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31 July 2023

**ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM COMMITTEE- DEVELOPMENT
AND IMPLEMENTATION OF REGIONAL MARINE PLANS IN SCOTLAND – RESPONSE
(AUGUST 2023)**

Dear Convenor,

Please find enclosed a copy of the Marine Directorate response to the final report by the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee (ECCLR) from their Inquiry into the Development and Implementation of Regional Marine Plans in Scotland.

As the ECCLR Committee is no longer sitting, we are notifying NZET and RAINE to ensure a full response to the inquiry findings is provided to the relevant successor Committee.

I would like to thank the previous Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee for their inquiry and the recommendations in the final report published in December 2020 which provided the basis for the enclosed response.

I apologise that this response has been this significantly delayed. This has been in relation to a number of contextual factors including the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, disruptive influences of the UK's exit from the European Union, and the ongoing illegal conflict in Ukraine, that required reallocation of resourcing and provided a changing context. There was also a need to factor in the relevant wider considerations to ensure a strategic approach is taken with a clear path forward for regional marine planning that takes advantage of and aligns with the development of the second National Marine Plan. We have taken the time to carefully consider how regional marine planning can better move forward to optimise on the benefits of this work and address each of the recommendations with workable proposals for each of them.

We will continue working with Orkney, Shetland and the Clyde Marine Planning Partnerships on the development of their draft regional marine plans. For other marine regions however,

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there will be no further Marine Planning Partnerships established until the second National Marine Plan is adopted. This is with the exception of the Outer Hebrides where early work has already commenced. This will allow for time for the implementation of the actions committed to in this response and for better alignment between the regional and national marine plans.

The attached Marine Directorate response makes a number of commitments. These include;

- collaborative working with MPPs and clear communication on expectations for transparent operations;
- work with Local Authorities to promote the building of marine planning expertise;
- to evaluate the current approach to marine regions;
- work to identify opportunities for the most appropriate funding sources for regional marine planning moving in consultation with relevant parties and continue to identify wider, complementary and relevant opportunities for funding;
- to form a Regional Marine Planning Forum which will deliver;
 - Lessons learned Guidance
 - Best Practice Guidance for developing Regional Marine Plans, governance options of MPPs, Best Practice Guidance for stakeholder engagement
 - Workshops and training opportunities
 - Raise awareness of regional marine planning

I look forward to the implementation of the actions committed to in this response as regional marine planning is progressed.

Yours sincerely,

MAIRI MCALLAN MSP

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ANNEX D: LIST OF ECCLR INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall progress on the development of Regional Marine Plans

- 1. To demonstrate its continued commitment to regional marine planning, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government publishes a renewed vision statement.**

This should include;

- Specific aims, objectives and outcomes for regional marine planning**
- Identification of priority regions for future rollout of regional marine planning and indicative timescales.**
- Priority socioeconomic and environmental issues that should be considered in future Regional Marine Plans**
- Details of work to secure long-term finance for future implementation of regional marine planning.**

The Marine Scotland Act 2010 provides powers for Scottish Ministers to delegate regional marine planning to a party nominated by Scottish Ministers. Regional Marine Plans (RMPs) are therefore delivered by Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) but adopted by Scottish Ministers. RMPs must be produced in conformity with the National Marine Plan (NMP) and as a result these two tiers of plan making are intrinsically linked.

In the [Programme for Government 2022-23](#), the Scottish Ministers committed to begin the process of developing a new National Marine Plan for Scotland (NMP2), to address the global climate and nature crises, by carefully managing increased competition for space and resources in the marine environment. This is reaffirmed in the [First Ministers Policy Prospectus](#) which includes the pledge that by 2026 the Scottish Government will have published and begun to implement the new National Marine Plan to address the global climate and nature crises by delivering sustainable management of our sizeable marine shared space in the interest of the whole of Scotland and in line with our Blue Economy vision.

Once adopted, the new NMP2 will provide the context for future regional marine planning by setting the vision for the sustainable management of our marine space. The updated NMP2 will also set national aims and objectives for marine planning as well as set out how these will be supported by regional objectives. The NMP2 will provide a new focus on regional issues and priorities that will provide issues and direction which should be considered within future regional plans.

Early work on the development of NMP2 has commenced and has included the launch of a new National Marine Planning Forum made up of key stakeholders and practitioners. The first meeting of this new Forum was held on 15 June 2023.

This response will help outline the current plans for the future of regional marine planning. There are lessons to be learnt for the development of regional plans to date. The new NMP2 will also update the context for the long-term development of RMPs. Therefore, we believe that no further Marine Planning Partnerships should be established until after the adoption of the NMP2. In this way we can ensure policy alignment between future RMPs and NMP2.

This is, however, with the exception of the 'Western Isles', meaning the Scottish Marine Region for the Outer Hebrides (defined in the Scottish Marine Region Order 2015), where early work on developing an MPP had commenced before the Covid-19 global pandemic required reallocation of resource. We will therefore stand by our commitment to support the formation of this MPP if the Outer Hebrides Marine Region wishes to continue with this work. We will also continue working with Orkney, Shetland, and the Clyde on the development of their plans, which are at a more advanced stage.

In order to better support regional marine planning and to help address the ECCLR Committee's recommendations we will establish a regional marine planning sub-forum (hereafter referred to as the Regional Marine Planning Forum). This will be coordinated alongside future National Marine Planning Forum events where possible. This will ensure that the threads of relevant discussion can run through both tiers of marine planning, but also to address the Committee's recommendations relating to the preparation of guidance for regional Marine Planning Partnerships and the identification of priority issues to be addressed in future marine plans. We plan to establish this Forum in 2024.

The NMP2 will enable Scottish Ministers and stakeholders to consider the most appropriate direction for regional marine planning in the medium and long term. In this process we will look at the current marine regions as defined under the Scottish Marine Regions Order 2015, and evaluate the opportunity to provide greater flexibility in the definition of the boundaries for regional marine plans. This is with a view to determining how best to stimulate interest in the development of further regional marine plans, following the adoption of the NMP2.

It is important to acknowledge that financial resources are finite and must be carefully managed, and apportioned to where priorities lie. This underlines the need to take stock beyond the RMPs in development and to use the opportunity the NMP2 provides to help shape the future of regional planning. We must ensure in establishing a future framework of support to regional planning that we are responding proportionately to the expressed needs and demands of regions and balance this with the other important priorities to be addressed in discharging our marine responsibilities. Within this context, we will work closely with our stakeholders to clearly define the roles and responsibilities across relevant interests required to support the activities proposed within this response.

The current funding mechanism for the MPPs and Local Coastal Partnerships (LCPs) reflects the established Scottish Government annual budgeting process. We are continuing to engage with relevant parties to identify the most relevant funding sources for regional marine planning moving forward.

2. The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government should do more to communicate the benefits of regional marine planning to coastal communities and other stakeholders across the nation.

We agree that communication is an important factor and is crucial to ensure that coastal communities and other key stakeholders can play a substantive role in the formation of RMPs. Such buy-in from coastal communities will be a critical part of the future success of regional marine planning.

We will ask MPPs to consider inviting key community council representatives onto their Advisory Groups and ensure that they provide a clear outline of how coastal communities can engage with the process as part of the Statements of Public Participation. We will also ask that MPPs clearly articulate to community council representatives the potential benefits that engagement with regional marine planning can bring.

During the development of NMP2 there will be opportunities to engage with coastal communities and stakeholders across the nation about marine planning more generally. In October 2022 we published the [Stakeholder engagement strategy and statement of public participation for Scotland's national marine plan 2](#) which sets out how we expect engagement will be undertaken and be vital for the development of NMP2.

We expect Marine Planning Partnerships and Local Coastal Partnerships (LCPs) to actively engage in the process of developing a new National Marine Plan and will work with these groups to assist them in spreading awareness, benefits, and information to coastal communities on the marine planning process more generally in addition to regional marine planning.

The Scottish Government's [Blue Economy Vision](#) (March 2022) sets out our long-term ambition for Scotland's Blue Economy to 2045. It includes an outcome for Scotland to be an ocean literate and aware nation. To support the delivery of this vision we are including an objective in the LCPs' grant objectives for this financial year (2023/2024) that will assist LCPs to frame their work and outputs around the Blue Economy Vision and its outcomes. This will help them receive better recognition of the importance of communication with communities. Much of their work already supports this delivery, particularly around ocean literacy through engagement with communities, research, raising awareness and education.

The NMP2 engagement programme includes engagement events focused on improving ocean literacy and coastal communities will be engaged during the development of the draft NMP2. This provides the opportunity to engage with coastal communities and stakeholders who may not currently be captured by regional marine planning activities and communicate the benefits of regional and national marine planning more widely.

Theme 1: Membership and governance of Marine Planning Partnerships

Guidance

3. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government publishes new national guidance for regional marine planning. Guidance should be provided in a dedicated website and include published ‘lessons learned’ documents. New guidance should include the following:

- **Best practice guidance for developing Regional Marine Plans and stakeholders engagement.**
- **Processes for selecting members of Marine Planning Partnerships**
- **Processes for decision-making, mediation of conflicting views and mechanisms for dispute resolution.**
- **Guidance on the role and responsibilities of Marine Scotland [*now called the Marine Directorate of Scottish Government*] in assisting the development of Regional Marine Plans.**
- **Guidance on how neighbouring Marine Planning Partnerships should interact and align Regional Marine Plans.**
- **Details of non-government funding sources available to support regional marine planning.**
- **Links to information on international best practice.**

As set out in evidence to the Committee, the Scottish Government and our partners have engaged in systematic lessons learned exercises with partnerships during the roll-out to date of regional marine planning. We agree that the development of this lessons learned documentation to form new guidance would be an important and essential addition to the support available for MPPs. We will undertake to develop such guidance through the proposed Regional Marine Planning Forum, as well as through collaborative working with MPPs to help improve future regional marine planning.

Such best practice guidance will be collaboratively developed with established and developing MPPs and be informed by input from the Regional Marine Planning Forum.

4. The Committee recommends that Marine Scotland should provide a training course for new Marine Planning Partnerships to ensure that delegates and stakeholders involved in the development of Regional Marine Plans have a clear understanding of the process and what is expected of them. This training should include approaches to collaborative working and deliberate processes for achieving consensus.

We accept that improved education and training for MPPs as they commence their work could help to improve outcomes and that to date this has been a shortcoming. As previously stated, we intend to produce guidance on the development of RMPs and to initiate a Regional Marine Planning Forum.

We propose to improve processes and outcomes through the production of collaborative guidance. Through the workshop opportunities provided within a Regional Marine Planning Forum we can provide the necessary training and communication with MPPs to improve collaboration and understanding of the process and requirements for delivering a RMP.

Governance

- 5. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government's review of regional marine planning should consider whether provisions under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 provide sufficient flexibility to allow appropriate governance structure for future emerging Marine Planning Partnerships. The review should also consider best practice governance structure for complex regions comparable to the Clyde.**

We consider that the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 already provides significant flexibility for Marine Planning Partnerships to develop tailored governance structures. This is evidenced by the wide variety of governance structures adopted by the current three Marine Planning Partnerships. For example, the Orkney marine region has a single delegate partnership formed by the Orkney Islands Council in contrast to the Clyde which has eleven public authority delegates in their partnership. As referred to under recommendation 3, we expect the development and delivery of guidance will be supported through the creation of a new Regional Marine Planning Forum.

- 6. The Committee recommends that Marine Scotland should initiate work to identify best practice for appointing independent Chairs for Marine Planning Partnerships to develop and facilitate trust and transparency in the process.**

As part of our response to recommendation 3, we will undertake the production of lessons learned documentation for Marine Planning Partnerships and best practice guidance regarding governance options will be developed through the new Regional Marine Planning Forum to help support the Partnerships. Through this process we can consider the feasibility of the involvement of independent chairs.

- 7. The Committee recommends that independent chairs of Marine Planning Partnerships should be responsible for dispute resolution, with clear guidance on the process for dispute resolution. Including escalating issues to Marine Scotland/Scottish Ministers where appropriate.**

As referred in our response to recommendation 3, lessons learned documentation for Marine Planning Partnerships and the preparation of best practice guidance, including on matters concerning dispute resolution, will be undertaken through the new Regional Marine Planning Forum.

- 8. The Committee recommends that Marine Planning Partnerships should demonstrate transparency in membership and facilitate trust in decision making by publishing minutes of meetings including relevant declarations of interest at each meeting for matters under consideration.**

We agree with this recommendation and will communicate to Marine Planning Partnerships that it is expected that minutes of meetings are continued to be published online and declarations of interest disclosed, to ensure the operation of Marine Planning Partnerships remain transparent and public trust is maintained. This will also be embedded in future best practice guidance.

- 9. The Committee recommends the Marine Planning Partnerships should publish a register of interests setting out any conflicts of interest delegates might have in undertaking their statutory role in developing Regional Marine Plan.**

We accept this recommendation and will include it in forthcoming best practice guidance.

- 10. The Committee strongly recommends that Marine Planning Partnerships should adhere to the Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies.**

We accept this recommendation and will include it in forthcoming best practice guidance.

Interaction between Marine Planning Partnerships and Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups

- 11. The Committee notes positive support for the Scottish Government's proposal to strengthen local management with Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) in its *Future Fisheries Management* national discussion. The Committee recommends introducing legislation providing a statutory underpinning for RIFGs. This legislation should provide provisions requiring joint working between RIFGs and Marine Planning Partnerships in developing Fisheries Management Plans and Regional Marine Plans.**

The importance the Scottish Government places on the sustainable management of fisheries is reflected in our 2020-2030 Fisheries Management Strategy, the Blue Economy Vision and the Bute House Agreement. This will help deliver, at a national level, transformational change in marine environmental protection and how we manage our shared marine resource while supporting thriving and sustainable fisheries.

The Fisheries Management Strategy highlighted positive support for the RIFG network. It is recognised that the RIFGs will need to adapt with the fishing

industry now operating in an increasingly busy shared marine space. The network was refreshed in early 2023, recruiting six new Chairs to ensure widest possible stakeholder engagement and better alignment with the Scottish Government's strategic direction of travel. The network will be reviewed again in Summer 2024, which will include consideration of statutory underpinning for the RIFGs.

Scottish Ministers are responsible for fisheries management in Scotland, and our RIFG network exists to support Scottish Ministers in delivery of this in the inshore area. Although the RIFGs do not themselves have statutory powers, they can develop local solutions to local problems, working with fisheries stakeholders and the Scottish Government to make these as effective as possible.

Fisheries management measures fall within the remit of the RIFG network, as opposed to the Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs), in relation to developing Scottish Government fisheries management measures and restrictions on the inshore fleet.

To address this recommendation, since 2021/2022 we have included in some of the Local Coastal Partnerships (LCPs) grant offer letters an objective that they develop and strengthen relationships with RIFGs and we will do so for all LCPs from 2023/24. Marine Directorate officials have also facilitated contact between RIFG chairs and the relevant LCPs or MPPs.

12. The Committee recommends that Fisheries Management Plans and Regional Marine Plans should be developed in tandem to facilitate partnerships working and avoid conflicting policy proposals. Both plans should develop and agree a common set of socioeconomic and environmental objectives underpinned by the principles of sustainable development.

As stated above, since 2021/22 grant objectives within the annual grant offer to some Local Coastal Partnerships (LCPs) has required them to take steps to develop, then maintain and strengthen relationships with RIFGs. All LCPs intend to include this in their grant objectives for 2023/24. Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) also have RIFGs as members of their advisory groups.

In our response to Recommendation 3 we have committed to developing guidance for the preparation of RMPs. Within this we will address issues of phasing RMPs with Fisheries Management Plans. We will also ensure that the outcomes included within our Blue Economy Vision are reflected within the guidance we provide to MPPs and RIFGs utilising the Vision's existing set of social, economic and environmental outcomes.

The Fisheries Act (2020) places a requirement on fisheries policy authorities to publish fisheries management plans (FMPs). The plans to be published are outlined in an annex of the Joint Fisheries Statement and the Scottish Government is taking the lead in drafting 21 FMPs, including pelagic and demersal stocks of greatest interest to us. It is important to note that FMPs being developed at a national level are different to any RIFG-led Operational Plans at a local level. Our co-management group FMAC will consider the approach to delivering these 21 FMPs alongside long-term development of other FMPs for non-quota species, ahead of a national consultation in 2024.

Theme 2: Scope and expectations of Marine Planning Partnerships and Regional Marine Plans

Alignment with the National Marine Plan

13. In its 2021 review of the National Marine Plan and development of a 'Blue Economy Action Plan' [now superseded by the 'Delivering Scotland's Blue Economy Approach'], the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government sets clear aims and objectives for regional marine planning in tackling key environmental and socioeconomic issues facing coastal regions. This should demonstrate how the latest scientific evidence on the health of Scotland's marine environment has informed alignment with wider policy ambitions such as the Climate Change Plan and ambition for a 'Green Recovery'.

As set out in our response to Recommendation 1 we will establish a new Regional Marine Planning Forum that will include a focus on regional marine planning and identify priorities for future RMPs. This will be based on the latest scientific evidence and be informed by the importance of effective alignment between RMPs and Scotland's wider policy objectives with regard to Climate Change, the environment and the economy.

Proposals for a Blue Economy Action Plan were superseded in March 2022 by the Government's publication of a [Blue Economy Vision for Scotland](#). This sets out the vision and outcomes for the Blue Economy that covers social, economic and environmental outcomes. This Blue Economy approach will be embedded within the development of the NMP2, which in turn will set out a new context for regional marine planning. The development of the NMP2 provides an opportunity to re-evaluate the guiding approach and considerations for regional marine planning and to set clear aims and objectives with which regional marine planning should be aligned.

Spatial management of marine activities

- 14. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government consults and provides clear guidance on the appropriate use of spatial prescription of sectoral activities in Regional Marine Plans. Particular emphasis should be given to how Regional Marine Plans should contribute towards the protection and enhancement of Marine Protected Areas.**

Our National Marine Plan sets the overarching planning framework for the sustainable management of Scotland's marine space. It contains some guidance on the delivery of spatial approaches within regional plans, for example with respect to aquaculture and grid landing points. It also sets out general policies on marine nature protection, including marine protected areas. Regional plans are expected to be in line with the National Marine Plan, except where relevant considerations indicate otherwise.

The development of the NMP2 will include extensive consultation and relevant policy input from all sectors, including that on nature protection, recovery and restoration. The NMP2 will draw on our new biodiversity strategy and forthcoming policies such as management measures for our marine protected areas, bringing these into NMP2's marine planning framework. We believe there will be sufficient direction on the appropriate use of spatial prescription within RMPs through the requirement for RMPs to be developed in conformity with the NMP2 and through the outputs of the Regional Marine Planning Forum.

Legal Scope of Regional Marine Plans

- 15. The Committee believes that Marine Planning Partnerships should be empowered to identify and address local marine issues. Where these lay outside the legal scope of Regional Marine Plans, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government considers mechanisms that enable Marine Planning Partnerships to contribute to the development of national policy and legislation. This should include the following:**

- **Regular attendance of Marine Scotland Officials at Marine Planning Partnership meetings to identify priority areas of concern.**
- **Ensuring Marine Planning Partnerships are made aware of relevant Scottish Government consultations.**
- **Providing Marine Planning Partnerships with opportunities to identify priorities for data collection to be undertaken by Marine Scotland**
- **Enabling Marine Planning Partnerships to provide input in reviewing the National Marine Plan.**
- **Enabling Marine Planning Partnerships to contribute towards developing management measures for Marine Protected Areas.**

The purpose of regional Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) is clearly established and defined in the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010. We foresee a Regional Marine Planning Forum to be a central component in helping the participation of MPPs in a number of areas, including those suggested in Recommendation 15.

Marine Directorate staff are in frequent contact with LCPs and MPPs and through these interactions and communications across the partnerships they are kept up to date with current Scottish Government policy development.

The Marine Directorate undertakes a wide range of marine research, monitoring and assessment. Much of this is done in collaboration with other agencies such as NatureScot, JNCC and SEPA between which we ensure data sharing through existing protocols. The Marine Directorate's research work will be led by the Blue Economy Vision and include the work of emerging Science and Innovation Strategy that will enhance existing collaboration, and which has been developed with a wide range of agencies, stakeholder groups and individuals including bodies such as the National SubSea Centre and industry representatives like the Scottish Fisherman's Federation. MPPs will continue to be engaged with regarding the range of rich and robust data already available.

Grant Objectives for 2023/2024 for Local Coastal Partnerships (LCPs) and MPPs will also include an objective to contribute to the development of NMP2. This objective reflects the value and importance we place in the contribution of LCPs and MPPs to the development of NMP2. Representatives of LCPs and MPPs have already engaged in the NMP2 process through attendance at the first National Marine Plan Forum.

Integration of marine and terrestrial planning

16. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government reviews options of improving the integration between terrestrial and marine planning. This should include alignment and integration with:

- **The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)**
- **Regional Spatial Strategies**
- **Local Development Plans (LDP) including aligning or integrating any possible marine strategies or action plans with LDP action programmes and monitoring statements**
- **The Infrastructure Investment Plans**
- **River Basin Management Plans**
- **Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plans developed by Local Authorities**

We agree with the Committee that integration between terrestrial and marine planning is important and that we should seek improvements where this is possible. National Planning Framework 4 was adopted in February 2023. It supports “Collaboration and strong alignment of terrestrial and marine planning, at all levels” and includes aquaculture policy that relevant RMPs will be aware of.

The National Marine Plan highlights the importance of ensuring alignment between marine and terrestrial planning through consistency across policy guidance, plans and decisions. This alignment is also supported through regional marine planning by the involvement of Local Authorities that are represented on or lead Marine Planning Partnerships. Guidance will be provided to detail the role of RMPs in connecting with terrestrial planning, and also Infrastructure Investment Plans, River Basin Management Plans, Local Development Plans (LDPs) and Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plans.

Greater integration has also been incorporated into the new development planning system. The new [Development Planning Regulations](#), which came into force in May 2023, require that in preparing a LDP planning authorities should have regard to the National Marine Plan; and any regional marine plan insofar as relating to the LDP area. The accompanying [guidance](#) also emphasizes the need for a collaborative approach to be taken to the preparation of LDPs and specifically highlights relevant stakeholders including those involved in marine planning . The guidance also notes that Marine Scotland [now Marine Directorate] should have the same level of involvement as key agencies. The guidance also highlights key datasets and guidance linked to marine planning for planning authorities to consider when gathering their evidence.

Our commitment to undertaking lessons learned from the existing Marine Planning Partnerships will also be invaluable in assessing how integration with terrestrial planning can be improved in the development of RMPs. We will use the Regional Marine Planning Forum to guide how and where integration with the terrestrial regime can or has been achieved.

17. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government should consider options for Marine Planning Partnerships to play a role in aquaculture planning decisions. This could include options to include Marine Planning Partnerships as a statutory consultee in approving planning consent for new development.

There are already two principal ways in which Marine Planning Partnerships can play a role in aquaculture planning decisions: firstly, by developing Regional Marine Plans which decision makers must act in accordance with unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise; and secondly, as a statutory consultee over

marine licences required for the installation of farm equipment according to [The Marine Licensing \(Consultees\) \(Scotland\) Order 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#).

18. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government's assessment of regional marine planning should identify opportunities for raising awareness of the benefits of marine planning and promote capacity building of marine planning expertise in Local Authorities.

We agree with the recommendation from the Committee. The development of regional marine planning guidance and the stakeholder engagement work envisaged in developing NMP2 will help to raise awareness of the benefits of marine planning at national, regional and sectoral level. This will be supported by the work of the Regional Marine Planning Forum.

We will also work with Local Authorities to promote the development of marine planning expertise, and our Regional Marine Planning Forum will provide opportunities for Local Authorities to engage in this work and encourage them to prioritise it.

Theme 3: Finance, resource, and expertise

Finance

19. The Committee considers that regional marine planning has the potential to be a key driver for delivering a Green Recovery and sustainable economic growth in Scotland's coastal communities. The Committee urges the Scottish Government to recognise the potential for substantial economic return on investment in regional marine planning. The Committee strongly recommends that the Scottish Government should commit to providing finance to establish Marine Planning Partnerships in all 11 Scottish Marine Regions over the next 10 years and to ensure adequate funding for existing Marine Planning Partnerships to undertake their statutory functions. This finance should be allocated for the duration of three years marine planning statutory review cycles.

The current funding mechanism for the Marine Planning Partnerships reflects the established Scottish Government annual budgeting process. We will continue to engage and have discussions with relevant parties to identify wider complementary and relevant opportunities for funding for regional marine planning moving forward.

20. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government begins work on exploring avenues for new financing options such as Crown Estate Scotland revenues, marine industry levies and the Scottish National Investment Bank as a matter of priority.

As noted in the response to Recommendation 19, we will continue to work with relevant parties to identify complementary funding options to support regional marine planning. We would note that the net revenues from Scottish Crown

Estate marine assets within 12 nautical miles are already allocated to coastal local authorities to spend in ways that deliver benefits for their communities, and that there is an important role for local partners to play in demonstrating their commitment to marine planning processes in their regions through funding support.

Expertise

21. The Committee recommends the Scottish Government begins working with Heads of Planning Scotland, the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland and Research Institutes to identify how to improve the standard and availability of marine planning expertise in Scotland to meet the long-term objectives of marine planning. This work should seek to establish what is required for marine planning to reach a professional standard similar to terrestrial planning. This should include working towards a CPD accredited programme of training for marine planning.

We recognise the importance of marine planning expertise to meet our long-term objectives for marine planning, and we also recognise the importance of maintaining a pipeline of talent with the knowledge and skills to deliver marine planning ambitions in Scotland.

We will explore the demand and interest in accredited training as part of the work of the Regional Marine Planning Forum, and following this we will engage with relevant SG colleagues and education providers to explore the opportunities within the existing framework to enhance the delivery of marine planning skills.

22. The Committee recommends that Marine Scotland consider working with the MAST-S Marine Planning and Governance Forum to establish an annual workshop on regional marine planning. This would provide an opportunity for Marine Planning Partnerships, marine stakeholders and research community to share best practice, identify data collection and research opportunities and encourage professional development in marine planning.

We accept this recommendation and will ask the Regional Marine Planning Forum to oversee the development of such a workshop that can focus on bringing relevant marine stakeholders together to share and identify data collection and research opportunities.

Research and data collection

23. The Committee recommends that new Marine Planning Partnerships explore options for forming research advisory subgroups to guide research support and establish the scientific evidence base for Regional Marine Plans. This could include a representative from Marine Scotland Science and a fisheries industry representative to develop and facilitate trust and collaboration in science and data collection. The existence of research

subgroups should not preclude opportunities to collaborate with the wider national and international research community.

We recognise the importance of good quality evidence to support the development of RMPs and the environmental baselines. We accept this recommendation and will undertake to reflect this in the production of guidance referred to earlier in this response. This will be developed and enhanced through collaboration with stakeholders as part of the work of the Regional Marine Planning Forum.

The option for Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) to form research advisory subgroups would primarily be a decision which rests with MPPs themselves, as their governance is delegated as part of the devolution of powers. We can however encourage regional MPPs to collaborate with the research community during their plan preparation and implementation stages.

24. The Committee recommends that Marine Scotland explore opportunities for involving fishers in data collection for marine planning as part of its inshore fleet modernisation programme.

The Marine Directorate has a strong track record of involving fishers in data collection for marine planning purposes. Opportunities to enhance fisheries data for wider marine planning purposes will be realised through the inshore fleet modernisation programme and remote electronic monitoring policy. A key action from the Future Fisheries Management Strategy is to improve accountability and confidence in our seafood products and fishing operations, and make full use of new available technology, including Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) and vessel tracking solutions, recognising that these will help deliver compliance and improve our knowledge base.

Using on-board electronic technology on our inshore vessels will greatly improve understanding of the spatial distribution of fishing activity in Scottish waters, as well as improving the evidence base on which we make management decisions.

25. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government provides dedicated funding to support research contributing towards regional marine planning.

We consider that improved research and data collection as well as tapping into existing relevant academic research is important to the future success of marine planning. RMPs are supported by a range of existing data sources in order to inform policy development and decision making and in order to undertake their statutory assessments. We will continue to engage with MPPs about the range of rich and robust data already available as noted in the response to Recommendation 15.

There are existing models such as the Scottish Marine Energy Research (ScotMER) programme, which is an initiative that involves collaboration from industry, environmental NGOs, Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, and other interested stakeholders, to facilitate the sustainable development of offshore renewable energy in Scottish waters. If there is appetite we will provide support to regional MPPs in the form of advice for taking forward similar approaches and work to join up, where possible, with other initiatives. We believe that joined-up working, particularly with established research programmes, provides the greatest opportunity to make most efficient and effective use of funding and to deliver research within a suitable timeframe, rather than establishing new funding programmes and bodies.

Theme 4: Community and stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement

26. The Committee recommends that Marine Planning Partnerships consider how the widespread adoption of video conferencing and other digital engagement tools as a result of the coronavirus pandemic could be deployed in future engagement work. This offers potential to improve engagement with ‘hard to reach’ communities and stakeholders and reduce the time and cost of engagement work and meeting attendance.

We accept this recommendation and will encourage Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) to make use of a wide variety of engagement and communication tools, to ensure regional marine planning is both transparent and inclusive. We will consider this matter during the preparation of best practice guidance and lessons learned documentation through the Regional Marine Planning Forum. This will build on the successful first National Marine Plan Forum. This was a hybrid event with in-person delegates joined by over 180 online delegates, and it was addressed by speakers in the room and remotely.

Since the COVID-19 global pandemic we have already seen MPPs and LCPs expanding engagement through online methods with webinars, video conferencing and online presence being utilised. The Marine Directorate will highlight opportunities for MPPs to utilise digital engagement tools whilst respecting local organisations’ understanding of how best to engage their stakeholders.

27. The Committee recommends that Marine Scotland and Marine Planning Partnerships should establish an online resource to improve knowledge transfer and sharing best practice on approaches to community and stakeholder engagement.

We recognise the importance of accessibility of key resources, including sharing of best practice guidance, for regional Marine Planning Partnerships. We accept this recommendation and will undertake to explore the feasibility of developing such resources through the Regional Marine Planning Forum.

Community Representation

28. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government should review provisions of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and wider legislation on community empowerment to identify legislative barriers to engagement and to identify opportunities to improve community representation in regional marine planning and marine licensing decisions.

We consider the current legislation as written provides significant scope for a wide range of stakeholders to actively engage with marine planning. This is particularly the case for regional marine planning through the extensive public consultation process for developing RMPs and because these are delivered by Marine Planning Partnerships that can be comprised of community representatives themselves.