

### Background

Ireland's marine region is ten times the size of its land mass. When the seabed is included, Ireland is one of the largest EU countries. Ireland committed to the Aichi target 11 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity of **protecting at least 10%** of its marine region by the end of 2020. Currently, the total marine area covered by marine protected areas (MPAs) in Ireland is 10,420 km<sup>2</sup> or **2.3%**.

Well-managed MPAs are **safe spaces** where sea life is protected and habitats can be **restored**. They increase biodiversity and resilience, can enhance commercial fish & shellfish stocks inside and outside their boundaries, enhance tourism and even have a role to play in **carbon sequestration** and climate change **adaptation**. A study funded by the European Commission<sup>1</sup> found that well-managed MPAs have economic benefits for the fisheries and tourism sectors in local communities.

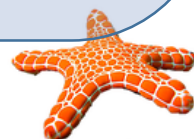
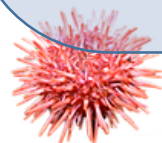
In Ireland, there are currently 159 marine special areas of conservation (SACs, EU Habitats Directive) and 89 marine special protection areas (SPAs, EU Birds Directive) that form part of the Natura 2000 network. There are currently 0 MPAs designated under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

According to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) **most habitats inside the marine N2000 network are in decline in Ireland<sup>2</sup>** in spite of their "protection". Current **conservation management** of protected sites is **not good enough** and MPAs in Ireland are **meaningless squares on a map** unable to reach their full potential.

### What does the government need to do help our MPAs thrive?

1. Protect **at least 30% of our seas** by 2030 of which at least **50% should be no-take zones**. The MPAs should build a **network of sites** that are well-positioned, representative, connected, monitored, enforced and researched. It requires robust legislation, properly resourced and empowered local stakeholder groups with balanced representation.
2. Protect all MPAs from the impacts of bottom trawling and dredging as this type of fishing causes the most harm to sea life. We also need to restrict the use of pelagic nets that might contribute to bycatch of sensitive species inside MPAs.
3. Prohibit industrial scale fishing inside MPAs in line with IUCN guidelines<sup>3</sup>.
4. Properly resource the NPWS to enable effective monitoring of sites and draw up conservation management plans for each of our MPAs.
5. Launch a complete review of marine enforcement.
6. Allocate more budget and staff for the agencies carrying out risk assessments of activities within MPAs to ensure thoroughly researched and scientifically sound reporting to eliminate the current adverse human impacts on protected habitats and species.
7. Reward sustainable small-scale and low impact fisheries with eco-certification in order to improve market access and increase value of catch.
8. Legalise commercial diving for scallop\razor clam and only allow this type of scallop\razor clam fishing in MPAs as this is one of most sustainable ways to harvest high value seafood.

If you have any questions about this document contact Regina Classen at [iwt.marineprotection@gmail.com](mailto:iwt.marineprotection@gmail.com)



<sup>1</sup> European Union (2018) Haines, R. (ICF), Hattam, Caroline (PML) Pantzar, M. (IEEP), & Russi, D. (IEEP). Study on the Economic Benefits of MPAs.

<sup>2</sup> NPWS (2019). The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. Volume 2: Habitat Assessments. Unpublished NPWS report. Edited by: Deirdre Lynn and Fionnuala O'Neill

<sup>3</sup> Day J., Dudley N., Hockings M., Holmes G., Laffoley D., Stolton S. & S. Wells (2012). Guidelines for applying the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories to Marine Protected Areas. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. 36pp