas, would be useful for the planning process.
- Impact: Additional data such as social and economic data allows us to assess the impact of economic activities on marine resources at the regional and local level.
- Land-sea interactions need to be mapped together and not seen as distinct separate data sets so that there can be better connectivity between marine and land-based planning systems.

Sources

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National Biodiversity Action Plan: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/93973-irelands-4th-national-biodiversity-action-plan-20232030/>

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Citation

O'Hagan, A.M., Fitzpatrick, J., Breen, C. National Brief for Ireland. Developed for the REGINA-MSP project. Funded by the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA). (Sept. 2024).

Disclaimer

This communication brief has been developed as part of the REGINA-MSP project. Its content is based on the activities carried within the framework of the project and does not necessarily represent the views of the authors' organisations and nations.



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