Quality Assurance Policy

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Part 1 – Purpose and scope

1.1 Policy statement
Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has a strategic aim to become the nationally and internationally recognised leader in marine management and sustainable development. Our core business encompasses marine planning, licensing, regulation and enforcement. All of these functions rely heavily on evidence, both data and information, which we obtain from a range of different sources to support and inform decision-making. Evidence is therefore one of our most important business assets.

To provide reassurance to our sponsor departments, stakeholders, customers and the taxpayer that we are managing our evidence effectively and responsibly we need
to implement a consistent approach to evidence quality. This is essential to ensure that organisational decisions, guidance, advice and published material are based on accurate, robust and defensible evidence. The information and knowledge derived from MMO data will be used by government, stakeholders, and external bodies for many purposes, including assessing our performance.

MMO is fully committed to the highest possible standard of quality assurance, including working to nationally and internationally recognised best practices. The MMO accepts its duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the accuracy and completeness of all evidence involved in the full range of the organisations undertakings.

MMO recognises its responsibilities regarding the management of data within the requirements of relevant legislation and guidelines in the UK, such as the Data Assurance Guidelines, the data handling procedures\(^1\), the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics and the Government Chief Scientific Adviser's 'Guidelines on the use of scientific and engineering advice in policy making'\(^2\). MMO is also aligned with government to comply with relevant EU directives, particularly the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

It is the responsibility of every member of MMO staff members to ensure that all evidence within their areas of responsibility is accurate and complete, appropriately coded in compliance with MMO requirements and properly managed and maintained. There will be mandatory training for all relevant staff on applicable quality assurance processes.

### 1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out the MMO’s quality assurance practices that will support the development of robust information, evidence collection and analysis procedures, and position the MMO as a centre of excellence for marine information.

This policy puts in place processes that support a culture to provide an appropriate level of quality assurance for our evidence. It is one of a number of policies within our organisation’s policy framework. While this policy refers to quality assurance, reference should be made to the Data Management Policy and our overarching Information Security Policy to understand our management of data and information security, and information risk practices.

### 1.3 Scope

For the purpose of this policy, evidence includes the following:

- spatial (GIS) reference and application data (such as bathymetry, boundaries, protected sites)
- business information (such as fisheries statistics, licence conditions)
- personal data (such as vessel information, licence contact details)
- internal or working datasets (such as licensing database)

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• published evidence (such as marine plans)
• internal and external documents (such as reports, scientific papers) and web services

This policy is applicable to all MMO information asset owners, staff or those with access to MMO core datasets.

**Part 2 – Key messages and policy**

**2.1 Important messages**

• Evidence used in our core business activities must be acquired legitimately and from reputable sources.
• We will assess the confidence levels of our data using well defined and repeatable processes.
• We will implement robust data management procedures that will ensure that the likelihood of introducing errors is minimised.
• We will make our staff aware of this policy and provide them with mandatory training on applicable quality assurance processes.
• We will work in partnership with our third party suppliers who store our data and deliver our ICT services to ensure they are aware of our quality assurance requirements, and their responsibilities in upholding our quality standards.
• We will seek written assurance from third parties providing us with data and evidence that that they are aware of our quality assurance requirements, and their responsibilities in upholding such quality standards, particularly in accordance to the Government Chief Scientific Adviser’s ‘Guidelines on the use of scientific and engineering advice in policy making’.
• As a non-departmental public body we will operate transparently and are committed to being open and sharing our evidence and quality standards and working practices, within commercial and confidentiality constraints.

**2.2 Policy**

This quality assurance policy supports the strategic direction and objectives set out in MMO's Corporate Plan. For further background reading on data management in the MMO, reference should be made to the MMO Data Review.

**Quality assurance**

Responsibility for the quality assurance of evidence used by the MMO lies with the Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management (EDKM) Team, assisted where necessary by subject matter experts from other teams.

MMO will determine confidence assessments for the data that is used, and in particular data from external sources. To facilitate this, the Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management Team will establish procedures to assess data for validity, accuracy, timeliness, reliability, relevance and completeness.

These confidence assessments will be applicable to the requirements of the MMO, and will be in line with best practice, fully auditable, and compliant with our quality management requirements.
A Master Data Register (MDR) of MMO datasets has been compiled and is maintained by the Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management Team.

The UK Gemini Standard for metadata (version 2, MEDIN profile) has been applied to each dataset to ensure our data is interoperable with other standard compliant datasets.

Also included in the MDR will be details of our assessment of quality of each dataset. Such details will be included in the published metadata. All quality assurance assessments and updates must be subject to version control procedures, to provide an audit trail.

All official statistics produced by the MMO will comply with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics\(^3\).

**Legislation**

The following legislation, statutory instruments and EC regulations are applicable to the evidence within the scope of this policy.

- Public Records Act 1958 (Admissibility of Electronic Copies of Public Records)
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Regulations Information 2004
- Re-use of Public Sector Information 2009

### Part 3 – Policy enforcement, governance, definitions and glossary

#### 3.1 Policy enforcement

Table 1 outlines roles or groups that are responsible for the interpretation of this policy document in the event of any alleged or actual noncompliance with this policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alleged noncompliance by:</th>
<th>Interpretation and enforcement by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>Human resources, union representative, Head of Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractors</td>
<td>Head of Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Organisations</td>
<td>Head of Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management, Chief Information Officer, Partner Organisation Relationship Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors or guests</td>
<td>To be determined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A suspected breach of this policy, suspected or actual is subject to the organisation’s disciplinary procedures and civil or criminal law as appropriate.

If you have a responsibility under this policy that you do not understand, you should seek advice from the Head of Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management.

3.2 Policy governance
Table 2 below identifies the roles within MMO that are accountable and responsible for this policy. Additionally, it identifies individuals that must be informed or consulted about this policy.

The following definitions apply:

- **Responsible**: those responsible for developing and implementing this policy
- **Accountable**: individuals that have ultimate responsibility and authority for the policy
- **Consulted**: groups or individuals that must be involved during the policy review and before it is published
- **Informed**: groups or individuals that must be informed about the policy after its publication or after it has been amended

Table 2: Policy governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible</th>
<th>Head of Evidence, Data and Knowledge Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountable</td>
<td>Director of Marine Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulted</td>
<td>Executive Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed</td>
<td>All MMO staff, contractors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Review and revision
This policy will be revised as it is appropriate and individuals responsible for the maintenance of this policy must review and update the policy as appropriate in the following instances:

- change of government
- the introduction or amendment of legislation that impacts this policy
- organisational restructure
- changes in the way MMO operates

3.4 Glossary

- **Asset**: An asset is something that has value to the business.
- **Bathymetry**: The study of underwater depth of lake or ocean floors.
- **ICT**: Information Communication Technology
- **Information asset owner**: Responsible to ensure that the integrity of the evidence stored in their information asset is kept up to date, accurate and in accordance with any specific standards appropriate for the subject domain.
- **MEDIN**: Marine Environmental Data and Information Network ([www.oceannet.org](http://www.oceannet.org)).
- **Quality assurance**: This is about assuring the quality of the evidence that the MMO uses in its decision-making processes.