



The Northern Ireland Marine Taskforce (NIMTF) is a coalition of non-government environmental organisations – it includes RSPB, Ulster Wildlife, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, National Trust, Friends of the Earth, Marine Conservation Society, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, Surfers Against Sewage, Shark Trust, Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust and Northern Ireland Environment Link. The NIMTF has the support of approximately 100,000 local people. We are working towards healthy, productive and resilient seas for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Marine Task Force response to: [Consultation on the Local Development Plan draft Plan Strategy for Ards and North Down](#)

Submitted: 16th March 2026

NIMTF thanks Ards and North Down District Council for the opportunity to respond to the Local Development Plan Strategy. Whilst we have not provided a full, complete response due to limited capacity, we have highlighted specifics for developmental processes with the proposed 'Undeveloped Coastal Zone'.

NIMTF welcomes the inclusion of an 'Undeveloped Coastal Zone' within this Local Development Plan (LDP), given the importance of the Strangford marine area through its diversity of MPAs. NIMTF would like to better understand how this LDP has taken into account the upcoming draft NI Marine Plan and how this may relate to the Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) sector in terms of developments under the Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (OREAP) in development by the Department for Economy¹. It will be important to ensure any developments which take place do not have a negative impact on NI's marine environment under the UK Marine Strategy which is currently failing 13 out of 15 indicators² to ensure that we are working to improve NI's contribution to ocean health. By presenting this as additional protections for the marine environment, NIMTF welcomes this but presses the importance that MPA Management Plans for Strangford are still being developed and therefore planning for this area should be in conjunction with those developments under the MPA Strategy for the Northern Ireland Inshore Region 2025 - 2030³.

1

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/Offshore%20Renewable%20Energy%20Action%20Plan%20for%20NI.pdf>

2 <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/summary-of-progress-towards-good-environmental-status/>

3

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/MPA%20Strategy%20for%20the%20Northern%20Ireland%20Inshore%20Region%202025-2030.pdf>

4 <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/b8454f3d62164518817e4c581b5555c8/page/Coastal-Forum-Information>

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<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-04/Northern%20Ireland%20Blue%20Carbon%20Action%20Plan%202025%20%E2%80%93%202030.pdf>

6 <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/0295557a52b5446595fc4ba6a97161bb>

7 <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/marine-plan-northern-ireland>

NI is without any Shoreline Management Plans and when these come into effect under the work of the NI Coastal Forum⁴, it will be important that this LDP is done in conjunction with plans and consideration of recommendations or management for this for the Strangford Lough and Ards Peninsula areas. For any developments which take place, it would be welcomed by the Council to explain what they mean by an “unacceptable impact” and what the thresholds for ‘acceptable impact’ and the associated metrics which the Council have identified. This should include the impacts to both intrinsic socio-economic and ecosystem benefits that society will gain by disturbance/impact affecting those species and habitats along the coastline to be protected under the Blue Carbon Action Plan 2025 - 2030⁵ and the MPA Strategy for the Northern Ireland Inshore Region 2025 - 2030. To monitor future projected impacts to the shorelines in relation to coastal management and climate change, NIMTF would recommend utilising NIMTF Member National Trust’s Climate Hazard Maps which considers the impacts of “Storm Damage” as one of their modelled variables⁶. All of this work is underpinned by the requirement of the NI Executive to sign off and publish the finalised version of the draft NI Marine Plan⁷ framework to coincide with the Marine MapViewer which provides the spatial component⁸.

These ecosystem services are also important when combined with the Nature Recovery Networks and associated partnerships to provide greater protection towards flood mitigation and management. NIMTF and the Freshwater Task Force have provided information to the Infrastructure Committee⁹ around developments which should be considered under the amendments to the Water, Sustainable Urban Drainage and Flood Management Bill¹⁰.

For further information, please contact the NIMTF Officer, Robert Walsh at robert.walsh@nimtf.org.

⁸ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/services/marine-mapviewer>

⁹ <https://niassembly.tv/committee-for-infrastructure-meeting-wednesday-11-february-2026/>

¹⁰

<https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/2022-2027/infrastructure/legislation/bills-primary-legislation/water-sustainable-drainage-and-flood-management-bill/>