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Finlay Carson MSP
Convener
Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

2 May 2025

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter on 24 April 2024 regarding the National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2) Planning Position Statement (PPS). While my officials have offered and scheduled direct dialogue with Open Seas regarding this issue, I welcome the Committee's engagement with these matters and would be happy to set out the Scottish Government's position.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that the PPS is intended to be a summary of the work undertaken to date in developing the NMP2, whilst simultaneously giving stakeholders an early opportunity to comment further on the Scottish Government's latest thinking towards the development of high-level objectives and potential policy directions.

The consideration of sector-specific objectives used in the adopted National Marine Plan (NMP) informed the work, and we welcome stakeholder feedback on our current approach. The PPS consultation has now closed, and my officials are analysing all responses received, with a full consultation analysis report to be published in due course. This in turn will inform future policy development and a draft NMP2, which will be subject to further full (statutory) public consultation. Furthermore, officials are undertaking additional stakeholder engagement with those who expressed a wish to do so following the PPS consultation.

With regards to the query on the wording you highlight within the PPS, I am happy to clarify this for the Committee. With regards to the First Minister's Environment Council (FMEC) advice, it should firstly be noted that the advice was, in the main, directed to Marine Planning as a discipline rather than for a specific marine plan. The implication that FMEC had directly recommended that NMP2 should not contain sector-specific objectives was unintentional. The Scottish Government's position that the NMP2 will not contain sector-specific objectives has been reached based on a range of factors, of which the key points on marine planning made by FMEC was one.

The FMEC recommendations include a number of relevant key points which have impacts on the delivery of future policy. These include, but are not limited to:

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- Establish a small number of national-level strategic objectives, with cross-Parliamentary endorsement.
- Define measurable outcomes and targets around the objectives of the national plan and measure progress towards these through an appropriate indicator framework.
- Establish sub-objectives which are relevant and targeted both sectorally and regionally. The activities of various actors should aggregate to achieve the national objectives.

When combined with other internal feedback received on the use of the current NMP, it is the current position that renewing sector-specific objectives would be challenging, and deliver limited impact, for a number of reasons.

The sector-specific objectives in the adopted NMP were established before the introduction of key influential legislation, including the Fisheries Act 2020 and the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2019. These legislative requirements are delivered through specific and relevant management approaches, and relevant strategic management plans, for example the Fisheries Management Strategy, Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture, Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Climate Change Plan. The application of the legislation through these structures and their relevant specific objectives negates the need to duplicate these within the NMP2. The inclusion of sector-specific objectives within NMP2 would risk them becoming quickly out of date as relevant sector frameworks emerge and/or are updated. As a result, NMP2 sector objectives could fall out of step with legislative requirements and the sector specific strategic direction and outcomes that Scottish Ministers support. This would severely constrain the longevity of NMP2 and create a requirement for near constant national marine plan renewal. It is helpful to remind ourselves that the NMP2 is a planning document that guides how marine decision making can support outcomes in our wider government strategies, and is in this way it is markedly different to a high level national strategy.

The FMEC advice proposes that the activities of various actors should aggregate to achieve the national objectives. A key aim of NMP2 is ensuring that national objectives and planning policies are both implementable and measurable at a national level. As the draft NMP2 develops it will consider how sub-objectives may be more usefully applied within the marine planning system. For example, certain sub-objectives may best fit with regional and sectoral marine plans, as well as the aforementioned tier of strategic management plans. The Scottish Government will seek views on any proposed approach during the statutory consultation and engagement on the draft NMP2. This will reflect the development of sub-objectives within relevant consultations including the draft Sectoral Plan for Offshore Wind Energy, and the ongoing development of UK Government's Strategic Spatial Energy Plan.

The NMP2 must help to inform if, where, when and how development or use takes place in our seas and provide guidance on reaching those decisions. A planning policy framework should be as specific, measurable and achievable as possible, whilst the regulation and management of activities is covered by sector specific regulations outside of planning. Therefore, our current position is that sector-specific objectives in the NMP2 would not be effective or efficient.

Should other stakeholders wish to get in touch regarding this process, the appropriate contact for further queries is our NMP2 team: nationalmarineplanning@gov.scot.

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I hope this information is helpful and answers the Committee's query and I would welcome further engagement at any point that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,



GILLIAN MARTIN

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