

Orkney Marine Planning Advisory Group – Meeting 7

OMPAG: AG7 Minutes: 2nd September 2025: 14:00 -15:30

Present: Kristopher Leask (Chair) (KL); James Green (JG); Daniel Morris (DM); Emily Murphy Gray (EMG); Mellissa Thomson (MT); Owen Tierney (OT); Dan Brazier (DB); Nigel Welford (NW); Kris Bevan (KB); Phil Bennett (PB); Peter Watson (PW); Cheryl Chapman (CC); David Patterson (DP); Janet Davies (JD); Mark Drever (MD); Sinead Sheridan (SS).

Apologies: Penny Coles (PC); Sarah Sankey (SS); David Thomson (DT); Penny Martin (PM); Victoria Clements (VC); Sandy Kerr (SK); Jenni Kakkonen (JK); David Dawson (DD); David Sawkins (DS); Jo Porter (JP); Brian Kynoch (BK).

Item 1: Welcome

KL (Chair) welcomed everybody to the meeting. Introductions were made by attendees.

Item 2: Update on Progress

Update A: The Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan consultation and feedback

JG gave a recap on the Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan, what it does and the area that it covers. Essentially the Plan contains policies to guide public authority decision making on marine development and activities in Orkney waters (out to 12 nm).

The Plan has been prepared by OIC on behalf of Scottish Ministers with support from this Advisory Group (AG) and wider stakeholder and community input. The Plan is needed to enable sustainable development, protect the marine environment and manage the diverse marine economic sectors present within Orkney.

The spatial information has been updated since the consultation with updated data where necessary.

JG outlined the timeline including the current stage of discussion with the Marine Directorate, an upcoming seminar with OIC elected members, OIC committee endorsement and adoption of the Plan by Scottish Ministers.

JG gave thanks for all the input by Advisory Group members so far. JG notes that after multiple rounds of reviewing the Plan, several changes were made as a result of Marine Directorate feedback.

JG gave a recap of the Plan consultation in Q3 2024. This included 11 community events across Orkney, two online community engagement sessions, 10 school classroom sessions, and a SmartSTEM session at Kirkwall Grammar School. During the events OIC Marine Planning also collected spatial data from local stakeholders and communities. Additionally, six interviews with businesses were conducted to give insight into the potential costs and benefits for businesses when implementing the plan policies.

JG thanked any AG members that responded to the consultation..

Discussion:

NW asks about timeline and whether the upcoming Scottish Parliament election will affect the RMP timeline. JG outlined that the current timeline is for the RMP to be adopted before the next election. It is hoped that the timeline will not slip but cannot be guaranteed due to the Marine Directorate timelines.

OT asked if WOWF is within the RMP boundary, JG confirmed that it partially is.

OT inquired whether fishing interests had been consulted throughout plan development. JG confirmed that the Orkney Fishing Association, Orkney Regional Inshore Fisheries Group and Scottish Fishermen's Federation as well as individual local fishermen had been consulted, through OMPAG and the consultation period at in-person events across Orkney. JG reminded the group that the Plan does not contain policy on fisheries management, however the sector policy on fishing is in place to protect commercial fishing by ensuring that development proposals consider potential impacts on this industry.

Update B: Key modifications made to the Orkney Regional Marine Plan consultation draft

The key modifications to the plan were summarised in a presentation delivered by JG. The report summarising these modifications is attached to the email sent to OMPAG dated 26/08/2025. The AG members should refer to section 5 of the Consultation and Modifications report for a full list. Detailed modifications will be published alongside the final Plan.

Update C: Orkney Islands Marine Region: Finfish Farming Spatial Guidance (FFSG)

DM thanked all AG members that were involved in the preparation of the FFSG.

DM recapped the consultation for the FFSG, which was done alongside the Regional Marine Plan. DM then recapped the FFSG and its uses. This guidance is a non-statutory decision support tool that will provide clarity/information on potential sensitivities/constraints for finfish farming developments. The guidance is the first of its kind and OIC Marine Planning is looking to prepare a series of spatial guidance documents, with a shellfish spatial guidance already started and then looking towards a seaweed farming spatial guidance as well.

DM confirmed that there will be a full consultation and modification report to follow, similar to the Regional Marine Plan's consultation and modification report.

DM then demonstrated the FFSG tool (Beta version) and gave a summary of the modifications to the guidance and online tool since the consultation.

Discussion:

SS asked if the tool worked better for a specific area, such as a bay or can one take an Orkney wide perspective?

DM explained that the tool does have benefit in looking at specific areas as it has a high level of detail on the potential sensitivities present within an area and therefore can be used comparatively against other potential areas. However, the tool does allow for use across an Orkney wide perspective as displayed within the demonstration, to identify areas of opportunity that might have less receptors than other areas.

SS asked if the FFSG could help to identify areas of least sensitivity or opportunity areas for developments?

DM stated that the SG would be able to do this however it doesn't necessary mean they cannot develop in an area that has many sensitivities. There may be more receptors to consider in a given area and a need to provide appropriate mitigation. OIC Marine Planning are keen to make this tool as useful as possible for the industry, therefore the process of zoning areas has been avoided, this allows flexibility for fish farmers to identify locations that meet their own operational and technical requirements. Throughout the development of the guidance OIC Marine Planning has consulted with the fish farming industry in order to get their input and make the guidance as useful as possible.

PB mentions that fishing grounds and spawning grounds data has not been included due to the fact that fisherman are reserved in sharing this data. The RIFG would like to include these useful datasets but as they are currently not available, this is not a possibility and a known data gap. DM agreed and is supportive of this information being included if it is available in the future.

Update D: Update on supporting guidance for the Plan policies

JG presented the guidance documents that will support the Plan to help implement the Plan policies.

The guidance documents that will be/are being prepared are:

- Natural capital and ecosystem services
- Marine enhancement and restoration
- Finfish farming spatial guidance
- Shellfish farming spatial guidance
- Seaweed cultivation spatial guidance

There were two additional guidance documents that were identified as being beneficial through the public consultation.

- Supporting sustainable social and economic benefits
- Amenity, wellbeing and quality of life

OIC Marine Planning will be contacting the AG members in due course to seek views on which guidance members believe are a priority to take forward first, and to ask AG Members if they would like to be involved in steering the preparation of particular guidance documents.

Discussion:

OT asked whether the marine enhancement and restoration guidance is relevant to the current community led oyster restoration project in the Bay of Firth. JG answered that the restoration guidance is there to help community projects such as this but also developers as well. The guidance will also look to identify best practice and potential habitats that would be a priority and most likely to succeed.

SS asked about Question 13a in the Plan consultation on Priority Marine Features (PMFs), and the policy differences at the regional level and national level. I.e. whether or not a policy on lower magnitude impacts on PMFs will be included in the RMP and if so, how will this policy sit alongside the PMF policy in the National Marine Plan. JG told the AG members that the policy will not be taken forward prior to the adoption of NMP2, and therefore will not be within the first iteration the Plan.

Update E: National Marine Plan Update

JG updated AG Members on the NMP progress. The RMP has been prepared in conformity with the current NMP (2015). The Marine Directorate is currently drafting NMP2 and delivered a NMP2 Planning Position Statement (PPS) consultation in November-January 2024-25. OIC responded to the PPS in January, providing a detailed response including the ask that island communities were considered in the plan as the PPS did not have a High Level Objective (HLO) for island and coastal communities which was disappointing.

OIC Marine Planning were further consulted directly by the Marine Directorate and we are now anticipating that this will result in a HLO included in the future NMP2 draft to '*Support and enable thriving and resilient island and coastal communities*'. OIC has also supported the Scottish Government's preparation of policies to promote socio-economic benefits from marine development for island communities.

A recent update (29/08/25) from Marine Directorate advised that NMP2 has been delayed and this provided no clarity on when the consultation draft will be published. An update from Scottish Government later this year on the matter is anticipated. The update also included the published Consultation Analysis Report from the PPS consultation which can be viewed on the Marine Directorate website. OIC Marine Planning would encourage AG members to review the document.

Update F: Regional Marine Planning Forum update

DM introduced the Regional Marine Planning Forum as a recommendation that came about from the ECCLR report (Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

Committee) who did a review into the progress of RMPs in Scotland back in 2020. It was critical of the Marine Directorate, and highlighted a lot of inefficiencies in central government and gave a series of recommendations. One of the recommendations was to establish a workshop or 'Forum' that would include the different regions and provide an opportunity for Marine Planning Partnerships and Local Coastal Partnerships to share best practice, feedback to central government on what's working and what isn't, and shape regional marine planning for the future particularly with National Marine Plan 2 down the line.

The first RMPF took place in Stirling in November 24. There was a follow-up online forum meeting in March 2025, and the next one is later this month (September 2025).

The first two sessions in particular focused on taking stock of where each region was up to, ongoing projects, discussing some of the common issues and areas of collaboration and opportunity. The RMPF gives MPPs and LCPs an opportunity to discuss with the Scottish Government the vision for regional marine planning going forward and how it will work alongside the National Marine Plan.

A few key outcomes that came out of the first two forum meetings was a series of subgroups. These are specific meetings between the regions involving the Marine Directorate on National Marine Plan 2 and how the regions can contribute to that, as well as a subgroup on developing guidance for policy implementation, and research and knowledge exchange between regions.

The Regional Marine Planning Forums are still new, but they've been very worthwhile and productive, and a step in the right direction.

As these evolve, OIC Marine Planning will keep the advisory group up-to-date on any developments.

Update G: Next steps

JG stated that the OIC Marine Planning Team are finalising the Consultation and Modifications Report which will detail the Modifications made to the Plan.

The Plan is in its final stages of edits and likely to be finalised by the end of this week (wk 01/09) with input from the Scottish Government. The Plan will then be brought before OIC elected members on 18 September for a seminar, to answer any questions, discussions etc. The OIC Marine Planning team will then seek Council endorsement of the Plan, taking the Plan to the OIC Development & Infrastructure Committee on the 11 November and the General Meeting of the Council in December, where the council will be asked to endorse it. Should the Council endorse the RMP for submission to Scottish Ministers, the Plan will be submitted in December for Ministerial approval.

Discussion:

DP asked if the Plan will be a live document after being adopted. JG explained that the team will, at an appropriate point, review the plan. OIC Marine Planning will prepare a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that will inform the future reviews of the plan. JG

comment stated that it is difficult for the plan to be truly adaptive due to the statutory steps in the plan preparation process.

Item 3: AOCB, questions and close

DB: NatureScot will be undertaking research on in combination and cumulative impacts on the North Orkney and Scapa Flow SPAs. This data and research will be published. NatureScot intend to invite comments from OIC and other statutory stakeholders. The research will look at the pressures on the SPA receptors, going back to the baseline from 2017 to now. The timescales include a draft report out in November/December and the report out early next year (2026).

No further questions. KL thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.

Meeting close: 15:12.