Marine Planning Policy Statement Submission

Trinity Centre for Environmental Humanities, Trinity College Dublin

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Background

We are increasingly hearing how we need to completely change the way we live with and in the world in order to deal with the societal challenges that we face today. Yet, we are also being told that the technocratic solutions (such as cutting carbon emissions from transport and energy) that are being proposed as a way to ensure a more sustainable and equitable world, are simply not sufficient. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is apparently calling for a "transformation" in food production and land management to keep global temperatures at safe levels.[1] Transformations require leaps of imagination that force us to think beyond our existing paradigms. It is more important than ever to provide space, at all policy levels, for imagining new ways of being in the world, and, indeed, for imagining a world that contains many different worlds, as opposed to the world that our policy systems are embedded in, a world where only one world fits. Unless this window for imagining a "world in which many worlds fit", a pluriverse, is written into policy-making practices and processes, we will remain limited by the idea that we must take "the world that is responsible for the plausible destruction of the planet as the exclusive starting point in a conversation about the current condition of the planet".[2] We need to create space for different starting points. We provide comments on the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS) within this broader, philosophical context, with a focus on transparency and process.

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[1] McKie, R. 2019. We must change food production to save the world. The Guardian, 4 August 2019.
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/aug/03/ipcc-land-use-food-production-key-to-climate-crisis-leaked-report
[2] Blaser, M. and de la Cadena M. 2018. *Pluriverse: Proposals for a World of Many Worlds*. In: De la Cadena, M. and Blaser M. (eds). A World of Many Worlds. Duke University Press, Durham and London.

Our key recommendations are:

- **Include the requirement to produce a principles and processes document as a practical step towards fair and transparent marine planning decisions.**
- **Include policy engagement with critical scholars as part of the ongoing planning process to enable inequities and inequalities to be identified in a timely manner.**

Transparency and process

We welcome the recognition by the MPPS that "*the NMPF is about the process as much as the plan*". We also welcome the commitment to "*transparent and fair decision making*" as a key priority and a strategic principle of the MPPS. We note that the ***documentation of principles and processes together with the plan*** is one of the key good practice recommendations on developing a marine plan from the vast integrated ocean management experience of Canada and Australia.[3] **We recommend including a principles and processes document in the MPPS' list of ways that transparent and fair decision making will be achieved (p13) as a practical step towards marine planning decisions being taken in a "*fair and transparent manner*"** (p10).

We propose that this document could, in particular, be explicit about the politically charged nature of marine planning processes.[4] For transparency to be meaningful on the ground, politics and power dynamics must be acknowledged and made visible. Policy documents by their nature tend to obscure the contentious nature of the policy-making process, and the exclusions and inclusions (advertent and inadvertent) that culminate in a specific framing of policy objectives, principles, priorities and visions. Yet, the frames, structures and language we choose to represent human-nature relationships, continually shape and reshape our socio-ecological systems.[5] These choices may produce uneven "*real-world outcomes*" (p11): privileging certain groups, imposing specific ways of knowing and doing to address problems, often reducing complex socio-ecological systems to technocratic practices and processes that serve to reinforce a particular kind of world - the world responsible for planetary destruction. While pragmatism and practicality are needed for planning

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[3] See Brennan R, Potts T and Mee L. 2010. Report on Social and Economic Objectives for a Scottish Marine Plan. Scottish Government Publications, Edinburgh

[4] See Flannery W., Clarke J., McAteer B. 2019. *Politics and Power in Marine Spatial Planning*. In: Zaucha J., Gee K. (eds) Maritime Spatial Planning. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98696-8_9

[5] See Nightingale, A.J. 2018. Geography's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals: Ambivalence and performance. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 8(2): 196-200 https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820618780790

and governance, we would like to see built-in safeguards (complementing the proposed the 6 year review) to alert us to inequalities and inequities produced as "*real-world outcomes*" by the planning choices made, and a clear commitment to address such inequities and inequalities. A principles and processes document could flag significant tensions and points of contestation during the course of the discussions behind the production of the plan and behind the choice of the MPPS' core principles to inform marine planning and development. This could provide insights into the contested politics and power struggles underlying the text that has been produced, and the world that the plan represents. Providing transparency around the politics of the choices that have been made allows space for imagining different choices, and a different politics. We might see that we have assumed the existence of (only) rational, economically-driven individuals, an uncertain marine environment to be improved,[6] a certain framing of human activities to be managed, particular values embraced. For example, Ireland's first Integrated Maritime Plan (Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth (2012)) envisages the National Marine Planning Framework as achieving management of our 'ocean wealth' and providing a competitive advantage for our marine sectors. It's not that these goals are wrong, but the choice of these goals presupposes, and shapes, a particular kind of socio-ecological system and world. As another example, the MPPS specifies (p11) that "*all future applications for human activities or development in our seas will be considered in terms of consistency with the objectives and policies set out in the NMPF*."

By bringing attention to our assumptions about the kind of world that needs to be planned and managed, this could open up space to imagine a world in which many, different, worlds fit. We suggest that there is a role for critical scholars, particularly from the arts, humanities and social sciences, to work in partnership with policy-makers to provide these kinds of insights. An example of such insightful critique is the recent report *The Blue Fix: Unmasking the politics behind the policy of blue growth*, in which the authors examine the implications of the ocean being reframed and re-regulated as a space for the 'blue economy'.[7] **As such, we recommend including engagement with critical scholars in the MPPS' list of ways that transparent and fair decision**

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[6] See Bresnihan, P. 2019. Revisiting neoliberalism in the oceans: Governmentality and the biopolitics of 'improvement' in the Irish and European fisheries. *EPA: Economy and Space* 51(1): 156–177 https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18803110

[7] Brent, Z.W, Barbesgaard, M, and Pedersen, C. 2018. *The Blue Fix: Unmasking the politics behind the promise of blue growth*. http://hdl.handle.net/1765/113242

making will be achieved (p13) as another practical step towards ensuring meaningful transparency.

Conclusion

As an interdisciplinary research centre, the Trinity Centre for Environmental Humanities is willing and able to bring critical insights from the arts, humanities and social science disciplines, to participate in the planning process alongside other stakeholders and to contribute towards developing innovative and coherent plans that provide space for imagining a "world in which many worlds fit."

Contact:

Dr Ruth Brennan
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellow (2018-2020)[8]
Trinity Centre for Environmental Humanities
ruth.brennan@tcd.ie