



Diverse Marine Values

Integrating Diverse Values into Marine Management

How to understand diverse values in marine decision making and enhance their inclusion for more equitable outcomes



Natural
Environment
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Introduction

Marine regulators have statutory responsibilities to consult with the public and other stakeholders when they are making certain decisions, including marine management.

These requirements are embedded in global and national legislation which seeks to ensure public participation in decision-making, access to information and justice in environmental matters ¹. Social objectives are also increasingly prevalent in policy and legislation with commitments across public bodies to enhance outcomes relating to wellbeing and inclusivity, requiring understanding what these mean in specific contexts.

However, there are challenges in the inclusion of social values in decision-making, and the UK's Environmental Audit Committee (EAC)² recently called for a new framework for stakeholder participation to empower coastal communities and integrate diverse voices into decision-making.

Through the Sustainable Management of Marine Resources (SMMR) Project: **'Integrating Diverse Values into Marine Management' (DMV)**³, we explored how to better incorporate diverse values into marine governance. This included identifying barriers, opportunities and tools to

enhance how people's values about the sea are considered within marine management decision-making.

As part of this project, we analysed decision-making processes across case studies of marine management in **England**, **Scotland** and **Wales** to better understand whose voices, and what types of knowledge and evidence, are being privileged within marine decision-making. We focussed on:

- 1 The development of the Welsh National Marine Plan led by Welsh Government,
- 2 The consenting process for the Southsea Coastal Defence Scheme,
- 3 The development of the River Wye and River Usk Fishing Byelaws,
- 4 Scottish Government's development of Scotland's Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy.

This policy brief presents insights into the challenges of incorporating values in decision-making, and opportunities to amend current practices to address them. This allows us to consider how to make decisions fairer, more transparent and more acceptable to diverse marine stakeholders.

How to understand 'diverse values' in marine decision making and enhance their inclusion for more equitable outcomes

What do we mean by 'marine decision-making'?

Key Messages

- Values generally relate to the importance of something to people, the beliefs that underpin these values, and also beliefs about how things should be done. Recognising these different components can help consider values more meaningfully in decision-making.
- Decisions made by marine regulators are shaped by a complex governance framework. Understanding law and policy, as well as the social and geographic context within which decisions are made, is essential to better understand the values expressed by stakeholders.
- Choices made by decision-makers and how these relate to the data and evidence available to them is a demonstration of their own values and beliefs. This may reflect their individual values or those of the institutions they are guided by, or a combination of both.
- Increasing the range of opportunities for social values to be considered in decision-making helps to engage local communities and builds trust in regulators.
- A better understanding of marine decision-making processes ('process literacy') across stakeholders and decision-makers would enhance engagement and support more accessible decision-making.

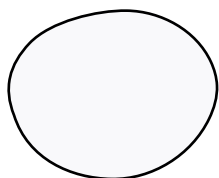
What do we mean by 'marine decision-making'?

In the UK, marine decision-making includes the regulatory processes which operate within the marine management frameworks in England, Wales and Scotland. These frameworks are set out in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (for England, Wales and Scottish beyond 12 nautical miles offshore) and the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.

Marine decision-making includes the processes of reaching a decision addressing human use or environmental protection in coastal or marine settings, such as:

- Marine policy development, for example consultation on the UK Joint Fisheries Statement (2022) or the National Policy Statement for renewable energy infrastructure (EN-3, 2024).
- Marine planning – including the development of spatial and non-spatial policy regarding human uses in the marine area. This includes the Welsh National Marine Plan (2019) and the eleven marine plans for inshore areas of England.
- Sectoral marine planning – large scale spatial plans for key sectors such as Scotland's Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy.
- Marine licensing based on consent applications for specific developments such as an aquaculture facility or an offshore wind farm
- Development of fishing and conservation byelaws

The 'decision' represents the end of a process where evidence is used through formal consultation to reach material determinations for a plan, project or policy, which are legally binding. When looking at a decision-making process we define when the process begins and ends, to consider how values are incorporated throughout it and into a particular decision.



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What do we mean by 'values'?

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Many types of values can be identified in marine decision making. These are linked to thoughts and feelings about how we should access or use the marine environment and its resources and how these thoughts and feelings should be considered within a decision-making process. Our understanding of diverse values is based on the IPBES framework⁴ and we use the following definitions to identify values in decision-making:

- **Statements** about the importance (or otherwise) of something, such as a habitat or species. This includes using measurements to communicate the value of something, for example: *"It is important that salmon are protected and we must ensure that the number of salmon increase."*
- The **underlying beliefs** that form these statements. These can be ethical, moral, political or ideological. For example: *"Salmon are intrinsically valuable; whilst they do have commercial value, they have a right to flourish in our waters regardless of this."*
- **Judgements** about how these statements are included in decision-making processes, for example: *"When making a decision about how best to protect Salmon we need to use the best available scientific evidence from respected and qualified technical stakeholders."*

Our approach for assessing values in decision-making:

To identify which values are included within a marine decision-making process, we followed these steps:

1. Identify and define "the decision" and the decision-making process - when did it end and what was the final decision made? When did the process begin?
2. Develop a visual timeline of the decision, including all consultation events, assessments and other activities related to the decision.
3. Through analysis of assessments and reports, identify, where possible, the stakeholders involved at each stage and in each activity.
4. Collate and review the representations made by stakeholders and the values expressed, and reflect on what values might be expressed by decision-makers in how they choose to run the process.

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Analytical example: The Southsea Coastal Defence Scheme

Example: Southsea Coastal Defence Scheme

The four steps outlined above (on page 03) were used to investigate the values in the planning process for the Southsea Coastal Defence Scheme. This dual process required a license from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and planning permission from Portsmouth City Council.

- 1.** The decision ended with the determination of planning permission and the marine licence in 2019/20 for the Scheme. We excluded post-consent activities in order to provide a clear end point for the decision. The process started with the 2010 North Solent Shoreline Management Plan policy to "hold the line" along the coast at Southsea, setting the intention for coastal defence.
- 2.** The decision-making process included multiple consultation exercises as well as assessments of the impact of the proposed Scheme on different marine species and habitats. This decision was made more complex by changes to local planning policy underway in parallel to the Southsea Coastal Defence Scheme. This included an updated Masterplan and Seafront Strategy for Southsea.
- 3.** Many stakeholders were included in this decision, including statutory agencies, experts in coastal flooding, local and parish councils and the wider public. These stakeholders were included throughout the process, from the earliest policies developed in the Shoreline Management Plan to the formal consultation exercises following consent application submissions.
- 4.** Values identified in this process included those related to each marine species and habitat assessed as part of the consent applications. In addition, public values related to the importance of accessing the beach, accessing the seafront by bike and car, and maintaining the sea views in the area were included in the design.

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Recommendations to increase inclusion of diverse values in marine decision-making

Recommendations to increase the consideration of diverse values in decision-making

Through our analysis, we identify three key areas in which diverse values can be better included in decision-making. Implementing these changes would increase stakeholder engagement with processes and lead to more equitable and accepted decision outcomes.

1. Understand the context of the decision-making process, including legal and policy drivers, and the specific social and geographic characteristics.

By doing this, we can better understand the different positions taken by people involved in the process and the values expressed. This includes:

Legal context: How are different issues, such as habitats and species, considered within the law? What values do these legal frameworks predetermine and how might they affect inclusion of wider values?

- **Policy context:** What overarching policies are providing steer for this decision?
- **Local geography:** What is unique about the area in which a decision is being made?
- **Social context:** How have people been affected by previous planning or decision-making experiences and engagement?

Being aware of the context would be helpful during the design of consultation processes, support interpretation and analysis of responses or when communicating with stakeholders.

2. Recognise the bias in the use of evidence in decision-making and enhance how social values are considered.

Decision-makers must use the best available evidence to ensure that decisions can stand up to scrutiny, including appeals and judicial reviews. However, there is notable bias towards the use of quantitative data representing economic or ecological interests in marine management⁵ with approaches needed to incorporate qualitative and social data.

Decision-makers face challenges in understanding how stakeholder and community perspectives should influence decisions because there are no clear metrics to assess social value. In many cases, there is also unfamiliarity or mistrust of approaches and a perceived lack of methodological rigour in social research. This can mean that stakeholders find it difficult to be heard and can feel disenfranchised, meaning that the outcomes of the decision are more likely to be unpopular.

Where public stakeholders are providing qualitative information based on their opinions and views, decision-makers should explore how this data can be included in the process.

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Recommendations to increase inclusion of diverse values in marine decision-making

3. Increase process literacy for both stakeholders and decision makers by embedding it as a component of ocean literacy strategies across the UK

We use the term "process literacy"⁵ to describe the extent to which people understand decision-making processes, their context and how they can engage with them. Increasing process literacy would mean that more people have a clearer idea of how marine decision-making processes work, and what they can do to help achieve equitable outcomes. Process literacy applies to both public stakeholders and decision-makers:

- For **public stakeholders**, increasing process literacy would involve helping stakeholders understand how a particular process works, what is involved, and the types of issues or concerns that can be considered by decision makers. This could include providing plain-English and easy-access guides to decision-making. It could also include describing the specific process in more detail.
- For **decision-makers**, increasing process literacy includes thinking about the decisions they are making in their wider context. What standard practices are being used, and can these be challenged or improved?

Enhancing process literacy as a component of ocean literacy provides opportunity for enhancing the capacity of stakeholders and decision-makers to articulate and engage with key decision-making processes in a meaningful way⁶.

References

1. Such as the United Nations (1998) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matter (the Aarhus Convention)
2. <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8759/governing-the-marine-environment/news/>
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4. Anderson, C. et al (2022). Chapter 2: Conceptualizing the diverse values of nature and their contributions to people. In: Methodological Assessment Report on the Diverse Values and Valuation of Nature of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Balvanera, P., et al. (eds). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany
5. Policy Brief: Using a Natural Capital Lens to Identify Evidence Gaps in Marine Decision-Making
<https://www.smmr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/DMV-Natural-Capital-Policy-Brief.pptx-1.pdf>
6. McKinley, E. and Fradera, K. (2025) "Shouting into the void: Democratising ocean literacy through integrating process literacy." Marine Policy 178: 106731.

The Diverse Marine Values project is led by an interdisciplinary team of researchers and partners

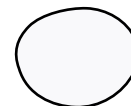
Project Partners: University of Portsmouth, University of Greenwich, Cardiff University, University of Liverpool, University College London, University of the Highlands and Islands, Marine Conservation Society, New Economics Foundation, Howell Marine Consulting, Ocean Conservation Trust, Company of Makers.

For more information on the Diverse Marine Values project, please visit:

<https://www.smmr.org.uk/funded-projects/integrating-diverse-values-into-marine-management/>

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