

Seabed User and Developer Group – Position Paper

Overview

The Seabed User & Developer Group comprises the key marine industries whose activities develop the sea bed. SUDG understands that the sea around our shores is a sensitive environment that needs to be valued and protected, but it is also a working environment that makes a substantial contribution to all our lives. From oil and gas, renewable energy and aggregates and from ports to cables and leisure boating and even emerging industries like carbon capture and storage, the industries of the sea make an essential contribution to our quality of life as well as the economy and represent 4.2 per cent of gross domestic product supporting c.900,000 jobs.

We are an informal grouping with a common interest and commitment to sustainable development within the UK's marine environment. We work closely for alignment with UK Government and Devolved Administrations, their agencies and other stakeholders in developing cost-effective regulation and marine management that benefits business, wider society and the environment. Having worked closely with Government during the development of the Marine and Coastal Access Act and the Marine Policy Statement, we welcome the recognition that managing the marine environment needs to reflect national policies on energy, transport and the economy as well as the environment.

SUDG has collaborated with conservation NGOs including the Marine Conservation Society, Wildlife Trusts and RSPB to prepare joint statements confirming our commitment to protection of the marine environment and seeking:

- Designation of an ecologically coherent and well managed network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) around the UK, including European Marine Sites and Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)
- Recognition that the regulated marine industries participating in SUDG can play a major role in economic growth and the sustainable management of marine resources
- Marine planning which contributes to facilitating the planning process, providing more certainty for both developers and stakeholders potentially affected

Our website, www.sudg.org.uk sets out more information about the group and our priorities which are summarised as:

- A future for our seas based on sustainable development
- Clear objectives which cover economic and social, as well as environmental needs
- An integrated approach to planning, management and protection
- Cost-effective and proportionate regulation and management
- Planning decisions based on science and knowledge
- Robust mechanisms for high level resolution of problems
- Consistency from the devolved administrations
- Clear guidance on how legislation should be implemented

Development on the marine environment is a high cost activity, requiring a significant degree of investor confidence that developments can proceed. Risk management is therefore a key aspect of corporate activity and greater understanding of the implications of legislation, including the development and management of MPAs is essential.

Industry mitigates risk, in part, through effective Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and collaborates in sharing data and information about the marine environment. All this has given us increasing knowledge of the impacts of differing sectors' activities, which has been used to develop and implement real, practical mitigating actions. This wealth of experience and knowledge that exists within industry should be used by regulators and their advisors to enable a risk based approach to decision making.

SUDG therefore calls for:

- Clear and objective methods for socio-economic assessment in regulatory decision making
- Certainty in marine planning and MPAs
- Wider acceptance and implementation of industry developed mitigation methods
- An appropriate balance of the application of the precautionary principle and a risk based approach to decision making
- Acceptance that new environmental data is not required for every development.

SUDG industries are already highly regulated but we have shown that we can work closely with other marine users to deliver sustainable development and a healthy marine environment. We will build on that success to ensure that economic growth and conservation are compatible and remain so in the future.