



Regions to Boost
National Maritime
Spatial Planning



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An Roinn Comhshaoil,
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Department of the Environment,
Climate and Communications



REGINA-MSP

Communication brief

Regional Brief for Co. Mayo, Ireland

Ireland's approach to MSP at a local level



REGINA-MSP communication brief series

The REGINA-MSP project is a two-year project (2023-2024) that aims to greater integrate the regional and sub-regional needs, perspectives and stakeholders into the development and implementation of national Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). The project highlights potential challenges to this integration and opportunities to reduce them, building on a general analysis at the European level and an in-depth analysis in eight case study regions in five European countries, i.e., France, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain.

Based on various activities carried out within REGINA-MSP and further described in this communication brief (e.g., workshops, bibliographical analyses), a set of policy needs and recommendations has been identified at different levels (European, national, regional). This communication brief summarises the main policy recommendations for the regional levels for the Irish case study, in County Mayo. This brief is part of a series of communication briefs produced as part of REGINA-MSP, focusing on various topics related to MSP (such as ocean literacy or communities of practice) and on each case study region and country of the project.

Characteristics of County Mayo, Ireland

County Mayo is situated in the North West Region of Ireland, bordering the Atlantic Ocean. It has the longest coastline in Ireland, at 1168 km, stretching from Killary Harbour in the south to Killala Bay in the north. The west coast of Ireland is notable for its rich biodiversity and this is evident in the high number of international, EU and national conservation designations for protected sites. These cover a range of habitats including sea cliffs, coastal sand dunes, coastal lagoons, salt meadows, coastal estuarine sites, as well as to protected species such as the bottlenose dolphin, wintering migratory water birds, etc.

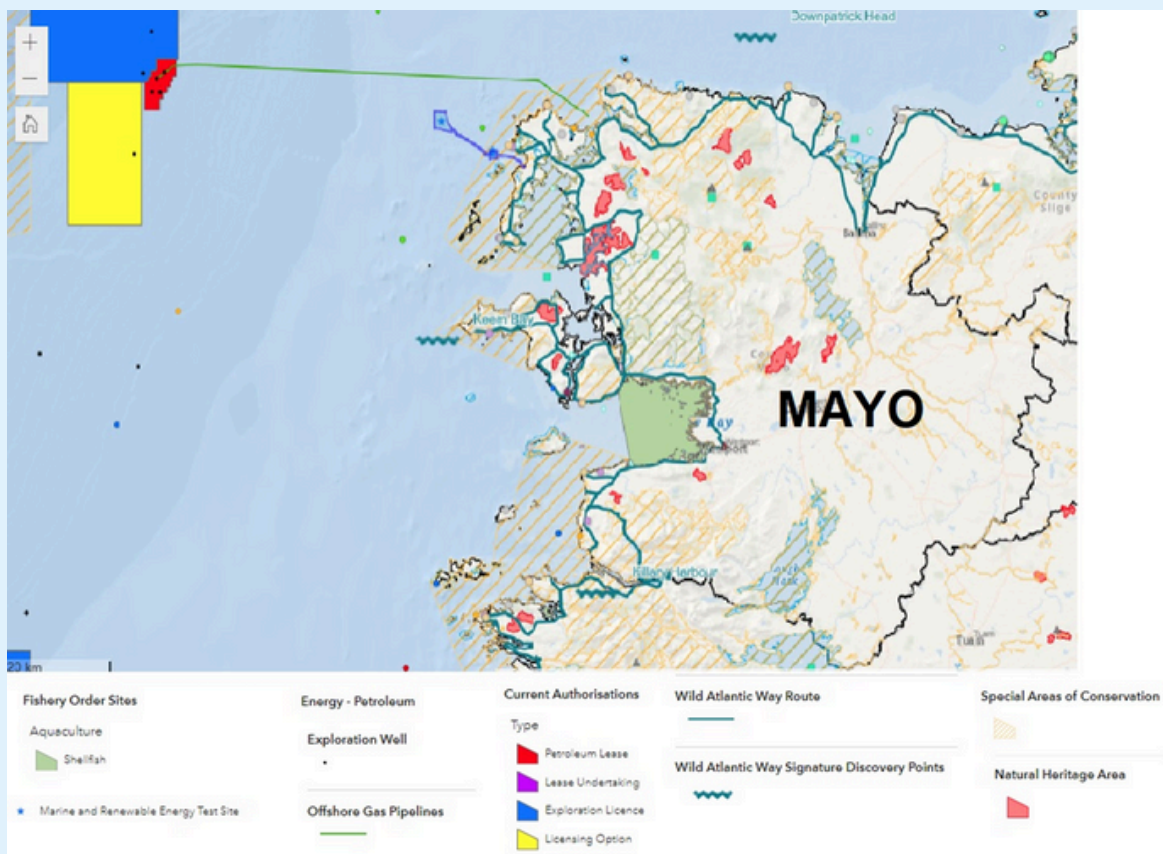
Mayo is predominately rural in character. The largest towns are Castlebar and Ballina with populations of about 10,000 people. It has its own Gaeltacht area where Irish (Gaeilge) is spoken as a first language, these areas are located in the west and northwest of the county and on many of its islands.

Mayo's coastal zone supports a wide range of related maritime industries such as fisheries and aquaculture, tourism, shipping and gas industries, which are regionally important in economic terms.

The Wild Atlantic Way, a national coastal tourism trail from the north of the country to the south, has stimulated additional tourism and contributed to the economic development of Mayo's coast in recent years. Significant potential exists to harness the marine resources along the Co. Mayo coastline including through the development of offshore renewable energy and its supply chain, marine tourism and leisure, marine biotechnology, and research and development activity. The County Development Plan contains a number of marine economy objectives to help develop this potential.

Co. Mayo is particularly vulnerable to river, coastal and tidal flooding, colder winters as well as surface water flooding arising from heavy rain and increased storminess. Some parts of Mayo's coast are already experiencing coastal erosion. Mayo County Council has adopted and is implementing a Climate Adaptation Strategy for the county and will also deliver a Climate Action Plan. Climate change is also an integral theme of the County Development Plan 2022-2028, which includes mandatory development objectives relating to land zoning, provision of infrastructure, conservation and protection of the environment, management of features and preservation of the landscape in line with national Planning and Development legislation.

Part of the REGINA-MSP project was looking at how national level MSP could be further implemented at regional and local levels. Mayo County Council, for example, could look at their existing planning objectives and explore how these could be achieved through the use of a DMAP as a forward-looking sub-national marine plan that will contribute to the overall management of the maritime area. DMAP's must be consistent with the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS), the NMPF and any other relevant Ministerial guidelines or policy directives. DMAPs can support sustainable development of the maritime area and facilitate coherent and transparent decision-making. A DMAP can have a sectoral or multi-sectoral focus and when adopted becomes part of the national marine planning framework. There is an opportunity to deliver DMAPs at the regional or local level to guide activity and development in the nearshore. No county-level or regional-level DMAPs have yet been created or adopted. The first DMAP for offshore wind energy is under consideration and will apply to the south coast of Ireland.



Activities conducted in Co. Mayo within REGINA-MSP

As part of the REGINA-MSP project two workshops were organised over two days and held in Co. Mayo to discuss how to develop a regional plan. A Training Day was held in Co. Cork for regional stakeholders on MSP.

Workshop for Killala Bay, Co Mayo.

Killala Bay lies between the counties of Mayo and Sligo and is an extension of the River Moy with deep waters of the continental shelf close to the shore making it an excellent fishing location. The bay is approximately 8.9 km wide and has a maximum depth of 36 metres. While the middle of the bay is safe for boats, caution is required near the coastline. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce local and regional stakeholders and authorities in the area to the national MSP process and how it might assist in developing their own Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) for sub-national planning in the Killala Bay area. During the workshops participants were asked to discuss the following questions:

- What is the overall theme for Killala Bay - what is its unique identity, what are the activities in the bay that make it what it is currently?
- What are the immediate requirements for Killala Bay to enable development of this identity and to enable the current activities to be enhanced or improved?
- What effects are climate change having on Killala Bay and what will the impact of these effects be in the next 2-3 years?
- What should the future/long term plans be for Killala Bay - which activities are most important?
- Is there requirement for a DMAP for these needs - consider (a) national existing supports and (b) local regional/county plans?

The majority of the discussions focused on the immediate needs for the area such as development and repair of existing harbours, additional berths for pleasure boats (local and visiting), provision of toilets and facilities for less-abled people at the beaches. There are some localised erosion problems that might need further study with a subsequent plan on how to deal with this in the longer term. The workshop represents a needed opportunity for local government representatives to shift their focus from terrestrial spatial planning to MSP and helped to raise awareness of both the complexity and the fragmentation of the maritime space and the implications this might have for an area such as Killala, which falls between two planning authorities and hosts marine activities that fall under various regulatory remits.



Workshop for Inishturk Island, Co Mayo.

The second workshop was held on Inishturk island, one of Mayo's inhabited offshore islands situated about 15 kilometres off the Mayo coast. The purpose was to explore the types of issues that arise on islands and how these might relate to current and future MSP with local residents, some of whom also had commercial enterprises on or related to the island.

In a similar approach to the first workshop, participants were asked to discuss:

- What is the overall theme for Inishturk: what is its unique identity, what are the activities that make it what it is currently?
- What are the main challenges facing the island(s)?
- What long-term plans would you have for the island and what is needed to achieve these ambitions?

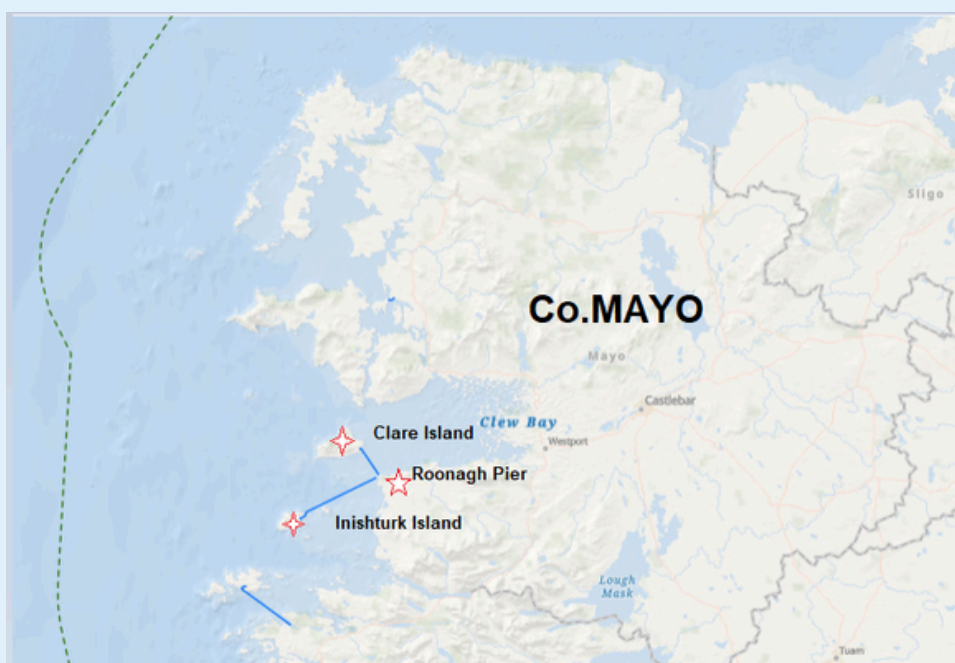
Given their wild and scenic beauty, many of the islands host seasonal visitors during the summer months putting pressures on local infrastructure and services. Whilst MSP could contribute to addressing some of these needs, there are much more urgent and pressing needs for the island of Inishturk particularly in relation to access via the pier. It will be some time before a dedicated Maritime Spatial Plan can be looked at for these remote Islands.



The local Ferry to Inishturk



A View of Inishturk Island and the pier



Location of Inishturk in relation to Co. Mayo and other inhabited Islands



A Helipad has recently been installed on the Island for medical emergencies



This picture highlights how important connectivity is to the Islands: Professor Stella Kvyelou, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens spoke via video-link highlighting marine spatial planning issues around Europe and the Greek Islands

Training Day in Co. Cork for MSP stakeholders

A regional Training Day was also held as part of the REGINA-MSP project. This MSP Training event was aimed at regulators and Regional Assembly staff members who will be making the decisions on planning applications within Ireland's maritime region.

This one-day event was held in the MaREI Centre, Environmental Research Institute at University College Cork and had participants from each of the three Regional Assemblies, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Irish Naval Service, and researchers from MaREI.

The Training Day commenced with an overview of research activities of relevance to MSP ongoing in MaREI and provided some context for the next stage of the day which was the interactive MSP Challenge Game. The participants were divided into three groups, representing fictional sovereign states, and asked to plan a specific amount of renewable energy for offshore wind and 30% MPAs (of which 10% were strictly protected) in their respective maritime areas on the board. This led to a lively and robust exchange of ideas and realisation of policy priorities between the neighbouring countries. It also helped to demonstrate the need for the experiences of different stakeholders to be embedded in MSP from the outset.

Potential policy recommendations for greater integration of regional and sub-regional needs, perspectives and stakeholders

Legal aspects

- Ireland's framework for MSP includes the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF), the Marine Planning Policy Statement with a legal basis in the Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021 that contains provisions relating to the creation of Designated Maritime Area Planning, planning guidelines and further regulations should they be deemed necessary. Each of these could have a future role to play in marine planning of regions and local areas.
- Amendments to the planning legislation in the form of the Planning and Development Bill 2023 are currently advancing through the formal legislative process. This amended legislation could provide a stronger legal basis for Regional Assessment in Maritime Spatial Planning across Ireland, including in the wider case study region (North West Regional Assembly area).

Governance

- Any future changes to the role of Regional Assemblies in MSP needs to consider and facilitate close cooperation with Local Authorities who already have significant knowledge of their adjoining nearshore and maritime areas. Similarly Regional and Social Economic Strategies need to align coherently with County Development Plans and Local Area Plans, particularly if a Designated Maritime Area Plan is going to be created. text (precise if national or regional level)
- The potential for Local and/or Regional Marine Planning groups or partnerships should be explored to facilitate open communication between everyone concerns and also help ensure the needs of local areas are reflected in any future official plans.

Resources

- Local Authorities and Regional Assemblies need to be appropriately resourced in terms of staff and finance/budgets to assist in maximising the effectiveness of MSP at these levels and build trust among stakeholders in this new and evolving planning system.

Data

- Whilst significant efforts have been made to build up national marine data and knowledge resources, future attention needs to concentrate on ensuring this information is useful for local and regional marine planning and decision-making.
- Interoperability between Local Authority planning and mapping systems with marineplan.ie should also be investigated.

Sources:

Marine Institute. 2023. Ireland's Ocean Economy report 2023:

<https://oar.marine.ie/handle/10793/1882>

Maritime Area Planning Act, 2021:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2021/act/50/enacted/en/print#sec3>

Mayo Council Council. 2022. Mayo County Development Plan.

<https://www.mayo.ie/planning/county-development-plans/2022-2028>

National Marine Planning Framework:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60e57-national-marine-planning-framework/>

Ireland's Marine Planning portal: <https://www.marineplan.ie/>

Citation

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Disclaimer

This communication brief has been developed as part of the REGINA-MSP project. Its content is based on the activities carried within the framework of the project and does not necessarily represent the views of the authors' organizations and nations.



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