



## **Our Ocean Wealth**

**Submission from the  
Western Development Commission  
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# ***Western Development Commission (WDC) Submission to the Consultation 'Our Ocean Wealth'***

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## **Introduction**

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The Western Development Commission (WDC) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the consultation 'Our Ocean Wealth'. In this introduction we present background on the work of the WDC and the WDC perspective on the development of our marine resources. In the next section the questions in the consultation are addressed.

The WDC is a statutory body established by government to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region<sup>1</sup>. It operates under the aegis of DECLG.<sup>2</sup>

The WDC works in co-operation with national, regional and local bodies involved in western development to ensure that the Western Region maximises its full development potential. It does this by:

- analysing economic and social trends and making policy recommendations;
- promoting the Western Region through the LookWest.ie campaign;
- supporting the rural economy through facilitating strategic initiatives (e.g. creative enterprise, rural tourism, renewable energy);
- providing risk capital to businesses through the WDC Investment Fund.<sup>3</sup>

One of the functions of the WDC is regional policy development. The WDC seeks to ensure that government policy reflects the needs of the region in such areas as infrastructure, natural resources, industrial and rural development. It also tracks the implementation of policies and recommends adjustments as appropriate.

The Western Region coastline is a very significant part of the Irish coastline running from Lough Foyle to the Shannon estuary and taking in some of the areas of greatest potential and also some of the least developed areas of marine activity. The WDC regards the development of our coastline and ocean resources as a critical opportunity for the region and for Ireland. The marine resource represents an important source of employment in coastal, peripheral and rural areas where alternative employment may be limited.

The WDC is an observer member of the Atlantic Ocean Energy Association (AOEA) and is active in seeking the development of offshore energy resources in our region from offshore wind and wave and tidal as they become feasible. It is also involved in the investigation of opportunities for marine biomass (using seaweed) through the RASLRES (Regional Approaches to Stimulating Local Renewable Energy Solutions) funded by the EU Interreg Northern Periphery Programme<sup>4</sup>. The Western Investment Fund has invested and supported companies involved in aquaculture and water based tourism facilities. The WDC, through Look West, provided sponsorship for the Galway stopover of the Volvo Ocean Race in 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Environment, Community, and Local Government.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.wdc.ie](http://www.wdc.ie)

<sup>4</sup> [www.raslres.eu](http://www.raslres.eu)

It will also be involved in sponsorship of the Grand Finale of the current Volvo Ocean Race in Galway in June 2012.

The Western Region has significant and under-developed marine resources and there is potential to tap into these in the areas of ocean energy, water-based tourism, marine food and transport and shipping activities. There are four aspects of the marine sector of particular relevance to the region:

- **Renewable energy** opportunities in the marine sector include ocean energy (wave and marine current tidal), offshore wind energy and marine biomass. The ocean energy resources of the Western Region are vast; however the technology is still not fully developed with a number of research and development projects ongoing at present in Galway Bay and off the coast of Belmullet at the marine test site. Ocean energy is unlikely to make a major contribution to renewable energy before 2020 but has substantial potential for future growth<sup>5</sup>.
- **Marine tourism and leisure** includes beaches, diving, marinas, sailing centres, angling, coastal walkways, whale and dolphin watching, and inland cruising. Several aspects of this have already been highlighted in relation to tourism. The Water-Based Tourism and Leisure Product Audit<sup>6</sup> identified Donegal, Galway, Clare and Mayo as having the resources to quickly take advantage of opportunities in marine tourism, while Sligo was identified as requiring strengthening of its resources. The existence of marine tourism resources is not sufficient however to ensure growth of this sector and the considerable number of public bodies at national, regional and local level with responsibilities in this area means that coordination will be particularly important for the future growth of this sector in the region. A major re-development of Galway port to accommodate cruise liners is planned which could provide a boost to water-based tourism in the region.
- **Marine food** encompasses fishing, aquaculture, seafood processing and seaweed. The performance of the fishing and aquaculture industries will have important implications for employment in coastal communities. In terms of future opportunities, marine functional foods, in particular seaweed, is an area being explored by the Marine Institute among others. Higher value seafood processing and organic production are other potential growth areas.
- **Shipping and transport activities** represent the largest proportion of the marine sector's total value nationally (€1.2bn in 2005). However ports in the Western Region only handled 2.0% of the total tonnage of goods passing through Irish ports in 2008. There may be potential to increase shipping and transport activities through the region's ports. Sligo port has a commercial licence and a rail link, while Killybegs has potential due to its depth, though road connections to the port need to be improved to fully take advantage of this. The development of wind turbine maintenance facilities on the west coast, as well as growth in ocean energy and offshore wind generation, is likely to require enhanced port facilities, while servicing offshore exploration and drilling may be an important opportunity.

As noted in the Western Development Commission (WDC) Policy Briefing, *Why care about regions? A new approach to regional policy*, regions must take advantage of and develop their opportunities and assets. The ocean and opportunities in the marine are significant assets of the Western Region which present us with important economic, cultural and social

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<sup>5</sup> Marine Institute and Sustainable Energy in Ireland (2005), *Ocean Energy in Ireland*

<sup>6</sup> Marine Institute (2006), *Marine-Based Tourism and Leisure Product Audit 2006*

opportunities. It is essential that focus is given to their development in future. Hence the WDC is pleased to make this submission.

**Q1** In 2007, Ireland generated €3.4 billion in turnover, €2.4 billion direct and indirect GVA<sup>7</sup> (1.2% of GDP) from our ocean resources. It is generally believed this performance could be substantially improved.

**What is a sufficiently ambitious yet realistic target for our ocean economy by 2020?**

The simplest way to set a target is to add an additional 10% or other appropriate level to the existing output figure. However a more robust target would arise from an examination of the underlying opportunities in each sector and the prospects for development by 2020 in each. In the short term the most realistic target can be set by examining the potential of each sector for development by 2020 using economic estimates which have already been done, for example in the areas of offshore energy and tourism. The targets in these and other sectors can be combined. Estimates based on the existing size and growth rate of a marine sector could be used in areas where no detailed work on opportunities has been done to date. This would give an idea of what growth estimate would be realistic. In doing this it would be important to accept that where there is little on going activity in a sector there is not likely to be significant growth by 2020.

A target for 2020 provides an important medium term goal but many gains from our ocean wealth are likely to come in the longer term, so as part of the planning for the development of our ocean resources it would be important to set longer term targets (such as 2030 and 2050) and then to develop a strategy to achieve these in each sector and developing a method of progressing its implementation over time and in response to arising needs in the sector.

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**Q2** What contributions can:

**(a) the private sector make to achieving growth potential in this area?**

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The private sector can drive development across the ocean sectors by making investments in the projects they believe will bring returns by highlighting the opportunities for the sector and by advocating policy changes where their experiences show that policy is acting as a barrier to the development of the sector. This is useful information which allows government at national and local levels to review and respond where changes are deemed necessary and appropriate.

The private sector is in a good position to bring experiences and expertise from other countries where the ocean economy may be more developed. This allows dissemination of expertise and allows Ireland to benefit from learning elsewhere.

The private sector is flexible and responsive and can seize opportunities and make quick developments where the opportunities exist, in the context of enabling development policy, and firm environmental and other regulation.

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<sup>7</sup> Gross Value Added

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The further development of our ocean sector will be best served by co-operation and co-ordination among the different sectors to ensure we can make the most of sustainable development opportunities.

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(b) **the public sector make to create an environment that provides the conditions needed for economic growth, investment and job creation in the ocean economy?**

The public sector has the overall responsibility for regulating the development of our ocean economy and exploiting the wealth that lies in it. It is important to ensure that developments are not at the expense of our environmental assets and that future generations will benefit from the envisaged economic development and from the high environmental and ecological quality of our oceans.

The public sector is also responsible for the creating a framework in which the development can take place, both in terms of planning for the opportunities, and in terms of granting of permissions and licences for use, and in monitoring the effect of these, and monitoring compliance. The public sector would also be responsible for the development, and implementation of any maritime spatial plan.

The public sector, with an overall responsibility for the development of the marine opportunities and with broad cross sectoral knowledge, is also in a position to co-ordinate effort among marine sectors. It can highlight areas of common opportunities and develop methods for dealing with areas of potential conflict of opportunities among different ocean sectors.

While the financial difficulties of the country make investment difficult, the public sector must be in a position to fund public goods associated with the sector and with its development. These may include broadly applicable research, and ecological and environmental studies to increase our knowledge and understanding of the ocean. It also includes environmental protection. Other public goods such as the funding of infrastructure which allow for the development of the ocean resource, but which would not be provided privately, is another important area for public sector involvement. It is also the responsibility of the public sector to ensure that where any public investment is made the maximum benefit from the investment is achieved, and that it serves the overall development of the ocean economy.

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(c) **our communities make to the achievement of our growth potential?**

Our communities have an important contribution to make to the development of our coastline and ocean areas. Communities which are near or associated with the ocean can bring an important understanding and experience of their local assets.

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They can be a part of the development of the opportunities, through small businesses and by exploiting small scale economic opportunities or through community involvement in larger scale private projects. They are also key sources of labour and skills for any enterprises in the sector.

Communities can make the most of the ocean asset by becoming informed about opportunities and their meaning.

Local knowledge within communities means they can provide early warning of changes in the environment or in ecosystems and they can be a part of the monitoring of the use of the ocean as well as beneficiaries of its use.

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### (d) the higher education sector make to the achievement of our goal potential?

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The higher education sector has a number of important roles to play in the achievement of the potential of our ocean resource.

A significant development of skills will be required if we are to be in a position to develop the marine sector to its fullest potential. Given the wide range of activities included in this sector, the skills needs are quite broad. Skills in marine biology and biotechnology will be required as well as fish stock management, new food product development, research and development and marine engineering. Training and knowledge of water-based leisure activities among employees in the tourism industry in coastal counties also needs to be enhanced. This will largely be provided by the higher education sector.

The sector is also an important driver of research, having the skills for much of the detailed research required to increase our knowledge of our oceans, and also in relation to more practical, task focused research and the provision of solutions to particular problems whether engineering, environmental or nautical.

Higher education institutions also have a responsibility for ensuring that, both within each institution and beyond institutional boundaries, knowledge, particularly from publically funded research is shared.

Higher education institutions have different specialisms and it is important that they work together and that overlap is minimised to ensure the most efficient use of resources.

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### Q3 What actions should be taken to strengthen our maritime awareness/identity?

This consultation is a step towards developing our maritime awareness and identity but here are many other opportunities which will allow Irish citizens to become more aware of our maritime opportunities and our maritime identity as an island nation.

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A focus on maritime heritage should start at an early stage with programmes for primary schools (similar to the ‘green wave’ run by Forfás). In future as part of the primary school curriculum all children should have an opportunity to visit the sea.

Information packs on our ocean and its resources should be continued (there are many examples of these) and case studies of ocean issues, either economic, social or cultural could be developed for dissemination.

The development of a second level subject on marine science (similar to that which exists for agricultural science) could be considered.

#### Q4 Is the draft vision for Our Ocean Wealth sufficiently ambitious and realistic or would you suggest an alternative?

The draft vision as set out on page 1 of Our Ocean Wealth is wide ranging and ambitious and as such is an appropriate vision. It is important that the vision, in all its aspects, receives commitment from government and citizens and is implemented in full.

#### Q5 How can we maximise the benefits of our ocean wealth and protect the marine ecosystem/environment?

There is no simple answer to this question, and there is no single way to ensure that we gain the most economic benefit from our ocean while at the same time ensuring we protect our ocean ecosystem and environment. Recognition that there will be conflict is an important first step, the next is to ensure that there are methods developed for resolving such conflicts as may occur in different areas.

The implementation of the precautionary principle in relation to developments is an important aspect of the ensuring the preservation of our ocean wealth. It states that if an action or policy has a suspected risk of causing harm to the public or to the environment the burden of proof that it is *not* harmful falls on those taking the action

It is important that we are strict but fair in relation to marine activities and developments and that in as far as possible the system not subject to undue influence. The on going monitoring of licensees and their activities is also important in ensuring fairness as well as protection of our environment.

#### Q6 How can the interests of competing sectors be balanced when it comes to planning the use of our ocean space and what criteria should be used to balance them?

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As mentioned above it is important that a precautionary approach is taken in relation to any developments in our ocean sector and this should provide the first stage in ensuring there is a balance among interests in relation to environmental exploitation.

There is of course a requirement to balance other competing interests and appropriate methods of prioritisation in relation to different sectors should be developed. The Integrated Marine Plan and the Maritime Spatial Plan discussed below are methods for doing this but there should be others.

There should be a commitment by those managing the overall development of the sector and managing our ocean resource to listening and understanding issues raised by different actors to providing a balanced view on what is best for Ireland.

### Q7 To what extent could the development of a Maritime Spatial Plan assist in this balancing process?

The development of a Maritime Spatial Plan (MSP) could be an important method for balancing the process providing a formal well established structure for decision making and for conflict resolution. It can provide clarity on what activities are appropriate and where they can take place and also provides a structure in which there can be informed input to any MSP.

It is important to recognise, however, that spatial plans allow development and co-ordinate development but they do not actually drive development. Preparing an MSP is a first stage in capturing our ocean wealth, but there are many other important aspects to ensuring that the best possible development takes place.

### Q8 Are the opportunities and constraints identified the right ones? Are the 'Enablers' the right ones to be focusing on in order to unlock the potential of our oceans? (See Pages x & x of the consultation document and the briefing document III: Getting the Conditions Right which is available on [www.oceanwealth.ie](http://www.oceanwealth.ie))

The enablers listed in the document seem to be the right ones necessary to provide the conditions for development. The next stage of ensuring these are working positively in a co-ordinated manner is very important.

### Q9 How can we ensure appropriate governance in national maritime affairs for optimal results (at local, regional, national, European and international level)?

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It is important that we have appropriate governance at all levels with clarity on the responsibilities of each to ensure that there are no overlaps and that there are no gaps.

In relation to sectors like tourism, there are a considerable number of public bodies at national, regional and local level with responsibilities for its development which means that coordination is particularly important for the future growth of this sector in the region

With the on-going development of the EU Atlantic Strategy there is an opportunity for Ireland to be strongly involved in shaping it and ensuring that it addresses the key issues facing Ireland. This strategy will provide an important European context for the development of our ocean resources and will provide a structure within which we can link with our neighbouring counties. It is important that such links are made and that countries whose ocean resources border each other should have a co-operative approach and should share knowledge and understanding of issues.

### Q10 Suggest ways we can foster and/integrate marine policy and planning in Ireland? With less resources, how can we do it better?

The Marine Co-ordination Group is a very important example of the cross government action for the sector, which allows consideration of a wide range of issues as they relate to marine policy and development.

In ensuring that we foster and integrate the development of marine policy and planning it is important that the focus on the overall goal of development of the ocean sector, in Ireland is maintained, and that we look at ‘the bigger picture’. The MCG provides an opportunity to do this as does the development of an Integrated Marine Plan which will address the issues of enablers and constraints in the sector and outline a method for dealing with conflicts and a prioritisation of issues to be addressed.

Given the cross cutting nature of the development of ocean resources and the fact that responsibilities are spread across a number of departments and agencies it is important that there are clear pathways through the system for those who are seeking to develop the sector, or who are already involved in economic, social or cultural aspects of our ocean wealth..

### Conclusion

The development of our ocean resource is a major opportunity and a major undertaking. The consultation has a particular focus on the potential for future development. In order to achieve this development there are many areas, as outlined above, which will require careful thought and planning and detailed consideration of opportunities and also of possible conflicts (both expected and also possible and unexpected) in order to achieve a successful development of the sector and to allow it to achieve its potential. It is important that staffing and skills are made available to do this.

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The WDC is pleased to have the opportunity of making a submission to the consultation on Our Ocean's Wealth. We are happy to provide further information or examples in relation to this submission, or discuss any of the issues in our submission should this be required.

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**Western Development Commission**

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