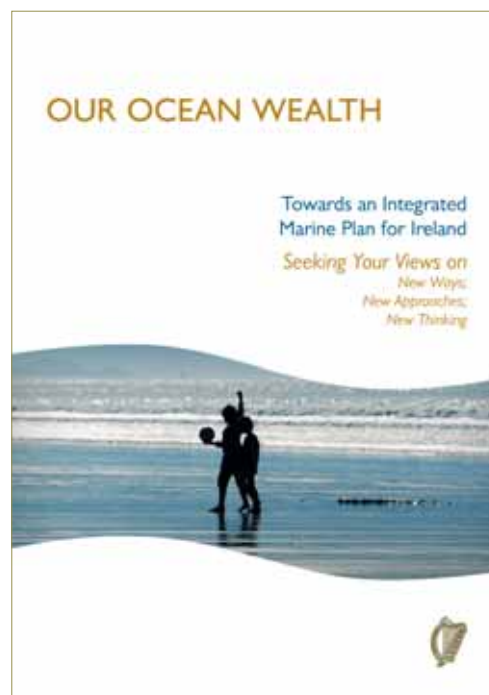


13. Summary Feedback from the Consultation – Your Views

Introduction and Overview of Submissions

In February 2012, a consultation document entitled **Our Ocean Wealth: Seeking Your Views: New Ways; New Approaches; New Thinking** was launched by Minister Simon Coveney T.D. This discussion document posed 10 questions designed to capture the views and ideas of the public on generating sustainable growth in our marine economy. Additional views and ideas were also welcomed and a public debate was facilitated through an online discussion forum; helping to inform marine policy-making and improving the quality of decisions reached and services provided.

One hundred and ninety-two submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders including Government/State organisations/committees (21); NGOs (7); individuals (106); local community groups (8); SMEs, MNCs and other private enterprises (22); Industry, Trade & Professional Organisations (17); Higher Education Institutions & Research Consortia (9); and Political Organisations/Representatives(2). As part of the consultation process, Minister Coveney T.D. and representatives of the Marine Coordination Group presented the initiative to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture. The Committee also delivered a submission²⁷ on *Our Ocean Wealth*, welcoming the Government's plan to initiate the development of an Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland and strongly supporting the sustainable exploitation of our marine resources. The submission also recognises the great potential of the ocean and marine resource for the creation of employment, wealth, commercial opportunities as well as an environmental and leisure resources. Specific comments in relation to aquaculture and seafood developments were also provided in the submission.



27 <http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/Agreed-Submission-on-'Our-Ocean-Wealth'-from-JCNRA-060612.pdf>

Key Themes and Messages

Towards an Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland

Overall, respondents welcomed and supported the public consultation in the development of an Integrated Marine Plan. A need for continued public participation and consultation was highlighted, emphasising the role of local and regional authorities. The need to underpin this plan with an effective implementation framework, with clear lines of responsibility, was highlighted. Submissions also emphasised the need to reflect environmental and social elements of development and avoid focusing solely on economic dimensions.

The Vision

The discussion document provided a draft vision for our ocean wealth. Respondents agreed with the general approach of the draft vision with some suggestions as to possible alternate time frames and a greater focus on non-economic benefits. It was also suggested that the vision should include references to coordinated and integrated governance, sustainable development, environmental protection, innovation and effective implementation of the Integrated Marine Plan.

Targets for Our Ocean Wealth

The discussion document highlighted the need to substantially improve our economic performance from our ocean resources, given that in 2007, these resources generated €3.4 billion in turnover and 1.2% GDP. The targets suggested varied widely, ranging from €2.1 to €34 billion and 1.5% to 10% of GDP. The majority of respondents suggested that a target should be set between €5 to €7 billion, and 1.5%-2.5% of GDP. Some submissions suggested that the use of TEV (Total Economic Value) would be a more appropriate measure of the contribution of the marine economy. Respondents suggested alternative time frames for such targets, with submissions favouring both shorter and longer term time frames. The benefit of focusing on specific sectors (i.e. Marine and Coastal Tourism and Leisure, Marine Renewable and Non-Renewable Energy, and Maritime Transport) in achieving overall marine sector economic growth was highlighted.

Enablers

The questions posed in the discussion document called on the public to share their views and ideas on the necessary conditions to achieve growth in the marine sector. An overview of these views and ideas on the enablers specifically identified in the discussion document, and other enablers which were identified through submissions (i.e. environmental protection, infrastructure and maritime safety, security and surveillance), is presented below.

Marine Governance, Policy and Legislation

There was significant agreement on the need for integrated governance of the marine sector with clear roles and responsibilities allocated to government departments and agencies. Continued public consultation and participation in marine governance was highlighted as necessary. The leadership demonstrated by the Department of the Taoiseach in the Our Ocean Wealth initiative was broadly welcomed. Many suggested the re-establishment of the Department of the Marine, a single responsible agency or an effective coordination mechanism. A call for the broadening of the membership of the Marine Coordination Group, to include for example, the Irish Naval Service, HEIs, NGOs, and industry representatives, was included in some submissions. There was a range of conflicting views on the extent to which local governance should feature in the development of the marine sector.

There was general agreement that marine sector policies should be integrated at the highest level and must be focused on establishing Ireland as an attractive place to do business. It was suggested that this could be achieved through favourable fiscal regimes, sector specific strategies and infrastructure development. Submissions highlighted the need to amend certain pieces of legislation in order to simplify development process and to improve access to the sea. The need to amend sectoral regulations was identified as critical, ensuring they are fit-for-purpose and enforceable to allow growth in the sector.

Planning and Licensing

There was very strong agreement on the need for better planning systems to provide for sustainable development. Marine spatial planning was regarded by many as critical in optimising the use of our marine resources. Marine spatial planning was viewed as a tool and views were expressed that it must not be regarded as a complete solution for conflict resolution. The need for continuous stakeholder involvement in the design of this tool was regarded as important. Submissions highlighted the need to take account of practices in other jurisdictions. The need to link marine spatial planning with integrated coastal zone management as a continuously evolving overarching framework focusing on long-term sustainable development was regarded as vital.

An effective licensing system was viewed by many submissions as the single most important contribution the public sector can make to the development of the marine sector. Numerous submissions regarded the current licensing systems as a barrier to growth (e.g. foreshore and aquaculture licensing and planning permission). It was felt that such systems must be fit-for-purpose, quick, consistent, efficient and transparent in order to attract investment.

Research, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation

Submissions highlighted that an Integrated Marine Plan must facilitate the focusing of research funding on priority areas for development, while facilitating necessary collaboration between institutions and agencies. Many submissions suggested the establishment of various frameworks and task forces to better focus research activities on the marine sector and the need to develop clusters in the sector in order to attract investment. The need to improve the commercialisation of research was referred to numerous times and HEIs were called upon to concern themselves with this priority, with the aid of state agency support and through strategic partnerships. It was suggested that funding agencies should be better aligned in order to ensure that appropriate funding is allocated to research activities in the marine sector.

Infrastructure

Respondents regarded infrastructure as a key enabler in developing the marine sector. A significant number of submissions highlighted the need for a national strategy on infrastructure for coastal areas as views were expressed that current infrastructure fell below the international standard and constituted a significant barrier to development. Many submissions identified island communities as particularly dependent on such infrastructure development. The need to categorise infrastructure developments according to activity, area, urgency and level of development or maintenance required was regarded as a necessity. The need to identify interdependencies between sectors in relation to infrastructure was also identified. In providing such infrastructure elements, it was suggested that the possibility of public-private partnerships needs to be explored. A number of submissions highlighted INFOMAR (seabed mapping programme) as an example of a successful and important overarching national infrastructure enabling programme.

Maritime Safety, Security and Surveillance

The importance of this enabler in developing the marine sector was considered as significant; as it provides certainty and transparency for potential investors in the sector and is regarded as an essential element of good governance. Submissions identified the need to highlight the role of the Irish Naval Service and the Irish Coast Guard. It was suggested that maritime security aspects of the Integrated Marine Plan would need to be aligned with the EU Integrated Maritime Policy and the future EU Maritime Security Strategy. Some submissions expressed the view that the discussion document did not adequately deal with the issue of marine environmental security. It was recommended that the Naval Service have access to better technology in carrying out surveillance and ensuring maritime security. Suggestions were also made around the sharing of resources with other agencies and organisations.

Capacity, Education, Training & Awareness

Submissions identified the need for more skilled manpower resources and an assessment for future skills in order to harness the potential of the marine sector. Numerous submissions detailed the importance of including marine-related subjects in the curricula at all levels of education. The need for the promotion of career possibilities related to the marine sector was regarded as key in developing the sector. At third-level, it was suggested that HEIs should pursue stronger industry links and improved course offerings to ensure skills requirements of the developing marine sector are met. The need for professional and ongoing training opportunities was highlighted, along with training courses for local coastal communities.

Submissions highlighted the need for our maritime identity to be strengthened and suggested measures such as early stakeholder engagement, public outreach programmes (e.g. 'Sea Week') and encouragement for entrepreneurship within coastal communities so that they have a greater sense of ownership of our maritime resource. Communities were encouraged to become more involved with our marine potential, and be supportive of the development of the sector. Local coastal communities were identified as key players in certain marine sectors; e.g. tourism and leisure. The need to promote engagement with the sea at a recreational level and strengthen our awareness and identity of our ocean wealth was highlighted. It was suggested that this might be fostered through the use of broadcasting, the internet, marine ambassadors, and through the presence of the Irish Naval Service and Coast Guard at maritime events.

Environmental/Ecosystem Protection – Clean – Green – Marine

The preservation of environmental resources to deliver benefits to all and to promote the common good was a recurrent theme throughout submissions. Policy makers were called on to deliver a commitment to sustainable development. It was suggested that environmental protection would be best achieved through proper, effective, adequately resourced, legislative, regulation and licensing frameworks that were effectively enforced and monitored. The need for proper data collection and auditing as well as the use of Environmental Impact Assessments was highlighted. The need to comply fully with EU and International environmental obligations was emphasised.

Balancing environmental protection with economic growth was discussed and calls were made for the private sector to lead the way in sustainable and eco-friendly exploitation and development through environmentally friendly methods and practices. On the issue of licensing and permitting systems to regulate development, it was suggested that the private sector should pay into an environmental contingency fund to support monitoring and policing. Communities were identified as having an important role to play in ensuring environmental standards are maintained. Some submissions felt that monitoring and compliance data in relation to licensing should be made publicly available to ensure transparency in these systems.

Business Development, Marketing and Promotion

A need to promote Ireland as a location for marine sector development in compliance with the highest environmental standards, which is an open and attractive as a place to do business, was identified. The current marketing of Ireland as a green, land-based economy was noted with a desire expressed to expand promotion of Ireland as a 'green and marine' economy. The need for sector specific promotion was highlighted (e.g. Irish seafood, marine and coastal tourism and leisure, and maritime heritage). The need for market and consumer trend data for specific sectors, socio-economic data on the effect of marine sector development, and seabed mapping data and collection were also highlighted as key enablers for business development.

International and North/South Cooperation

It was felt that Ireland should strive for a more robust representation and negotiation strength at EU level. The opportunities associated with the EU Strategy for the Atlantic and in the Irish EU Presidency in 2013 were emphasised. It was suggested that local representatives should be better consulted on Ireland's negotiating position. The CFP was identified as key area for Ireland to focus on in pushing for ambitious reform. There was a disparity in submissions as to the effect EU environmental legislation has on growth and development of the marine sector. The role of the private sector in lobbying for policy changes at EU level was also highlighted through submissions. It was suggested that a stronger cross-border and transnational approach be adopted in relation to governance and development of the marine sector, in order to further harness our growth potential.

Sectors

Shipping, Ports and Services

The contribution of the shipping, ports and services sector was acknowledged as vital in the recovery of Ireland's economy. Submissions identified opportunities for further development of the sector; including the establishment of an international shipping and shipping services hub in Ireland and niche market areas for development (e.g. renewable energy, tourism and leisure, training and support services). The proposed Ports Policy Statement was welcomed and seen as an opportunity to allow for integrated planning so that Ireland's ports will have the capacity to adapt to changing markets. Greater cooperation between responsible government departments and agencies was highlighted as vital for the continuing successful development of the sector, as was a review of planning and foreshore application processes and regimes; marine spatial planning; and appropriate and fit-for-purpose training and education opportunities to meet future skills shortages in the sector.

Marine and Coastal Tourism and Leisure

The current and significant future development potential of the marine and coastal tourism and leisure (sailing and cruising, other water sports, angling, coastal walking and cycling) was highlighted by a significant number of submissions. The importance of the sector to rural coastal and island communities, especially on the West Coast, was referred to by many respondents, with a particular focus on the maritime heritage of such areas. Fragmentation between the various responsible departments and agencies was viewed by some as a barrier to future development. It was suggested a national strategy with a local focus could help overcome this. Other key issues highlighted included: a need for integrated planning to resolve potential conflicts with other sectors; a simplified planning and licensing regime; appropriate training and enterprise development opportunities; the provision of adequate infrastructure; and a healthy marine environment protected by fit-for-purpose legislation and regulation.

Seafood (Fisheries, Aquaculture, Processing)

Overall, the enormous potential for the seafood sector was highlighted in the many submissions received.

Seafood Processing

The opportunities provided by the Irish seafood processing sector were highlighted, with a general feeling that the sector understood the challenges, opportunities and the need to contribute to employment. It was suggested that the sector was aware of the need to meet the demands contained in a reform of the CFP. Submissions highlighted recent efforts to develop a growth strategy, aiming to add value to the sector by branding Irish produce at home and abroad. An important link between the seafood sector and marine and coastal tourism was identified in many submissions. In relation to seafood processing, it was suggested that environmental protection must become a key element. The area of high value-added seafood processing and organic production was regarded as an important potential growth area. It was suggested that the level of research and development should be increased in the sector through support from state agencies. Tailored training courses and business development assistance were also regarded as necessary.

Fisheries

It was suggested that greater stakeholder engagement is required in the fisheries management process, with submissions highlighting the need for better representation at European level to pursue an ambitious reform of the CFP that reflect Irish interests. The need to return ownership of our fisheries resources to local communities, or national bodies, to sustain the sector and the well-being of such communities was identified. The need for adequate infrastructure in certain locations to support the fisheries sector was highlighted, as was the need to allocate greater research resources to the investigation of stock levels and conservation tools. Submissions discussed the need to regard environmental protection as an enabler, rather than an inhibitor, of growth. Finally, it was suggested that a ban on commercial fishing of sea bass be maintained in order to sustain the contribution of angling to the economy.

Aquaculture

The areas of fish and shellfish farming were highlighted as key areas of potential growth that could generate large-scale employment opportunities. However, some submissions suggested there was a low value and low-level nature of employment opportunities associated with aquaculture. Growth in this sector was identified as potentially creating growth in other sectors (e.g. vessel building and support services). Serious barriers to growth were identified, including; the lack of strong government intent; the need for a more efficient licensing process; the lack of public assistance (including financial supports) for start-up businesses; and a focussed research effort. The export potential of Irish aquaculture produce was viewed as significant, provided the right promotion and branding was in place—i.e. high-quality sustainable seafood. Balancing the views on the development potential of the sector were concerns over the potential environmental interaction/impacts of aquaculture (e.g. disease, wild fish interactions); the need for adequate monitoring to ensure compliance with environmental regulations; and the need to consider the balance/interaction with other sectors.

Marine Renewables

Many submissions focused on the significant potential for Ireland in the marine renewable energy (wave, wind and tidal) sector and highlighted that development could offer export potential and long-term direct and indirect economic benefit and contribute to Ireland's energy security, renewable energy policy and CO₂ reduction targets. The submissions outlined what was needed in order to develop this potential:

- A clear recognition by government of the opportunity as a national priority for development;
- Publication of the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Programme, together with a focused and clear implementation plan;
- An appropriate, clear and stable policy framework to create an attractive and secure place for investment and to confirm (internationally) that Ireland is "open for business"; and
- Adequate enabling legislation, effective planning procedures, stable tariff/fiscal regimes, appropriate enterprise development opportunities, physical infrastructure (including grid interconnectors, port facilities, seabed mapping and energy storage facilities) and incentives for investment.

Submissions pointed to the critical need to ensure environmental protection and to involve local communities and stakeholders, and relevant government departments and agencies in the process of any development. Submissions highlighted the contribution the higher education sector can make to development of the sector (e.g. research expertise, targeted courses) and the need to provide continued research support.

Offshore Oil and Gas

Many submissions highlighted the importance of offshore oil and gas to our energy supply and economic growth. There were, however, mixed views expressed on the indigenous employment opportunities and revenue return to the exchequer that oil and gas developments can deliver. The associated risks and potential negative impacts on the marine environment and coastal communities were emphasised. Differing views were expressed as to the extent to which the state should engage in promoting (via the development agencies) and developing Ireland's offshore potential, with some suggestions that the state should partner with E&P companies. The need for a robust, stable and effective regulatory regime to attract investment, demonstrate stability and ensure protection of the marine environment was seen as vital.

Marine ICT

The potential of this sector to contribute to economic growth by servicing markets for Marine ICT products and services to support/enable sectors such as shipping and port services, renewable energy, oil and gas, and aquaculture, and to marine environmental monitoring/regulation was emphasised. The development of a Marine ICT cluster in Ireland was viewed as a key to realising this potential, building on existing research capacity and test and demonstration infrastructure (e.g. SmartBay, IMERC).

Marine Biotechnology/Functional Foods/Seaweed

Submissions highlighted the potential from sustainably and innovatively exploiting our marine biological resources for high-value products and processes. Biotechnology, functional foods and seaweed were recognised as key areas for development in this regard. Building on the recent investments in research, knowledge and innovation was regarded as a key to realising the opportunities in the sector. Support for the development of seaweed aquaculture and the resolution of licensing issues for seaweed aquaculture and wild harvesting were considered vital.

Ocean Mining and Gas Hydrates

A small number of submissions addressed ocean mining and gas hydrates, highlighting the size of the market and the potential of the sector. It was suggested that existing patented technology could be put to use in extracting minerals, metals and gas hydrates from offshore Ireland. The need to invest in a skilled workforce and associated research to take advantage of this potential was noted.

Conclusion

Many of the submissions to the consultation agreed that an Integrated Marine Plan is needed to harness our ocean wealth, get the environment right for investment and use the potential of our marine economy to create jobs in a sustainable manner. A more detailed report on the feedback from the consultation (Our Ocean Wealth; Your Views) is available at www.ouroceanwealth.ie