

Principles supporting restoration and enhancement in marine or coastal development proposal

Guidance note

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What is this document about?

This document sets out our approach to advising on inclusion of restoration or enhancement elements in a marine or coastal development proposal.

Who is this document for?

The intended audience is internal staff, developers and decision makers involved in marine and coastal planning and development.

Contact for queries and feedback

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Version History

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1.0	March 2022	Document published
2.0	August 2025	Updated hyperlink (page 5).

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To report issues or problems with this guidance [contact Guidance Development](#)

Introduction

One of NRW's roles is to provide advice (statutory and non-statutory) on how new legislation, policies, plans and developments might affect the Welsh marine environment.

We aim to provide marine advice that will **positively influence** policy, planning, development, and decision making; to ensure that the marine environment and natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, enhanced and used, now and for the future.

Restoration and enhancement of marine and coastal environments is receiving growing attention from a wide range of stakeholders, from biodiversity-focussed activities through to elements of wider development planning. NRW are working to develop evidence, advice and guidance to support marine and coastal restoration and enhancement, recognising the opportunities for the delivery of multiple environmental and societal benefits.

This document sets out our approach to advising on inclusion of restoration or enhancement elements in a marine or coastal development proposal, in line with our first general marine advice principle:

“Our marine advice will be proactive and targeted on enabling consideration of key environmental issues and opportunities at an early stage”.

This document and the principles herein **sit outwith NRW advice** related to impact assessment, mitigation and compensation that may be required under the Habitats Regulations.

Legislation and policy

The first **Welsh National Marine Plan (WNMP)**, adopted in Nov 2019, supports integrated decisions that take full account of environmental, social and economic issues and therefore plays a key role in the delivery of the objectives of the Environment Act and Well-being of Future Generations Act in Welsh seas.

Under the heading “Living with Environmental Limits”, the Plan sets out a suite of policies that “promote the protection and enhancement of the marine environment to ensure that Wales has resilient marine ecosystems that can meet the needs of future generations”.

This includes WNMP Policy **ENV_01: Resilient marine ecosystems** which reads:

Proposals should demonstrate how potential impacts on marine ecosystems have been taken into consideration and should, in order of preference:

- a) avoid adverse impacts; and/or
- b) minimise impacts where they cannot be avoided; and/or
- c) mitigate impacts where they cannot be minimised.

If significant adverse impacts cannot be avoided, minimised or mitigated, proposals must present a clear and convincing case for proceeding.

Proposals that contribute to the protection, restoration and/or enhancement of marine ecosystems are encouraged.

The WNMP clarifies the aim of Policy ENV_01 to “ensure that biological and geological components of ecosystems are maintained, restored where needed and enhanced where possible, to increase the resilience of marine ecosystems and the benefits they provide” and as such provides an opportunity for consideration of the inclusion of restoration and enhancement in a development project.

The Welsh Government's WNMP [Implementation Guidance](#) provides some examples of restoration and enhancement that could be considered under this policy and instructs marine plan users to engage with NRW for advice:

“Proposals are **encouraged** to contribute to the restoration or enhancement of marine ecosystems. Incorporating restoration and/or enhancement of marine ecosystems into proposals does not have to be expensive or complex. It could include using different substrates for building on the foreshore that are favourable to postconstruction colonisation by a range of species. Small changes to intertidal structures that allow the formation of crevices in walls or pools at low tide as opposed to the structure drying out entirely can provide an additional environment for rock pool species that would otherwise be unable to exist there. Developers should engage with NRW for advice on enhancement to ensure any proposed enhancement is suitable.”

NRW advice

NRW provides advice to developers and decision makers on a statutory basis regarding the protection (maintenance) of marine biodiversity, particularly in relation to protected habitats and species.

However, inclusion of restoration and enhancement as part of marine developments is a relatively new consideration for developers, decision makers, and for NRW advice.

As part of our advisory role, we have developed a set of five core principles on restoration and enhancement of marine and coastal ecosystems to provide a starting point for meaningful discussions with project developers.

Core principles for inclusion of restoration or enhancement in a marine or coastal development proposal

Principle 1: Restoration and enhancement should seek to increase marine ecosystem resilience

Appropriate restoration or enhancement of marine habitats and species, **in keeping with the natural environment**, is encouraged to help to **build resilience of marine**

ecosystems in Wales by increasing biodiversity and supporting ecosystem functions such as nutrient cycling, water filtration and coastal protection.

Principle 2: Restoration and enhancement should be deliverable and sustainable in the long term

Proposals that incorporate established / evidenced approaches to restoration and enhancement, that can be maintained into the future, are encouraged to maximise their contribution to building marine ecosystem resilience.

There is also the opportunity to trial new and innovative approaches to restoration and enhancement under this policy, in a way that would not be possible under other regulatory requirements (such as compensation under the Habitat Regulations, ENV_02: Marine Protected Areas¹).

Consideration should be given to ensuring that restoration and enhancement is not likely to be compromised in the longer term for example by planned developments or predicted climate change impacts.

Principle 3: Embedding restoration and enhancement into a proposal should not prejudice operational activities

Developers need to be able to continue to deliver operational activities in the longer term, and delivery of restoration and enhancement should not prevent these.

Principle 4: Restoration and enhancement can be delivered at any scale and any location

Restoration and enhancement does not need to be costly, complex, large in scale or directly related to the activity or location for which a permission is being sought in order to contribute to improving the resilience of marine ecosystems in Wales.

Principle 5: Delivery of restoration and enhancement provides opportunities for learning

Restoration and enhancement of marine ecosystems is still a relatively new concept. It is important that there is: sufficient scope and flexibility for developers to consider different approaches; effective dialogue between developers, regulators and advisors to develop ideas; and appropriate and proportionate monitoring in place to learn from the actions that are taken to inform future guidance and best practice. This is particularly important for marine and coastal ecosystems, where the evidence base can be patchy and the approaches for delivery are less well established.

¹ WNMP Policy **ENV_02: Marine Protected Areas** “Proposals should demonstrate how they: avoid adverse impacts on individual Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the coherence of the network as a whole; have regard to the measures to manage MPAs; and avoid adverse impacts on designated sites that are not part of the MPA network.”

Supporting work

The principles set out above sit within and support NRW's broader work to develop evidence, advice and guidance to enable nature recovery and enhance resilience of Wales' marine and coastal ecosystems, recognising the opportunities for the delivery of multiple environmental and societal benefits.

There are a number of products currently available that can support initial considerations of embedding restoration or enhancement within a proposal, including:

- Research to identify what and where the key opportunities are for delivering nature recovery, for example:
 - [Restoring marine and coastal habitats in Wales: identifying spatial opportunities and benefits](#)
 - [Supporting the implementation of the Welsh National Marine Plan: Enhancing marine ecosystems](#)
- Developing understanding of the range of benefits derived from marine natural resources which are underpinned by biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, for example:
 - [Estimating the Carbon Sink Potential of the Welsh Marine Environment](#)

In addition, we continue to provide advice on, and delivery of projects focused on restoring and enhancing marine and coastal ecosystems in Wales, and engaging with Welsh and UK partners in developing evidence and best practice.

Further information

- Read our guidance for marine developers
- Find out more about our [Development Planning and Marine Services](#) and [Marine Licensing](#)
- Explore [our marine and coastal evidence reports](#)
- View our [Marine Area Statement](#)
- You can find out more about marine planning in Wales on Welsh Government's website: [Welsh National Marine Plan: frequently asked questions | GOV.WALES](#)