Achieving Ocean Recovery:

A Northern Ireland Perspective

Northern Ireland
Marine Task Force

Biodiverse and Beautiful Seas

Healthy, productive and resilient seas around Northern Ireland is our vision, full of wonderful marine wildlife; from huge 10 metre long basking sharks, to swimming crabs and multi-coloured sea slugs. Yet, the demands we put on the marine environment are higher than ever before, and in the face of the twin climate and nature crises, our biodiverse and beautiful seas are suffering.

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The Need for Ocean Recovery

A healthy ocean is vital for life on earth as we know it. Yet our seas are suffering from climate change, damaging human activities and pollution. With the climate and nature emergency lapping at our shores we must urgently deliver a focused new agenda to recover our marine environment.

The ocean produces over half of the air we breathe. Globally, the oceans have absorbed 20-30% of human CO_2 emissions and up to 93% of the extra heat captured by greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. However, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change debut report on the state of our oceans has warned that it is reaching a critical turning point.

The UK Government has recognised the need for urgent action on the international stage but commitments without targeted action for change won't deliver for our domestic waters. Despite having legislation to protect our marine environment in Northern Ireland and across the UK, its implementation has been ineffective to date, in part due to a lack of resources and the prioritisation of economic growth over environmental protection. In 2019, UK Governments by its own standards failed to achieve 11 out of 15 indicators for healthy seas.

The recovery of depleted habitats and species populations is crucial. Business as usual will leave our waters bereft of life and our coastal communities poorer.

Fortunately, research has suggested that our oceans can be recovered by 2050 if there is a global effort and ambitious action. However, to achieve action on a global scale, we must first achieve ambitious actions on a local scale.

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Ambitious action to turn the fate of our seas around is needed urgently

Recovering Northern Irelands marine environment means bringing our seas back to life, so they are healthy, resilient and thriving, for people, climate and nature.

Unfortunately, the most recent assessment of our sea did not paint a positive picture. We have failed to achieve 'Good Environments Status', our network of Marine Protected Areas is still incomplete and what's more, many are still lacking effective management. We need ambitious and urgent action to turn the fate of our seas around.

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Our mission:

To be an enabling force for ocean recovery in Northern Ireland

Action for Ocean Recovery

Recovering Biodiversity
Species declines are halted and reversed; previously damaged fragile habitats are in recovery.

Sustainable Fisheries
Fisheries are sustainable and managed to protect the wider environment.

Sustainable Development
Effective marine spatial planning recognises the importance of ocean recovery and puts the environment at the forefront of all decision making.

Climate Action
Our seas and coasts are providing nature-based solutions for climate action.

Raising Voices
NIMTF are a leading voice on marine issues in Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland are inspired to act for ocean recovery.

Actions for Ocean Recovery

Recovering Biodiversity

Northern Ireland is home to an abundance of iconic and often vulnerable marine wildlife such as harbour porpoise, puffins, horse mussel reefs, seagrass beds and many more. These species and habitats will benefit from an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Northern Ireland which is well-managed, monitored, enforced and resourced.

Only sustainable levels of activities and development impacting on our seas are allowed, meaning all marine wildlife and natural ecosystems can survive and thrive in Northern Irish waters.

Outcomes:

- ***Current gaps in MPA network are filled with new designations and effective management.***
- ***Good Environmental Status achieved for our wider seas and indicators***

Sustainable Fisheries

The fishing industry is an important aspect of Northern Ireland culture and economy. To ensure its success and to protect fish stocks as well as the wider environment, it must be truly sustainable.

An ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management must be applied whereby healthy ecosystem level components and processes are recognised as vital for good fish stock management, and are used to inform decision making. To aid this process, all fishing activity must be fully documented, monitored and integrated with other marine planning and conservation measures at sea.

Outcomes:

- ***An ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management is applied, in agreement with the latest scientific advice.***
- ***Northern Ireland has effective legislation and implementation procedures in place to enable sustainable and climate friendly fishing.***

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Climate Action

Northern Ireland climate policy needs to recognise the role of protecting and restoring blue carbon habitats and species, aka 'Nature Based Solutions' to climate change. Inside and outside of MPAs, crucial blue carbon habitats and species will help mitigate against the impact of climate change by drawing down carbon, provide tangible benefits to biodiversity and will also act as a natural defence against increased storminess. A long-term programme of restoration must be put in place to increase blue carbon habitats around NI, including seagrass meadows, maerl and saltmarsh.

Outcomes:

- ***The marine environment is included in the Northern Ireland***
- ***Climate Change Act.***
- ***Develop recommendations for the establishment of climate smart management of MPAs preserving natural blue carbon ecosystem functions and processes.***

Sustainable Development at Sea

Strategic and fit for purpose marine planning and licensing which puts the environment at the forefront of decision making, is the key to the successful recovery of our marine environment. It should give activities and policies which prevent the achievement of healthy seas a lower priority, and similar to fisheries, apply an ecosystem based rather than a sectoral based approach.

Outcomes:

- ***Marine planning in Northern Ireland is spatially prescriptive and implements the Ecosystem Based Approach to decision making***
- ***All development is set within environmental limits and positively integrated with Marine Strategy and MPA network goals.***
- ***Adverse impacts of offshore energy and other developments in the marine environment are limited with strict regulation on noise and location.***

Raising Voices

By helping others raise their voice for marine through increased public engagement and awareness work, online webinars,'easy access' guided consultation responses and effective campaigning and online petitioning, NIMTF aim to give power back to coastal communities and people to participate and implement change for themselves.

Building trust and close relationships with NIMTF members, industry, community groups and the general public, NIMTF will provide a platform for knowledge sharing and facilitate more and better joint working and collaboration.

Outcomes:

- ***The people of Northern Ireland are inspired and empowered to act for ocean recovery.***
- ***NIMTF has a visible presence in communities, holding events, increasing public engagement and support.***

Northern Ireland Marine Task Force

Our journey towards healthy seas and ocean recovery

The Northern Ireland Marine Task Force is a coalition of non-governmental organisations working together towards, healthy productive and resilient seas and is funded by Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation.

2007
NIMTF established.

2011
The NIMTF 'Act UP Campaign' resulted in 4000 letters to MLAs calling for a strengthened Marine Bill.

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2012
NI Environment Minister forms a new marine division inside the department (DoE) for coordinated marine activities.

2013
Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 paves the way for the designation of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and the creation of marine plans and updated licensing regimes.

2015
NIMTF launches the MCZ Roadshow which results in over 1400 signatures in support of better marine protection for NI.

2015
NIMTF campaign for the designation of four proposed MCZs: Rathlin Island, Waterfoot, Outer Belfast Lough and Carlingford Lough.

2016
All four MCZs were formally designated protecting a host of important marine features including; deep seabed, black guillemot, seagrass beds, ocean quahog and seapens.

2017
NIMTF leads the NI voice in campaigning for an ecosystem based UK Fisheries Bill.

2018
NIMTF and academic partners submit critical evidence on the need to strengthening the ecosystem based approach within the draft Northern Ireland Marine Plan.

2020
NIMTF cautiously welcome the UK Fisheries Act (2020), in particular new commitments to setting climate change and sustainability objectives.

2020
NIMTF engage on the development of NI MPA management plans including proposals on fisheries.

2021
NIMTF launches a new vision for ocean recovery in NI and continues to work with DAERA, the fishing industry and our members to deliver for nature at sea.

2023
Co-chairing Co-Fish to ensure sustainable fisheries and conservation management

2024
Establishment of the NIMTF Student Placement Programme

2025
NIMTF welcome the MPA Strategy Review and Blue Carbon Action Plan

2025
Launch of the NIMTF Ocean Advocates Programme

2026
NIMTF launches a 5-year project, Sea Across Society at Stormont

2026
NIMTF welcome the Seabird and Elasmobranch Conservation Strategies

2030
Progression towards a routemap to achieve 30by30

2031
NIMTF have delivered on their decade-long Marine Vision

Instagram - @nimarinetaskforce

Tiktok - @NIMTF

Youtube - @NIMTF

LinkedIn - Northern Ireland Marine Task Force

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