



SUPPORTING MARICULTURE DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FOR INFORMED REGULATION

POLICY STATEMENT

September 2020

This policy statement is drawn from the evidence, experience and recommendations outlined in the accompanying Policy Brief.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR MARICULTURE POLICY AND REGULATION

This document aims to guide the development of mariculture policy and regulation in England. Recommendations are drawn from evidence and experience presented by a range of industry, academic and regulatory stakeholders from across the UK, and are based on focussed discussions around South West England, which are captured in the related policy brief.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Developing a clear roadmap for licensing (e.g. within or in conjunction with the new English Aquaculture Strategy) would support innovative mariculture development and expansion. Building upon the Cefas '[aquaculture regulatory toolbox](#)' to create a user-friendly roadmap that provides:

- A process flow of the 'routes' that various farmed species (existing, emerging and novel) and practices may need to take to get final approval.
- Additional information for applicants to use to help build rapport with key contacts, including contact fora/databases for regulators, stakeholders and applicants.
- Detail on opportunities for securing research or other business start-up/expansion funding support.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Clear, proactive channels of communication between marine users (industry and recreational stakeholders) and regulators should be created and used during the application, development and farm implementation process.

This will facilitate improved engagement and relationships to span the lifetime of mariculture operations and provide strategic level alignment, collaboration and communication with the [English Aquaculture leadership group \(ALG\)](#). It will help deliver national growth through:

- **Formation of local working groups** – comprised of individuals from across sectors and marine user groups to represent those with a vested interest. These can potentially link with existing fora, such as the Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs), to facilitate community-led local development. [Dorset and East Devon FLAG](#) provide a great example of such integration of aquaculture into local development strategies.
- **Formation of regional aquaculture industry representative groups** – helping to bring mariculture industry stakeholders together to act as regional advocates for the industry. Regional networks similar to the South West Aquaculture Network (SWAN) could be established to undertake this role. Such networks should account for intersecting regional areas, e.g. MMO Marine Spatial Planning Areas, IFCA Districts and LEP Regions. Existing fora could also be used to support aquaculture-focussed groups e.g. [Dorset Coast Forum](#), [Cornwall Marine Network](#) and [Devon Maritime forum](#).

RECOMMENDATION 3

Pilot mariculture projects and test sites/hubs should be developed to support small ‘tenant farmer’ operators to test new methods or species and help support evidence provision. Funding support from central and/or regional capital investment would need to be carefully considered, but these hubs should:

- **Support innovation** by centrally managing the regulatory approvals (possibly using a similar system to the [IFCA Shellfisheries: Several Orders and Regulating Orders](#)) for the individual farmers who use the site; and
- **Collect and share data to enhance the evidence base** and support novel and emerging aquaculture developments.

RECOMMENDATION 4

A shift to a proactive, collaborative approach to developing finer-scale marine spatial planning would help identify opportunities for coexistence of different uses. An important next step for any new mariculture policy will be to outline a process for how this finer-scale marine spatial planning can be driven at high level, but achieved collaboratively – perhaps drawing on the [Cefas Aquaculture mapping project](#).

- **Consider assigning Allocated zones for Aquaculture (AZA)** – specific zones that through careful spacial planning and consultation are highlighted as suitable for aquaculture activities.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Regulation and licensing processes require a balance in adaptability and clarity to support innovative mariculture development.

- Appropriate resources need to be made available to allow this to happen.
- Clear engagement frameworks between regulators, industry and researchers.
- [The Coastal Concordat](#) could be built upon to ensure streamlined and coordinated consenting was possible for coastal development in England.

A NEW MARICULTURE POLICY SHOULD:

Be clear, and written in collaboration with mariculture industry, academia and regulators. The policy should:

- Enable enactment* of the new English Aquaculture Strategy, by providing a high-level framework that will facilitate aquaculture development, address key constraints and facilitate the achievement of milestones and targets set out in the Strategy.
- Outline the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.
- Include a roadmap to guide development approval.
- Be supported by sufficient regulatory resourcing (ideally overseen by one overarching industry authority i.e. Seafish) with government backing.

** (In Scotland the Aquaculture and Fisheries Act ensures that farmed and wild fisheries - and their interactions with each other - continue to be managed effectively, maximising their combined contribution to supporting sustainable economic growth with due regard to the wider marine environment.)*

BACKGROUND

- The UK government has ambitious plans for growth in the aquaculture sector. As part of the [Seafood 2040](#) strategy, growth of 40% is considered achievable and desirable. This creates an immediate requirement for concentration and funnelling of regulatory resources that will be essential to facilitate this growth.
- The existing [2015 UK Multi-annual National Plan](#) for the development of sustainable aquaculture and the forthcoming Aquaculture Strategy for England provide mechanisms that brings these threads together.
- Marine Aquaculture (Mariculture) is recognised as a growing sector in the UK.
- The South West presents a potential hotspot for development, but competition for marine space is intense.
- Mariculture has the potential to restore and enhance marine environments if appropriately located, as well as contribute to local coastal economies, but the evidence for these positive impacts is still emerging.
- An online workshop was held in July 2020 to bring together the voices from England's South-West mariculture industry including representatives from academia, industry, conservation organisations and regulators.
- This policy statement and the accompanying, more comprehensive policy brief are a result of discussions at that workshop.



KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY STAKEHOLDERS

- **Collaboration across sectors is needed** to support the development of novel mariculture, particularly working together across research, government and multiple industries to build the evidence-base for the impacts of mariculture.
- **Marine spatial planning is often at too large a scale to facilitate neighbouring or co-existence of marine activities** in a way that benefits multiple users. The reactive consultative process for marine spatial planning does not facilitate engagement between parties.
- **Mariculture developers find approval and licensing processes confusing, cumbersome and economically restrictive**, due to the many regulatory departments, agencies and separate processes involved and evidence requirements for novel or emerging species.
- **Mariculture researchers find it difficult to link research funding applications and studies to mariculture development projects** due to complex licensing processes and protracted decision-making, which confound project planning and alignment.
- **The lack of a clear national mariculture policy** makes it difficult for regulators to make consistent regulatory decisions in relation to other marine sectors, which are supported by clear policies and Government administrative offices.
- **Aquaculture development and administration in Defra, MMO, IFCA is considerably under-resourced compared to other sectors.** The aquaculture industry is relatively small in England and has few dedicated regulatory staff, particularly when compared to fisheries. This disproportionate resourcing is not conducive to the ambitious growth targets, and is spread across multiple agencies – often causing confusion and additional barriers for mariculture development.
- **Conflict between mariculture operators and other marine users can arise from a lack of engagement** and communication during mariculture development and operations.
- **Sustainable, well-managed mariculture development requires a greater understanding of impacts of mariculture** (both positive and negative) on the surrounding habitats and sensitive species.

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The event was led by Carly Daniels and facilitation provided by Ian Ashton, Ross Brown, Josh Martin, Katrina Ryan and Sara Mynott.

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