

OPINION

Valuing Jersey's seas – how the Marine Spatial Plan could deliver some significant economic gains

Jersey is at a crossroads in determining the fate of our seas – we need Islanders to have their say



Freddie Watson, Jersey project manager for Blue Marine Foundation

JERSEY has a new plan for its seas which is ambitious and pioneering. I have written before about how this will allow our fisheries and marine environment to thrive. But it is reasonable to ask whether the proposed Jersey Marine Spatial Plan will bring economic benefits too.

The plan has controversial elements to it. The 256-page document includes a proposal to extend Jersey's marine protected areas from 6.5% of our territorial waters to 27%, covering the marine habitats which deliver the most for biodiversity, fisheries, climate and communities.

Jersey's current marine protected areas only restrict mobile fishing gear (dredging and trawling). The proposed areas for protection would take this same approach providing an opportunity for the lower-impact forms of fishing, such as potting, hook and line, netting and scallop diving, to thrive.

National parks on land are known to be positive for the economy – and some people, like ourselves, see what Jersey is doing as essentially creating a marine national park. A 2017 report valuing England's national parks said they added between £5.5bn and £8.7bn a year to the English economy – the equivalent output of a medium-sized city such as Plymouth. But is the same true for the sea?

Earlier this year we worked with the New Economics Foundation to understand the ecosystem services of Jersey's most valuable marine habitats. These services are the direct and indirect benefits people gain from their surrounding ecosystem. These benefits typically include increased food production, recreation (and therefore quantifiable improvements in health), branding opportunities, regulating climate, improving biodiversity and taking up nutrients from the sea, that would otherwise create algal blooms and kill sea life.

Jersey's seas deliver all of these services which have an associated monetary

value. Some of these, would be concrete additions to the Island's bottom line if coastal habitats improved in quality. Others, such as regulating climate, are real but would be harder to actually monetise, only because the mechanisms for creating credits that could be sold to benefit Jersey's economy are as yet in their infancy.

Looking at a scenario similar to the areas proposed for protection in the Jersey plan, it was calculated that the total cost of lost scallop dredging and trawling activity across five, ten and 20 years was about £8.15 million, £15.9 million and £30.1 million. However, the total value of the gained ecosystem services mentioned above was £8.6 million, £27 million and £68 million across the same 20-year period. Overall, the model showed a 700% increase in the value of ecosystem services provided by Jersey's seas over 20 years, compared to its current status.

This therefore means that the benefit to the Island over 20 years outweighs the economic cost of lost dredging and trawling activity by nearly £40 million. Within this £40 million excess, a large proportion is made up of the harder-to-grasp services such as managing nutrients, waste and carbon. However, other contributors include increased benefits to static fishing, recreation and leisure, which are real services that everyday people like us can see.

As discussed, some of the benefits are easier to get hold of than others, but they are all positive and they exceed



■ The Marine Spatial Plan is under consultation until 2 January, but this deadline could be extended Picture: JON GUEGAN

the benefits of continuing "business as usual".

Economic benefits are not only restricted to enhanced ecosystem services and a healthier fishery. In 2015, the Crown gave the seabed to the public of Jersey. With the Island already being a self-governing Crown Dependency, this provides another element of flexibility and autonomy in managing Jersey's seas, opening up other economic opportunities.

How do you put a value on regulating climate? Taking up carbon from the atmosphere is obviously a good thing to do, but can you place a monetary value on it and claim credits from doing so? Carbon credits have lost a lot of credibility recently after a number of scandals about verification. Also, a relevant challenge is that Jersey only hosts one currently recognised blue carbon habitat, seagrass, almost all of which is already protected. We would have to actively increase the amount of seagrass in our waters significantly, which would be challenging, in order to claim carbon credits. The next option is to wait for more marine habitats, such as kelp, or accreting sediments, to be officially recognised in international frameworks.

A more realistic opportunity in the medium term, I believe, is the novel area of nature-positive marine biodiversity credits. Here, Jersey has the opportunity to lead. By improving biodiversity and monitoring positive change over time, which is entirely doable, there is the opportunity to generate a certified credit which can be sold to companies and individuals who want to be seen to be restoring and protecting biodiversity. This is not a credit that can be traded and speculative profits made. Instead, 60% of the revenue gained from the sale

of a credit goes directly back into a fund which supports the local community in return for habitat protection.

Biodiversity credits could pay for a range of things – from compensating displaced fishermen all the way through to subsidising public transport, or however the island feels the income could be best utilised. The remaining 40% is allocated to the ongoing monitoring of biodiversity to ensure the continued validity of that credit.

These are just some of the ways in which the protection of Jersey's inshore waters could benefit the Island's economy.

The Marine Spatial Plan is under consultation until 2 January. However, there are discussions about extending this deadline. Its proposal for large-scale and meaningful marine protection needs your support.

Jersey is at a crossroads in determining the fate of our seas, so have your say on the future of Jersey's waters by scanning the QR code and responding to the online form.



What do you think?

■ How would you like to see funds from "biodiversity credits" used in the community?

■ How should the Island protect its sensitive sites for future generations?

Send your thoughts to editorial@jerseyeveningpost.com or #jointhedebate on social media

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