

Marine environment

Introduction

The seas around Wales provide essential resources and key transport routes as well being an important habitat for a diverse range of marine organisms. A number of sectors impact on the marine environment including the fishing industry, marine aggregates extraction and offshore renewable energy.

- ◆ The coastal and marine environment supports (directly and indirectly) 92,600 jobs in Wales, contributing £2.5 billion of GDP to the economyⁱ.
- ◆ Fishing practices over a period of decades have led to a decline in many marine ecosystems, with significant impacts on target and non-target species as well as habitat damage through seabed disturbanceⁱⁱ.
- ◆ Sea levels around Britain have been rising at a rate of 3mm per year since 1993 and estimates suggest a rise of between 14 and 74cm by 2080, depending on the emission scenario usedⁱⁱⁱ. Sea level rise at the upper end of this range would have major implications for coastal environments.

Overview of current statutory powers of the Assembly

Issues relating to conservation, management and planning within the marine environment are covered by Fields 1, 6 and 15 of Schedule 5 of the *Government of Wales Act 2006*, namely "Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food", "Environment" and "Town and country planning". The National Assembly for Wales can seek Measure-making powers over these issues through Legislative Competence Orders. The following secondary legislation responsibilities of the Second Assembly will transfer to Welsh Ministers in the Third Assembly:

- ◆ Conservation and management, including nature conservation, biodiversity, and fisheries.
- ◆ Environmental protection, including flooding, coastal risk, pollution prevention, climate change, and environmental strategy.
- ◆ Marine spatial planning, marine aggregate extraction and offshore renewables.

Forthcoming EU and UK primary legislation

- ◆ A Marine Bill White Paper was published on the 15th March 2007.
- ◆ A European Maritime Policy is currently under consultation – a joint response was sent to it by two of the Second Assembly's Committees. Initial conclusions are expected in October 2007 followed by a White Paper in 2008.

EU policy

The EU has wide jurisdiction over environmental matters. The European Commission Directorate General for the Environment has responsibility for marine environmental conservation. In addition, the Directorate General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs is responsible for Common Fisheries Policy and other commercial activities that impact on the marine environment.

- ◆ The Commission proposed a *Thematic Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment*^{iv} and a *Marine Strategy Directive* in 2005 to establish common principles by which Member States should achieve good ecological status in their marine waters. European Marine Regions will be created on the basis of geographical and environmental criteria and Member States will be required to develop marine strategies for these areas.
- ◆ The *European Biodiversity Strategy* was adopted in 1998 and the EU has set itself the objective of halting biodiversity loss in its own territory by 2010^v, although this is unlikely to be achieved^{vi}.
- ◆ Under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, the UK is required to select and protect Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protected Areas within waters for which it is responsible.

Key Assembly Government strategy documents and action plans from the Second Assembly:

- ◆ *The Environment Strategy for Wales*^{vii} and its accompanying *Action Plan*^{viii} are the principal means of tackling environmental issues. The Strategy states that by 2026, the seas around Wales should be clean, support vibrant economies and contain healthy and functioning ecosystems.
- ◆ *The Integrated Coastal Zone Management Strategy for Wales*^{ix} provides a framework to facilitate integrated working on the coast and sustainable management of the coastal zone.
- ◆ *Starting to Live Differently*^x is the sustainable development scheme of the National Assembly for Wales. It is accompanied by a *Sustainable Development Action Plan*^{xi}.

Legacy issues from the Second Assembly

The Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee's legacy paper highlighted the following issues relating to the marine environment for the attention of the Third Assembly:

- ◆ The Environment Strategy for Wales Action Plan
- ◆ The Marine Bill
- ◆ The Climate Change Bill
- ◆ The European Commission's Green Paper on maritime policy

Useful links

1. The Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership comprises representatives from public, private and voluntary organisations: <http://www.walescoastalpartnership.org.uk>
2. The Welsh Assembly Government has a website covering marine and fisheries issues: http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/env_cons/marine_fisheries/?lang=en
3. The Directorate-General of the Environment marine strategy page can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/marine/index_en.htm
4. The Directorate-General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fisheries/index_en.htm

Further information

Research papers are available on the Environment Strategy for Wales, climate change and Environmental Protection Areas in Wales at <http://assembly/presidingoffic/mrs/briefings/environment-planning-e.htm>

For further information on any aspect of the marine environment, please contact:

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ⁱ Valuing Our Environment Partnership, *Valuing Our Environment – Economic Impact of the Coastal and Marine Environment of Wales* http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-wales-valuing_our_environment-marine-english.pdf

ⁱⁱ Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, *Turning the Tide; Addressing the Impact of Fisheries on the Marine Environment*, 2004 <http://www.rcep.org.uk/fishreport.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ UK Climate Impacts Programme, *Updates to Regional Net Sea-Level Change Estimates for Great Britain*. <http://data.ukcip.org.uk/resources/publications/documents/124.pdf>

^{iv} Commission of the European Communities 2005. *Thematic Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment*. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0504en01.pdf

^v Commission of the European Communities, 2006. *Communication from the Commission, Halting the Loss of Biodiversity by 2010 – And Beyond*

^{vi} Verboom J. *et al.*, 2007. *Combining Biodiversity Modelling with Political and Economic Development Scenarios for 25 EU Countries*, *Ecological Economics*, 62 (2), p 267-276

^{vii} Welsh Assembly Government, May 2006, *Environment Strategy for Wales*, http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/epg/Environment_strategy_for_wales/About_the_strategy/?lang=en

^{viii} Welsh Assembly Government, *Environment Strategy for Wales: First Action Plan*, http://new.wales.gov.uk/docrepos/40382/4038231121/118554/Env_strat_rewrite/Action_Plan_e.pdf?lang=en

^{ix} Welsh Assembly Government, March 2007, *Making the Most of Wales' Coast: The Integrated Coastal Zone Management Strategy for Wales*, http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/env_cons_management/countryside_coastal_access/iczm/?lang=en

^x Welsh Assembly Government, *Starting to Live Differently*, <http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/strategy/strategypublications/strategypubs/935748/?lang=en>

^{xi} Welsh Assembly Government, *The Sustainable Development Action Plan: 2004-2007*, http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable_development_publicat/sdactionplan?lang=en