

## Living with the Seas

### Developing an ecosystem approach for marine planning in Scotland

This briefing provides an overview of Scottish Environment LINK's document 'Living with the seas', which summarises LINK's expectations for Regional Marine Planning and presents a vision of how and why the *ecosystem approach* should be incorporated into the design and implementation of marine spatial planning in Scotland.

#### Recommendations

- 1) Marine plans must prioritise the natural environment as the basis upon which goods and services rely;
- 2) Plan policies must to be tailored to suit the needs of the plan area;
- 3) Plan management targets should aim to fill knowledge gaps;
- 4) Plans should identify opportunities (both spatial and temporal) for marine ecosystem enhancement as well as development;
- 5) Plans should be developed in a transparent manner with regular stakeholder engagement;
- 6) Plans should integrate local knowledge and expertise;
- 7) Plans should be informed by evidence-based environmental baselines and decisions must apply a precautionary approach where confidence is low and/or risk is high.

#### Background

The adoption of the Marine (Scotland) Act in 2010 presented a new vision for managing the competing demands on Scotland's marine environment. The Act set out a tiered approach to developing marine plans, from a national down to a regional level. This led to the adoption of the National Marine Plan (NMP) in 2015. The NMP aims to manage the many demands on Scotland's marine environment through a single framework, which encourages sustainable development of marine industries and incorporates environmental protection into decision making. Set out in the NMP are the boundaries for 11 further Regional Marine Plans, which will be developed by regional Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) at a local level and take into account local circumstances and smaller ecosystem units.

If implemented correctly, the NMP and RMPs could contribute greatly to meeting Scotland's biodiversity and sustainable development commitments, as well as become an effective tool for informing licensing decisions.

#### Developing regional marine plans

The RMPs present an opportunity to design tailor-made spatial management plans that integrate the health of the marine environment and the needs of local industries and communities. To ensure RMPs meet the needs of each region, regular engagement with local stakeholders and communities throughout the plan's development will be essential for sourcing and incorporating local knowledge and expertise.

As part of the RMP development process, MPPs are required to carry out an environmental assessment, which should identify the current health status of the region's marine environment. The data collected within the regional assessment will be important for identifying pressures, data gaps, and opportunities for enhancement and multiple-use of the marine environment. Using these findings, MPPs can then build policies around the needs of the region, design an action programme for filling data gaps, and pursue opportunities that can prove beneficial to multiple stakeholders (Figure 1).

The findings of the regional assessment will also create an evidence-based environmental baseline for the respective region, which will be an important reference point for future monitoring of the environmental, social and economic impacts of the RMP. Continuous monitoring is a fundamental component of reviewing and improving the effectiveness of the RMP and also for informing the objectives and targets of the NMP. The feedback loop between the NMP and RMPs (Figure 1) is essential for ensuring the plans are up-to-date and able to address the demands placed on the marine environment at both national and regional scales.

### *The Ecosystem Approach*

For RMPs to successfully integrate environmental protection, human activity and social need, LINK believes that the principles of the ecosystems approach (EA) should be adopted. The EA is a method of marine planning and management that focuses primarily on the requirements of the natural environment and considers humans as an integral part of the ecosystem. LINK defines the EA as:

*“a holistic and adaptive management approach for conserving and enhancing the integrity and diversity of marine ecosystems, and their services, by integrating multiple marine uses into a coherent and inclusive plan.”*

The core elements of the EA are:

- 1) Recognising connections between ecosystems and human societies;
- 2) Valuing ecosystems for the basic goods they generate as well as for the important services they provide and their intrinsic importance;
- 3) Addressing the cumulative impacts of various activities affecting an ecosystem;
- 4) Managing and balancing multiple and sometimes conflicting objectives;
- 5) Embracing change, learning from experience, and adapting policies throughout the managing process.

The value of the EA is that, when implemented strongly, it provides a transparent and flexible process that is continuously reassessed and the priorities re-appraised with input from multiple stakeholders. The adaptable, long-term focus of the EA allows for policies and planning objectives to adjust to changing social, economic and environmental needs, which makes it well suited for guiding the development, implementation and re-assessment of RMPs.

### *The role of LINK in marine planning*

Environmental non-government organisations' (eNGOs) primary role in marine planning is to ensure the natural marine environment is protected and enhanced for the long term through means of increasing civic, political and legislative support. In LINK's ongoing commitment to the effective implementation of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, it shares responsibility to support the development of RMPs and will continue to offer external and non-sectoral advice, champion the integration of the ecosystem approach, and provide scientific evidence and assistance when possible.

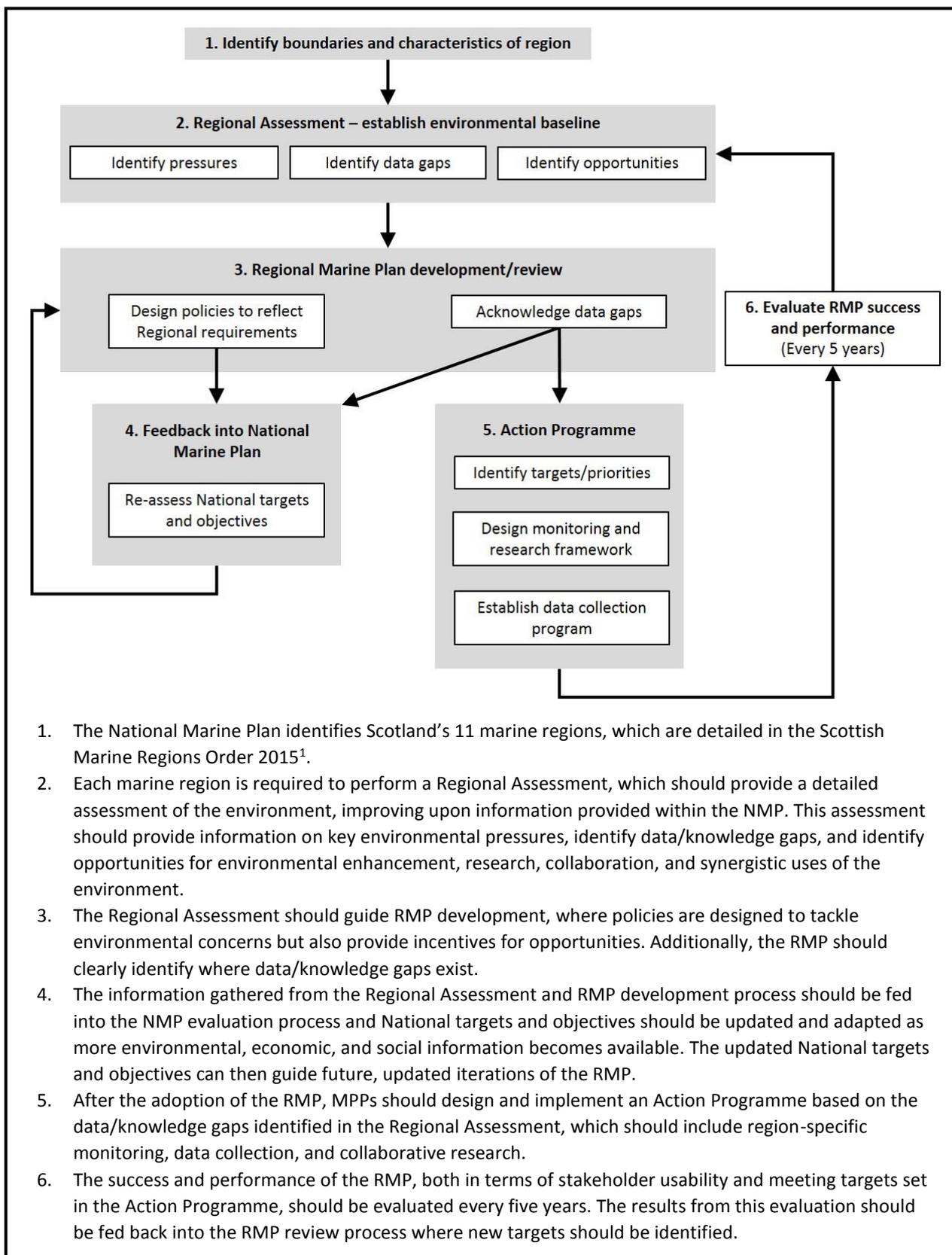


Figure 1. Regional Marine Plan development and evaluation process

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/sdsi/2015/9780111027004>