

# Towards sustainability in the Celtic Sea



Supporting Sustainable Seas

## PISCES: Partnerships Involving Stakeholders in the Celtic Sea Ecosystem

EC LIFE+ project with the contribution  
of the LIFE financial instrument of  
the European Community.  
Project Number: LIFE07/ENV/UK/000943.

For more information, please visit  
[www.projectpisces.eu](http://www.projectpisces.eu)



## About PISCES

PISCES was an innovative three and a half year project (2009-2012) led by WWF-UK that has created a unique partnership of sea-users from the UK, Ireland, France and Spain to jointly explore ways of governing and managing activities in the Celtic Sea more sustainably.

The Celtic Sea, including the western Channel (see Figure 1), in the north-east Atlantic, has a long maritime heritage and supports many economically significant industries and activities. It is a productive area, hosting varied habitats and rich biodiversity (including many commercially important species). However, growing demand for marine space and resources is causing increased conflict between stakeholders and threatening the health of the marine environment on which so many depend. PISCES stakeholders have an alternative vision for the Celtic Sea: one in which marine industries flourish, communities prosper and the environment is healthy.

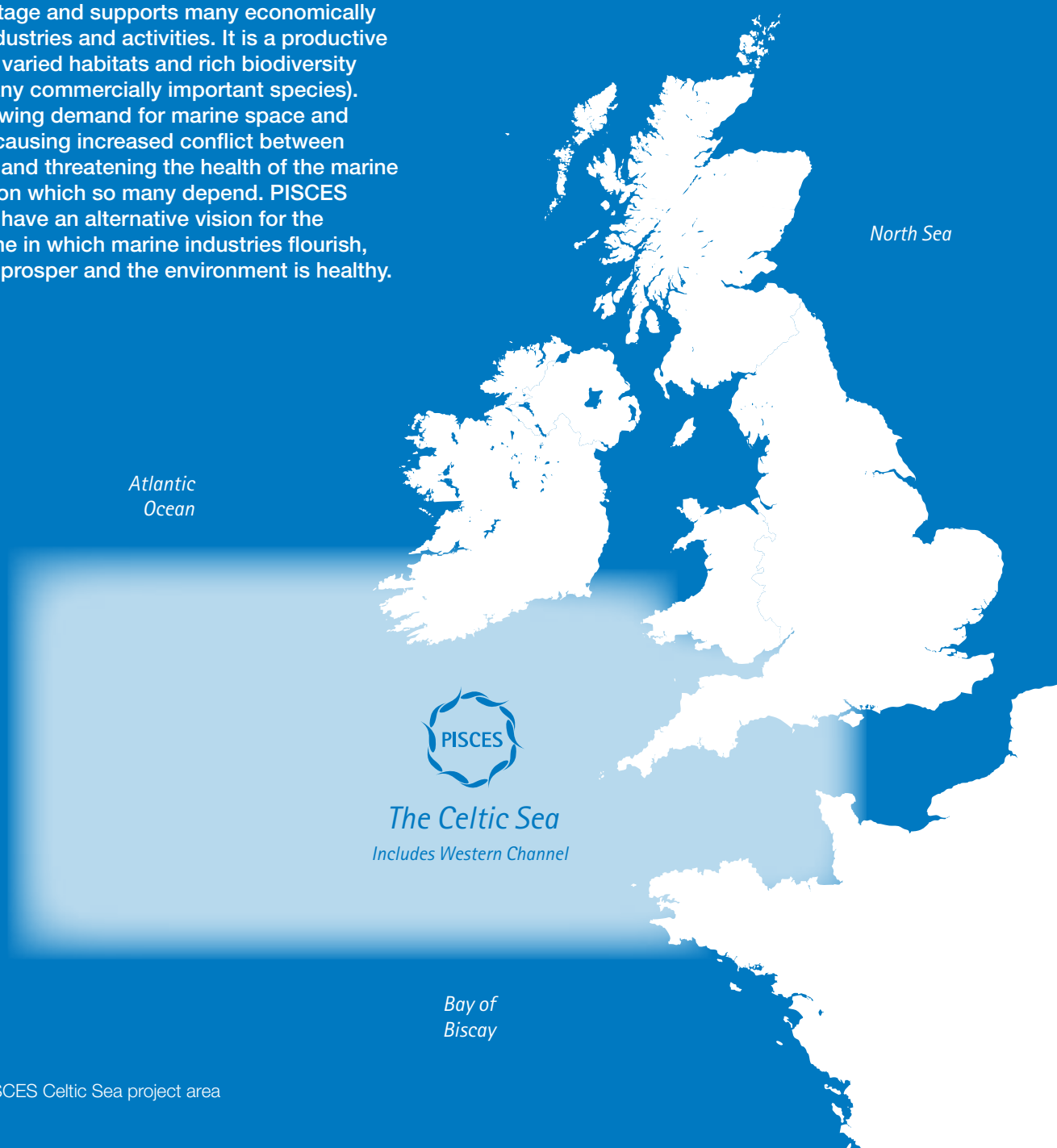


Figure 1. The PISCES Celtic Sea project area

## Project scope and objectives



Aquaculture © thegreekphotoholic / istock

PISCES was innovative for its trans-national nature, bringing together stakeholders not just from different sectors but from different countries, cultures and languages.

The main project driver was the ‘ecosystem approach’ (see Box 1), a central pillar of European marine policy. In particular, the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) requires European countries to develop marine strategies based on the ecosystem approach to improve the condition of Europe’s seas by 2020.

Implemented in the right way, the ecosystem approach should ensure that we have viable marine industries, prosperous coastal communities and a healthy marine environment for generations to come. PISCES stakeholders demonstrated a desire to ensure this happens in the Celtic Sea, and to play a vital role in the process.

The ecosystem approach (EA) is a way of making decisions in order to manage our activities more sustainably. It recognises that we are part of the ecosystem: we both depend on the services and goods it provides (e.g. food, energy, clean water and recreation) and we affect it. The ecosystem approach requires:

- An integrated approach that considers all ecosystem components (e.g. human activities, habitats and species, and physical processes).
- Consideration of ecosystem functions and resulting ecosystem services that we all depend on (e.g. food provision, energy, waste absorption, recreation and climate regulation).
- Strong participation of stakeholders, since the EA is about changing human behaviour. It is also widely accepted that involving stakeholders greatly enhances support for resulting policy.

In the marine environment, the EA requires an overarching decision-making framework to guide integrated management of all human activities that affect the sea. It also requires the day-to-day decisions taken by all of us (e.g. governments, businesses, sea-users and consumers) are aligned with this approach.

PISCES focused on seeking ways to help improve stakeholder participation in marine policy and management, as both a key EA principle and an important component of stakeholder-led project. To help support this, the project has also explored ways of improving engagement between sea-users and between sea-users and government, particularly at the trans-boundary or regional level.



## Project scope and objectives



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We achieved our objectives by:

- Creating a trans-national, multi-sector partnership of Celtic Sea stakeholders from the UK, Ireland, France and Spain.
- Convening a programme of workshops to bring together stakeholders and enable trans-boundary engagement;
- Exploring approaches to help improve engagement and overcome barriers;
- Undertaking education, awareness-raising and capacity-building activities with stakeholders;
- Developing a guide to implementing the ecosystem approach with stakeholders;
- Communicating key messages from the project to other sea-users, governments, inter-governmental agencies, scientists, other projects, and NGOs.

*By 2012, relevant marine stakeholders in the Celtic Sea have a significantly greater shared understanding of the ecosystem approach of integrated marine management.*

*By 2012, cooperation and coordination between all relevant representative marine stakeholder groups has led to the development (and Celtic Member State recognition) of agreed mechanisms for implementing the ecosystem approach in the context of EU Marine Strategy and Directive.*

*By 2012, the outcomes of the project are effectively disseminated to the wider marine community in the Celtic Sea and upscaled to other marine sub-regions within EU maritime waters.*

*By 2012, the project is technically and financially managed and monitored coherently within the timeframe of the project, and stakeholders have committed to a shared strategy to ensure the project's future sustainability.*

*“The PISCES guide is essential reading for those who want to understand what marine stakeholders want to see in policy implementation”*

Ann Bell, North Sea Commission

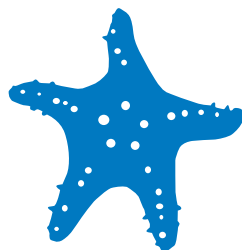
# Methodology



Dunlin © spartak762 / istock

Initial efforts focused on forming the stakeholder group. This involved interviewing and recruiting representatives from a wide range of sea-user sectors and groups (See below), that could act as an effective link within their sector.

- Renewable energy
- Offshore infrastructure (cable laying etc)
- Commercial fisheries
- Mariculture
- Shipping
- Ports & harbours
- Coastal tourism & recreation
- Marine aggregates
- Environmental statutory agencies



Over the course of the project, five stakeholder workshops were held across the region (in England, Wales, Ireland, France and Spain) with 46 participants. The first workshop focused on agreeing project objectives, developing relationships, sharing information and experiences, and exploring key issues. Issues included Celtic Sea environmental threats, sectoral interactions, and governance and management. Training resources through online tutorials were developed to help raise awareness and understanding of the ecosystem approach, marine policy and marine spatial planning.

Guide development began at the second PISCES workshop, and involved a highly iterative and participatory process in which stakeholders were directly involved in determining the objectives, scope and content of the guide. Additional information was collected through literature research, interviews, and questionnaires.

The guide also benefited from the contributions of an advisory group of international experts (working in the fields of marine policy, management, the ecosystem approach and stakeholder engagement) and from comments from a range of other individuals across Europe (representing government, sea-users, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), universities and others). On completion, the guide was formally endorsed by contributors through a declaration at the start of the document.

The guide was officially launched in November 2012, through a series of events in the UK, Spain and Belgium and through presentations at a number of international conferences and meetings. It is available in English, French and Spanish and a summary leaflet version was also created.

The project website was redesigned to highlight the guide ([www.projectpisces.eu](http://www.projectpisces.eu)) and also contains further information on the project background, activities and outputs.

# Results



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PISCES represents the first opportunity for people who use, live by and enjoy the Celtic Sea to translate policy into practical recommendations.

Through PISCES, it has become clear that a range of actions need to be taken to implement the ecosystem approach, including improving stakeholder participation. Detailed recommendations can be found within the guide.

Key priority areas for action are identified as:

## 1) Improving stakeholder participation in MSFD implementation.

In line with this key principle of the ecosystem approach, the MSFD requires that opportunities for “early and effective” participation are provided. PISCES has shown that at every step, stakeholders can add value, helping to ensure that marine policy implementation is appropriate, cost-effective, equitable and supported by stakeholders.

“The ecosystem approach is nothing without stakeholders.”

(Renewables sector)

## 2) Encouraging stakeholders to proactively identify issues and implement their own solutions, and encourage others to do so.

Voluntary actions could bring commercial benefits to stakeholders, and reduce the need for regulatory intervention. Actions need not necessarily be radical or costly. Even minor changes can be beneficial, especially if they are taken up across a sector, with other sectors, or within an entire region.

## 3) Fostering greater communication between stakeholders and between stakeholders and government.

Stakeholders should communicate their plans, activities, needs and concerns. This will help to ensure that learning is shared, developed and expanded, and governments recognise the benefits of stakeholder efforts (which may strengthen the case for voluntary actions as a means of meeting MSFD targets). Transnational, multi-sector forums should be established to help foster greater communication, cohesion and integration across borders and sectors.

“The PISCES guide makes important recommendations about the need for transnational stakeholder forums to improve stakeholder participation in policy implementation. It is a timely contribution at a scale that makes sense.”

(Prof. David Johnson, Executive Secretary, OSPAR Commission)

## 4) Developing and implementing the required governance and management mechanisms to support fully integrated marine management.

Marine spatial planning (MSP) has the potential to play an important role within the MSFD, including in terms of trans-boundary coordination, and needs considerable further development. Sector-specific policy is increasingly reflecting ecosystem approach concepts. Further effort is needed to fully integrate and harmonise policy within the context of an overarching, ecosystem-based approach.

## Benefit and impact



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Creation of the PISCES stakeholder group (the first trans-national stakeholder forum in the Celtic Sea) has helped to increase knowledge, build trust and partnerships between organisations and people.

The PISCES guide, and the process used in its development, has also created a powerful and united Celtic Sea stakeholder voice – setting out a roadmap that identifies priority actions and responsibilities. It is relevant to sea-users, marine industry and those working in marine policy, planning and management in the Celtic Sea and other marine regions

A survey of stakeholders (30 interviews and 37 questionnaires) identified a number of positive project impacts:

- Improved communication between sea-users in the Celtic Sea, as a result of the partnership with 76% of those surveyed stating PISCES has made it easier for them to work together.
- Greater understanding amongst sea-users and government on issues and solutions associated with implementation of the ecosystem approach as identified by 86% of those surveyed.
- More than three quarters of those surveyed were highly confident in their ability to take forwards elements and recommendations from the PISCES guide and felt it was useful to policy makers and sea-users.
- Governments representatives identified a greater understanding of the views of stakeholders, with 80% of those surveyed stating they will use the PISCES guide.

The guide has been widely cited and referred to in stakeholder networks, conferences, government meetings, reports and communications including press.

The development of the stakeholder engagement process and the establishment of the stakeholder group will also have lasting positive impact in European regional seas governance and management both in the Celtic Sea and as a model for other marine areas.



## Discussion



The success of PISCES can be demonstrated through the endorsement of the PISCES guide by 25 stakeholders and the review and comments by a wider 30 stakeholders. PISCES stakeholders communicated the guide to 1,500 people in their sectors. The outreach and dissemination during PISCES reached an estimated audience of 11,197 marine stakeholders across Europe.

The PISCES process resulted in the establishment of trust and understanding among stakeholders and an increased confidence to communicate the ecosystem approach. Governments recognised the value of PISCES and its recommendations.

The success of PISCES has helped to secure a further four years of funding for another WWF-UK led project: the Celtic Seas Partnership. This €4m LIFE+ funded project will expand the partnership concept to a wider geographical area (including waters to the north west of the UK and Ireland), and explore a range of specific practical projects, tools and approaches to help improve governance and management.

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PISCES was led by WWF-UK in partnership with The Environment Council and WWF Spain, with thanks to country technical support from SeaWeb and the Coastal & Marine Research Centre.

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