

Navigating a better digital user service for marine planning

Marine Management Organisation

The Challenge

- Develop a user-friendly, trusted digital app giving users access to up-to-date information and policies

The Benefits

- Intuitive and enjoyable user experience
- Better customer service
- Enhanced time and resource savings
- Accelerated decision-making

As the Non-Departmental Public Body with delegated authority for preparing and implementing marine plans, providing users access to up-to-date data is a key responsibility of the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). Users had been frustrated by navigating complex sets of hard-copy documents with static maps, which are quickly out-of-date. The MMO needed to replace this outdated system with a Government Digital Service compliant one, giving users access to up-to-date information, which would support implementation of marine plans in the English marine area.

The Challenges

England's seas are getting busier. Commercial shipping activity is increasing; offshore wind is expanding as a renewable energy source, while carbon capture and storage is a growing industry. Fishing remains a vital source of employment for many while recreational activities, from sailing to surfing, support the tourism sector and provide seaside enjoyment for millions. All these activities mean that the England's diverse marine life competes with the building of new turbines, pipelines, power cables and even submarines.

As the manager and independent regulator of England's seas, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) plays a unique role in delivering a trusted marine planning, licensing and regulatory framework supporting environmental, societal, and economic progress.

Access to and being able to provide up-to-date information on marine planning for users, has always been a challenge for the MMO. As a Non-Departmental Public Body, customer service is paramount so that users can progress their activity or get their businesses off the ground as quickly as possible.

Previously, users accessed plans and related policy documents which are long, hard-copy reports, containing static maps. Mapped data were often out of date as soon as the documents were published, and it was a lengthy process for the MMO and its users to access the information they required.

What was needed was a user-friendly, efficient and trusted map-first service that would assist anyone needing to use or apply marine plan policies. This service needed to help the user quickly understand the best location for their planned activities, including where new developments may be appropriate, while ensuring coastal habitats and recreational activities remain protected.

The Solution

The Explore Marine Plans web service was one of the first interactive web mapping applications developed by the MMO for use on GOV.UK. Users are now presented with a map-first approach, minimising the upfront volume of information, allowing them to self-serve. Their whole end-to-end user journey takes place entirely within the interactive map and even those without access to GIS software can interrogate data generated by the MMO.

There are two simple components to the service: access to data and policy search. Applicants and their consultants seeking development consent from the MMO can guide themselves by drawing a polygon on the map covering their area of interest, and then pull-down related policy information. For example, users may interrogate a 'live' version of the marine licence dataset, allowing them to easily identify planned activities that may have an impact on their proposal.



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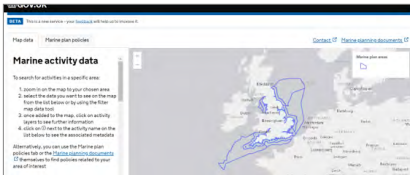
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James Lawson, Senior Marine Manager, Marine Management Organisation



Information is accessed via GOV.UK, enabling users to retrieve data and policy information they require quickly and easily.

“Having everything in one place in an integrated application makes access to and implementation of marine plans a much simpler process. It’s a win, win for us, as ArcGIS enables us to leverage some of the experience we have internally, while meeting the needs of the user,” says James Lawson, Senior Marine Planner at MMO.

A consultant from Esri UK’s Professional Services team worked collaboratively with the MMO and its digital transformation provider, who were responsible for the Content Management System (CMS), to deliver this vital interactive, web-mapping component. Backed by the CMS, complex marine planning information now sits in an application built around the ArcGIS software development kit so data can be quickly and easily updated. Importantly, this can be done without having to return to hard copy documents to update static maps, which might trigger complex sign-off processes.

Since Explore Marine Plans was launched there has been a notable increase in the average session duration, increasing from approximately 30 seconds to around three minutes. This was initially higher but has now stabilised as people are becoming more familiar with how to use the service.

The Benefits

Better Customer Service

With a single point of entry on GOV.UK, information is easily accessed enabling users to retrieve the data and policy information they require more quickly. An effective user experience is a vital component for any Government digital offering and, now, users of Explore Marine Plans can take the decisions they need to take appropriate action to ensure compliance with marine plan policies.

Intuitive User Experience

Visualising data on an interactive map makes for a much more enjoyable and intuitive user experience. Information can be analysed more efficiently than with hard-copy reports and static maps, and immediate access to up-to-date policy data further enhances the efficacy of the service.

Time Savings

More effective digital data management has made internal processes faster and increased efficiencies. Improved data management processes and integration with internal GIS services has increased efficiency and data accuracy.

Data-driven Decisions

Visual navigation makes it easier for users to identify their areas of interest, and then pull down and interrogate the relevant marine plan policies. Layers of information can be shown or hidden at the click of a button and users have access to the most up-to-date version of the datasets and licensing data, simplifying and accelerating decision-making processes.

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