

The 25 Year Environment Plan - Key Points of Interest for D&S IFCA

Introduction

The UK Government recently published its 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP). The plan outlines the direction which environmental management will take in the future in the UK. Chapter 5 focuses specifically on seas and oceans, but potentially relevant information is found throughout the plan. A summary of some key points can be found below. The 25 YEP sits alongside the Industrial Strategy and the Clean Growth Strategy, both of which are referred to within it. The Plan and its appendices can be found online here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>.

Key points of interest

1. Brexit and fisheries management

There is relatively little detail in the 25 YEP about exactly how fisheries will be managed after the UK leaves Europe. A white paper for the new Fisheries Bill is due to be published in early 2018 and this is referred to. The plan does commit the UK Government to bringing in a world-class fisheries management system and confirms our commitment to the principle of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) as well as referring to restoring and protecting the marine environment.

2. Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management

The 25 YEP refers to an ecosystem approach to fisheries management in a number of places. The concept of ecosystem based fisheries management (EBFM) is well developed in the US and is being incorporated into fisheries management systems. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the US define EBFM as:

'A systematic approach to fisheries management in a geographically specified area that contributes to the resilience and sustainability of the ecosystem; recognises the physical, biological, economic and social interactions among the affected fishery-related components of the ecosystem, including humans; and seeks to optimise benefits among a diverse set of societal goals'.

3. Whole site approach to management of Marine Protected Areas

Marine Protected Areas are a prominent feature in Chapter 5, both in the UK and in Overseas Territories. The Plan discusses increasing the proportion of protected and well-managed seas, and better managing existing protected sites. The Plan also refers to moving to a 'whole-site approach' to protect sites of greatest biodiversity interest. It is not clear exactly what this move involves, but it does seem to signify a change in approach to the management of some sites. D&S IFCA will update on the interpretation of the whole-site approach as soon as more information becomes available.

4. Natural Capital

Natural Capital is a recurring theme throughout the 25 YEP. Natural Capital refers to the economic benefits that originate from nature and our natural heritage. The definition of Natural Capital given in the plan is:

'Natural Capital is the sum of our ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, soils, minerals, our air and our seas. These are all elements of nature that either directly or indirectly bring value to people and the country at large. They do this by providing us with clean air and water, wildlife, energy, wood, recreation and protection from hazards.'

The Natural Capital approach being developed by the Natural Capital Committee is likely to become increasingly relevant to all environmental policy.

5. UN Sustainable Development Goals – SDG14

The Plan refers to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). This set of 17 goals aims to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda. All UN member states signed up to these goals in September 2015 and each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years. Of particular interest to D&S IFCA is SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and the targets therein, many of which refer to fisheries management. D&S IFCA are already managing in a way consistent with SDG14 but there may be opportunities to clarify how the work we do contributes to these goals within the existing annual planning and reporting cycle. More information on the UN SDGs can be found here: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

6. Gaps in the 25 YEP – mariculture and aquaculture

One key area of D&S IFCA work that was very poorly represented within the 25 YEP was mariculture. Whilst water quality and the management of the land-water interface were covered well within the plan, as was the marine environment, mariculture did not appear in either section. Defra published a multiannual national plan for sustainable aquaculture in the UK in 2015 but this did not feature prominently in the 25 YEP.

How can D&S IFCA help to deliver the 25 YEP

Much of the work D&S IFCA is currently undertaking is consistent with the aims of the Plan. Furthermore, the flexible permit byelaw approach allows D&S IFCA to incorporate any new management measures resulting from anything contained in the plan to be implemented quickly.

The Pioneer programmes, referred to in the 25 YEP offer an opportunity to test delivery of the Plan at a local level. D&S IFCA are key partners in the North Devon Marine Pioneer programme, sitting on the steering group and developing some of the projects which will test delivery. Two projects are currently being developed by D&S IFCA and the Blue Marine Foundation. The first aims to develop Research and Management Plans for stocks in North Devon and the Bristol Channel/ Severn Estuary (as a pilot which will then be carried out for the whole D&S IFCA district). These plans will draw together existing research, policy and management and review any gaps in these areas which may allow D&S IFCA to improve the sustainability of a local stock by filling these gaps. The second is a project looking at Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management in the Severn Estuary. These projects will help to also help develop EBFM in the D&S IFCA district and allow for close working with Defra in delivering the 25 YEP.

Finally, D&S IFCA will develop a mariculture strategy to fill the gap identified in the plan, at a local level and align future mariculture strategy in the D&S IFCA district so that it is consistent with the broader themes in the 25 YEP.