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# REVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF IRISH MARINE AND COASTAL TOURISM STRATEGIES

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## **Review of the Evolution of Irish Marine and Coastal Tourism Strategies**

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### **Abstract**

The Irish marine and coastal tourism strategies pursued by successive Irish governments encompass a complex set of interdisciplinary goals and objectives that have radically changed over the last twenty years. This review traces the evolution of these strategies through an examination of national, regional and county level documents that describe the policy and strategies that have steered marine and coastal tourism in Ireland over the previous two decades. The review indicates a clear and concerted change in Irish marine and coastal tourism strategies starting as an ad hoc, disparately managed collection of natural assets and ending with a national strategy with clearly defined goals. Further attention is given to how the national strategies being pursued affect actions within counties where, it seems, there may be a lack of attention paid to how neighbouring counties may benefit one another. The review concludes by moving to the present, examining how current challenges facing marine and coastal tourism in Ireland could benefit from strategies used in geographically similar regions.

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## 1. Introduction

Marine and coastal tourism is a vital component of Ireland's economy that is inextricably linked with Ireland's cultural heritage (Fáilte Ireland 2007), the vibrancy of rural communities (Department of Rural and Community Development 2017), the marine environment (Heritage Council and Fáilte Ireland 2009), employment (Tsakiridis et al. 2019) and the economic health of the country (Hynes et al. 2019, Hynes et al. 2020). Consequently, Irish marine and coastal tourism strategies are a complex set of interdisciplinary goals and objectives that aim to achieve much more than solely the growth of this sector of the tourism economy. Irish marine and coastal tourism strategies seek to sustainably develop this sector in a manner that is environmentally conscientious, considers the needs of local economies and residents whilst also considering the interplay between different users and sectors of marine assets.

In this review, the evolution of Irish marine and coastal tourism strategies is examined, beginning with *A Marine Research, Technology, Development and Innovation Strategy for Ireland* published in 1998 by the Marine Institute and ending with the most recent documents addressing the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF). The focus is kept on domestic strategies driving the developments in the sector but of course many of the new policy directions were themselves being driven by EU policies and strategies such as the *EU Blue Growth Strategy* and the *EU Commission communication on Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future* (EC, 2021). Other reports at the EU level also offered direct guidance on fostering further growth in marine and coastal tourism (European Commission 2014).

This review has several aims. Firstly, to describe how marine and coastal strategies in Ireland developed over time, up to the NMPF. In particular, it looks at the need for an integrated marine plan and how this resulted in *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth* (HOOW) (Inter-Departmental Marine Coordination Group 2012). Then, following HOOW, the subsequent actions taken to deliver on the HOOW promises leading to the NMPF. Secondly, the review aims to examine how local level

governance plays into the holistic approach set out in the national strategies. Thirdly, the review aims to present possible enhancements to marine and coastal tourism policy by presenting successful projects and policies in countries with similar climates to Ireland.

In achieving the aims listed above, the remainder of this review is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly describes the current state of marine and coastal tourism in Ireland. Section 3 outlines the search criteria used to develop the marine and coastal tourism strategy database used for this review. Section 4 presents the evolution of the strategies from 1998 to the present day at a national scale. Section 5 examines the interplay between the national marine strategy and local level governance of marine and coastal tourism. Section 6 explores international best practices and discusses their possible integration into the Irish marine and coastal strategy. Finally, Section 7 looks to the future of the Irish marine and coastal tourism strategy.

## **2. Marine and Coastal Tourism in Ireland**

Tourism in Ireland is highly dependent on coastal resources. Research by Fáilte Ireland shows that 70% of domestic and overseas tourist days are concentrated in just 30% of the country, with the majority of these areas being coastal (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2021). It is therefore no surprise that recent research illustrates that nearly three-quarters of overseas tourists visited the Irish coastline and nearly 43% of all expenditure by these tourists was related to marine and coastal tourism (Hynes et al. 2019). Likewise, Irish domestic tourists are equally enamoured with marine and coastal visits. In fact, data from a nationally representative sample illustrates that more than a third of all domestic tourism expenditure occurs in coastal economies (Hynes et al. 2020). Consequently, marine and coastal tourism was estimated to account for almost 50% (18,107) of all jobs in the Irish ocean economy in 2018 (Tsakiridis et al. 2019).

The attractiveness of marine and coastal tourism in Ireland, highlighted by the statistics above, is due to a combination of natural resources, cultural heritage, recreational facilities and strategic investment. In the most successful Irish tourism products, all of these assets work in tandem. For example, the development of the experience brands, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW), Ireland's Ancient East (IAE) and Dublin, combine Ireland's coastal assets in a manner that has helped to increase economic activity, spread tourist footfall and provide greater access to Ireland's coastline. As a brand, the WAW, a coastal route spanning 2600km along the west coast of Ireland, has been described as "possibly the most significant change in the tourism industry since *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth* was first published in 2012" (Marine Institute 2020, p. 46). Indeed, recent figures seem to suggest this is the case. Based on data collected in 2019, more than nine out of ten Irish residents had heard of the WAW and 40% had purposely visited the route in 2018 (Hynes et al. 2020). The figures are similarly impressive for overseas tourists as more than two-thirds of interviewees in 2018 were aware of the WAW and the average sampled tourist spent two and a half days on the WAW during their visit to Ireland (Hynes et al. 2019).

These branded experiences exemplify an overarching theme of national level Irish marine and coastal strategy; that is, a unified approach taken to capitalise on Irish marine assets for tourism. However, Irish marine and coastal tourism assets were not always viewed in this holistic fashion. Earlier policy documents portray a sector that was managed with little thought to the complete tourism package that the Irish marine and coastal environment could provide. In the following sections this report aims to outline how Ireland has shifted its management style to bring together Ireland's marine assets in a coherent fashion.

### **3. Building the Database**

In order to analyse the evolution of marine and coastal tourism strategies in Ireland a database of all appropriate documents needed to be compiled. With this in mind, in January 2021, a search

was conducted to find all policy, strategy and related documents referring to marine and/or coastal tourism in the Republic of Ireland. The search was concentrated on the period 2000 to 2021 with the exception of the Marine Institute's *Investment Strategy for the Water-based Tourism and Leisure Sector in Ireland 2000-2006*, published in July 1999, and *A Marine Research, Technology, Development and Innovation Strategy for Ireland*, published in 1998, as these documents provide a convenient starting point for the evolution of Irish marine and coastal tourism strategy analysis.

In relation to what was deemed appropriate to be included in the database, the initial criterion was that each document must be in some way related to marine and/or coastal tourism. The documents to be included had to have a geographical scope at least as large as county level, including large marine and coastal attractions, such as the document *The Three Peninsulas: West Cork and Kerry Visitor Experience Development Plan* (Fáilte Ireland 2020). However, documents relating to singular small attractions were not included, e.g. documents relating to an individual lighthouse. It was also decided that for the document to be included in the database it must be in some way forward-looking. As this report are concerned with strategy development, documents that focused solely on recounting or numerating past or current assets were excluded. However, documents like *A National Survey of Water-based Leisure Activities 2003* (ESRI, 2004a) were included for their commentary related to challenges and future opportunities related to Irish water-based leisure activities. The final criterion was that the strategy document must be accessible online so that interested parties could go directly to the source from the database.

Once the inclusion/exclusion criteria were defined the second step was to decide where to search. Responsible bodies and research institutes involved in the marine space were included as primary sources of documents. These included but were not limited to Fáilte Ireland, the Marine Institute, The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), the Socio-Economic Marine Research Unit (SEMRU) at the University of Galway, gov.ie (the central portal for government services and information) and Our Ocean Wealth. Following this, publications related to all coastal counties

and inter-county organisations such as the Southern Regional Assembly and the Northern and Western Assembly were searched for relevant documents. Finally, the websites of governing bodies involved in the management of Irish marine assets were searched. These include, the Port Authorities, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Commissioners of Irish Lights as well as Ireland's signature coastal assets the WAW, IAE and Dublin.

Once all the relevant documents were collected, a database was compiled. From this database, documents that related solely to marine and coastal tourism were reviewed. If a document had a single chapter about marine and coastal tourism, that chapter was read and search terms such as marine, coast, water, recreation and tourism were used to determine if any important information was missed by only reading the marine and coastal tourism chapter. If, when reading these documents, another document was referenced within the text, but not in the database, this new document was searched for and, if possible, included in the database.

An Excel database was created with searchable web links to each document. The database can be found [here](#). In total 140 relevant marine and coastal tourism strategy related documents, across all levels of governance, were compiled. For each document, the title, author, publication date<sup>1</sup> and governance level the document relates to, e.g. national, county level etc. is listed. Following this, the purpose of the document and the marine and coastal assets the document covers are presented in the database. Where appropriate, the strategies and aims/objectives related to marine and coastal tourism are detailed. For the purpose of the database, an aim or objective is a singular defined task, whereas a strategy refers to a goal with multiple aims or objectives. It is worth noting that some documents only had aims related to marine and coastal tourism that fed into larger non-marine

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<sup>1</sup> In some cases, dating documents became an issue. Often, the documents did not contain their publication data in the text. The only accessible date was the date the document was put online. As such, there may be some discrepancy between the dates presented here and the initial publication date but it is unlikely that the discrepancy will be greater than a year.

related strategies and some documents had strategies without any outlined aims or objectives. Where applicable, challenges and recommendations/opportunities were also noted. Within the database, aims such as ‘increase tourist expenditure’, ‘tourist length of stay’ or objectives akin to this are not included. It is taken for granted that almost all tourism-based documents not explicitly looking at preservation of heritage sites or the remediation of environmental damage, aim to increase revenue from tourists. Issues related to COVID-19 or Brexit due to their ubiquity, unless the document solely focused on these issues and offered some sort of solution.

Each entry in the database is provided in the present tense at the time of the respective document’s publication. As much as possible, the exact language used in the original document was used in the database. Although this review aims to explore the evolution of the Irish marine and coastal tourism strategy through this database, not all documents found in the database will be discussed here. The focus of this review is to discuss key documents along the timeline of the Irish marine and coastal tourism strategy development.

#### **4. Ireland’s Evolving Marine Tourism Strategies**

In 1998, the Marine Institute produced Ireland’s first strategy for the marine sector. Titled *A Marine Research, Technology, Development and Innovation Strategy for Ireland*, the document was the first of its kind in Ireland, to present a detailed evaluation of the development potential for the marine sector. The document catalogues and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the sector in 1998. Amongst the weaknesses highlighted is the absence of a development strategy for the sector as a whole. Indeed, this sentiment is echoed in many strategy documents from 1998 to 2006 with these early documents reporting “a need for a unified approach to developing this sector” (Marine Institute 1998, p. iv), “absence of an integrated development plan for the sector” (Marine Institute 1999, p. 18), and that development of marine leisure access facilities had been



undertaken largely on an ad hoc basis and that there was a need for a coherent national plan (Marine Institute 2001). As such, *A Marine Research, Technology, Development and Innovation Strategy for Ireland* advocates for a single sector approach to develop the Irish blue economy<sup>2</sup>. It is also interesting to note that this early document presents a picture of marine and coastal tourism as an underappreciated resource. The authors state that there was a need for “recognition by the government and policy makers of the water-based tourism sector as a key sector within the Irish tourism sector” (Marine Institute 1998, p. 27). Similar comments looking for recognition of marine and coastal tourism can be found elsewhere in the document.

Although a strategy for the marine sector was outlined by the Marine Institute in 1998, it would seem that some public bodies with responsibility for tourism at the time felt that little was achieved between 1998 and 2006. This sentiment can be seen in the opening statement of the executive summary of *Sea Change: A Marine Knowledge, Research & Innovation Strategy for Ireland 2007–2013* (Marine Institute 2006a); “Ireland has neglected its maritime economy”. Additionally, the foreword notes the “need for a shift in our traditional view of the [marine] sector from one which is primarily associated with food harvesting to one which is multifaceted and also contributes towards energy, health, tourism and leisure, transport and environmental well-being”. A need for change was clearly emphasised that would incorporate the interplay between all areas of the marine environment.

*Sea Change* (Marine Institute 2006a) highlighted the ability for growth in what the authors defined as niche markets such as angling, boating, water sports and cruise tourism through the development of top-class regionally dispersed products. *Sea Change* also further advocated for (i) the potential for growth in the cruise tourism sector, (ii) clustering of products and (iii) signature

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of the Blue Economy can be traced back to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. Since then, a number of definitions have been applied to the term. A review of the concept of the blue economy has suggested the following definition “Blue Economy is the sustainable industrialisation of the oceans to the benefit of all” (Smith-Godfrey 2016, p. 60).

products highlighted in Ireland's earliest marine strategy document (Marine Institute 1998). These three elements are, from this point in time onwards, key points of development for marine and coastal tourism nationally. In particular, clustering of products and signature product offerings became a lynchpin of marine and coastal tourism development at the county level in subsequent years. In addition to *Sea Change's* (Marine Institute 2006a) ambitions for Irish marine and coastal tourism, the *Water-Based Tourism and Leisure Product Audit 2006* (Marine Institute 2006b) suggested that Ireland held a comparative advantage over other European countries with respect to its marine and coastal resources due to the fact that Ireland is an island. However, issues previously raised are again brought to the fore. The product audit further highlighted the absence of a unified approach to the management of Irish water-based products and the lack of investment in leisure resources, despite an investment strategy (Marine Institute 2001), earlier calls for investment in infrastructure (ESRI 2004a) and investment programmes proposed investment in infrastructure, integrated product development, marketing, training, environmental management and technical assistance (Marine Institute 1999).

The issues relating to the Irish marine products were again examined in *The Tourism Product Development Strategy 2007-2013* (Fáilte Ireland 2007). In this document, a framework and policy guidance for the development of marine products is outlined. The development strategy recommended state funding for water-based facilities and marinas, moorings and jetties. The priority of this funding was further clarified in *Ex-Ante Evaluation of the Investment Priorities for the National Development Plan 2007-2013* (ESRI 2004b).

*The Tourism Product Development Strategy 2007-2013* (Fáilte Ireland 2007) also established actions that changed the landscape of Irish marine and coastal tourism going forward. Within the document's outlined actions, it is suggested that sites of world heritage quality should be produced. This action set an interesting precedent. Although older strategy documents (Marine Institute 1999, Marine Institute 2001, ESRI 2004a) discussed the need for improved tourism products, this

particular action advocated that Irish tourism strategy should aim for the establishment and provision of world class heritage sites as one of its goals. There was a greater motivation to produce a product that would stand out internationally to offset declining tourist numbers and emerging competition internationally. This goal, in concert with the *Sea Change* (Marine Institute 2006a) ambition to produce a coastal walk around the entirety of Ireland, may have been the initial impetus for some of Ireland's most impressive current tourism products, i.e. WAW and IAE.

*The Tourism Product Development Strategy 2007-2013* (Fáilte Ireland 2007) also promotes the development of an Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) strategy which was recommended by the European Commission to the Council and the Parliament in September 2000 (European Commission 2000). The purpose of the ICZM strategy was to establish sustainable levels of social and economic activities while protecting the coastal environment. The need for such a strategy was reiterated in 2009 in *Climate Change, Heritage and Tourism: Implications for Ireland's Coast and Inland Waterways* (Heritage Council and Fáilte Ireland 2009) as well as the need for a national landscape strategy, sustainable development of tourism infrastructure and climate proofing of this infrastructure. The gap between the first call for an ICZM strategy in 2006 by *The Tourism Product Development Strategy 2007-2013* and the restatement of this need in 2009 may have been due to the external economic climate.

Irish marine and coastal tourism strategy, like many others, was derailed due to the great recession of 2008. Due to the depressed economic climate, a monumental shift occurred in the prioritisation of marine and coastal tourism on a national scale. Availability of investment funds and the number of overseas tourists were, unsurprisingly, greatly affected. In order to revitalise the sector, the Tourism Renewal Group was commissioned. The Group produced the document *Survival, Recovery and Growth – a Strategy for Renewing Irish Tourism 2009-2013* (Tourism Renewal Group 2009) that outlined a strategy to reinvigorate tourism in Ireland. The document highlighted the necessity of returning to the previously discussed investment needs in leisure products, to

increase marketing presence and the need to recapture the growth that had previously been delivered in the cruise sector. In line with the need to also revive the cruise tourism sector, Fáilte Ireland produced the *Cruise Tourism to Ireland Research Report – 2010* (Fáilte Ireland 2011). The report indicated that although Ireland is viewed as a well-defined and important cruise destination, other regions are seen as better value. Development of the ports was also deemed to be important to the growth of the cruise tourism sector.

As Ireland emerged from the worst of the great recession the need for a more holistic marine strategy was once more being discussed. Consequently, the Marine Strategy Coordination Group (MSCG) was set up in 2009 in recognition of the lack of a unified approach to the management and governance of Ireland's marine resources. The MSCG was composed of senior representatives from across government departments with marine responsibilities. In 2012, the MSCG produced one of the most significant documents in relation to the marine sector in Ireland; *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth – an Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland* (HOOW) (Inter-Departmental Marine Coordination Group 2012).

HOOW set out a “roadmap for the Government's vision, high-level goals and integrated actions across policy, governance and business to enable our marine potential to be realised” (Inter-Departmental Marine Coordination Group 2012, p. i). The strategy outlined in HOOW firmly projected the goal of a unified marine plan. Amongst the issues highlighted as hindering the development of marine and coastal tourism at the time were fragmentation of departments and agencies governing various elements of the marine and coastal sector, a need for an integrated plan and a lack of adequate infrastructure. One of the most important objectives set out in HOOW was the completion of the WAW. The WAW branded experience, at its core, signifies how marine and coastal tourism can be harnessed most efficiently by managing the resources as one large entity rather than a number of disparate attractions. Additionally, HOOW set a target of €1.5 billion in annual turnover from marine and coastal tourism by the year 2020.

To address the needs raised in HOOW, the ‘Development Task Force’ was set up. The Development Task Force aimed to strengthen the work of the MSCG and to progress the actions set out in HOOW. Subsequently, the Development Task Force produced the document *Our Ocean Wealth Development Task Force Report* (Development Task Force 2015). In this document eight actions are presented which, the task force believed, would help to meet the targets set out in HOOW. On the theme of marine and coastal tourism, the Development Task Force suggested that leveraging and building on the success of the WAW initiative could help to generate revenue in coastal areas.

Similarly, *Fáilte Ireland’s Driving Tourism: Sustaining Communities to 2017* (Fáilte Ireland 2015) focused heavily on the concept of leveraging the then three experience brands, WAW, IAE and Dublin. In particular, this strategy aimed for further development of walks, greenways and blueways and encouragement of the usage of these facilities by promoting hiking, walking and cycling along the coastal routes. These ideas were carried forward to Fáilte Ireland’s related document providing a framework for investment of funds (Fáilte Ireland 2016), focusing on how the experience brands could be further developed.

*Tourism Development & Innovation: A Strategy for Investment 2016 – 2022* (Fáilte Ireland 2016) highlighted the means by which the experience brands could be improved. The document suggested that the WAW should be developed with a focus on three themes: 1. Adventure, 2. Culture, 3. Landscape and Seascape. The document suggested that IAE should be developed into a world class destination attracting overseas tourists. The strategy also suggested that the Dublin Experience should take better advantage of its coastal resources becoming ‘a living bay’. *Tourism Development & Innovation: A Strategy for Investment 2016 – 2022* (Fáilte Ireland 2016) also marked a distinct change from a supplier-based model to a consumer-focused model. By shifting to a consumer-focused model, a core element of marine and coastal tourism development from this point, particularly in regional based policy documents, was to capture tourists from the ‘three

priority segments' (Fáilte Ireland 2014), 'social energisers', 'culturally curious' and 'great escapers'. The latter two segments, from the perspective of marine and coastal tourism, are the most important as both are interested in various elements of the marine space.

Likewise, *The Tourism Action Plan 2016 – 2018* (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport 2016) also suggested the enhancement of the then three branded experiences through the addition of various food elements, e.g. festivals and food trails. Additionally, Bord Bia and Fáilte Ireland were to collaborate on food-related experiences including marine trails. This plan presents somewhat of a departure from previous national strategies related to marine and coastal tourism as little attention was given to the food-related component of this tourism market up to this point.

In addition to the leveraging of the experience brands, the Development Task Force highlighted the need for integrated marine-based tourism products and services. Interagency development could be achieved, according to the Development Task Force, through an 'Integrated Marine Development Team'. The document *Development Task Force Report* (Development Task Force 2015) also discussed the need for greater improvement of cruise tourism facilities and particularly the development of ports, akin to comments made in the *Cruise Tourism to Ireland Research Report – 2010* (Fáilte Ireland 2011).

In addition to the Development Task Force, an Enablers Task Force (Marine Coordination Group 2015) was set up as a direct response to the HOOW initiative. The Enablers Task Force was set the duty of recommending a framework for implementing a Marine Spatial Plan (MSP) for Ireland, first outlined in HOOW and necessary as part of the country's commitments under the EU Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (European Parliament and Council 2014). The Enablers Task Force sums up the vision of the Irish MSP as "Marine spatial planning will facilitate the sustainable use and development of Ireland's oceans and seas by creating an integrated, evidence-based planning process which will provide more certainty for investors and a robust policy context for

marine licensing/consent authorities”(Marine Coordination Group 2015, p. 48). It was recommended, by the Enablers Task Force, that discussions in relation to marine and coastal tourist attractions be integrated into the earliest stage of the MSP. It was also noted that there could be increased conflicts between different groups for the use of marine space that could put sustainable development at risk.

Between 2017 and 2021 a suite of documents was produced that focused on the MSP. The first of these documents *Towards a Marine Spatial Plan for Ireland: A Roadmap for the Delivery of the National Marine Spatial Plan* (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2017) set out to inform all relevant parties about the MSP and to assist in how to properly incorporate the views of stakeholders. This was then followed by the *National Marine Planning Framework Baseline Report* (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2018), that delivered the results of the consultation process. A first draft of the NMPF was published in 2019, followed, again, by a consultation. In June of 2021 the final draft of the NMPF was published (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2021).

The NMPF “outlines the proposed approach to managing Ireland’s maritime activities to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources up to 2040” (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2021, p. 5). Highlighted within the framework are several objectives related to the development of marine and coastal tourism. In general, the direction of marine and coastal tourism, based on the NMPF, is to sustainably develop a world-class all island marine and coastal tourism destination with improved access and facilities. Importantly, the framework recognises the impact that other marine and coastal activities have on the tourism industry. One particular provision of the framework is that new developments must disclose their potential impact on the tourism industry. Notably, sustainability and the environment play a substantial role in the framework. The framework discusses the impact that tourism can have on the marine environment and the added pressure on infrastructure and heritage sites from tourist activity. Recommendations made by

Fáilte Ireland in their submission to the NMPF (Fáilte Ireland 2017, p. 17) highlighted the need to maintain and enhance access to the Irish coastline, and made the valid point that “the tourism sector does not directly own or manage the assets which underpin the sector and therefore is reliant on this alignment of policies for the sustainability of the sector”.

The holistic approach to Ireland’s marine and coastal tourism strategy presented in the NMPF (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government 2021) is a significant improvement from *A Marine Research, Technology, Development and Innovation Strategy for Ireland* (Marine Institute 1998). However, it is of vital importance that, to ensure a truly integrated plan, policy set by governing bodies with remits for tourism below the national level also adhere to the concepts set out for Ireland as a whole. Disjointed management at scales lower than the national level will lead to sub-optimal performance of the marine and coastal sector if the plans of one county or region do not support and complement the plans of another region. It is for this reason that county and regional level management can be equally as important as national level strategy.

## **5. Marine Tourism Strategy at the Sub-National Level**

What follows is an examination of the evolution of marine and coastal tourism strategies at all levels of governance smaller than the national level. This examination aims to uncover trends across the relevant documents that change in line with the national level strategies, instead of dealing with the county by county or region by region specifics. To frame this discussion, include in the appendix, a table that presents some, but not all, Government and non-government agencies that contributed to the development and implementation of Irish marine and coastal tourism policy and strategies. Table A1 provides the title and function of the organisations, and in a few cases, their key published documents. The appendix also includes a figure (Figure A1) of these organisations to better understand the flow of duties. Finally, the appendix contains a short case



study for County Donegal as an example of a coastal county with a history of marine and coastal tourism strategy development.

In the early 2000s county level documents possessed few unifying themes. Of course, there were commonalities. Those with the resources aimed to build coastal walks, develop ports and improve water-based leisure activities. However, the lack of a unified vision changed with the introduction of the tourism experience brands. In particular, there was a shift in the county level documents in relation to their marine and coastal tourism strategies. After, and in some cases during, the creation of the WAW, counties firmly aimed towards creating the best product they could, thereby enhancing the WAW. Comments like “support the development of the WAW” or “enhance the WAW” were common in the lead up to the creation of the WAW. Likewise, counties along the east coast focused on IAE, although it would seem to a lesser degree. The Dublin experience brand was somewhat different given that other counties cannot, to the same extent, benefit from tourists visiting the capital city. As such, only documents related to Dublin concerned themselves with this visitor experience brand.

The importance of the WAW and IAE brands can be seen with even a cursory glance at sub-national tourism policy documents after 2015. In most documents after 2015, terms like “capitalise on”, “become a key destination” or “maximise opportunities” presented by the WAW or IAE are easily found. As a consequence, county level documents placed a focus on the development of products that would enhance IAE and the WAW. These counties still aimed to develop products that they had the natural resources for but there was a distinct change. There was now a unified product that counties fed into.

With respect to county level policy, it would seem that national level strategies like HOOW were less noticeable in the county level documentation than experiences that more obviously impacted tourist activity. This is not to suggest that governance bodies at sub-national levels were not

concerned with national level strategy (a submission was made by all counties in relation to the NMPF for example), but that policy relating to strategy at these levels was more readily built on larger well-developed projects.

However, there is a noticeable trend amongst the county level documents. It seems apparent that, if possible, each county would like to be the prime destination along their brand experience. For example, it was common to see terms like “become the key destination”, “must see destination” and “establish the most compelling cluster experience”. Although this ambition is understandable, and in some respect laudable, this attitude may not serve the national experience brand and, arguably, county most efficiently.

County development strategies throughout the last 20 years paid little attention to their neighbours and, with the exception of some national heritage sites, there are few attempts at specialisation, i.e. focusing on one product/set of products that a county has an advantage in. As a result, many counties aim to develop attractions that are, for almost all intents and purposes, identical to their neighbouring counties<sup>3</sup>. In many of the counties there are unique experiences but the focus of the county level strategy, with respect to tourism, is not to fully embrace these experiences and build around them. Instead, these unique experiences emerge as being additions to the experiences found in all other coastal counties. If counties were to specialise, the experience brand, be that WAW or IAE, could be enhanced, resulting in increased revenue to all areas along the brand. Fáilte Ireland said it well in their submission to the NMPF “Tourism should not create competition between communities but rather a healthy interdependency which galvanises areas to work together to leverage their collective value” (Fáilte Ireland 2017, p. 6). This point strongly suggests that even at the county level there needs to be unity in marine and coastal tourism strategy development.

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth highlighting that this argument ignores the amenity needs of county residents. Better development of coastal walkways in every county with a coastline may not be of great benefit to tourists (other than those who are interested in long-distance walking and hiking) if all surrounding counties have equally good walkways but residents may thoroughly enjoy this type of amenity in their home county.

To this end, regional level governance plays an important role in unifying county level strategy. In Ireland, three regional assemblies are charged with the task of strategic planning of intra county development to the benefit of their region. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly, Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly and the Southern Regional Assembly support, co-ordinate and promote strategic planning and sustainable development in accordance with the National Planning Framework and national strategies more generally.

The most recent strategic plans (Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly 2019, Northern & Western Regional Assembly 2020, Southern Regional Assembly 2020) highlight tourism, and marine and coastal tourism assets of strategic importance and how these assets will be developed over specified timelines, the regions' sustainable development strategies, and the need for greater levels of access and accommodation. However, the assets highlighted and the strategies for tourism and, to a much greater degree, marine and coastal tourism, pay very little attention to how the region as a whole can operate as an economic unit. Asset development is presented in a similar manner to the county level documents in which development is presented for one-off assets that aim to increase tourism days in that town/county with little to no attention paid to how this will impact surrounding areas. It is then worth considering if the development of such assets brings more tourists to the region or moves tourists from one county to another within the region.

In order to enhance marine and coastal tourism nationally, it may be the case that a greater level of emphasis has to be placed on regional tourism strategies. The three strategic regions Ireland has been divided into may be a more appropriate scale for marine and coastal tourism policies to be developed and enacted, in comparison to county level, because regional level governance can consider how assets work together, how the development of assets can add or subtract from other counties in the same region and at what monetary cost. Focusing on regional level governance may reduce the amount of cannibalising of tourist days between counties in a manner that benefits country, region and indeed, county, best.

## **6. International Benchmarking**

Over the last two decades Ireland has developed a strong marine and coastal tourism policy infrastructure. However, a number of issues persist in the Irish marine and coastal tourism sector. Some of the most significant challenges facing the sector are; seasonality, sustainability, tourist spread and overtourism (during the peak holiday season). In the following section, the two most significant challenges facing the sector are focused on; seasonality and sustainability. However, in discussing how other regions have dealt with these two challenges, policy measures that have been used to reduce overtourism and increase tourist spread are also explored.

### *6.1 Seasonality*

In countries like Ireland, with relatively cold off-peak seasons, tourist activity is often tightly concentrated around the summer months. As a consequence, people employed in these sectors may only work for a few months of the year and, in some cases, businesses only operate during peak holiday periods. This seasonal work cycle can have a severe impact on marine and coastal tourism economies. Indeed, the National Coastal Tourism Academy (NCTA) (NCTA 2016), a United Kingdom (UK) based organisation focused on coastal tourism, called seasonality “the most significant challenge facing many coastal communities”, adding “the seasonal nature of tourism often results in a high proportion of temporary and short-term employment, and low-skill, low-wage local economies” (House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities 2019, p. 57). In some cases, these seasonal trends in tourism result in overtourism during peak holiday periods. As such, businesses may not be able to capitalise on the demands of tourists during these peak periods as potential bookings may exceed capacity. Likewise, local residents may feel the strain of overtourism as demands on services such as water, fire and

sewerage systems increase. Tourist satisfaction may also be reduced as a result of overcrowding and tourists being unable to partake in activities or social events.

In 2015, the NCTA examined domestic tourism (day trip and overnight stays) in the UK to address some of the areas they perceived as causing under performance in marine and coastal tourism (NCTA 2016). They found strong opportunities for growth outside of the traditional tourism period. Specifically, the NCTA advocates targeting pre-family and empty nester (over 55s) tourists as they tend to take 'top-up travel' between longer holidays. The NCTA also suggests that regional and local residents may provide much needed activity during the off-peak period particularly for restaurants and attractions. According to the NCTA, product development in the UK should focus on soft adventure activities such as walking and cycling. Importantly, the organisation recommends that coastal businesses remain open during the shoulder months as the perception, in the UK, is that coastal attractions are closed during these off-peak periods. Further to this, a report published by the Authority of the House of Lords (2019) recommends that the off-peak period should be seen as an opportunity for young seasonal workers to partake in training and skills development. Given Ireland's similarities to the UK, with respect to marine and coastal tourism, it is likely that much of the advice given by the NCTA is also applicable to Ireland.

The Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC) aims to "attract different visitors to different areas at different times" (NBTC 2019, p. 28). In order to do so, the authors outline four distinct steps:

1. Define the distinctive features of the regions.
2. Offer attractive transport, accommodation and entertainment options, including the development of a national event calendar.
3. Improve accessibility, and
4. Enhance awareness of relatively unknown, off-the-beaten-track spots.

Irish tourism policy has developed and is developing some of these points. However, development of unique offerings for different locations is limited and a national event calendar for marine related events could assist in directing tourists to different regions throughout the year helping with both seasonality and tourist spread. Likewise, by promoting locations ‘off-the-beaten-track’, a greater level of tourist spread can be achieved as well as a reduction of tourists in areas suffering from overtourism.

In line with NBTC’s stated goal to “attract different visitors to different areas at different times”, in a wide-ranging international study of blue growth including marine and coastal tourism, conducted for the European Commission, ECORYS (2013) proposed targeting tourists outside of Europe from areas with different holiday periods. ECORYS believe that this would assist in developing more economic activity outside of the traditional tourism months. However, this approach may be less effective in regions like Ireland with colder shoulder months and may have a larger carbon footprint due to longer-distance international travel.

## *6.2 Sustainability*

Sustainability, in the context of marine and coastal tourism, traditionally has two fundamental components; environmental sustainability and socio-economic sustainability. As such, the goal of sustainable tourism policy is to create a market that generates sufficient socio-economic benefits without degrading the natural resources the industry is based on. The creation of such a market requires intense interaction between both producers and the Government as well as an ideological change. More tourist days cannot be viewed as inherently better than fewer tourist days and policy tools may be needed to internalise the negative effects caused by tourism. In light of the need for policy tools and a change of ideology, a recent comprehensive report was published by the Eco-

Union on sustainable blue tourism highlighting many of the methods used to create a sustainable marine and coastal tourism market (Eco-Union 2019).

The report outlines a number of policy tools that may be used to develop sustainable tourism. Green taxes, for example, may be employed to penalise activities that are harmful to the environment; tourist taxations can be applied to tourist establishments as a means of internalising the negative effects of tourism and, alternatively or additionally, taxation can be applied directly on tourists. Such a tax has recently been placed on tourists visiting Majorca, Spain and Venice, Italy. In Majorca, tourists pay a per night tax based on their accommodation and the time of year (off-season taxes are lower than peak season taxes). Importantly, the funds raised from this tax are used to conserve the natural environment in Majorca. Ring fencing of taxation from sustainable marine and coastal tourism policy tools is a vital component of creating a sustainable marketplace, as it provides a means of conserving the natural assets, providing benefits to tourism product providers, future tourists and locals alike. The NBTC (2019) have suggested a more radical taxation in which the price does not just change based on the season but rises or falls based on real time data, with more tourists resulting in a higher level of taxation. However, this method, if applied in Ireland, would require rigorous monitoring with real-time data.

A similarly monitoring reliant metric is ecological indicators. Ecological indicators are used to measure the ecological footprint of tourist activity. By combining these indicators with life cycle assessment values, the environmental impact of tourist activity can be measured. One example of this is the Boatcycle project in Catalonia. By combining the concepts of ecological indicators with lifecycle assessments, the Boatcycle Project measures the most sustainable means of producing and maintaining a boat while also considering the environmental impact of the boat after it has finished its useable lifecycle. This method applied more generally, could allow for more sustainable development of marine related products used in marine and coastal tourism.

Measuring the ecological footprint of tourist activity also has the added benefit of being able to tax tourist activity based on the associated ecological costs of such activities. Alternatively, or additionally, to taxation, carrying capacity limits could be introduced in which a finite number of tourists are allowed to visit an area at any one time.

Another widely used means of creating a more sustainable marine and coastal tourism market is through eco-labelling. Although Ireland already has its own eco-labelling certificate<sup>4</sup> other regions have developed additions to their eco-labelling certificates that could be valuable in Ireland. One of the most useful of which can be found, in Ecolabel Toolbox, an organisation that aims to support those looking to obtain the EU-Ecolabel for accommodation. Ecolabel Toolbox produced a document that outlined marketing practices that can be employed to take best advantage of the certificate (Ecolabel Toolbox 2013). Through marketing, the consumer can become more informed and choose more eco-friendly options. Consequently, producers with the environmentally friendly certificates can benefit monetarily, either through increased tourist activity or by applying a price premium. Importantly, by increasing awareness of environmentally friendly tourist locations through eco-marketing, Ireland may be more readily viewed as an environmentally friendly destination for those interested in sustainable tourism.

To further enhance Ireland's reputation as an environmentally friendly coastal holiday destination, policy could focus on creating a greater array of eco-tourism products. However, as emphasised by the Eco-Union (2019), due to the impact of eco-tourism on the environment<sup>5</sup>, creating these eco-tourism products will not ensure a sustainable tourism market. Additionally, a recent literature review on marine ecotourism states that "a lack of reliable and consistent information on marine

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<sup>4</sup> More details on Ireland's sustainable tourism certificate can be found at the following address: <https://www.sustainabletravelireland.ie/>

<sup>5</sup> Even eco-tourism places a demand on the natural environment. Two of the main concerns are the greater need for infrastructure and an increasing number of tourist days, both of which have negative environmental impacts. Additionally, due to a lack of stringent labelling, some businesses present themselves as eco-touristic purely as a marketing ploy and do not act in an environmentally friendly manner.



ecotourism industry characteristics and its social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts, impedes effective decision-making” (Milne et al. 2021, p. 1). Without a concrete conceptualisation of the core components of eco-tourism as it pertains to a specific geographic location and community, markets will not flourish or may not embody the principles of eco-tourism.

As such, specific steps need to be taken to create eco-tourism products. A useful resource in this respect is the Mediterranean Experiences of Eco-Tourism (MEET) manual which aims to “provide protected area managing bodies and the local eco-tourism sector with a clear pathway to plan and enhance engaged conservation-focused eco-tourism in their areas” (Noll et al. 2019, p. 5). The MEET approach is to develop a group of producers in a confined geographic area that each provide eco-tourism products/services. This group of eco-tourism product providers work collaboratively to produce a tourism experience that is unique to that area and does little damage to the environment. To ensure that these products are environmentally sustainable, the MEET manual describes a means by which the ecological impact of a tourism product can be measured and monitored (Noll et al. 2019).

Similarly to MEET, the Strategic Tourism Expansion Programme (STEP) (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Programme 2021) suggests clustering products into a more complete tourism package offering. STEP is a sustainable tourism development planning process for the Atlantic Canada region that advocates for the clustering of tourism experience products produced by small and medium sized enterprises. The STEP framework (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Programme 2021) highlights the importance of communication and cooperation between enterprises that develop a cluster of products. The authors also report that community engagement is a vital component of their sustainable tourism framework; listing several communication tactics that should be employed to garner appropriate levels of community involvement.

The importance and indeed benefit of an active local community is further utilised by the STEP concept of ‘communities of interest’. This concept links local communities with tourists through a shared interest related to experiential tourism. These ‘communities of interest’ aim to create an online community of engaged individuals who share photos, ideas and experiences, which in turn creates a greater digital presence for local experiences.

However, in order for eco-tourism to thrive it is often not enough that local business and governing bodies develop eco-tourism products. In general, a national level approach is required. For example, the previous mentioned literature review on marine eco-tourism states that “to achieve blue economy outcomes, marine ecotourism must be viewed as an integral part of the overall tourism system and be factored into ecosystem-based management” (Milne et al. 2021, p. 3). In order to construct national level policy, the goals of the sector must be clearly defined. The authors suggest that eco-tourism should be viewed as an approach “that emphasizes a continuum of activities that reflects sustainable development values and intensity of interaction with the marine environment”. In relation to goals, the literature review presents the quadruple bottom line approach currently in operation in marine ecotourism businesses in New Zealand. The quadruple bottom line approach aims to measure sustainability through a social, environmental, cultural, and economic prism (a triple bottom line may also be used in areas where diversity of culture is not as strong as in New Zealand). The approach ensures that emphasis is not solely placed on the touristic attributes of eco-tourism.

It is also important to note that there must be a strong relationship between governing bodies and producers in order to create a sustainable marine and coastal tourism market. A breakdown of communication between policy makers and producers can lead to markets where sustainability is side-lined. In this respect, a recent Danish pilot study highlights the importance of interactions between producers and governing bodies in order to create an environmentally sustainable marine and coastal tourism policy (Andersen et al. 2018). In October of 2015, Danish politicians granted

ten businesses permission to propose plans for physical marine and coastal tourism projects. These projects were required to meet the criteria of a variety of sustainability measures. Instead, the project proposals focused on economic growth potential, job growth and increases in days/nights in their coastal region. In fact, four of the ten proposals did not use the word sustainable. The authors suggest that for sustainable marine and coastal tourism to exist the concept must be clearly defined for tourism product providers by governing bodies.

Another area in which sustainability must be discussed is the cruise tourism sector. As presented earlier in this report, Irish marine policy has focused on the need to develop cruise tourism. Importantly, an increase in cruise tourism has well known effects on sustainability which include; various detrimental impacts on marine life, increased environmental pressures and negative impacts on social structures in receiving ports (Eco-Union 2019). However, a number of authorities have implemented policies that aid in the mitigation of cruise related activities that detrimentally affect the natural environment. For example, the Swedish port authority gives a 10% discount on port tariffs to vessels with good environmental performances, the government of California demands that all vessel operators retain all ballast waters to reduce the risk of introducing invasive species and a new Environmental Port Index developed by the Norwegian cruise port association focuses on air emissions while at port (Eco-Union 2019).

## **7. Conclusions**

Irish marine and coastal tourism strategy has been greatly enhanced since the earliest efforts to create a plan for the development of the sector back in 1998. By the governing bodies' own assessment, Ireland was underutilising the substantial marine natural resources at its disposal. Since then, a significant shift has occurred. Ireland now has clearly outlined national goals and strategies for ocean economy industries, including marine and coastal tourism. In particular, the

development of HOOW marked a dynamic shift in how marine assets, including marine and coastal tourism assets, were managed and viewed. A greater focus was placed on managing the marine environment as an integrated set of assets that only truly work together, understanding that mismanagement of one area will affect all other areas of the marine environment. However, even though marine and coastal tourism strategy in Ireland has evolved, there remain a number of challenges facing the marine and coastal tourism sector.

Firstly, county level strategies rarely consider the actions of their neighbours. As has been seen with the national level strategy, collaborative efforts benefit the country and counties more. As such, county level strategies should not be developed in isolation, but should look towards actions that will enhance their county with a clear understanding of what is available in the surrounding counties. A strategy that increases revenue to a county by drawing tourists away from other counties<sup>6</sup> should not be seen as equally meritorious as a strategy that increases the number of days spent in Ireland or the number of tourists brought to Ireland. The goal of regional marine and coastal strategy conduct by the three regional assemblies should be to enhance the overall tourism product by creating a unique and cohesive product offering within each region.

Seasonality and sustainability are two of the most significant challenges facing the marine and coastal tourism sector. Although these are complex issues, there are a number of avenues that Irish governing bodies could take to enhance the current strategy. Fortunately, many of these strategies have added benefits such as increased tourist spread and reduction of overtourism.

Tackling seasonality, through means that do not include taxation, seems reasonably uncontroversial. Reductions in seasonality come at little cost to both producers and consumers. However, it may require looking beyond Ireland's traditional tourists, either by focusing on tourists from countries with different tourist seasons, or by placing a greater emphasis on domestic

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<sup>6</sup> Such a strategy can have some merit as it can promote tourist spread. However, increased tourist spread is not the goal presented in county level documents.

tourism, or focusing on new tourist segments by producing less weather dependent tourist activities such as food tours and musical festivals. Actions to improve sustainability, on the other hand, may not be as readily accepted.

Sustainability measures usually incur some level of cost. This could be through loss of income to producers, reduced tourist numbers or increased costs for tourist activity. The types of measures that cause these costs are rarely embraced by the parties losing out. This makes marine and coastal sustainability strategies difficult to develop and implement. Producers may be more willing to accept sustainability measures that are subsidised by the State, but these measures may not be the most cost effective. It is generally the case that an individual business will choose sustainability measure that best suits their business, if required to. It is then a strategy decision between the most effective measures or a measure that will be more widely adopted.

Finally, the Irish marine and coastal tourism sector is facing two other major challenges previously not discussed in this review; COVID-19 and Brexit. Brexit, the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union, has serious implications for Irish marine tourism and, consequently, marine and coastal tourism strategy. British people visit Ireland more than any other nation (Hynes et al. 2019). Brexit brings uncertainty around the frequency with which British people will travel to the Republic of Ireland after leaving the EU. As a consequence, the marine and coastal tourism sector may be severely impacted by diminished tourist activity. Further to this, a number of marine and coastal tourism initiatives (e.g. the Great Lighthouses of Ireland) are conducted on an Island of Ireland basis. Northern Ireland leaving the EU, may have detrimental effects on many aspects of any all-island strategy (Marine Institute 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic delivers another set of issues for marine and coastal tourism. Travel restrictions had a serious impact on tourism in 2020 and 2021. In fact, the targets set out for marine and coastal tourism in HOOW (Inter-Departmental Marine Coordination Group 2012) for 2020

were not met due to the pandemic. As such, tourism strategies have shifted from continued growth to recovery (Tourism Recovery Taskforce 2020). However, as highlighted in Ahearne and Hynes (2020) marine and coastal tourism could be the engine for recovery of the Irish tourism market. Given Ireland's natural resources, historical investment in coastal infrastructure and initiatives, and forced savings, it is possible that visitors in and to Ireland will be willing to stay longer and spend more in the coming tourism seasons. As such, a comprehensive and dynamic marine and coastal strategy has never been more important.

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## Appendix

**Table A1: Government and non-government agencies that contributed to the development and implementation of Irish Marine and Coastal tourism policy and strategy**

Title	Functions Relating to Tourism
Government Departments	Set national level policy and provides strategic direction to support the growth and development of sectors within their remit. Primary departments related to marine and coastal tourism – Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage – Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Supports fishing communities including marine tourism and agri-tourism.
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Leads in advising and implementing the Government’s policies of stimulating the productive capacity of the economy and creating an environment which enables employment creation and sustainability in all sectors including tourism.
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Provides a framework for the sustainable management of water resources Key policy documents: Development of National Planning Framework, published February 2018 National Marine Planning Framework, published July 2021 The Maritime Area Planning Bill, published July 2021 Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth, published July 2012
Department of Rural and Community Development	Provides supports for rural tourism, including in coastal areas.
Department of Transport	Develops transport, to support economic growth and social progress, including ports, ferries and cruises.
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	Supports the tourism industry in increasing revenue and employment through enhancing competitiveness and through marketing and product development. Key document: People, place and policy – Growing tourism to 2025, published July 2019
State agencies and regional authorities	Provide services and strategy related to marine and coastal tourism within their boundaries.

Bord Bia	Brings Ireland's food, drink and horticulture produce to the world. Works with tourism organisations in the promotion of food-related tourism.
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	Supports and enables an increase in value creation of a sustainable Irish seafood sector which includes seafood tourism such as 'Taste the Atlantic'
The Commissioners of Irish Lights	Responsible for providing marine aids to navigation around the coast of Ireland and provide more direct tourism services through the development of the products such as the 'Great Lighthouses of Ireland'.
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly	Supports, co-ordinates and promotes strategic planning and sustainable development in accordance with the National Planning Framework and national strategies.
Local Government Management Agency	Enhances the performance of local government sectors with teams focused specially on tourism.
Fáilte Ireland (the National Tourism Development Authority)	Administers policy and provides a wide range of financial and other tourism supports and works with local authorities (county and city councils) at sub-national level.
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Protects, manages and conserves Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources.
Northern and Western Regional Assembly	Supports, co-ordinates and promotes strategic planning and sustainable development in accordance with the National Planning Framework and national strategies.
Tailte Éireann/Ordnance Survey Ireland	National mapping agency that provides mapping services for tourists.
Skillnet	Promotes and facilitates workforce learning in Ireland with sectoral focuses that include tourism and hospitality.
Southern Regional Assembly	Supports, co-ordinates and promotes strategic planning and sustainable development in accordance with the National Planning Framework and national strategies.
Sport Ireland	Plans, leads and co-ordinates the sustainable development of competitive and recreational sport in Ireland and international sporting events.
Waterways Ireland	Manages, maintains, develops and promotes over 1000km of inland navigable waterways principally for recreational purposes.
Loughs Agency	Provides sustainable social, economic and environmental benefits through the effective conservation, management, promotion and development of the fisheries and marine

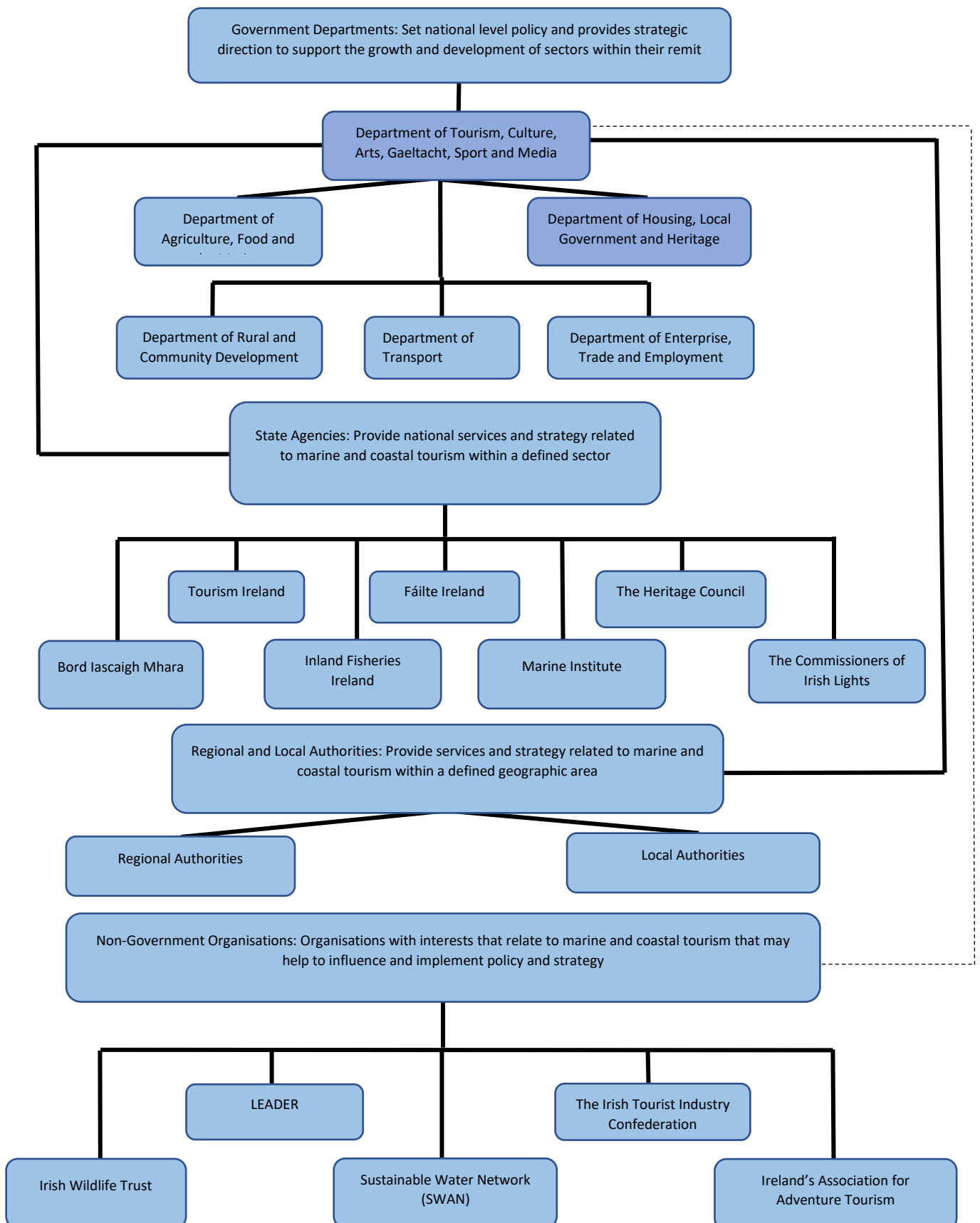


	resources of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas.
Teagasc	Supports science-based innovation in the agri-food sector and wider bioeconomy including adventure and rural tourism so as to underpin profitability, competitiveness and sustainability.
The Heritage Council	Develops a wide understanding of the vital contribution that Ireland's heritage makes to our social, environmental & economic well-being including marine and coastal tourism.
Tourism Ireland	Promotes Ireland and Northern Ireland jointly as a tourism destination.
Marine Institute	Funds research relating to marine and coastal tourism.
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Supports the development of tourism in Gaeltacht areas.
Local Authorities and other public bodies	Provide services and strategy related to marine and coastal tourism within their boundaries.
Local Authorities (31 councils, 26 of which are county councils)	Develop, maintain and fund facilities for tourism and recreation and support local community tourism activities and business within their region.
Various Universities and IT with some focus on Tourism e.g. Institutes of Technology and the Shannon College of Hotel Management	Provide education and training for tourism, catering and recreation
Sub-County Level organisation (e.g. Port Authorities and Units within County Councils e.g. Donegal tourism)	Development and implementation of city and county strategy related to tourism.
NGOs	Organisations with particular interests that relate to marine and coastal tourism that may help to influence and implement policy and strategy.
Local development organisations (e.g. LEADER)	Support small tourism businesses.
The Irish Tourist Industry Confederation	Represents the tourism trade.

### Note

This is not an exhaustive list all bodies with influence on marine and coastal tourism. Tourist agencies that are not connected with marine and coastal tourism e.g. Irish National Stud have been excluded. As have agencies that benefit tourists but do not themselves seek to increase tourist numbers e.g. Irish Rail and Bus Eireann.

**Figure A1: Hierarchy of Irish government and non-governmental bodies related to marine and coastal tourism**



## **Case Study**

### **Donegal County Council – A Collaborative Approach**

Through the purposeful efforts of Donegal County Council, marine and coastal assets have become a corner stone of their tourism offering. Donegal was naturally positioned to capitalise on marine and coastal tourism due to their long coastline, marine tradition, culture and heritage. These advantages were further enhanced when Donegal became one of the end points of the WAW. However, it was the strategic planning and development that ensured the growth of marine and coastal tourism in the county. In addition to traditional development of marine and coastal assets, research and investment became a key part of their strategy. Within their tourism strategy, Donegal County Council aimed to place themselves at the forefront of EU funded projects that enhance the marine and coastal tourism assets in the area. For example, Donegal County Council is a member of the Wildsea Atlantic Ocean Heritage (WAOH!) Project. The WAOH! Project is a sustainable diving route promoting the Atlantic Coastline as a recreational diving destination. The partnership offered by the WAOH! project ensures funding for dive tourism in Donegal, greater marketing reach and promotion of sustainable eco-tourist activity using existing natural assets. Likewise, Donegal enhanced their marine cultural heritage offering by partnering with the Atlantic Network for Developing Historical Maritime Tourism (TIDE) project. The TIDE project uses virtual reality technology to link cultural attractions across Europe. Donegal County Council were also members of Malin Waters an EU funded sailing project, the European Federation of Nautical Tourism Destinations (FEDETON) which aims at improving sustainability and competitiveness of marine and coastal tourism and CAPITEN which focused more generally on sustainable development of the nautical industry. Donegal County Council's approach to development of their assets has also involved collaboration with other Irish counties. In 2015, for example, Donegal collaborated with

Sligo to host the World Sea Angling Championships. From 2015 to 2018 Donegal County Council and Sligo County Council partnered with Cork Institute of Technology as part of the Cool Route project to develop a sailing route that stretches from Cork, through Donegal and ends in Norway. Donegal County Council have also been highly active in the WAW project capitalising on their position as an end point of the coastal route. In a further demonstration of their commitment towards a collaborative approach to building marine and coastal tourism, Donegal County Council have worked towards greater linkages between the WAW and Causeway coastal route in Northern Ireland. To cement the Council's position as a leader in in marine and coastal tourism, they also hosted, on an annual basis (pre-Covid19), the Donegal Marine Tourism Conference that had a dedicated following from tourism operators and policy makers across the country.