With eyes across the globe focused on recent events in Glasgow for COP26, there is no underestimating the scale of the challenge ahead of us in tackling the climate emergency. It is something we face collectively, on a truly global scale, and indeed the only way we will overcome this is if we come together to deliver change to move us towards a collective vision.

Renewable energy is one of the tools we have in our arsenal in the fight against climate change and indeed, the UK government reaffirmed its commitment to delivering 40GW of offshore wind, including 1GW of floating offshore wind by 2030 in the recently launched Net Zero strategy. However, we also face a biodiversity crisis, with marine life under threat across Europe's seas. Multiple pressures affect species and habitats, leading to cumulative impacts that reduce their overall resilience and so deployment of renewable energy needs to be compatible with goals for marine restoration and other activities.

That's why I'm hugely proud that we can play our part through the Offshore Wind Evidence and Change programme. I am delighted with the commitment shown by the Programme Steering Group (PSG) members and others, working together to help achieve the programme mission of facilitating the sustainable and coordinated expansion of offshore wind while helping us to care for our precious marine environment.

It's been an incredibly busy period over the past few months with several key milestones achieved, including:

- A multi-million pound funding award for the first tranche of main call projects, following a rigorous process of assessment. We are now in the process of finalising contracts and I look forward to making a public announcement, once these have been concluded. I am hugely grateful to the lead organisations and their partners for shaping such ambitious and game-changing proposals and also to the Project Evaluation Board for their diligent reviews and feedback.
- The EcoWind call for proposals went live on 28 October, with a deadline for outline bids of 25 November. We are pleased to be a funding partner of this research programme into the Ecological Consequences of Offshore Wind, which is led by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).
- Work continues in developing the Offshore Wind Environmental Evidence Register (OWEER) following a successful forum on 24 September. In response to feedback from participants, the scope of the register will be expanded to include fish as a key receptor, in addition to seabirds, marine mammals and the benthic environment. Led by Defra and delivered by JNCC, the register is hosted on our Marine Data Exchange.

In this newsletter we will be hearing from Siobhan Browne from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on her aspirations for the programme and speaking with Peter Barham, Chair of The Seabed User & Developer Group, on identifying strategic targets for Marine Net Gain. There is also a digest of the

upcoming Future Offshore Wind Scenarios announcement and other projects.

Mandy King
Programme Manager

THE CROWN ESTATE

Latest programme news

Future Offshore Wind Scenarios: This UK-wide project will help to identity future potential scenarios and provide greater certainty around future costs for offshore wind deployment. Whilst the project will not constitute a marine spatial plan, it will define a range of plausible scenarios for offshore wind development to 2050 and assess the extent to which deployment levels are constrained by technical, economic, environmental and system factors – including the trade-offs involved.

Outputs will include a web-based interactive dashboard to be used by those from across government, regulators and industry to select pathways and explore different scenarios and options against deployment and cost. With project tools due in early 2022, we don't have long to wait.

Known as the 'Future Deployment scenarios of Fixed Bottom and Floating Offshore Wind in the UK', the project is jointly funded by BEIS, The Crown Estate, and Crown Estate Scotland.

Read more

Headroom in Cumulative Offshore Wind Farm Impact for Seabirds: This project seeks to identify potential solutions to legally securing the as-built parameters of offshore windfarms to facilitate better assessment of the cumulative impacts of offshore wind. This report was published in July and is available on the Marine Data Exchange *here*, together with a webinar recording.

The report produces some tangible actions for policy and regulatory organisations to take account of, and potentially apply, recommendations that could make an immediate difference. The report also recommends specific actions in relation to future consents, historic consents and further workstreams.

The project was led by The Crown Estate with participation from Natural England, Crown Estate Scotland and RenewableUK, along with support from statutory nature conservation bodies and regulators.

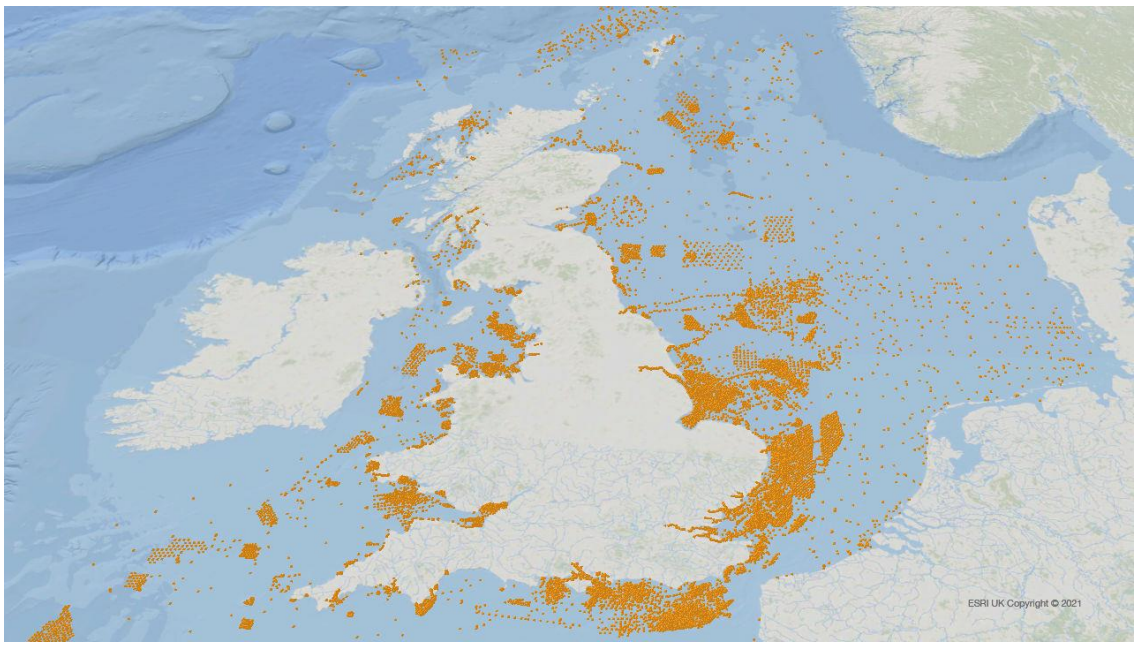
Read more

Fish and Fisheries Evidence Gaps: Led by Marine Scotland (through its ScotMER Programme) with support from The Crown Estate, this report aims to identify key gaps in fish and fisheries data across the UK relating to offshore wind farms. Outcomes are due to be reported shortly.

North Sea Net Gain: The purpose of this project is to bring together data and evidence on how benthic biodiversity is distributed across the North Sea and around the UK into one dataset so decisions around offshore wind deployment can be made using the most comprehensive information. Taking an international perspective will allow us to look across administrative boundaries, providing a baseline picture that will enable conversations on net gain initiatives such as nature inclusive design.

Following a thorough data mining process, the project team are now producing detailed maps of habitats and distributions of key benthic species in the North Sea. This will then be brought together in a publicly accessible app to be used by the industry, government bodies and anyone with an interest in marine life and space. The app is due to be completed by the end of the year and will be launched with a webinar in early 2022, so keep your eyes peeled for that.

The project is led by The Crown Estate in partnership with The Rich North Sea Programme, delivered through the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) and supported by the Project Advisory Group including Natural England and JNCC.



The map above shows the locations of all the benthic samples that the North Sea Net Gain project team have collated the data from, bringing it all together into one standardised format that is being fed into the modelling work – in all there are over 44,000 sample points!

The programme in the spotlight...

The Offshore Wind Evidence and Change programme received some fantastic coverage at one of the first big industry events since the easing of Covid restrictions - Global Offshore Wind 2021 - hosted at the ExCel Centre in London at the end of September.

During the day's opening remarks, newly appointed Energy Minister Greg Hands MP noted that the acceleration of offshore wind deployment needs to be environmentally sustainable. He referenced the work of the Offshore Wind Evidence and Change programme in helping to gain a greater understanding of the impacts of deployment, and finding the strategic solutions to manage and mitigate them.

The programme was showcased during a session with Olivia Thomas, Head of Marine Planning at The Crown Estate, on '*solutions for collective use of the sea – what tools enable net zero*?'. Olivia, who was joined by Rachael Mills from the Offshore Wind Industry Council's Pathways to Growth co-ordination group, discussed how we are using the power of collaboration, innovation and communication to tackle the twin challenges of the climate crisis and biodiversity loss.

Will Apps, Head of Marine Development at The Crown Estate, also highlighted a project being delivered through the Programme to enable the co-location of air defence and offshore wind. The project is part of a wider work package driven by the Air Defence and Offshore Wind Windfarm Mitigation Taskforce to deliver an initial Strategy and Implementation Plan which was launched at the conference. The Government and industry-led partnership has identified how innovative new technology could allow future offshore wind projects to exist alongside air defence radar systems.

Project insight – Strategic Targets for Marine Net Gain

This edition, we caught up with Peter Barham, Chair of The Seabed User and Developer Group, to gain a project insight into the Strategic Targets for Marine Net Gain Study.

How did this project come about?

The need for greater action to restore the marine environment is recognised as key to addressing the continuing decline in marine biodiversity. Net Gain has been identified as a potential development approach that can contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, by leaving the natural environment in a measurably better state than before. Developments that adopt Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) aim to have a positive impact by delivering an overall increase in biodiversity.

Implementing BNG in marine and intertidal environments is recognised as being particularly challenging, due to its dynamic nature and the complex interactions between diverse marine users. It is therefore important to establish clear objectives and targets for Marine Net Gain (MNG) that provide a focus for developer-led action.

The Offshore Wind Evidence and Change programme has established Net Gain as one of its four key research themes – and we're really pleased to have been given the opportunity to undertake this important project.

How was it delivered?

A Strategic Net Gain Task and Finish Group (T&F Group) was established through the Offshore Wind Evidence and Change programme with the aim to identify a set of strategic targets for the delivery of MNG. An initial gap analysis of existing legal and policy objectives and targets informed discussion around possible priorities for MNG and views of marine stakeholders were obtained via two online surveys. The Group comprised a range of

organisations including Defra, Energy UK, Natural England, Renewable UK, RSPB, SUDG, The Crown Estate, The Wildlife Trusts and UK Major Ports Group, supported by an experienced consultancy, ABPmer.

What are the key outputs?

We've identified a robust set of strategic targets for MNG, which have strong consensus and agreement from industry, regulators and conservation bodies. The targets set a clear direction for how developers could contribute towards MNG to restore and improve marine and intertidal environments. The aim of the T&F Group is for these targets to inform Defra's ongoing work through the Offshore Wind Enabling Actions (OWEAP) Programme to develop policy for MNG and its implementation.

What are you focusing on next?

Our work as the T&F Group is complete – we recently published the report (which you can view here) ahead of Defra's planned consultation on MNG principles later this year. The report includes a set of recommendations to support further discussions on MNG, which can assist Defra in its development of MNG policy. In effect, our work has been a building block gathering evidence for Defra's policy work. We are looking to see whether there is value in us conducting further work to explore options for how MNG targets could be delivered, including at a more regional or local level.

Spotlight on – Marine Management Organisation

Each newsletter, we'll be shining a spotlight on one of the programme partners or members. For this edition, we heard from Siobhan Browne, Strategic Renewables Unit Manager at the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) about her role and why MMO are involved in the programme.

The Marine Management Organisation's purpose is to protect and enhance our precious marine environment, and support UK economic growth by enabling sustainable marine activities and development. We play a central role in planning and delivering new offshore wind farms in particular through marine planning and

licencing.

We recently established a Strategic Renewables Unit at the MMO to act as a hub on offshore wind and marine renewables, both internally and externally, maximising the expertise and contributions of our relevant teams.

The MMO is delighted to be a member of the Offshore Wind Evidence and Change programme. The Programme's strategic research and data projects will provide essential insights to help the offshore wind sector better understand and address environmental considerations and interactions with other industries and activities, both around the coast and offshore. This will enable a more coordinated and strategic approach to the delivery of the new infrastructure required to deliver net zero emissions by 2050, ensuring the sector can deliver at pace while protecting the broader natural environment.

As well as being a member of the programme steering group, the MMO is also involved in several projects, including Natural England's POSEIDON project. This is one of the Offshore Wind Evidence and Change programme main call projects which aims to improve the knowledge of environmental risks across UK waters and provide tools for future offshore wind planning

Dates for your diary

2021

- 25 November - Deadline for outline bids for EcoWind first call for projects

2022

- 27 January – Programme Steering Group meeting
- 19 May – Programme Steering Group meeting
- 28 September – Programme Steering Group meeting

Feedback is important to us, if you have any comments or enquiries, please visit our website to get in touch.