



## DRIVING THE TRANSITION TO A RESILIENT AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE: THE ROLE OF THE OCEAN

January to July 2021

### Final Report

#### A. Summary

##### Main objectives and context

Through events and dialogue from January to July 2021, this project focussed on accelerating progress towards the 'Just Transition' for an environmentally sustainable, resilient and equitable economy and society in Scotland, within the framing of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our specific focus was on the role of the ocean and marine science, supporting dialogue between the scientific and policy communities in Scotland. The notion of a 'Just Transition' deliberately extended beyond the usual energy context, exploring opportunities and challenges for progressive policy supported by science, including on seafood sustainability, the circular economy and nature-based solutions. The two main events of this project (multi-stakeholder workshops) had clear but connected objectives, namely to:

1. Develop our understanding of interdependencies between marine and cross-cutting policy themes to promote policy coherence, through the identification of synergies and management of trade-offs.
2. Mobilise the science and policy communities in co-developing knowledge for policy impact, especially with respect to the Scottish Government Blue Economy Action Plan/Strategy, including understanding data and evidence needs for innovation and measuring progress.

##### An account of the insights resulting from the programme (including lessons around the theme of the Sustainable Development Goals)

The rich discussions in these workshops raised wide-ranging insights, revealing the challenges but also the opportunities and the wealth of expertise and ambition for driving progress in achieving an integrated implementation of the SDGs in Scotland and beyond.



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Progress towards policy coherence and sustainable development in Scottish Government is evident, with the ‘guiding light’ of the National Performance Framework steering activities across all Government activities, within the context of the SDGs. **Political will and government ambition is positive, but implementation could be accelerated.** The Blue Economy Action Plan is opportune for pursuing policy coherence across and beyond marine-specific policy. **Ensuring effective engagement and contribution of science is essential,** alongside a ‘whole-of-government’ approach.

Interactions between policy areas are many and diverse, with **greater coherence offering opportunities to develop synergies and navigate trade-offs** for socially and environmentally just progress. Relatively subtle links between overtly marine policy and other policy areas can be developed, including transport, education, employment and local communities. However, even for intuitive policy interactions (e.g. fisheries and nature-based solutions) opportunities remain to deliver synergies and tackle trade-offs. **Post-Brexit, there is a rare opportunity for change to the fundamental governance systems,** to reflect on what is not working, form a new vision and develop new approaches.

Leadership is essential to promote coherence and support transition to sustainability in Scotland, and this must be **realistic and honest about long-term ambitions and the difficult decisions** that need to be made.

Policy can provide strong levers, but **we must also consider economics and market-led drivers,** including in relation to aspects of well-being economy that can support a sustainable transition. However, there is an **over-reliance on economic and numerical metrics** in valuing the oceans and we need to embrace more qualitative targets and intrinsic values.

Coherence at the policy level **requires implementation through integrated planning and management tools,** with regulatory processes that adequately address the trade-offs. Systems of multi-scale governance are evolving for Scotland’s marine area and are a timely opportunity for innovative governance approaches. Effective, inclusive, balanced and informed **stakeholder and public engagement is a particular challenge** within these governance processes, but important to resolve if policy decisions are to reflect societal choice.

Across the Blue Economy, **science must play a fundamental role in moving us away from business as usual** to a more sustainable pathway, through understanding baselines, trends and tipping points, as well as the multiple and interacting effects of human activities and policy interventions.

The Workshop 2 report includes further detail on the **science needs across the themes of the Just Transition, Sustainable Seafood, Nature-based Solutions and the Circular Economy,** for which we considered:

- What research and knowledge can help us manage synergies and trade-offs?
- Where is innovation needed to promote synergies?
- What type of indicators, data and evidence are needed to measure progress?

Main outcomes and (expected) impact



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The two main events were **well attended by diverse actors**, with **open and rich discussion** on the topics raised. A central aim was to make connections beyond the policy-areas marine scientists usually engage with, so we were particularly pleased with engagement from a diverse set of government officials, including departments not ordinarily connected with the development and progression of marine-related policies.

The workshop reports reveal a **thorough examination of the topics and delivery against the stated objectives**, with the emerging insights and recommendations a **sound basis to support the development of a collaborative community, linking academia to the policy and practice, and understanding pathways to impact for research**. While not all of the discussions and resulting key messages were new to senior scientists and marine policy officials, the context of current and emerging government ambition was revealed as new and noteworthy as cause for greater optimism about the potential for meaningful impact. In particular we made strong links between the programmes purpose and the current development of Scotland's Blue Economy Action Plan (BEAP), with opportunities for science engagement made overtly through Workshop 2. In-between workshops, core members of the programme team met with the Scottish Government BEAP team, and with those who will revise Scotland's National Marine Plan in the next few years. This interaction will continue through 2021 and beyond, promoting key messages from this work.

Also of note was **diverse participation from the science community**. Senior scientists, some facilitating workshop discussions, provided valuable insights alongside policy colleagues and other scientists. Importantly, a good number of social scientists (often overlooked in these matters) engaged, as well early career researchers and graduate students (providing a valuable learning experience).

Recognising that policy development and delivery, and science delivery and advocacy, do not just occur in central government and universities, **public agencies, NGOs and some industry voices were also represented and provided significant added value** to discussions. Their investment of time is important to secure their role in relaying the recommendations below in their influential advisory and advocacy roles.

To support **distribution of outputs to a wider audience**, we shared workshop reports via [Scotland's SDG Network forum](#), also inviting workshop participants to engage in this network. [A blog post](#) pointing to this forum was posted on Scotland's SDG Network website, promoted widely through email groups and social media. Finally, an [animated video](#) explaining 'policy coherence' and ambition for advances at the science-policy interface was produced, providing an entry point for ongoing promotion of outputs.

## *Key recommendations for end user / policy communities*

1. To **move beyond 'business as usual'** in the Blue Economy, explicit recognition of the trade-offs and acknowledgement of the limits to growth of marine sectors (or specific practices) is needed.
2. A 'whole of government' approach, with **cross-ministerial engagement and coordination** akin to the Just Transition Commission<sup>1</sup>. However, where possible, there is preference for **streamlining approaches** over

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/groups/just-transition-commission/>



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creating new mechanisms, **easing barriers and leveraging opportunities** for coherence and collaboration. Greater cross-governmental co-ordination could be enabled by a strong relationship between BEAP outcomes and Scotland's NPF, also relating national performance to the SDGs.

3. Alongside policy, **economic drivers (in a broad sense) are essential** in supporting a sustainable transition. New markets can help achieve social and ecological goals while creating private sector opportunities. 'Valuing' the ocean must account for natural capital benefiting society, including qualitative targets for the multiple dimensions of wellbeing and social outcomes; accommodating **marine natural capital assessment into the NPF** is an outstanding challenge.
4. **Regional marine planning should play an important role** in policy coherence, as a space for setting long-term visions, navigating trade-offs and building synergies at a tangible scale. Renewed focus on both regional and national marine planning can drive progress and support implementation of the BEAP.
5. Local governance is central to delivering the BEAP, but we need to evaluate whether recent devolution of decision-making is leading to more **democratised marine governance**, and whether it be improved.
6. **Adaptive approaches** are essential, and learning can be accelerated at local scale. Scotland's islands are opportune for innovation in governance, due to higher adaptive capacity and local engagement.
7. Scientific evidence informs policy by understanding baselines, trends, thresholds and tipping points, as well as the multiple and interacting effects of human activities and the effectiveness of management interventions. **Measuring progress requires robust data and evidence** from a monitoring framework with well-defined objectives and indicators. There is **growing emphasis on the need for significant advances in the social sciences** and its application to sustainability challenges.
8. The differences between the scientific and policy worlds are stark, including the time pressures of governmental decision-making, and the lack of support and reward in academia for policy engagement. We seek an **evolution in our professional 'cultures'**, for greater collaboration.
9. Skills in working across the **science-policy boundary** are valuable but require training and professional recognition. Boundary organisations and knowledge brokers play an important role.
10. Specific recommendations for **improving science / policy integration** for the Blue Economy:
  - Train scientists in policy processes, including students and early career researchers.
  - Support policy experts in understanding the scientific process and emerging research.
  - Secondment opportunities for scientists to play active roles in policy development and implementation.
  - Enhance the role of research-pooling initiatives to support policy, including Marine Alliance for Science and Technology in Scotland (MASTS)<sup>2</sup> and SAGES<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.masts.ac.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sages.ac.uk/>



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- Recognise the role of scientists within government in facilitating knowledge transfer from non-government scientists.

## Planned follow up activities

Beyond the promotion of existing reports, video and a briefing for key policy officials amongst workshop attendees and our broader science and policy networks, we will:

- Attend and contribute the key messages to further meetings and workshops informing the development of the Blue Economy Action Plan / Strategy and the revision of Scotland's National Marine Plan. Programme team members will be directly involved in this.
- Pursue more tailored briefings for specific policy audiences where appropriate.
- Sharing of outputs and key messages with UK and international networks and contacts, primarily via programme team members engaged in groups and activities associated with the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the Convention for Biological Diversity.

We are also likely to pursue a peer-reviewed publication, which will provide opportunity for much wider dissemination and ongoing legacy through citations.