

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
BY DEPUTY J. RENOUF OF ST. BRELADE
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON MONDAY 9th SEPTEMBER 2024
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 16th SEPTEMBER 2024**

Question

“Further to the lodging of ‘Marine Spatial Plan’ (“MSP”) ([P.44/2024](#)), will the Minister –

- (a) detail the evidentiary basis underpinning the reduction in Marine Protected Areas from the draft MSP including any further research undertaken within these areas since the publication of the initial draft MSP;
- (b) provide an itemised timetable for the further research as proposed in the MSP and the expected date of the research results;
- (c) explain what steps will be taken on completion and evaluation of the research in (b) above, particularly in relation to expanding the Marine Protected Area network; and
- (d) advise whether, in his assessment, the "precautionary approach", which is one of the MSP's principles, has been adopted in relation to the areas that have been identified as needing further research?”

Answer

- (a) The reduction in these areas was based on the responses received from the mobile gear fishing industry (both Jersey and France) during the public consultation. This evidence consisted of vessel tracking information and could not be included in the consultation summary due to anonymity issues. Further to this, meetings were held between Marine Resources officers and the mobile gear working group to work out where the proposed MPA network would have the biggest impact on their operations. Where economic importance was great and the evidence base to protect these areas was less refined, it was decided to take out the areas from the MPA network until further research could be done to refine the boundary so that it only covers the sensitive habitats in question.
- (b) In line with ongoing habitat mapping work, research into these areas began in summer 2024, and will continue into spring/summer 2025. Drop camera surveys will be carried out on a 500x500m grid across the research areas. This work feeds into the Marine Resources workstream to gather seabed footage to help ground truth the 2022 modelled habitat map. Should the MPA proposal be accepted, drop cameras in the research areas will be prioritised going forward and should be completed in spring 2025. The data analysis will be carried out in spring and summer 2025 once all of the drop cameras are complete. Once the drop camera videos have been assessed, this will indicate distribution of sensitive habitat. If results from the drop cameras do not show clear distribution, or if there is uncertainty as to the condition of the habitat, in particular maerl, this will be followed up with towed video or grab sampling to understand the composition of the maerl (live vs dead maerl nodules and infaunal species).
- (c) This is not specified at this time. If the MPA proposal is accepted in its current form by the States Assembly, the timelines to implement the various MPA types (initial, phased, seasonal and research) will depend on a number of factors, such as law drafting time for the initial and phased MPA areas, and consultation periods for the seasonal and research areas. Consultation will be carried out initially through the Marine Resources Panel (MRP). Marine Resources officers will then make a recommendation to the Minister for the Environment. Further law drafting time would be needed for any legislation amendments arising from the results from the research areas and consultation through MRP. If sensitive habitat is found, then the recommendation will be to close all or part of these areas to mobile gear. If no evidence is found, then no further amendments will be suggested. Closure of fisheries areas will have implications under the Trade and Cooperation agreement and will therefore require standard notice periods to be followed.

- (d) With the current data available Government does not have a 100% understanding of the extent of sensitive habitats or their condition. Under the precautionary principle Jersey could argue to protect the whole of its waters while research is carried out on habitat extent and condition. The current MPA recommendation protects the areas where greater confidence exists in the habitats that are there, based on a combination of datasets, such as benthic videos, grab samples, dive information etc. Offshore areas are typically less surveyed and reliance on the modelled habitat map (extrapolated from available datasets) is therefore greater in some areas. While there are charts from historic surveys, there is limited recent ground truthed data from some of the MPA areas that have been highlighted as economically important to the mobile fishing industry. Fishing is an important part of Jersey's cultural identity, and the MSP also highlights the need to safeguard this industry and make sure it is sustainable into the future. It was therefore decided to conduct benthic habitat surveys in these areas prior to making a recommendation for their inclusion in the MPA network and it may be that only part of these research areas are put forward for protection from mobile gear. It is important to note that MPAs are not the only way of managing the impact of mobile gear fishing on the seabed. There is now a permit system in place to limit the number of Jersey mobile gear boats, and there are technical measures currently being discussed to improve the efficiency and sustainability of this sector.