

## Draft Minutes

### Joint NWWAC/PelAC Focus Group Spatial Dimension

#### Virtual meeting via Zoom

29 May 2024

#### Participants

Gonçalo Carvalho (Chair)	Sciaena	PelAC
Enda Conneely	IIMRO	NWWAC
Falke de Sager	Rederscentrale	NWWAC
Ed Farrel	KFO	NWWAC/PelAC
John Lynch	ISEFPO	NWWAC
Mo Mathies	Secretariat	NWWAC
Aodh O'Donnell	IFPO	NWWAC/PelAC
Mark O'Reilly	Fisheries Liaison Officer	
Alexandra Philippe	EBCD	NWWAC/PelAC
Irene Prieto	OPPF4	NWWAC
Dominic Rihan	KFO	NWWAC/PelAC
Mark Willis	DECC	

#### 1 Welcome from the Chair (G. Carvalho)

The Chair welcomed all participants emphasizing the importance of the two ACs coming together to address joint issues. Apologies were received from Jérôme Jourdain and Tim Heddema ahead of the meeting. The agenda was adopted.

Action points from the last meeting (Dublin, 14 March 2024)

<b>Part I: Spatial Dimension</b>	
<b>1</b>	Put UK MPAs on agenda of next Inter-AC Brexit Forum as a priority issue to address. <a href="#">Discussed at last Inter-AC Brexit meeting, update at next FG meeting</a>
<b>3</b>	Write a letter to understand which groups to engage with fisheries in the in Special Member States Groups under marine action plan, to break the silo approach now happening. ACS to write letter COM to encourage to not work in silo, but bring environmental and fisheries topics in these groups. See if fisheries has a place in special MS groups, now all focussed on environmental topics.
	<a href="#">To be discussed under agenda item 3</a>

<b>4</b>	Deltares reports are available in ENG by googling ‘WOZEP ecosystem effects’. Collect reports and circulate to members.
	<a href="#">Link included in meeting report and circulated to members via email</a>
<b>5</b>	Circulate Richard Cronin’s notes to HWG participants.
	<a href="#">Notes included in meeting report and circulated to members via email</a>

## **2 South Coast DMAP – Mark Willis (DECC), Mark O’Reilly (Fisheries Liaison Officer)**

The slides can be found [here](#).

Mark Willis thanked the ACs for the opportunity to present on the South Coast DMAP as part of the statutory consultation, Ireland’s first spatial plan for offshore renewable energy. The plan identifies four areas of the South coast for proposed fixed offshore renewable energy development. It also includes a suite of policy objectives that proposed developers must have regard to when they seek to develop these projects.

He encouraged the ACs to make a written submission as part of the consultation to assist with updating the draft DMAP emphasizing that this is a plan, not a project, which will be subject to all statutory assessments as part of their development should they go ahead.

Willis then covered the policy context governing the development of offshore renewable energy (ORE) in Ireland referring to the plan-led regime introduced in 2023, before introducing the initial South Coast DMAP proposal from July 2023.

He explained that the areas presented in the draft plan were identified within the South Coast DMAP proposal for an approximate 900 MW project that would seek to deploy by 2030 or as soon as possible thereafter, but also including identification of further maritime areas for offshore wind projects that would deploy into the 2030s. The area was refined during public engagement which is still ongoing, as well as through technical and environmental analysis.

Moving on to the technical analysis, Willis stated that this is also informed by the statutory environmental assessments that have to be carried out under Irish law on this draft DMAP. Following the area definition, a wide range of robust comprehensive environmental data was gathered to inform both a constraints and an economic analysis. These work streams fed into the publication of the four maritime areas proposed for development which was followed by a consultation phase that we are in now. All submissions will be considered and hopefully help the future refinement of the draft plan via amendments. Once the draft plan has been refined it will be submitted to the Irish Parliament for approval after which it will be deemed to be established.

Willis identified that data analysis was carried out based on the ecosystem approach. Over 200 different data layers were collected under seventeen different attribute categories informing the environmental, technical and economic analysis.

He clarified that the final four areas were identified based on the lowest environmental constraints, with Area A (Tonn Nua) proposed for deployment of offshore wind for the 900 MW project to be developed by the winner of an auction that's scheduled to commence this year. 900 megawatts would translate to 60 15 MW turbines if it was built today but that detail will only be finalised at project level. This area ranges between 48 to 69 metres in sea depth, which, if the project was built tomorrow, would make it the deepest fixed bottom offshore wind project globally or certainly in Europe. The other three areas are identified for the development of

offshore wind beyond 2030 and would not be suitable for deployment right now due to their depth.

Looking at spawning and nursery grounds, Willis described that there is no overlap with herring and Nephrops grounds while there is an overlap with cod spawning grounds based on best available data from the Marine Institute.

Following this overview, Willis provided insight into the suite of policy objectives associated with the project which will be given a statutory basis should the project be approved by the Irish Parliament. He explained that these objectives fall broadly into two categories, firstly measures that seek to provide for the protection of the marine environment and biodiversity, and secondly a number of policy objectives that specifically relate to the coexistence to providing for coexistence between offshore renewable energy and other maritime activities. It is mandatory that all projects will employ fisheries liaison officers. In addition, the Department has introduced a requirement that there are no mandatory exclusions of other activities taking place within wind farms, including fishing, bar in the case of exceptional circumstances relating to safety. Willis added that all projects will be required to develop a fisheries management and mitigation strategy or an aquaculture equivalent plan that relates to the management and the mitigation and measures for each impacted commercial fishery. In addition, there is a statutory requirement on all projects to bury and protect their cables.

The draft DMAP also includes a governance and a monitoring structure that is led by DECC which will also lead the implementation programme board. Willis explained that the implementation board will be responsible for implementing a strategic environmental assessment monitoring programme as well as for convening a so-called collaborative forum that will meet at least twice every year, bringing together relevant stakeholders to discuss the development.

Willis finished by mentioning that the draft DMAP also includes a new research and monitoring programme for assessing any potential impacts of offshore wind energy developments on marine ecosystems which will be led by the Marine Institute.

The Chair thanked Willis for his comprehensive presentation and opened the floor to questions.

Mark O'Reilly also thanked the ACs for the opportunity to join the meeting and mentioned his availability for any future meetings.

On the slide for the monitoring policies and implementation board, John Lynch asked who the competent authority was.

Willis explained that this was the Minister for the Environment, who will appoint the board which is likely to involve DECC and possibly MARA. Working groups will be established to advise.

Lynch asked on the cost layer why the main scallop fishery did not show up to a greater extent.

Willis explained that it did show up but was not assessed as a hard constraint, for example a piece of physical infrastructure which would prevent the construction of a wind turbine. Most areas are also weighted according to the cumulative buildup of all different layers together. What can be seen is a partial overlap between the scallop fisheries and area B and C.

Lynch mentioned that there is quite heavy fishing in the area according to the Marine Institute Atlas and felt it should have been given a higher weighting.

Willis invited this to be put forward in any submission being made. He added that fishing on its own is not a hard constraint and would only become this if there were other constraints layered. He commented that it was not possible to identify any area for development that would not overlap with any fishing activity.

Ed Farrell wondered regarding the weighting of layers in the overall approach where a high rating is given to designated areas such as SPAs. Fisheries was only considered in the context of co-existence and not in the context of avoidance, minimisation or mitigation as laid out in the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF). He felt that the NMPF was overlooked.

Willis responded that he would come back on the ratings but felt that the NMPF had been adhered to. He added that there is no overlap between SPAs and SACs as they are located much closer to shore which are more environmentally constrained as more activities take place there.

Farrell added that it would be useful to receive more detail on the breakdown of the rating. He also referred to the Ecological Sensitivity Analysis (ESA) of the Celtic Sea and wondered if there was a reason to not wait for the publication of this study.

Willis commented that the ESA was evaluating the most ecologically sensitive areas off the South coast. The output of this report will inform the refinement of the draft South Coast DMAP. He felt that ORE is critical to decarbonisation and to energy security therefore delays must be avoided.

Farrell asked what the DMAP would do if the whole of area A was highlighted under the ESA.

Willis felt he could not answer a hypothetical question but reiterated that the study results will not be ignored, and that transparency will exist around how this has shaped the DMAP.

Dominic Rihan referred to the potential issues raised as part of the public consultation and how the scope of the DMAP would allow for refinement of the four identified areas.

Willis commented that as part of this proper public consultation all submissions will be assessed against the plan including the policy objectives and the proposed areas. The legislation required that “*refinement of the draft DMAP must have regard to the consultation.*” He commented that this is also consistent with how ORE areas are chosen in other jurisdictions and referred to developments by the UK in the Celtic Sea.

Rihan agreed that the public consultation was a valuable exercise and that the areas could change but reiterated his interest in the flexibility within the DMAP.

Enda Conneely asked for clarification as to why fishing was not a hard constraint but that SPAs are. He noted on the policy objectives that the ORE is critical for decarbonization and energy security but felt that the fishing industry which is critical for food security was being dismissed.

Willis responded that he would need to come back to this but would not accept that fishing has not informed the process at all and that it has been disregarded. He felt it was reflected in the constraints analysis and in the policy objectives. He understood the scepticism but was confident that fishing would continue in the ORE developments. He invited additional comments on how the policy objectives could be strengthened.

Farrell asked if the research and monitoring programme has been developed. Willis stated that it has not been developed yet but will be implemented and developed by the Marine Institute. Any suggestions regarding increasing the efficacy are welcome. The plan related to all four areas.

Farrell pointed out that the maps reflecting commercial fisheries constraints layer and the tourism layer are almost identical and felt that this was unusual and suggested that this would need follow up.

Willis thanked Farrell for this observation and suggested that a wrong map could have been included due to human error.

Mark O'Reilly added that everyone was welcome to contact him directly.

The Chair thanked both for joining the meeting this morning and for the detailed exchange. He felt that having an open channel and continued communication is key in these developments.

### 3 Review and discussion of draft advice

#### Submission on South Coast DMAP

Aodh O'Donnell stated that at an event last Friday fishermen were shocked at the overlap of the scallop fishery and the proposed development and was wondering why the fishery was not deemed to be a hard constraint.

The Chair shared this concern as shellfish are stationary and felt this was relevant to express in any submission.

Lynch felt it was critical that two of the areas in question are in the middle of the biggest scallop fishery in Ireland and the only significant offshore fishery in Ireland. If this area was lost to the Irish fleet, pressure will increase on other areas which are likely in other MS areas or the UK jurisdiction.

The Chair asked if within Area A the turbines could be placed so that fisheries would be possible.

Lynch explained that communication is happening with a UK based developer where fishery is allowed within the ORE development so that the heaviest scallop area remains as a fishing ground. However, this does not allow for scallops living closest to the turbines.

Farrell highlighted the overlap with some of the spawning grounds and stated in one of the reports a study by the Marine Institute was mentioned. He suggested to contact the Marine Institute regarding this analysis and to evaluate the overlap with the cod conservation area.

Lynch confirmed that are B and C fully cover the cod conservation area. He felt that the data used was more recent as cod stocks have diminished over the past years.

The Chair agreed to ask for the MI analysis.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to contact the Marine Institute and request a copy of the report prepared for the SC-DMAP.

O'Donnell stated that the ACs need to have an input in the refinement process as the overlap with the scallop fishing grounds and spawning areas needs to be clarified.

Falke de Sager wondered how fishers experienced safety in ORE development as even when allowed fishers tend to avoid these areas due to safety concerns. She also referred to the



spawning and nursery areas and wondered if the areas just outside designated areas had been taken into account.

The Chair felt that the extent of impact is very poorly known and referred to the Deltares presentation from the last meeting, specifically on turbulence, stratification etc.

Lynch commented that the projects are still in planning phase and not constructed but that the Irish industry has been informed of a Scottish project where scallop fishing takes place. DECC has offered to bring Irish fishermen for a site visit. He added that the Belgian beam trawlers would also be impacted by DMAP development.

The Chair agreed that the safety issue should be addressed as training may need to be provided in addition to special safety measures.

Rihan commented that as part of the TCA/SCF a mapping exercise was carried out in the Celtic Sea primarily around cod by the Marine Institute and Cefas. The proposed development covers existing closed areas, and other proposed developments will potentially impact on spawning areas in other jurisdictions. He expressed his concerns regarding consultation with other MS fleets and that there was a danger that international stakeholders were going to be overlooked.

The Chair reiterated the importance of involving the ACs in those process.

Farrell referred to the need for more data used and aggregated fisheries data as the Marine Institute only has Irish effort, Irish landings and international effort though this would not show the true value of the areas. He added that the KFO is working on a submission and various patterns can be seen when putting together different data streams.

Mo Mathies provided an update on the ACs' proposed membership in the Seafood/ORE group and explained that following the presentation made on 16 April, work is continuing by the Fisheries Liaison Officer to overcome opposition to this on the ORE developers side so that in the next meeting the ACs can be officially represented.

De Sager commented on the international effort as part of the consultation and stated that the Rederscentrale was not contacted.

The Chair added that the ACs may wish to raise the issue of potential impacts on Small Scale Fisheries (SSF).

Conneely added that fisheries was not a high priority under the policy and that he was not confident that the consultation process was robust enough.

The Chair felt that a good list of concrete aspects was discussed to be put forward as part of the consultation process.

O'Donnell stated the importance of acknowledging that the DECC has always been open to engagement with the industry.

The Chair thanked O'Donnell for this but added that he felt that there were knowledge gaps for the ACs.

Farrell offered to contribute maps to the AC submission for illustration purposes.

Mathies explained the urgency of preparing a submission as the deadline is 14 June.

The Chair felt that it would be good for the NWWAC to lead on the submission and that the joint work with the PelAC could be included in the letter.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to draft submission to DECC consultation.

#### Letter on silo approach

The content of the letter was refined by the members during the meeting.

**ACTION:** Secretariat to initiate approval procedures in both ACs.

#### **4 Next steps**

The NWWAC Secretariat will circulate the draft response to the public consultation to the FG members for approval before initiating the approval procedure in the NWWAC HWG. Following approval by the HWG, the letter will be submitted to the NWWAC Executive Committee in a fast-track procedure in order to meet the deadline.

#### **5 AOB**

None raised

#### **6 Timeline and summary of actions agreed**

<b>1</b>	Secretariat to contact the Marine Institute and request a copy of the report prepared for the SC-DMAP.
<b>2</b>	Secretariat to draft submission to DECC consultation
<b>3</b>	Secretariat to initiate approval procedures in both ACs on letter re. policy coherence.
<b>4</b>	Potentially contact Marine Institute for presentation at future meeting.