

The Future and Changing Context of the Irish Sea in the 2020s



Executive Summary

Results from the 2020 Irish Sea Stakeholder Survey
carried out by the Irish Sea Maritime Forum

Irish Sea Maritime Forum. June 2021



Executive Summary

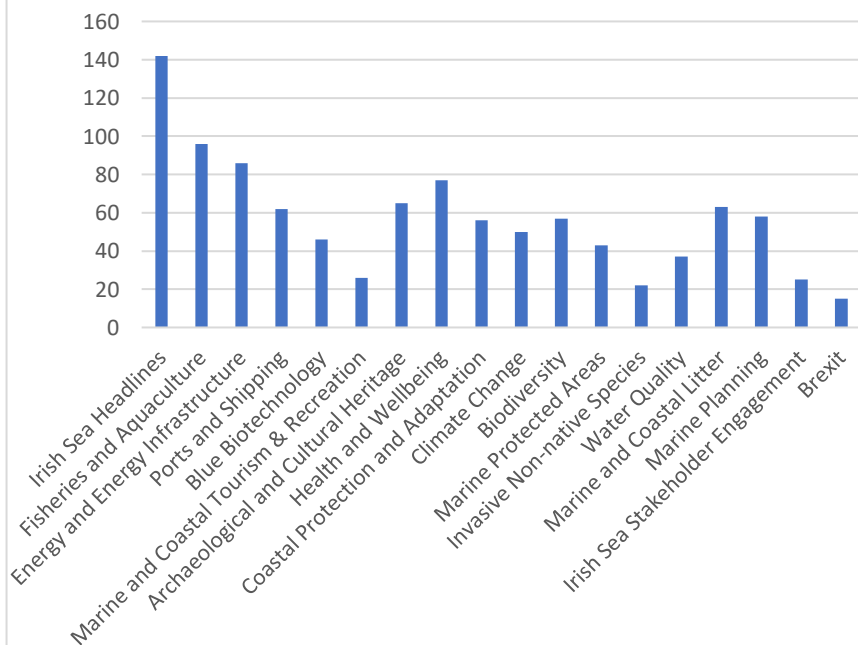
Over the summer of 2020 the Irish Sea Maritime Forum¹, supported by the University of Liverpool, conducted an online survey to develop a comprehensive picture of the future for the Irish Sea and its communities on a whole Irish Sea scale.

The **aim of the survey** was to discover and extend understanding of what makes the Irish Sea special for those who use it or live around it, identifying both challenges and opportunities, now and looking forward, for the Irish Sea’s businesses, communities and environment. To explore these questions a thematic approach was taken, but with the understanding that many issues are cross-cutting, particularly themes such as climate change.

The survey results are summarised in a report **‘The Future and Changing Context of the Irish Sea in the 2020s’** of which this report is an executive summary, and the findings will be further explored at a future Irish Sea Maritime Forum event in order to validate and finalise the research.

Responses were received from all six Irish Sea nations – England, Republic of Ireland, Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as further afield. Several responses were not identifiable by country. Respondents were people from national government departments and agencies, research institutions, local and national businesses, local authorities, a range of NGOs representing between them environment, recreation and heritage, and local residents. In total over 1000 individual comments were received across the full range of themes explored, some addressing multiple points and cross-cutting issues and opportunities.

Number of Comments per Theme



Irish Sea Headline Quotes

“There are lots of opportunities in the Irish Sea, for energy, environmental protection, shipping etc. It is also unique in the UK with an overlap of jurisdictions, devolutions, and differences in governance.”

“The area for which I am responsible in my work, it's where I live and I feel passionate about protecting its health for future generations.”

“I also value it for its potential for climate change mitigation, e.g., through renewable energy generation.”

“The Irish Sea has its own unique biodiversity.”

“Its ecological services support the health and well-being of millions of people (residents and visitors) in its six coastal jurisdictions.”

“Rich array of geological and geomorphological features and site along the coast and on the sea-bed. These are important for research, teaching and geo-tourism.”

“The area has potential for carbon capture and storage in geological media or for energy storage as part of the transition to a low carbon economy.”

“It's a precious marine habitat that is on the receiving end of a lot of plastic pollution that has a devastating impact on the wildlife in the sea.”

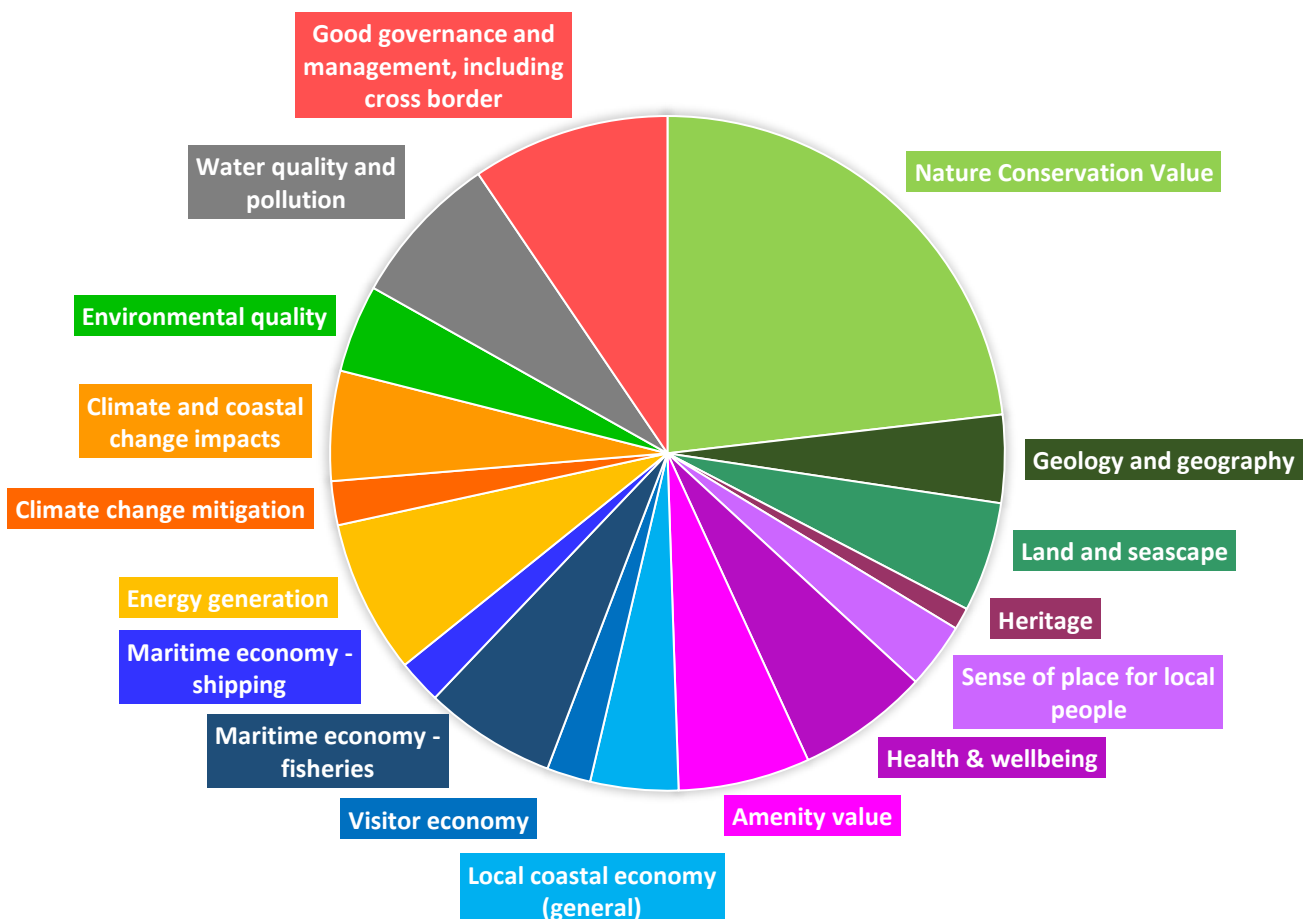
“There is value too, perhaps more intangible, in its health and wellbeing benefits: the enjoyment people get from being by the sea, the 'sea air' and the views.”

Draft Irish Sea Headlines

Different stakeholders have different perspectives on the Irish Sea and its value to them. This survey captured a wide range of views on the reasons why the Irish Sea is an important and special place. From these a draft set of **Irish Sea Headlines** have been developed. These will be tested and refined at the next Irish Sea Maritime Forum conference with a view to the headlines being a valuable tool for use by organisations developing policy or projects in the Irish Sea area.

- The **diversity of wildlife and habitats of the Irish Sea are highly important and valued** for their contribution to marine and coastal biodiversity and the network of Marine Protected Areas for internationally important species and habitats. As well as being important in its own right **the natural environment of the Irish Sea offers benefits for climate change mitigation, amenity** (e.g., recreational fishing, landscape value) **and the health and wellbeing** of both coastal communities and visitors to the Irish Sea and its surrounding regions. **Threats to the Irish Sea include invasive non-native species, climate change and pollution**, including plastics.
- **Socio-economic benefits deriving from working on and living in close proximity** to the Irish Sea are important for Irish Sea communities:
 - **Economic benefits: A wide range of coastal and maritime industries** – in particular tourism, ports and shipping, fisheries and energy generation - **support local jobs**.
 - **Social benefits: People enjoy the amenity value** the Irish Sea and its coastline provide to them, including **opportunities for recreation and exercise** and the **more intangible benefits for health and wellbeing** provided by enjoying **open spaces and attractive views**.
- **Cross-border governance** is a key feature of the Irish Sea, with six national administrations, and good governance and management of activities to provide **long term environmental sustainability** for the Irish Sea area are important to Irish Sea stakeholders.

What make the Irish Sea special?



Key Future Issues and Opportunities

As part of the research respondents were asked to identify up to three top issues and opportunities for a range of thematic areas. The following table gives a 'snapshot' of the top issue and opportunity identified for each theme. Occasionally the results were found to be tied, hence two points are given. Again, the research findings will be tested and refined at the next Irish Sea Maritime Forum conference with a view to the research being a valuable tool for use by organisations developing policy or projects in the Irish Sea area.

Theme	Key issue	Key Opportunity
Fisheries and aquaculture	Brexit ²	Fishers' involvement in research & data. Irish Sea-wide cooperation on a range of issues.
Energy and energy infrastructure	Financial issues (energy price, lack of investment)	Promotion and use of 'greener' energy
Ports and shipping	Brexit ² . Pollution from shipping.	Environmental improvements to ports and shipping. Expansion and diversification of activity.
Blue biotechnology	Environmental issues	Products for people and the planet
Marine and coastal tourism & recreation	Access and facilities	Development of geo and eco-tourism
Archaeological and cultural heritage	Lack of funding. Coastal change and flooding.	Public education and engagement
Health and wellbeing	Accessibility of the coast	Health benefits from exercise and connecting with nature
Coastal protection and adaptation	Governance, policy and planning. Litter and pollution.	Coast protection solutions that deliver multiple benefits
Climate change	Domestic and international policy. Risks to communities.	Renewable energy. Future proofing coastal assets.
Biodiversity	Habitat and species loss	Data and evidence
Marine Protected Areas	Lack of awareness and understanding of MPAs	Improving the evidence base and management
Invasive non-native species (INNS)	Managing INNS transport mechanisms	Monitoring
Water quality	Farming practices	Research (studies and surveys)
Marine and coastal litter	Clean up and enforcement	Cleaning up litter
Marine planning	Awareness and engagement in marine planning	Benefits of collaborating at an Irish Sea scale. Environmental benefits.
Stakeholder engagement	<i>Not applicable – question not asked</i>	Knowledge exchange and advancement
The future for the Irish Sea after Brexit ²	Socio-economic impacts	None* <i>*'none' was the top response in this section however some opportunities are given by respondents in this and other sections of the report</i>

For more details, please refer to the full report '**The Future and Changing Context of the Irish Sea in the 2020s**' which is available to download from the Irish Sea Maritime Forum website:

www.irishseamaritimeforum.org.uk

¹ For more information about the ISMF and its work see www.irishseamaritimeforum.org.uk

² the exit of the UK from the European Union