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Marine Participation Review

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Introduction and Project Overview

Dr Pamela Buchan and Aisling Lannin



**The right to participate in the
transformation of the human-
ocean relationship for sustainability**

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MMO1473 – A systematic review of the research evidence base on **participation** in aspects of marine management in England

Late October 2025 – March 2026

Best available evidence base

Offshore wind case study

Whole of life – marine planning, seabed leasing, consenting, offshore and onshore construction and operation, community benefit, decommissioning

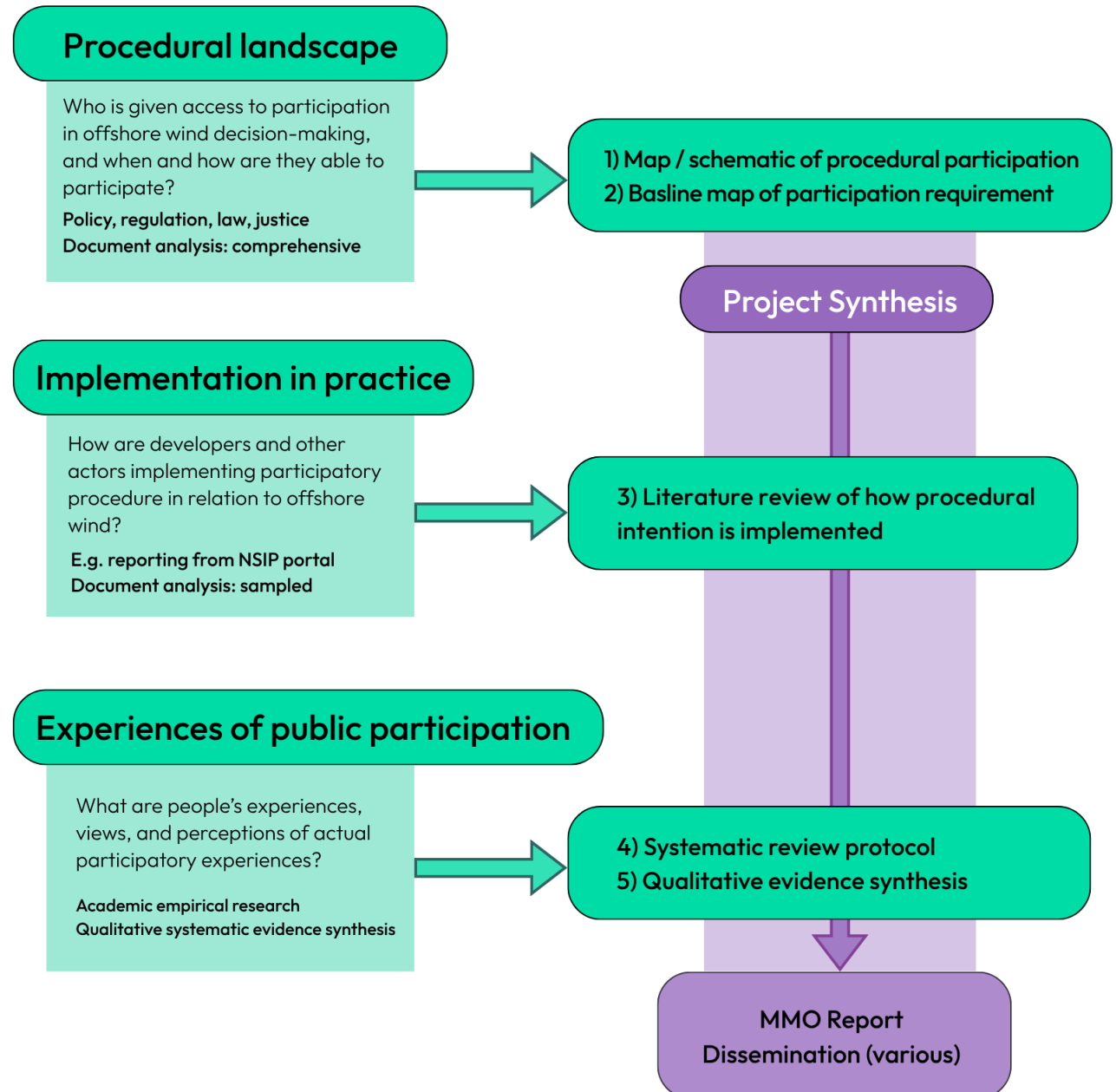
Stakeholder group



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Procedural review

- Desk-based document review
- Legislation, regulation, statutory and formal guidance
- Since 2011

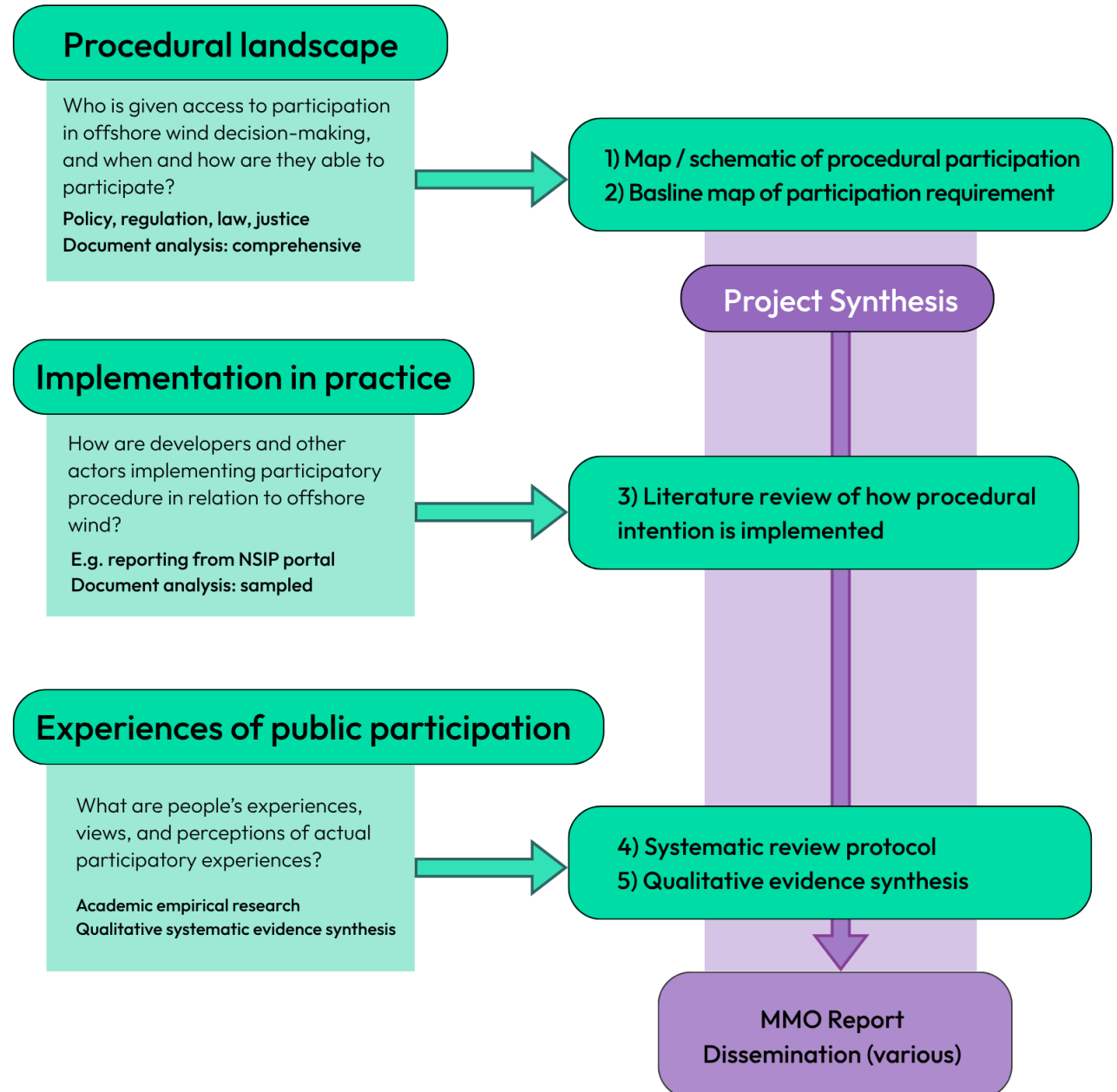


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Implementation review

- Desk-based document review
- Four case studies
 - Norfolk Vanguard
 - Hornsea Project 2
 - Navitus Bay
 - White Cross
- Multiple stages
 - Marine planning
 - Seabed leasing
 - Pre-application
 - Consenting (NSIP, non-NSIP)
 - Post-consent (judicial review, community benefit)

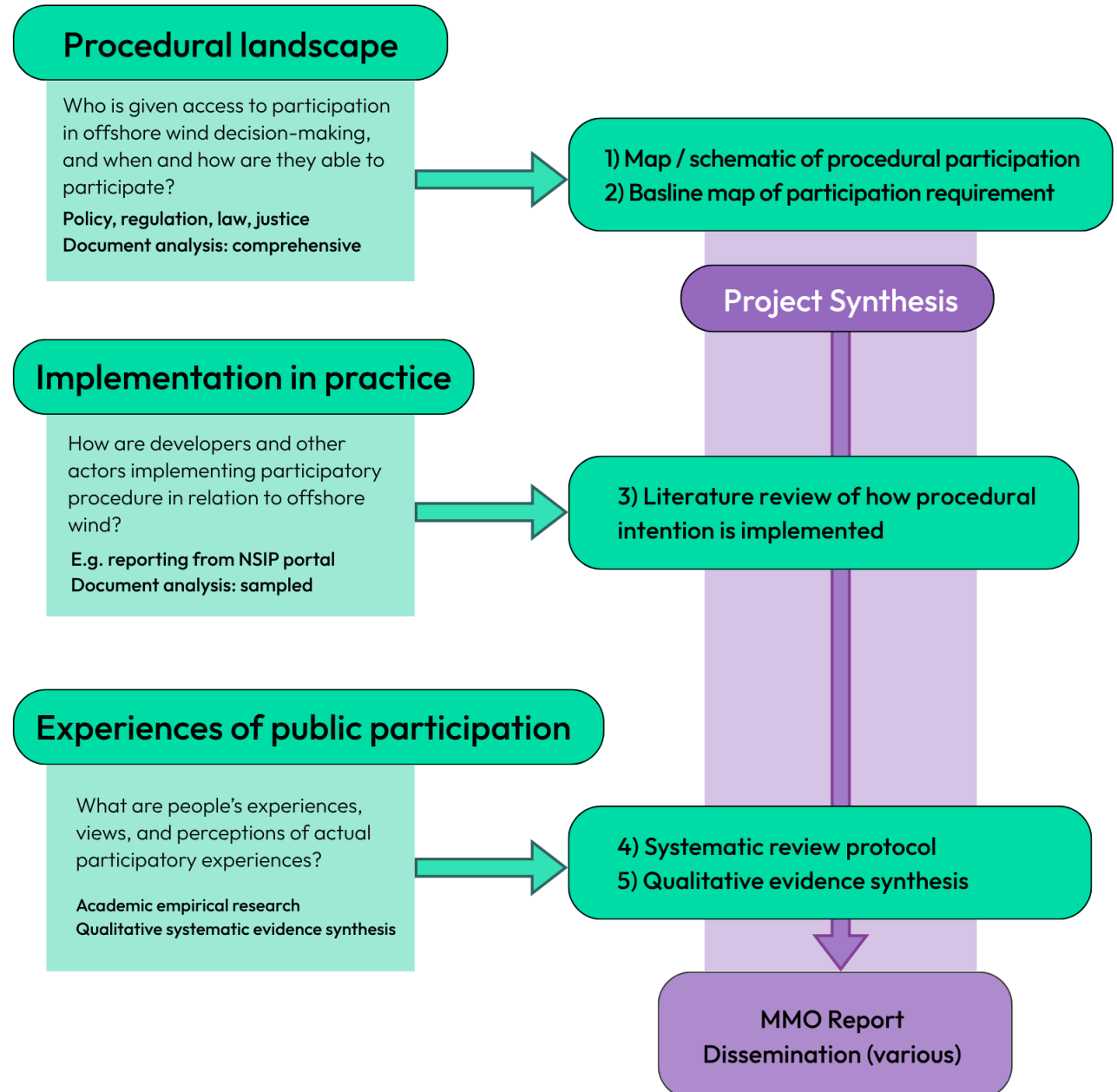
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Systematic review of participation experiences

- Systematic review (ROSES standard, Collaboration for Environmental Evidence guidelines)
- Qualitative evidence synthesis
- Protocol pre-published
- 16 eligible articles
 - Since 2011
 - Offshore wind in England
 - Non-decision-making participants
 - Actual real-world participation

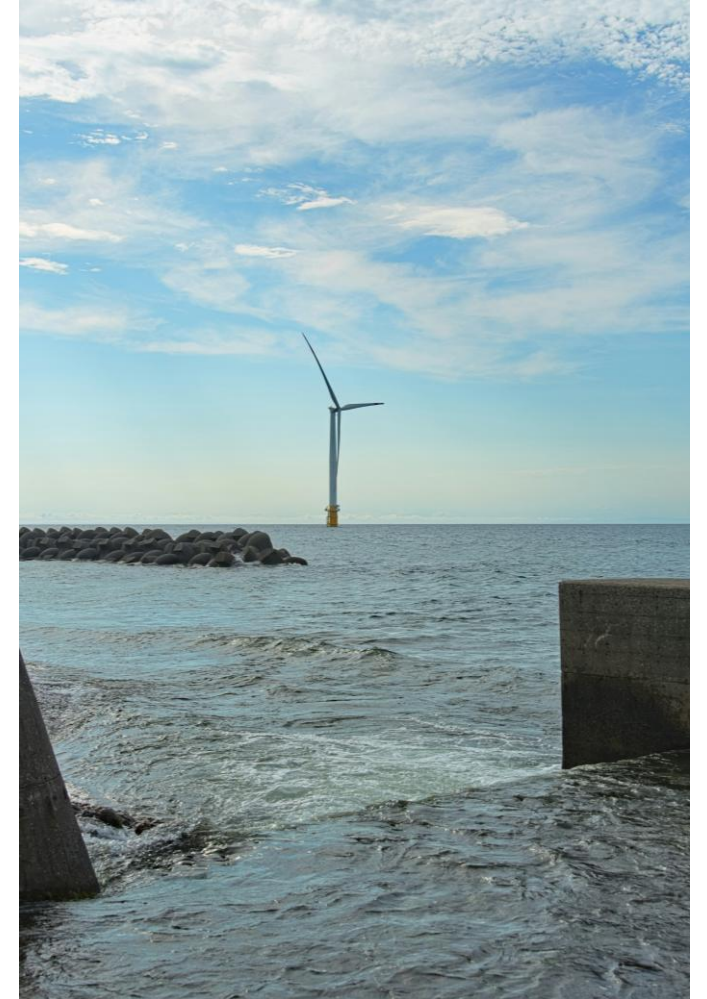
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- **Part A: Project Report** Integrates the findings and reflections from across the whole project.
- **Part B: Procedural Review** Presents the findings of the document analysis of the legislation, regulation, and guidance that governs procedural participation in decision-making.
- **Part C: Implementation Review** Presents the findings of four offshore wind case studies to examine how policy is implemented in practice by developers and authorities.
- **Part D: Technical Annex** Provides a comprehensive description of the methods applied across the whole project.
- **Systematic Review Protocol** *How do people experience taking part in offshore wind decision-making in England? A qualitative systematic review protocol: a Systematic Review Protocol.* Published in Proceed*.
- **Systematic Review Publication** *How do people experience taking part in offshore wind decision-making in England? A Qualitative Systematic Review.* Will be submitted to Environmental Evidence. Sets out the full systematic review methods as applied, together with the complete qualitative evidence synthesis that underpins the thematic findings presented in this report.

*Buchan PM, Egedusevic M, 2026. doi:10.57808/PROCEED.2026.2

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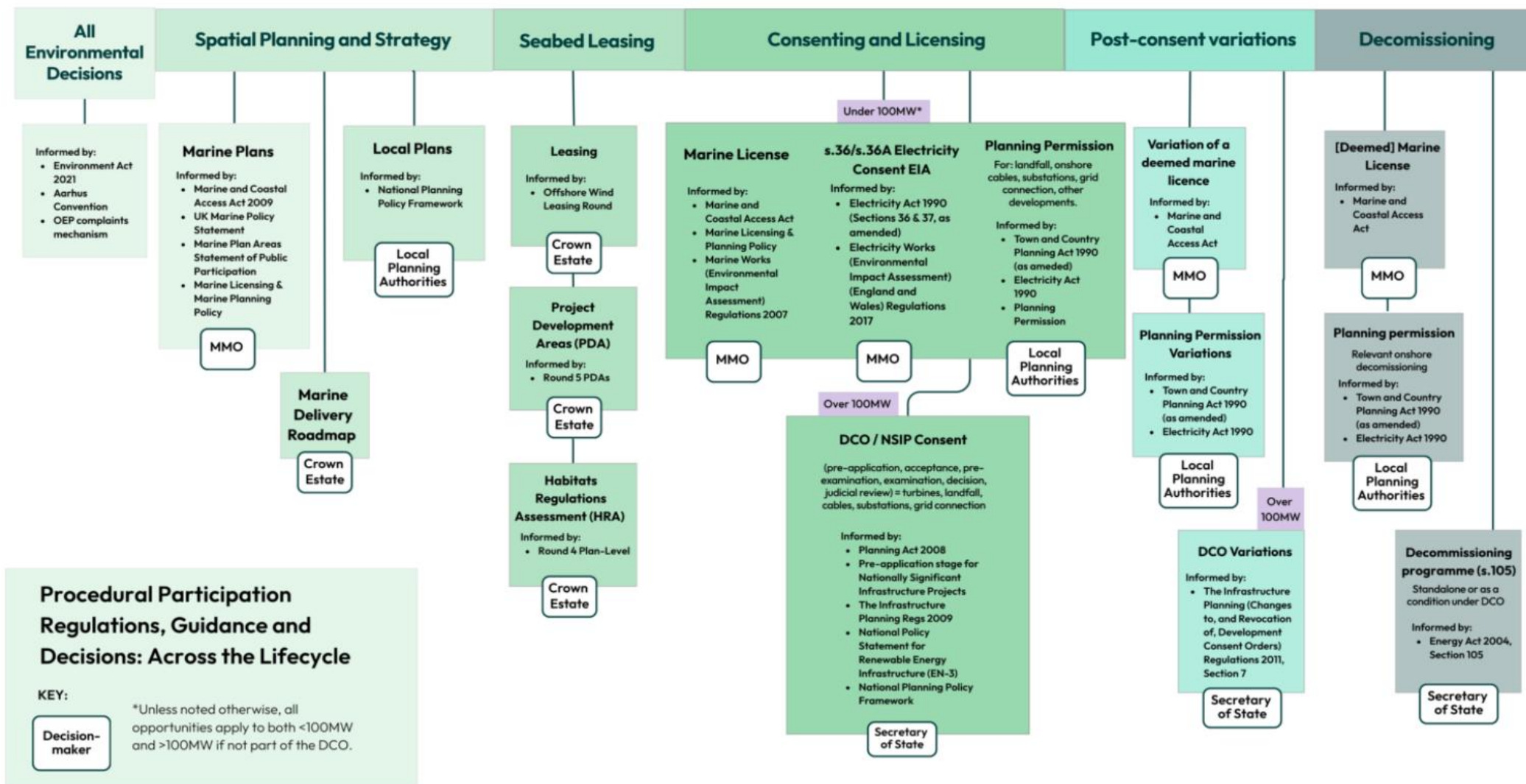
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Participatory Procedure

Dr Chioma Udeozor

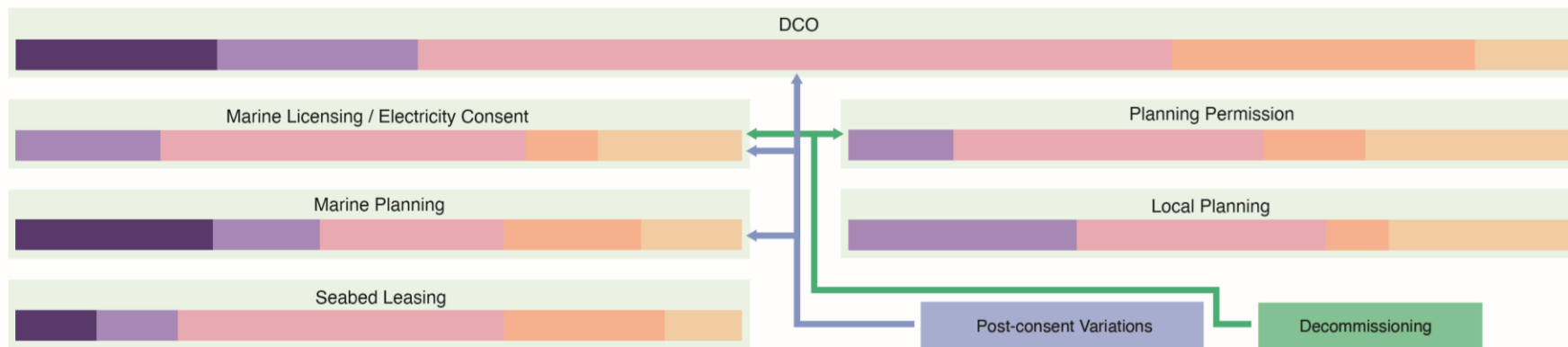


Legislation and regulation governing participatory requirements for offshore wind

Stakeholder Recognition



Participation
of different
stakeholder
groups at
each stage of
decision-
making





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Marine Planning

Dr Martina Egedusevic

Marine Participation Review

- **Marine plans have legal force**

- Prepared by MMO under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and guided by UK Marine Policy Statement (2011)
- Once adopted, they must be considered in decisions on: DCOs and Marine licences.

- **Marine plans shape every stage of offshore wind development**

They provide:

- Spatial guidance
- Policy direction
- A framework for regulators, developers, and stakeholders

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- Research and implementation evidence focused on East Marine Plan development
- Participatory approach to develop Statement of Public Participation
- Research evidence suggests:
 - Stage that most clearly recognises distinct stakeholder groups
 - May not reach non-NGO communities of place effectively
 - More recognition of place-based marine businesses than terrestrial procedures
- New approach allows flexibility and iteration in methods
- Uses and develops place-based networks and relationships
- Perceptions of top-down final decision overriding participatory power and co-design (political priorities)

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- No research evidence about participation in leasing
- No coastal community engagement, limited public responses in consultation (Round 3)
 - Leasing participation limited to regulatory, navigational, fisheries, developers, environmental
- Criticised for not considering onshore impacts
- New opportunities to increase recognition and representation of coastal communities
 - Round 5 introduced social value plans, including plan for community engagement
 - New energy strategies will increase connection across the coastline e.g., with NESO
 - Marine Delivery Routemap could involve communities in social evidence generation and integration

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- Research evidence about participation limited to aggregates
- White Cross case study – split consenting
 - 20 non-statutory responses across three consultations
 - Criticism of separate onshore and offshore processes
- Research identified
 - Highly technical process
 - Technical and scientific evidence more influential than place-based knowledge
 - Community concern over developer non-compliance with conditions

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- Local communities and onshore impacts have not been recognised enough in early decisions (leasing)
- Technical bias in stakeholder recognition and evidence risks more conflict in downstream decisions
- Marine Plans newer than many existing offshore wind decisions
- NSIP process has higher level of decision-making, disempowering marine plan development participants – despite requirement to recognise Marine Plans

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NSIP and non-NSIP Consenting

Dr Jodie West and Isabel Brown



- Almost all offshore wind projects within the study period have been NSIPs
- An advantage of the NSIP route is that it considers all the infrastructure together, bridging the land-sea divide
- However, evidence showed that earlier decisions on offshore wind siting limit the influence participants can have at the pre-application stage
- DCO process is highly structured with distinct stages
- Much responsibility for public consultation lies with the developer in the pre-application stage
- Statutory requirements are not extensive at the pre-application stage but are supported by formal guidance
- Developer has power over the degree to which participation can influence the project design

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NSIPs- Pre-application



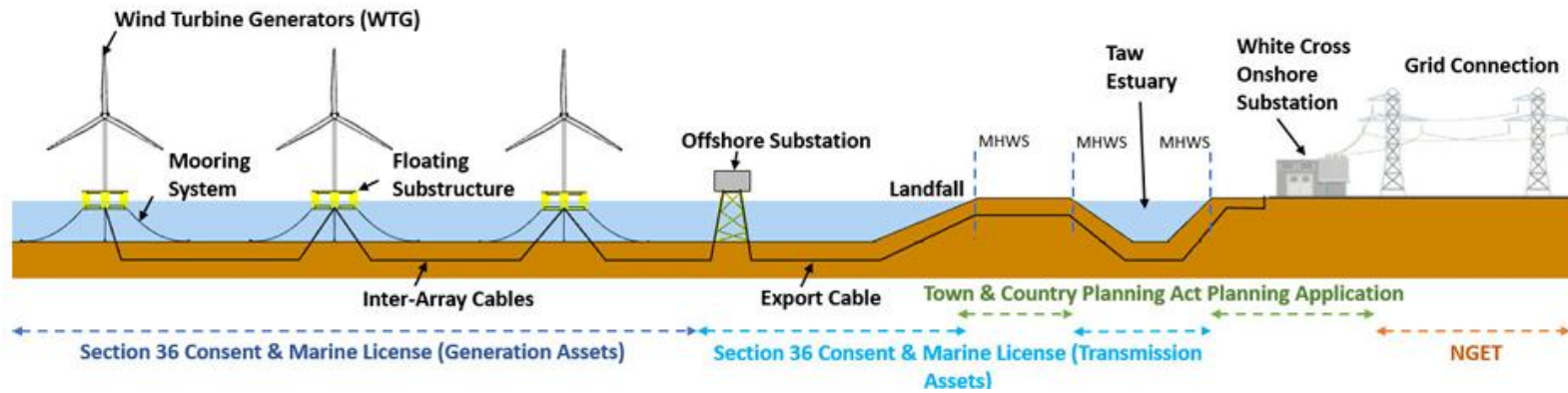
- Implementation review demonstrated that developer led pre-application participation can appear thorough
- Multiple methods and phases of engagement and actively targeting harder to reach groups
- However, case studies and evidence synthesis showed that developer led participation was at the heart of participant's low trust in the NSIP process
- Local communities and civil society groups who had engaged in the process strongly distrusted the developer:
- Felt that evidence was selective or manipulated
- Felt opportunities to participate were not fair or equally offered to all
- Felt their contributions were sometimes ignored or omitted
- Perceptions that the developer could be dishonest about plans

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- Perception that evidence was incomplete or inaccurate
- High evidential bar, privileging expert opinion over local or lay knowledge
- Strict bounds to which parts of project and what evidence was open to examination
- Lead to frustrated local communities who felt unable to influence parts of the decision which mattered the most to them
- Local communities and businesses also found the examination process to be intimidating due to the formality and layout of hearings
- Being an audience to the process rather than participants
- Exacerbated distrust in the process
- Lead to feelings that participation was tokenistic
- Greatest influence related to mitigation and compensation
- Judicial review found to be costly and limited
- **Core project finding is that engagement is not early enough to influence crucial decisions that later limit the potential to shape project design. The general perception among communities of place is that participation was more often than not insufficiently meaningful**

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Offshore Consents (MMO)

- Marine Licence
- Section 36 Consent

Onshore

- Town and Country Planning Act

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Participation Experience

- The non NSIP route was not included in the systematic review
- *However-*
- Perception that evidence was incomplete or inaccurate
- Engagement was procedural
- Core project finding is that engagement is not early enough to influence crucial decisions that later limit the potential to shape project design. The general perception among communities of place is that participation was more often than not insufficiently meaningful



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Evidence Base, Gaps and Recommendations

Dr Pamela Buchan

- There has been insufficient public participation and consideration of onshore impacts during past seabed leasing decision-making processes.
- Marine planning is proactively engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, but there remains uncertainty about how far that engagement reaches lay publics directly.
- There are perceptions that political priorities limit the influence of participation on marine plan development, and plan reach is itself limited for influencing NSIPs.
- Participatory power is limited in non-NSIP projects by parallel decision processes for offshore and onshore project elements.
- Developer-owned participation opportunities are uneven and carry issues of trust and perceptions of predetermined decisions.
- Across the decision-making processes examined, technical and statutory evidence tends to carry greater weight than local place-based knowledge, limiting how far communities of place can influence outcomes.
- Each decision along the way narrows the options for influencing project design at the next stage, reducing how meaningful participation feels.
- Post-decision participation and participation in community benefit design are limited, fragmented, and largely non-statutory, representing a clear area where participation could be improved.
- Communities of place feel the least heard but the most responsible for the integrity of their local area.

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Recognition of affected people needs strengthening and their inclusion to happen earlier

- Is the current understanding of what a stakeholder is fit for purpose for all affected groups, especially coastal communities, civil society, less formal publics, and small-scale, place-based marine businesses including fishing?
- Can potentially affected people be more meaningfully included in earlier stages of decision-making?
- Are developers doing all they can to identify and meaningfully engage with potentially affected communities?
- How can the MMO better reach place-based communities and carry their perspectives into other processes when acting as a consultee?

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Meaningful and legitimate participation recognises different kinds of evidence and knowledge

- How can local and technical knowledge be better integrated in all stages of decision-making?
- Can current processes be more transparent about how different kinds of evidence are weighed and used in decisions?
- To what extent can developer-led engagement achieve legitimacy while developers retain control over its timing, format, and scope?

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Participation should not be limited to consent

- How can better accountability, improved visibility of compliance, and community confidence post-consenting be promoted?
- Can participation be used earlier and more effectively to improve project design, long-term accountability, and community benefit outcomes?

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The land-sea interface remains unresolved

- What kind of participatory design is needed if neither the split route nor the DCO is functioning well from the public perspective?
- What can be transferred from marine planning participatory methods into licensing, monitoring, evidencing, and wider marine governance?

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The evidence base itself needs strengthening

- Research dominated by
 - Perceptions and views of offshore wind in general or hypothetical sites
 - Academic frameworks / guidance for good participation
- Very limited evidence base for actual experiences across all stages
- Key research and practice evidence needs:
 - Participation experiences in **seabed leasing**
 - Participation experiences in the **split route**, including marine licensing and planning permission for offshore wind, both independently and together within a single project
 - Participation experiences **after consent**, including decommissioning
 - The **reach of marine planning** to lay, place-based publics
 - Participation in the design and co-design of offshore wind **community benefit schemes**
 - Monitoring and evaluation of **actual socio-economic and distributive outcomes**

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Thank you

Thank you to the MMO for funding and supporting this project. Thank you to the stakeholder group members for their enthusiasm, commitment, and contributions.

Please contact pb381@exeter.ac.uk to discuss the project.