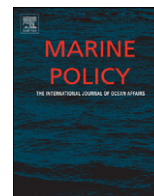




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## Priority questions to shape the marine and coastal policy research agenda in the United Kingdom

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### ABSTRACT

United Kingdom (UK) and European Union policy is rapidly developing to meet international targets for the sustainable use and protection of the marine environment. To inform this process, research needs to keep pace with these changes and research questions must be focused on providing robust scientific evidence. Thirty four priority research questions within six broad themes were identified by delegates who attended the 1st marine and coastal policy Forum, hosted by the Centre for Marine and Coastal Policy Research at Plymouth University in June 2011. The priority questions formed through this research are timely and reflect the pace and change of marine policy in the UK in response to international, European and national policy drivers. Within the data theme, the majority of questions seek to find improved procedures to manage and use data effectively. Questions related to governance focus on how existing policies should be implemented. The marine conservation questions focus entirely upon implementation and monitoring of existing policy. Questions related to ecosystem services focus on research to support the conceptual links between ecosystem services, ecosystem function, and marine management. Questions relating to marine citizenship are fundamental questions about the nature of societal engagement with the sea. Finally, the marine planning questions focus upon understanding the general approaches to be taken to marine planning rather than its detailed implementation. The questions that have emerged from this process vary in scale, approach and focus. They identify the interdisciplinary science that is currently needed to enable the UK to work towards delivering its European and international commitments to achieve the sustainable use and protection of the marine environment.

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### 1. Introduction

The need to identify research priorities is important because a robust evidence base is critical to support informed policy change. However, it is a complex issue as national policy for the marine

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and coastal environment is not created in isolation and is driven, at least in part, by the need to meet international commitments. These include global treaties, such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and regional agreements, such as the OSPAR Convention of the Protection of the North East Atlantic [1–3]. These policies provide a framework for both UK and European Union (EU) marine policy through the definition of important over-arching principles and criteria for species and habitat protection. The EU translates many of these principles into more concrete objectives through its directives and it is the responsibility of the member states to ensure the requirements of these directives are met.

Central to the management of the European marine environment are the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) which together create a network of protected areas for a number of listed species and habitats native to member states in the terrestrial and marine environment. These directives require the designation of European Marine Sites as either Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and subsequently protection of these sites from harmful development [4]. More recently the Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC (MSFD) has been introduced to provide broader marine environmental protection in European waters [5]. This Directive, which constitutes the environmental component of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), aims to achieve good environmental status in all EU marine waters by 2020 while protecting the resource base for economic and social activities. This brings the marine environment in line with the EU's Water Framework Directive's (WFD) requirements for inland and coastal waters. In addition, the IMP, which advocates an integrated approach to governance of marine and coastal waters, has proposed the introduction of marine or maritime plans, working in close association with integrated coastal zone management.

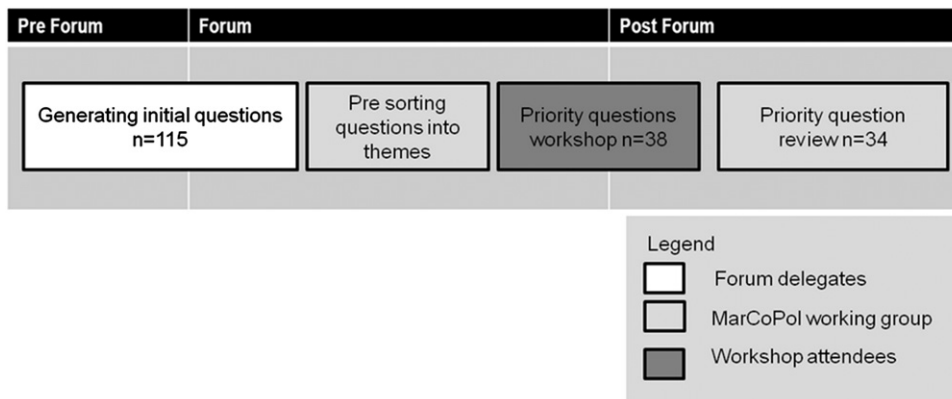
To support the UK Government in meeting these international and European commitments and to achieve the Government's aim of 'clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas' [6], the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA) [7], the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 [8], and the forthcoming Northern Ireland Marine Bill 2012 are providing the framework to streamline the way the marine environment is managed in the UK. Along with developing legislation from the devolved administrations [9] these new provisions include the legal frameworks to develop Marine Plans (guided at a national level by the Marine Policy Statement [10]), provide powers to set licensing controls for development proposals in the marine area, and enable the designation of a new type of Marine Protected Area (MPA) called Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs).

The scale and pace of change in European and national policy presents challenges in managing the marine environment for its sustainable use. These changes in the governance of the marine environment place considerable demands on the marine community to work together to provide the necessary information and understanding to fulfill the set objectives. Decision makers need access to scientific evidence that is targeted to their needs [11,12]. To this end, academic research in the science-policy arena must be integrated and interdisciplinary. It must also be timely by framing research activities within the context of the general trends in that field [13,14]. Collaborative exercises to identify priority areas for research and management have demonstrated a methodology for identifying relevant areas of research to scientists, policy makers and practitioners [15–22]. However, none has focused on the interdisciplinary research requirements needed to achieve the sustainable use and protection of marine environment in the UK. To fill this gap in knowledge the aim of this study was to work with policy makers, practitioners and academics to identify priority questions to shape the marine and coastal policy research agenda in the UK.

## 2. Methods

In his taxonomy of horizon-scanning methods, Sutherland [16] identifies the methods used in this research as 'expert workshops' which "bring together experts to suggest possible future issues based on their own experience and knowledge" (p. 524). Sutherland identifies the advantages of this approach as the credibility provided by experts and that the iterative nature of the workshops draws out key issues and provides opportunities to refine the outcomes. The disadvantages are that the findings are always constrained by who was (or was not) involved in the workshops and by the precise process that was followed. The authors recognised these qualities in this study and specifically sought to minimise the disadvantages inherent to the method through the application of a rigorous research process described below, yet inevitably some effect will remain. Any variation in the methods used and in participation in the workshop would have resulted in a slightly different list of research questions; however, this is the case for all such processes.

The development of this research involved four stages (Fig. 1). The central focus for undertaking this research was the 1st marine and coastal policy Forum which was hosted by the Centre for Marine and Coastal Policy Research (MarCoPol) at Plymouth University, UK in June 2011.



**Fig. 1.** Process diagram that shows the stages undertaken for developing the priority questions to shape the marine and coastal policy research agenda in the UK. *n*=the number of questions at each stage of the process.

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