

Marine Management Organisation Research Priorities for UKRI's

Sustainable Management of UK Marine Resources (SMMR) Programme

MMO scientific evidence programme – April 2020

The current five-year programme (2015-2020) of scientific evidence gathering for MMO is in its final year and we are in the process of developing our next five-year programme. This is slightly unfortunate timing for pointing potential collaborators to evidence requirements online as a lot has been done on our requirements at this stage. However, we have ideas about what the next five-year programme requires and we are very happy to talk to people about these. Please contact MMO's head of evidence at aisling.lannin@marinemanagement.org.uk to ask questions and discuss ideas. We are likely to be able to give a quick steer on any emerging ideas. We really want to be involved in designing projects if people think their ideas are relevant to MMO.

Some useful information about our role and responsibilities and how that relates to our evidence requirements is in our Evidence Strategy 2015-2020 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-strategy-for-the-marine-management-organisation-mmo>. This should help to give an overview of what might be relevant to the MMO.

We do list our evidence requirements (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-and-the-marine-management-organisation-mmo/evidence-requirements>) but, as mentioned, at this stage they are almost out of date. A number of those listed have recently been fulfilled so it is best to check with us before exploring any of these as projects to see what is still current and what has been developed already.

We publish every evidence report that we commission or use and they are listed and linked at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-and-the-marine-management-organisation-mmo/evidence-projects-register#on-going> so this is a good list to refer to if you are wondering if a requirement has been fulfilled or not.

MMO Evidence emerging requirements 2020-2025

Our new requirements are expected to be within the following themes. Please contact us to discuss any related ideas especially those that span several themes. As these are emerging please do contact us to discuss any ideas outside of these that you think might also be of interest.

Protecting marine ecosystems including habitats, wildlife, interactions and processes

Across all parts of the MMO protection of the marine environment is a key responsibility. This applies to conservation in MPAs, environmental protection while enabling marine developments, implementation of marine plans and management of fisheries. Requirements are both strategic and specific ranging from how to support climate and biodiversity recovery through current legislation and regulations to development of methods to reduce human impacts on specific protected species.

Marine Management Organisation (MMO) outline evidence requirements for SMMR programme April 2020

The thrust of our requirements in this theme are not just about ecological thresholds but very much about methods and frameworks that support people to improve and restore ecosystems. This covers evaluation, improvements or changes to management practices, incentivising behaviour, increasing stewardship among all actors, understanding the root causes of issues and increasing capability and capacity of colleagues to improve outcomes for nature through MMO decision making.

Enabling sustainable development

This is relevant across all parts of the MMO but is particularly focused on the marine licensing and planning function. There is a complex challenge in ensuring that nature is protected and improved while humans carry out activities to support their health, livelihoods, leisure and wellbeing. Integrating the management of activities, pressures, impacts and competing goals is a challenge that requires a system-based approach, that easily accommodates interdisciplinary considerations and methods. Our requirements on this are evolving much like the situation, making us aware that there are new disciplines and areas of research that should be explored practically (action research) to progress marine management to a point where it easily flexes and adapts to overcome the current climate and biodiversity crises. This includes achieving net zero.

Delivering sustainable fishing opportunities

We are at a broad transition point in fisheries management in the UK. This is an opportunity to evaluate our current approaches, develop and implement a fisheries management system that is world class and embed approaches that can better support restoration of nature. It is also an opportunity to develop and test ways to better integrate marine fisheries management with marine management.

Incentivising behaviour that protects and sustains the marine environment

The MMO is very engaged in managing activity and behaviour and would benefit greatly from exploring practically the best and most up to date science that can inform this. This is a new and emerging focus for evidence at MMO.

Supporting global marine protection

The MMO is leading the Blue Belt Programme in Overseas Territories for the next three years and is supporting the OTs in their efforts to protect their marine environments. This is a relatively new area of work for MMO so evidence requirements are emerging.

Evaluating the impact of management interventions and activities to support adaptive approaches

Evaluation is an underutilised social science tool that could make a significant contribution to managing the impact of people on the marine environment. This is a new area of interest for MMO but evaluation could become a business as usual activity that improves capability to design, test, iterate and evolve working practice and achievement of outcomes for nature and people.