

## OPINION

# Islanders can grasp this once-in-a-generation opportunity to safeguard the future of our marine environment

Islanders should be proud of what lies right on our doorstep and the new opportunities and benefits we could reap from these unique waters

**O**UR Island is surrounded by a vast expanse of sea, which makes up 95% of Jersey's territory. Ensuring that these waters are healthy and thriving is vital for Jersey's people and will bring many benefits.

To this end, a few weeks ago, the government released its first Jersey Marine Spatial Plan, recommending the actions needed to manage our surrounding seas for all marine users.

Notably, the Marine Spatial Plan proposes to expand marine protected areas (MPAs) from 6.5% to an exciting 27%, covering some of our most sensitive marine habitats.

Protection would extend to all the cherished bays that people currently enjoy during common recreational activities, whether that's a beach walk, participating in the "30 bays in 30 days" swimming initiative, surfing,



**Kathryn Smith**

or snorkelling. All these are ways of discovering some of the 3,200 marine species and habitats that can be found in Jersey's waters.

Our snorkel trail initiative is a brilliant example of the inspiration many people have derived simply from exploring beneath the water's surface.

The initiative educates younger generations about the benefits of marine protection, through classroom practical demonstrations and physical pool and sea activities.

There is a huge appetite for



■ The Marine Spatial Plan looks to give more recognition to all marine activities  
Picture: BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION

opportunities like these, with over 20 schools showing interest, showing how the plan aligns with the wants and needs of the local community.

The protection of these shallow marine habitats around our coast would recreate some of the most exciting marine ecosystems in the world, with all the enhancement of physical and mental wellbeing that would bring for those enjoying them.

Over the last two years, around 600 children across the Island have already participated in the snorkel trail programme, which has received an extremely positive reception.

Reviews from children from St Peter's School and Beaulieu have included statements such as: "I loved it so much, now I want to be a marine biologist when I am older" and "Thank you for an amazing experience of a lifetime".

Teaching children safe snorkelling practices and how we should use and care for our valuable marine environment is hugely important, as well as for the personal benefits they gain, providing unique experiences to those who may have never previously had the chance to learn. Securing a long-term, healthy marine environment would continue to improve educational opportunities like these to the benefit of the Island.

Snorkelling activities are only a fraction of the wider social benefits that the Marine Spatial Plan and its network of protected areas could bring.

The recovery of marine ecosystems can help sustain fisheries that support local livelihoods and provide greater food security through replenished fish and shellfish stocks, something that will be covered in more depth in this column over the coming weeks.

A plan of this scale could also create opportunities for tourism and research or "science tourism" that can stimulate coastal economies. The plan looks overall to balance ecological goals with creating local jobs, cultural heritage, expanding knowledge, and allowing sustainable use of marine resources.

Aside from marine protection and the mosaic of social benefits that brings, the plan also aims to make coastal areas more accessible, more diverse, and

more affordable, providing easier and safer opportunities for all Islanders and visitors to enjoy our wonderful marine environment.

Recommendations include maintaining and adapting coastal areas to improve access for those with diverse needs, along with providing better storage facilities for recreation equipment.

This is an important aspect for several marine users, especially organisations such as Healing Waves, a charity that helps individuals of all conditions and disabilities to enjoy the sea.

Healing Waves say they are "particularly looking forward to the proposed improvements aiming to create a more accessible coastline, so that more islanders, including our athletes, can get the most out of our marine environment".

The Marine Spatial Plan looks to give more recognition to all marine activities that play an important role for our island's community.

Islanders should be proud of what lies right on our doorstep and the new opportunities and benefits we could reap from these unique waters. The public consultation for the Government's Jersey Marine Spatial Plan is now open until January 2 2024. It needs your support.

Have your say on the future of Jersey's seas by responding to the online form. Together, Islanders can grasp this once-in-a-generation opportunity to safeguard the future of our valuable marine environment, and in turn, the future health and wealth of our people.

■ Kathryn Smith is the Jersey project officer for Blue Marine Foundation, a charity dedicated to protecting and restoring the world's oceans.

## What do you think?

- Could Jersey become a "science tourism" destination?
- What could be done to better engage Islanders with sea conservation?

Send your thoughts to [editorial@jerseyeveningpost.com](mailto:editorial@jerseyeveningpost.com) or #jointhedebate on social media



■ Schoolchildren taking part in the snorkel trail initiative Picture: BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION

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