

Copies of the Guidelines can be purchased from the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources. Contact details are given below.

DEPARTMENT OF THE MARINE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Department of the Marine and Natural Resources
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Department of the Marine and Natural Resources (West)
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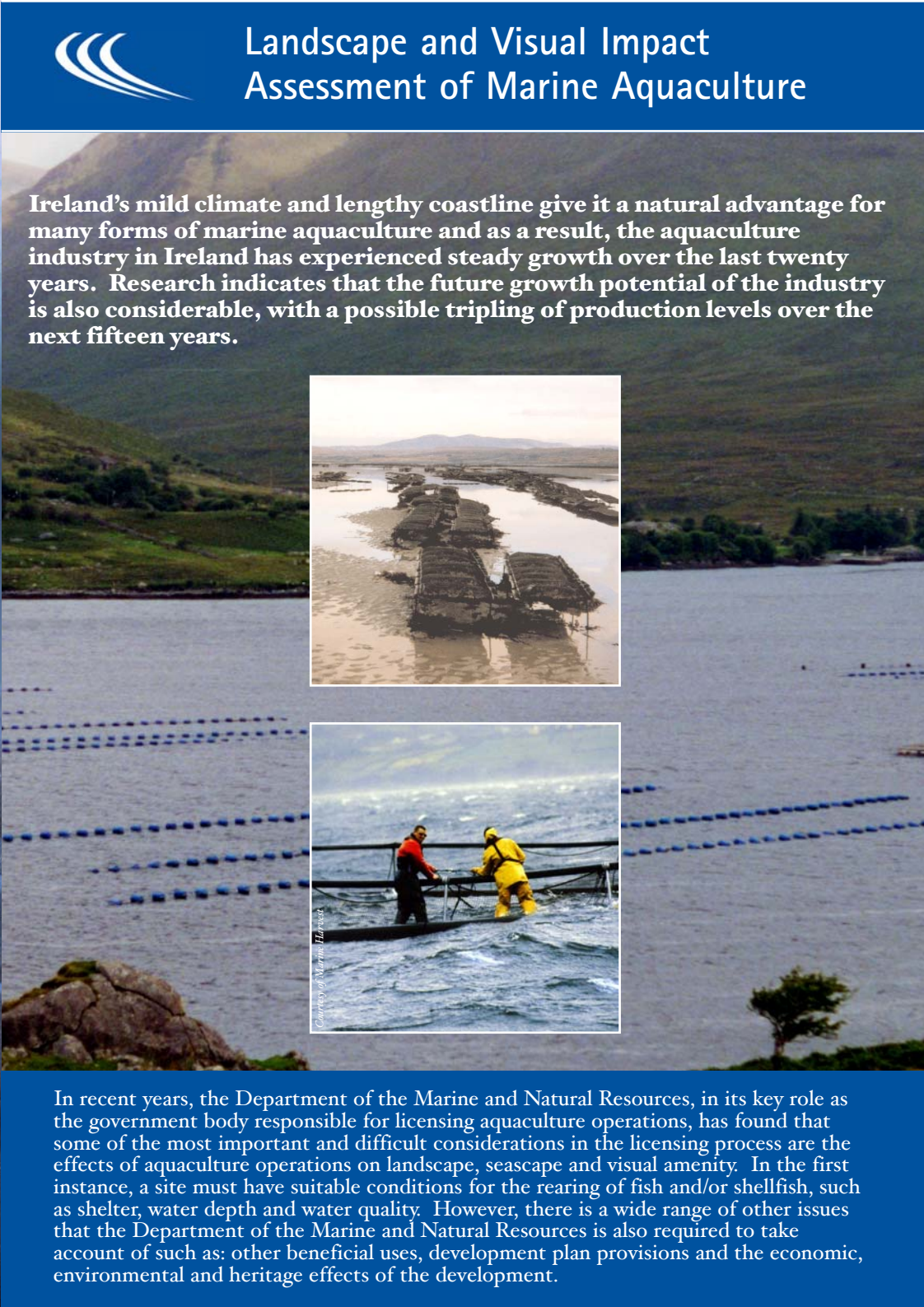
Marine Survey Office

Department of the Marine and Natural Resources
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Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of Marine Aquaculture

Ireland's mild climate and lengthy coastline give it a natural advantage for many forms of marine aquaculture and as a result, the aquaculture industry in Ireland has experienced steady growth over the last twenty years. Research indicates that the future growth potential of the industry is also considerable, with a possible tripling of production levels over the next fifteen years.



In recent years, the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources, in its key role as the government body responsible for licensing aquaculture operations, has found that some of the most important and difficult considerations in the licensing process are the effects of aquaculture operations on landscape, seascape and visual amenity. In the first instance, a site must have suitable conditions for the rearing of fish and/or shellfish, such as shelter, water depth and water quality. However, there is a wide range of other issues that the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources is also required to take account of such as: other beneficial uses, development plan provisions and the economic, environmental and heritage effects of the development.



Aquaculture developments should respect the character and diversity of their landscape setting and help to sustain the qualities which lend a distinctive sense of place to Ireland's coastal landscapes. Aquaculture, as with all other activities in the coastal area, must be developed in harmony with other uses. In addition to its importance to the aquaculture industry, the Irish coastline's landscape and seascapes are recognised as part of the national heritage. They are a valuable resource that contributes to the quality of life of the Irish people and an important economic asset, for example to the tourism industry.

In August 2000, Environmental Resources Management (ERM) and ERA-Maptec Ltd were commissioned by the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources to develop guidelines for the assessment of the landscape and visual impacts of marine aquaculture operations. The specific objective of these *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of Marine Aquaculture* is to offer advice on how to assess and deal with the landscape and visual impacts of marine aquaculture developments.



Mussel rafts & longlines



Harvesting mussels



Scallop farm

Who are the Guidelines for?

The Guidelines are intended for use by a whole range of organisations and individuals:

- **The Department of the Marine and Natural Resources** in appraising new aquaculture licence applications and in reviewing existing licences;
- **Aquaculture developers and operators** when planning the development of new sites or expanding existing sites;
- **Other government departments, agencies and local authorities** in responding to consultations on aquaculture licence applications;
- **Amenity societies, community groups, local residents and businesses** in consultations with fish farm developers and operators;
- **The Aquaculture Licences Appeals Board**, which determines appeals against Ministerial decisions to grant or to refuse to grant aquaculture licences.

What do the Guidelines Contain?

The Guidelines contain the following information:

- **Contextual Information.** An overview of trends in the aquaculture industry in Ireland, key landscape and visual issues that are of concern, and the policy and regulatory context within which the industry operates.
- **Principles for Scheme Planning and Preparation.** Advice that encourage applicants for marine aquaculture licences to identify potential landscape and visual issues at an early stage.
- **Technical Advice on Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.** Advice on how to undertake a landscape and visual impact assessment.
- **Good Practice Principles for Siting, Layout, Design and Management of Aquaculture.** Practical ideas to help the operators of aquaculture installations integrate their developments into the landscape and minimise visual intrusion



Salmon farm



Round salmon cages



Oyster trestles

Clearly, landscape and visual issues are only one factor in the decision-making process for new aquaculture applications. However, the preparation of landscape and visual information by applicants for marine aquaculture licences, in line with the methods in the *Guidelines*, will ensure that landscape and visual issues can be considered systematically alongside all the other issues.

The level of information required by the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources by each applicant for an aquaculture licence will depend on the nature and scale of the aquaculture installation and the landscape and visual environment of the area in which it will be located. Separate leaflets have been produced for the salmon industry and the shellfish industry to provide more guidance on the type and level of information likely to be required by the Department.