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[By email to msp@environ.ie]

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Re: Consultation on draft Marine Planning Policy Statement

A Chará,

The Irish Planning Institute (IPI) welcomes the publishing of the Marine Planning Policy Statement Consultation draft paper. The introduction of the Marine Planning Policy Statement will underpin the operation of the maritime planning system in Ireland. Papers such as this one and other policy initiatives should be welcomed as they begin to facilitate the sustainable use of Ireland's vast maritime resources, especially the potential of the bio-diverse marine and coastal environments to contribute to Ireland's first National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF).

Founded in 1975, the Irish Planning Institute (IPI) is the all-island professional body representing professional planners engaged in physical and environmental planning in Ireland. The Institute's mission is to advance planning by serving, improving and promoting the planning profession for the benefit of the community and the common good. The IPI represents c.700 planners from across the public, private, semi-state and academic sectors. Our members work in central government, private practice, agencies, third level institutes, planning authorities in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, An Bord Pleanála and elsewhere. It is also affiliated to the umbrella body the European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU) and has international links with the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) and the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) and is a member of the Global Planners Network (GPN).

While the publication of the draft Marine Planning Policy Statement is welcomed it should have been issued at an earlier date as the forward planning process is ongoing with the imminent publication of the draft National Marine Planning Framework. The introduction of up-to-date legislation is urgently needed as the current legislation prevents Ireland from achieving its maritime targets. It is on this basis that the announcement of new legislation for 2020 is welcome and should be made a priority which can no longer be postponed.

The IPI strongly advocates for legislation to make clear and unequivocal links to existing legislation, in particular, the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended and the EIA regulations, particularly as EIA weighs substantially in the decision-making process at development management level. The marine spatial plans must be consistent with the policies of the National Planning Framework and that consistency is carried through in the hierarchy of plans to ensure integration between maritime spatial planning and the planning system. While climate resilience is referenced it is essential that the statement and final Framework are coherent with the requirements of the National Adaptation Framework and sectoral adaptation plans as well as local authority adaptation strategies prepared under it, particularly where the local strategies will also be reflected in local development plans.

The uncoordinated use of coastal and maritime areas is currently resulting in competition for maritime and coastal space and inefficient use of marine and coastal resources. With the rapidly increasing demand for maritime space for new activities, such as renewable energy and aquaculture installations, the State must ensure coherent planning of maritime activities at sea. Facilitating cross-border co-operation on maritime spatial planning (MSP) and integrated coastal management (ICM) in EU marine regions and sub-regions will be essential in the planning of major investments and applicable policy processes in sea basins. As many areas of economic activity have implications for the conflicting claims on the maritime area, spatial planning is the appropriate mechanism to deal with such conflicts. Consideration should be given to the cost of energy imports following post-Brexit, the system should be prepared to allow for commercial energy projects to go ahead.

While the NMPF will provide Ireland with a national level plan, as matters stand, there will be no marine spatial plans below it which will put it at variance with the terrestrial planning system. The IPI is mindful that a hierarchy of marine plans which includes national, regional and county level will take some time to be integrated. However, the Institute considers it vital that it should be included as a medium to long term objective in the Marine Planning Policy Statement. The Irish Planning Institute suggests a timeframe of 2021 as required for the National level marine plan. Followed by three regional level marine plans that are based on the existing Regional Assembly areas in 2025 that translate the National level marine plan policies to regional level and the coastal county level plans to follow two years after that. This proposed timeframe will provide us with a full suite of marine plans by 2027. The availability of relevant baseline data for integration into marine spatial plans is essential to ensure that marine plans are evidence based and robust. We would support for future development plans of coastal counties to include an additional chapter for marine planning to ensure alignment of terrestrial and marine spatial planning policies to provide for more effective and sustainable environmental management on both land and sea.

In tandem with this hierarchical marine planning system, the governance structure of the Regional Assemblies and coastal Local Authorities must also be considered. While An Bord Pleanála should be the lead Authority, there should also be a role for Regional Assemblies and Local Authorities in both marine plan preparation and marine developments/activities consent. This would inevitably result in the need for effective education, training and upskilling of planning students and professionals in the area of marine spatial planning to ensure a skilled workforce is readily available to deliver the requirements of the NMPF. Consideration of the fees levied on applications for development in the marine area should be reflective of the resources required to evaluate the application. Furthermore, additional resources for coastal Planning Authorities and Regional Assemblies to employ appropriate expertise will be necessary. The Institute undertook a survey of Local Authority Planning Department resources in 2018. 27 Local Authorities responded to this survey with 25 calling for additional resources for their Planning Departments. The Institute will work with its network of Senior Planners known as the Senior Planners Forum to qualify the expertise needed at Local Authority and Regional Assembly level to ensure successful implementation of the National Marine Planning Framework.

The legislation should carefully consider the need for enforcement and ensure that sufficient funds are made available. Moreover, the provision of a robust plan governing the development of this territory will be mutually supportive of any enforcement mechanism to achieve its intended objectives and targets. Therefore, effective enforcement of foreshore licence is vital to promote the sustainable development of our natural marine resources.

The Institute strongly advocates that we encourage public engagement and community involvement in marine spatial planning. Further consideration should be made for public participation to be inscribed in legislation to ensure public input. It is therefore suggested that Public Participation Networks are included as prescribed bodies to enable members of the public to participate in policymaking and local decision making. It may be useful for public participation concepts to be submitted before lodging applications for development. This will begin to facilitate marine spatial plans to be meaningful and

measures are identified to ensure that communities can engage and participate with marine spatial plan making and also in the development consent process.

The IPI is aware that strategic principle 7 addresses the maintenance and restoration of biodiversity, which is welcomed however, it is noted that the designation of marine protected areas (MPAs) is not listed explicitly. Further consideration needs to be given to how the planning process can support ecological protection and enhancement. As a signatory to OSPAR, Ireland committed to having 10% of the sea and coastlines protected by 2020, however, we are far from meeting this target. It is suggested there should be greater clarity on the direction of legislation for MPAs.

The Irish Planning Institute welcomes the opportunity to give its views on the draft Marine Planning Policy Statement and would be delighted to meet and discuss any issues outlined above, should the Department consider it necessary to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Corr MIPI
President
Irish Planning Institute.