

What the Marine Strategy Framework Directive means for conservation

Factsheet 5

March 2012

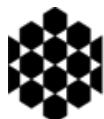
Background

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) consultation includes a cover paper for the Initial Assessment of the state of the UK's seas, as well as proposals for UK characteristics of Good Environmental Status (GES) and associated targets and indicators. GES involves protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration and restoring it where practical, while using marine resources sustainably. The Directive is very wide-ranging and sets out eleven descriptors of GES relating to biological diversity, non-indigenous species introductions, commercially exploited fish and shellfish populations, food webs, human-induced eutrophication, sea floor integrity, impacts on hydrographical conditions, concentrations of contaminants, contaminants in fish and other seafood, marine litter and underwater noise.

How will the proposals in this consultation help improve the conservation of marine species and habitats?

As a framework Directive, the MSFD acts to bring together the wide range of existing marine environment legislation, as well as to fill any gaps. Although there is already a significant amount of legislation in the UK to protect specific marine species and habitats (e.g. the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives), the MSFD is unique in the breadth of its coverage; GES must be achieved across all aspects of the UK's marine ecosystem and covers all the key pressures and impacts on it, including cumulative impacts.

The proposals for GES characteristics and targets in this consultation recognise the broad nature of the Directive and cover all the components of the marine ecosystem (birds, marine mammals, fish, pelagic habitats and benthic habitats) and all the main pressures on them. We anticipate that the full range of GES targets will also enable the identification of any cumulative impacts on the marine environment, although further work is needed to test this in practice.



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Will the proposals lead to new measures for the protection of the marine environment?

The Government and Devolved Administrations expect existing policy measures, such as the implementation of the Wild Birds and Habitats Directives and the designation of marine protected areas, to play a major role in helping us achieve GES. However, at this time it is difficult to predict exactly how far existing policies will take us and some additional management measures may be needed to further improve the state of the marine environment in order to achieve GES.

Although this consultation does not cover proposals for measures to achieve GES, the Government and the Devolved Administrations have carried out an Impact Assessment to look at the potential additional measures which may be needed, (see www.defra.gov.uk/consult/open/). This analysis is based on an assessment of a range of **illustrative** management measures which are examples of the types of additional measures which could be needed to achieve the proposed GES targets.

For fisheries, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) will continue to be the principal legal mechanism for managing fish stocks in EU waters. We expect a reformed CFP to play a critical role in supporting the achievement of GES both for commercial fish stocks (Descriptor 3) and wider biodiversity (Descriptors 1, 4 and 6), ensuring consistency across European waters, promoting sustainable stocks and fishing practices.

Stocks outside the CFP, including shellfish, will also be considered as part of the overall achievement of GES. It is possible that some additional national or local measures may need to be taken to protect non CFP stocks, including shellfish (except nephrops). Any additional measures would be delivered through relevant Government

and Devolved Administration policies and local byelaws.

For more information on implications of the MSFD for fisheries see Factsheet 4.

For litter some additional measures are likely to be needed to reduce the amount of litter on coastlines and in our seas. For noise, our preferred approach involves the development of a noise registry for loud, low, impulsive sounds over a particular threshold. We are currently carrying out further work to assess what additional measures might be needed to reduce the risk of introduction and spread of non-indigenous species.

The Government and the Devolved Administrations will be working closely with scientific experts and marine stakeholders, including conservation organisations, over the next two years to carry out a more in-depth assessment of the need for additional measures to achieve GES and to consider how these can be developed in the most cost effective way possible.

How will the Directive help improve our understanding of the marine environment?

The monitoring programmes for GES, which have to be in place by the middle of 2014, will help improve our understanding of marine ecosystems and human impacts on them. Although this consultation does not cover proposals for monitoring programmes, scientific experts have undertaken a broad initial assessment of the possible additional monitoring implications associated with the proposed UK GES targets and indicators. This potentially exaggerates the additional costs of monitoring because it has not considered possible efficiencies which could be made in the UK's current marine monitoring programme. The UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy community is reviewing current monitoring

programmes and will recommend changes to existing monitoring programmes to meet the aims of the Directive.

The Directive is also driving decisions about marine research and development spending both within the UK and more widely within Europe. Defra is currently carrying out a range of research projects to help improve our understanding of the less well researched aspects of GES (e.g. food webs, impacts of non-indigenous species), and a significant number of European research projects will also support the implementation of the Directive.

Further information about Defra funded research programmes is available at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/science/. Further information about EU funded Research and Development projects is available at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/research/index_en.htm.

You can find out more about the MSFD at:

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/msfd/

If you have any questions, please contact:

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