



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 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 around Wales 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.

Current and proposed legislative competence of the Assembly

Under the *Government of Wales Act 2006*, the National Assembly for Wales can seek legislative competence through Acts of Parliament or Legislative Competence Orders (LCOs) to make a piece of law in the form of an 'Assembly Measure'. Measures can only be made in a specific policy area (or 'Matter') added to one of the 20 'Fields' (or broad subject areas) which are contained in Schedule 5 of the Act.

As issues relating to conservation, management and planning within the marine environment are covered in Fields 1, 6 and 19 of Schedule 5 to the Act^{iv}, the National Assembly for Wales can seek Measure-making powers in these areas. Under Field 6 (environment), Matter 6.2 has been proposed with regards to 'environmental protection, including pollution, nuisances and hazardous substances'.

Forthcoming EU and UK primary legislation

- A *Draft Marine Bill*^v was published on 3 April 2008. The deadline for responses was 26 June 2008.
- The vision for an Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union^{vi} was launched on 10 October 2007. Two of the Second Assembly's Committees sent responses to the preceding consultation. The European Council has invited the European Commission to report on the progress of the Action Plan at the end of 2009.

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* and a *Marine Strategy Directive* in 2005. 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^{vii}. Work to stop the loss of biodiversity will intensify following the 2008 Report on the *EU Biodiversity Action Plan*.

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 Welsh Government strategy documents and action plans

- *The Environment Strategy for Wales*^{viii} and its accompanying *Action Plan*^{ix} 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. A *Report on Progress*^x was published in September 2007.
- *The Integrated Coastal Zone Management Strategy for Wales*^{xi} provides a framework to facilitate integrated working on the coast and sustainable management of the coastal zone.
- *Starting to Live Differently*^{xii} is the sustainable development scheme of the National Assembly for Wales. It is accompanied by a *Sustainable Development Action Plan*^{xiii}.
- The *Renewable Energy Route Map for Wales*^{xiv} consultation ended on 13 May 2008. Generating electricity by tidal power, wave power and off-shore wind farms will affect the marine environment. Considerations of such schemes will come under the marine planning system of the future *UK Marine Bill*.

Useful links

- The Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership comprises representatives from public, private and voluntary organisations: <http://www.walescoastalpartnership.org.uk>
- 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
- The Directorate-General of the Environment marine strategy page can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/marine/index_en.htm
- The Directorate-General for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fisheries/index_en.htm

Further information

For further information on any aspect of the marine environment, please contact Victoria Paris, Members' Research Service (Victoria.Paris@wales.gsi.gov.uk), 029 2089 8602

ⁱ National Trust, [Valuing Our Environment – Economic Impact of the Coastal and Marine Environment of Wales](#), webpage [on 04 September 2008]

ⁱⁱ Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, [Turning the Tide; Addressing the Impact of Fisheries on the Marine Environment](#), webpage [on 04 September 2008]

ⁱⁱⁱ UK Climate Impacts Programme, [Updates to Regional Net Sea-Level Change Estimates for Great Britain](#), webpage [on 04 September 2008]

^{iv} Office of Public Sector Information, [Government of Wales Act 2006](#), webpage [on 04 September 2008]

^v Defra, Marine and Fisheries, [Marine Bill](#), webpage [on 04 September 2008]

^{vi} European Commission, Maritime Affairs, [A Maritime Policy for the EU](#), webpage [on 04 September 2008]

^{vii} Commission of the European Communities, [Communication from the Commission, Halting the Loss of Biodiversity by 2010 – And Beyond](#), webpage [on 04 September 2008]

^{viii} Welsh Assembly Government, [Environment Strategy for Wales](#), webpage [on 04 September 2008]

^{ix} Welsh Assembly Government, [Environment Strategy for Wales: First Action Plan](#), webpage [04 September 2008]

^x Welsh Assembly Government, [Environment Strategy for Wales: Report on Progress](#), webpage [04 September 2008]

^{xi} Welsh Assembly Government, [Making the Most of Wales' Coast: The Integrated Coastal Zone Management Strategy for Wales](#), webpage [04 September 2008]

^{xii} Welsh Assembly Government, [Starting to Live Differently](#), webpage [04 September 2008]

^{xiii} Welsh Assembly Government, [The Sustainable Development Action Plan: 2004-2007](#), webpage [04 September 2008]

^{xiv} Welsh Assembly Government, [Renewable Energy Route Map for Wales](#), webpage [04 September 2008]