



BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION

NATIONAL MARINE PARKS

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Photo: George Karbus

NMP STRATEGIC WORKING GROUP

2023



A NEW NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

This national framework aims to promote common understanding of the vision for National Marine Parks across Britain. The aims of an individual National Marine Park (NMP) may differ depending on the particular coastal and marine features, designations, uses and socio-economics of the local area. However, underpinning any NMP should be a common understanding of what the status means. An accepted purpose and common objectives will guide how NMPs are established, designed and delivered.

Blue Marine has initiated the following framework in consultation with a strategic working group and location facilitators, to offer a definition, and propose the purpose and objectives for NMPs.

A set of principles and example aims, that can be used to guide communities seeking to establish a NMP, also offer standards associated with the status.

Underpinning any NMP should be a common understanding of what the status means.

Photo: Henley Spiers

DEFINITION

A National Marine Park is an expansive seascape of national importance, where the priority is to promote public awareness and understanding of coastal and marine heritage and seascape recovery; enable recreational enjoyment; and realise environmental and socio-economic benefits for coastal communities.

NMPs should have a purpose and objectives that encourage a new, sustainable relationship for people with the sea. The purpose and objectives that already apply to National Parks on land have provided a starting point for the coastal and marine environment.

PURPOSE

Connect people with their seascape to share in a sustainable future¹.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were initially based on those already in place for National Parks in England, Wales and Scotland, but have evolved through a national workshop with location facilitators and discussion between members of the NMP strategic working group:

- Facilitate sustainability through collaborative working.
- Promote public understanding and responsible enjoyment.
- Conserve, enhance and recover coastal and marine seascapes.
- Nurture the socio-economic health of coastal communities who depend upon their seascape.
- Build seascape and climate change resilience by leading nature recovery and a just transition to net zero.

¹) Seascape, like landscape is about the relationship between people and place and the part it plays in forming the setting to our everyday lives. Seascape results from the way that the different components of our environment – both natural and cultural – interact together and are understood and experienced by people. [Natural England \(2012\) An Approach to Seascape Character Assessment.](#)

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Building on the overall purpose and objectives above, there are a number of key guiding principles that could underpin the identification, creation and management of NMPs across Britain. These will help to ensure that the NMP status benefits the environment as well as local economies and the wider public.

The following principles build on those that are applied to the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and general principles for effective stakeholder engagement in area management. As NMPs are generally defined and differentiated

from MPAs as being multi-use, the range of stakeholders that need to be engaged to endorse NMP status and management, far exceeds those that have been involved in the designation and management of MPAs.

It is important to weigh up objectives and balance social, environmental and economic considerations to ensure one side of the argument is not always dominant.

1. SUSTAINABILITY

Balance the three pillars of sustainability (social, environmental and economic).

It is important to weigh up objectives and balance social, environmental and economic considerations to ensure one side of the argument is not always dominant. NMP management actions taken to support one of the three pillars should not compromise either of the other two. As with National Parks in the UK (with the exception of the Broads National Park), if there is a conflict between a park's purposes or

objectives, a key principle of a NMP (based on the Sandford Principle) should be that greater weight be given to the purpose to 'conserve, enhance and recover coastal and marine ecosystems, cultural heritage and seascape'. If economic development proposals form part of the aims for a NMP, ensure that these are pursued following best-practice environmental guidelines (e.g. incorporate renewable energy and waste reduction innovations in any new infrastructure).



2. CONNECTIVITY

Seek synergies and connections between the sea and coastal communities through ‘umbrella’ status which connects protected sites, the wider marine environment, the land and sea.

NMPs should complement and support coherence in the existing network of protected areas both on land and at sea, by providing an ‘umbrella’ status over clusters of existing designated sites and the wider marine environment (e.g. MPAs and cultural/maritime heritage). Complementarity helps to avoid unnecessary duplication of protected areas and subsequently to minimise potential additional restrictions placed on the community to use and enjoy the marine environment. From a biophysical point of view, aligning NMPs with terrestrial protected areas can help to buffer the marine environment from land-based impacts and provide ecosystem linkages between the land and sea.

NMPs should be designed to complement existing terrestrial and marine management practices and conservation agreements where appropriate. A NMP should promote more coherence (e.g. in planning processes), pulling together different authorities under a common umbrella and aim to reduce conflict.

Connectivity will increase seascape identity if the extent of the NMP and management of activities is simple for users to associate with (e.g. through zoning) and may lead to benefits such as greater compliance and less need for enforcement action.

3. FUNDABILITY

Seek sustainable funding models.

To succeed, NMPs require significant investment of time and money over the long-term. While increased revenue from recreation and visitors may be an outcome of NMP status, which can then be fed back into fund management, this will take time to realise. A sustainable funding model is a vital first step to the establishment and success of a NMP.

NMPs should avoid a ‘project-led’ approach and create a sustainable long-term funding strategy. This could include: a combination of central or regional government funding with private money; a levy on commercial marine uses; or an ‘ecological enterprise zone’ approach, where sustainable business investment is encouraged through specific incentives.

A NMP should aim to access diverse sources of funding aimed at coastal regeneration, sustainable development, marine biodiversity and maritime heritage protection, climate change mitigation, public health and wellbeing. NMPs are a natural fit to combine these initiatives and access novel central government funding sources.

Photo: Rowan Aitchison



4. LIFELONG LEARNING

Provide opportunities for increasing understanding, appreciation and enjoyment.

NMP status gives the opportunity to simplify understanding of the complexities in existing designations and marine management, and enhance education and enjoyment for communities. Messaging about the importance of marine spaces helps them to be valued and encourages stewardship. NMPs should be designed in a way to enhance communication which increases ocean literacy, appreciation and enjoyment of the coastal and marine environment, particularly through recreational activities. Increased community understanding of the seascape can lead to a shift in community perception and improvement of lifestyles, potentially resulting in less impact on the marine environment.

5. EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Seek to involve all interests through diverse and inclusive participatory approaches.

Stakeholder and community engagement should be central and core to the creation and management of NMPs. Management of multi-use areas requires the participation, collaboration and co-operation of a wide range of marine users, authorities, regulators and local communities. Engaging the whole spectrum of stakeholders from the early stages of planning and throughout the design and implementation of a NMP is fundamental to their success. Engaging communities in the planning phase and ongoing decision-making can gain buy-in and a sense of ownership. This will add weight to funding proposals and support compliance with NMP management in the longer-term.

There are many guides and principles for effective stakeholder engagement which should be considered including:

- **Relationship building** – through regular and in person contact. A dedicated liaison officer or co-ordinator will build relationships that increase understanding of different perspectives and increases trust.
- **Transparency** – be transparent about the decision-making process and how stakeholders can and cannot influence decisions and outcomes.

- **Inclusivity** – seek out and listen to diverse perspectives, don’t exclude potential dissenters or sectors that may raise objections.
- **Regular communication** – seek a high profile through different communication channels.
- **Neutrality** – provide objective information and avoid any immediately divisive terminology; neutral facilitation can help to bridge gaps and locate common ground in challenging conversations.
- **Clarity** – provide clear messaging, tailored to specific needs and perspectives.
- **Expectation management** – be honest about the outcomes and impacts of a NMP for different stakeholders and the timeframes for development.
- **Empowerment** – share the responsibility for making decisions and accountability for the results of such decisions.
- **Evaluation** – establish evaluation mechanisms, seek feedback on progress and ways of working, and adapt where appropriate.

NMPs can promote inclusivity and equality by promoting social cohesion and equal access to the sea, recognising value through recreational activities, ecosystem services, and public health and wellbeing.

Management of the marine environment should also take into account trends in use, such as seasonal fluctuations in populations during holiday periods. NMP design should aim to minimise any unnecessary disruption to the lifestyles and livelihoods of local residents and businesses without compromising the conservation objectives of the NMP.

It is vitally important to understand and respect the motivations of different users within the marine space, especially the commercial users, and work collaboratively to highlight the benefits of any proposal, as well as confront any challenges. A NMP should seek multi-sector support and help speak to and inform society on a range of marine issues, engaging a wide diversity of users. NMP design should aim to minimise any unnecessary disruption to the lifestyles and livelihoods of local residents and businesses without compromising the conservation objectives of the NMP.

A NMP should seek multi-sector support and help speak to and inform society on a range of marine issues, engaging a wide diversity of users.



Photo: Zoe Tumer

EXAMPLE AIMS

A list of aims has been drafted to select and adapt as appropriate for a specific location. Potential aims that stem from the above principles and could support the overall purposes and objectives include:

- **Connect people's lives with the seascape to improve health and wellbeing.**
- **Celebrate our extraordinary natural and cultural maritime heritage.**
- **Promote better understanding of life below water.**
- **Build awareness of, and support for, existing conservation designations.**
- **Encourage positive communication about our marine environment amongst those that use and protect it.**
- **Promote balance and collaboration between the many different types of users and visitors.**
- **Facilitate recreation and tourism opportunities and generate additional economic opportunities through better branding.**
- **Engage local communities in developing an inclusive plan to solve local challenges, promote local opportunities and generate a stronger sense of stewardship.**

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