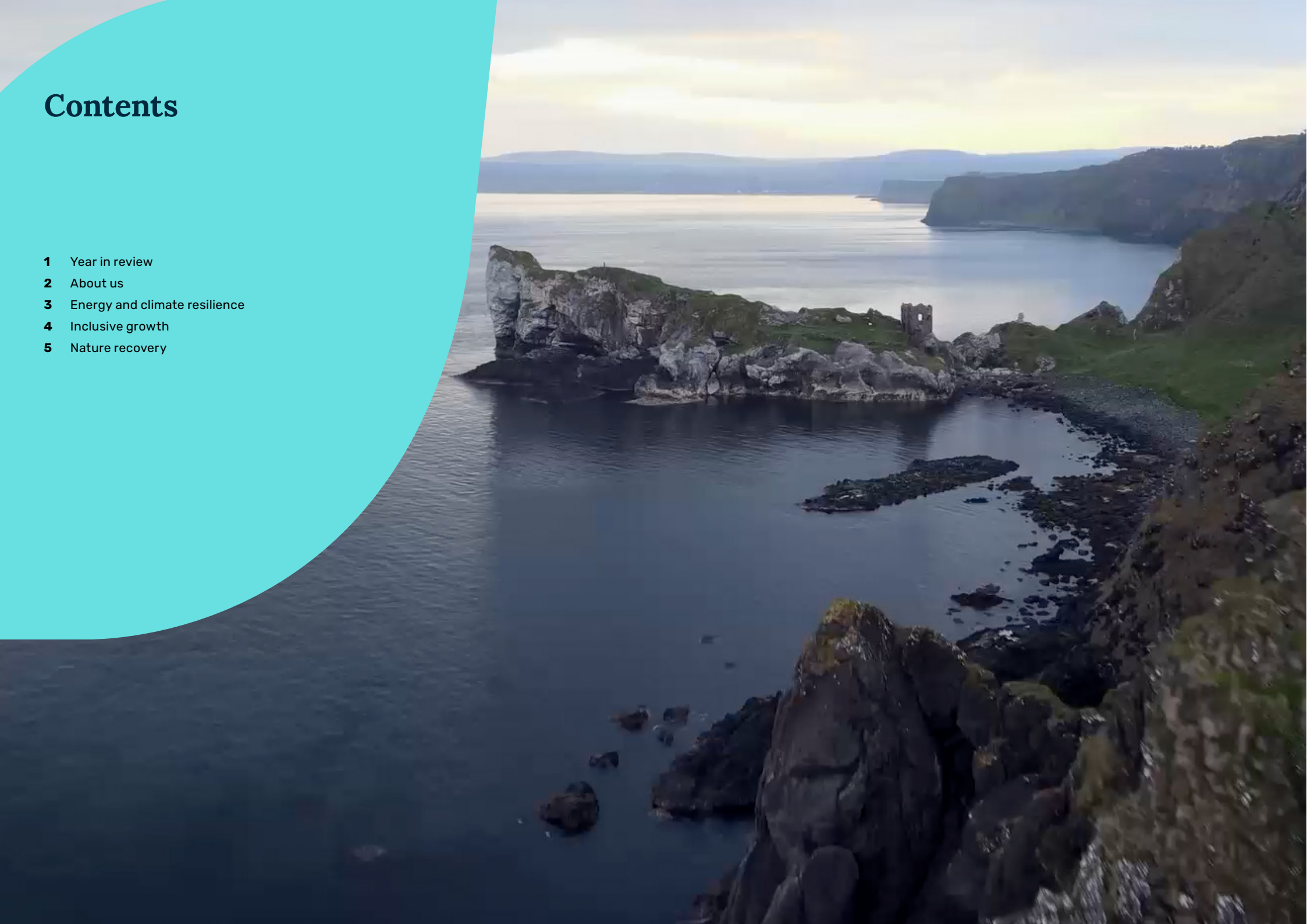


Northern Ireland Review 2025/26



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Year in review



“ We see a significant opportunity to contribute to a more resilient and prosperous future for Northern Ireland.”

Northern Ireland has significant strengths: a rich natural environment, a highly skilled workforce, strong industrial capability and an increasingly clear ambition from the Executive to build energy security and climate resilience.

The Crown Estate’s role is to work in partnership with others to help unlock that potential. As well as generating a profit that we return to the UK government for public spending, we are focused on how the land, property and seabed space we manage can support a home-grown energy supply, nature recovery, economic growth and long-term prosperity.

This year, we have continued to work closely with key stakeholders to advance the Northern Ireland Executive’s offshore wind ambitions. As well as attending the Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (OREAP) steering group alongside government departments and regulators, we are engaging with industry to discuss the opportunities offshore wind can bring, including through an onshore supply chain. While the wider market environment continues to present challenges and there remains considerable work ahead, we are encouraged by the commitment, collaboration and momentum we have seen across the sector.

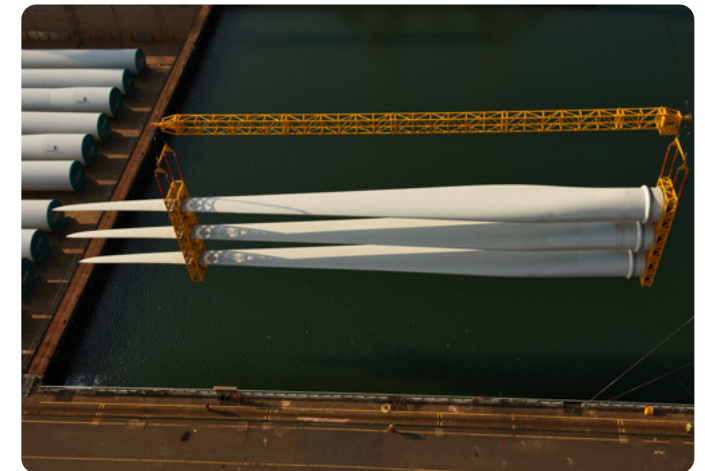
Alongside this, we have continued working to strengthen our understanding of how we can create broader value. During the year, we completed our first acquisition in Northern Ireland for many years with the purchase of the Dunnyneill Islands in Strangford Lough (see page 5). This is an exciting step forward for our ambitions to do more to support nature recovery.

We have also engaged with coastal local authorities and other stakeholders to better understand how our leasing arrangements can support local communities and nature. These conversations will help to shape future approaches to managing our coastal assets and relationships.

Following the passing of the Crown Estate Act 2025, our own governance is evolving, with new Commissioners being appointed to our Board to report on conditions in Northern Ireland, Wales and England. An open and competitive public appointments process will begin later this year to find a new Board Commissioner with a specific responsibility to advise on conditions in Northern Ireland. In due course, we look forward to welcoming a candidate who can ensure a Northern Irish perspective continues to be reflected in our decision-making.

The examples in this review demonstrate how we are collaborating with others to create lasting value over the long term. While many of the opportunities will take time to realise, by bringing together longstanding industry expertise, evidence and investment, we see a significant opportunity to contribute to a more resilient and prosperous future for Northern Ireland.

Dan Labbad
Chief Executive



About us

Who we are

The Crown Estate is an independent business that owns and manages land and the seabed on behalf of the nation, working to create financial, social and environmental benefits over time.

We are responsible for managing Northern Ireland's seabed out to 12 nautical miles, with interests including pipelines, telecommunications and power cables. We also manage the rights to the resources on the continental shelf, including offshore renewable energy projects, and to deposits of gold and silver.

We steward around 65% of the foreshore and riverbed, supporting the aquaculture industry – such as oyster, mussel, seaweed and kelp farming – alongside other coastal interests, including commercial ports, recreational harbours and marinas.

While we have a long history, the organisation that exists today was founded by an Act of Parliament in 1961 to operate independently and commercially to grow the value of our portfolio for future generations. The Crown Estate Act 2025 added to this legislation, giving us new borrowing and investment powers and making provision for the appointment of new Board Commissioners to provide advice relating to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A public appointments process will begin later this year to recruit for the role of the Commissioner with special responsibility for reporting on conditions in Northern Ireland.

Our strategy

Enable the UK's transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and energy-secure future

Energy and climate resilience



Protect, restore and connect people with nature, across land, cities and sea

Nature recovery



Responsibly generate financial returns and value for people in the UK

Responsible financial returns

Inclusive growth



Contribute to inclusive growth that unlocks potential and enables communities to thrive through improved access to new homes, jobs and infrastructure

THE CROWN ESTATE

Energy and climate resilience

Through our stewardship of the seabed around Northern Ireland, England and Wales, we aim to create the most attractive and sustainable marine economy in the world.

This means working with our customers and partners to boost energy security and decarbonisation, restore marine habitats and support vital industries from fishing to technology. It also creates exciting opportunities for economic and social benefits.

Over the past 25 years, The Crown Estate has been instrumental in helping the UK to build a global leadership position in offshore wind, providing a clean and secure national energy supply. This year, we have drawn on that background to continue progressing a pipeline of new projects that will further increase energy security and opportunities, despite global pressures on the sector.

A highlight was the first two Offshore Wind Leasing Round 4 projects entering their leases in January 2026, meaning they have now advanced to construction stage. Located in the Irish Sea, the Mona and Morecambe projects have a combined capacity of 2GW. We have also secured developer agreements to build three floating offshore wind farms in the Celtic Sea, ensuring the UK remains at the forefront of innovation in the sector. To secure progress amid challenges in the global market, we have drawn on our long experience, strong relationships and consistent track record to provide stability, and have invested significantly to de-risk projects for developers.

Advancing OREAP

In Northern Ireland, we have been working hard to support the Northern Ireland Executive's goal to build 1GW of offshore wind capacity from 2030. We are doing this as part of the Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan (OREAP) steering group that meets regularly in Belfast, with good progress made this year. We are also working with key stakeholders –including the Department for the Economy (DfE), the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the electricity System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) and the and Utility Regulator of Northern Ireland (UREGNI) – to align our activities and create opportunities. In addition, we have supported valuable industry events such as the Smart Energy Conference and an offshore wind roundtable hosted by RenewableNI at Stormont.

Supporting new technology

Carbon capture and storage (CCS) has a vital role to play in national decarbonisation efforts and we are supporting our customers to advance pioneering CCS projects in our waters. These include the Morecambe Net Zero Cluster and Eni's Liverpool Bay project, both located in the East Irish Sea. We also co-chair the Offshore Wind and CCUS Co-Location Forum, undertaking research into how we can support both sectors.

Planning ahead

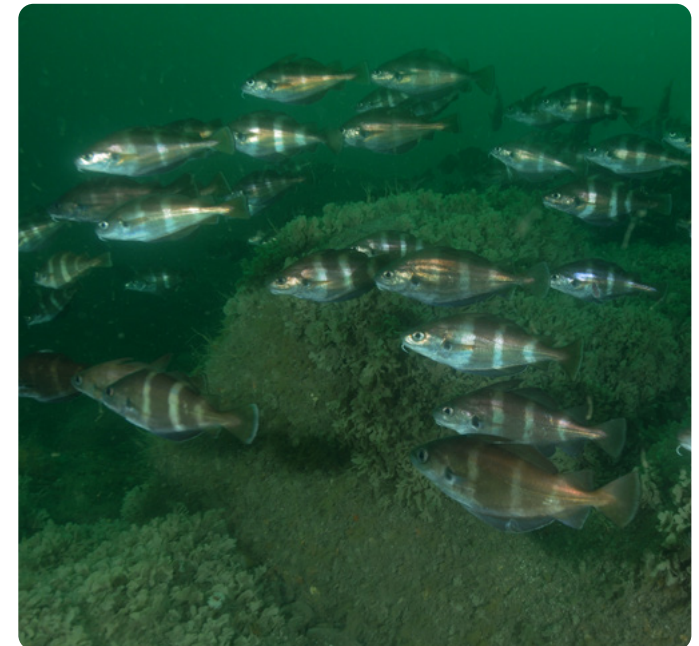
To help us manage increasing and often competing demands on the seabed, including caring for the marine environment, we have developed the Marine Delivery Routemap. This long-term planning tool uses data and evidence to facilitate decision-making by enabling marine users, regulators and stakeholders to understand future uses out to 2050. We have been working with officials in Northern Ireland to understand how the Routemap can add value to their current processes.



“We are proud to be supporting the growth of the offshore wind sector, which can continue to bring substantial benefits to Northern Ireland.”

Will Apps

Offshore Wind Strategy Director



Inclusive growth

Our landholdings in coastal areas give us an opportunity to make a difference to communities and local economies. In line with our social impact principles, we follow a place-based approach that listens to and involves local people, working in partnership to increase opportunity for all.

This year, our Coastal team has consulted leaders from several local authorities in Northern Ireland to ask how we can evolve our regulating leases to deliver greater social, environmental and financial impact. We also visited customers and conservation partners in Belfast Lough, Strangford Lough and around the coast to learn more about their work. We are now using our learnings to develop new agreements that will give leaseholders more freedom to deliver interventions that benefit communities and nature.

Further engagement is planned in the summer of 2026 to support the continued development of our working relationships in coastal areas. In the coming year, we will launch a new Coastal strategy to continue expanding and scaling our impact.

Offshore wind opportunities

Building a national supply chain and skills base for offshore wind will be vital to ensuring continued progress in the sector. It is also creating substantial opportunities for Northern Irish businesses and skills providers, and ports including Belfast Harbour. We have made a long-term commitment to invest up to £400 million in developing supply-chain and infrastructure capacity to support renewables projects, and are working closely with the Northern Ireland Maritime Organisation (NIMO) to understand the areas of greatest opportunity in Northern Ireland.

To date, our Supply Chain Accelerator has invested in 27 early-stage projects, including a new recycling facility being built by Plaswire, a specialist business based in County Armagh that turns wind turbine blades into construction materials.

Projects must relate to ports and port-related infrastructure, and/or align with the opportunities identified in the Industrial Growth Plan we published with partners, which sets out how to triple the UK's offshore wind manufacturing capacity. The Accelerator's third funding round launched in May 2026 and will close in early July.

£400 million

commitment to invest in the UK offshore wind supply chain

27

early-stage projects funded through our Supply Chain Accelerator to date



Nature recovery

As custodians of the seabed, we have a responsibility to protect marine ecosystems and the communities who rely on them.

Stakeholders including Ulster Wildlife and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute helped to shape our Ambition for Nature, which has set specific goals for how we can support nature recovery across our portfolio.

This year, we were proud to publish our Guiding Nature Principles for Marine (see box), which will shape our approach to managing the seabed. As industrial demands on the seabed continue to increase, these principles have been integrated with the Marine Delivery Routemap (see page 3) to ensure that nature is considered early, transparently and systemically in spatial planning and leasing processes. The Routemap not only guides our own approach but encourages our stakeholders to factor nature into their activities, promoting a more joined-up approach to enhance the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems.

We are also investing substantially in data and evidence. In 2025 alone, 243 new surveys were added to the Marine Data Exchange, which gives industry, regulators and researchers open access to environmental and survey data.

DAERA and the DfE both sit on the steering group for our Offshore Wind Evidence and Change (OWEC) programme, which has a total of £50 million funding from The Crown Estate and £12 million in partner contributions to award. To date, we have funded 42 projects that support the delivery of renewable energy while ensuring marine and coastal ecosystems thrive.

We continue to see an increase in the number of activities seeking to restore seagrass, native oysters, saltmarsh and seabirds across the seabed and foreshore. We are collaborating with DAERA to support the restoration and sustainable management of native oysters, and maintaining close collaboration with aquaculture stakeholders and producers.

We are also working with restoration practitioners to explore how our licensing and leasing mechanisms can be used to enable future work, including the scaling-up of ambitions through seascape-scale restoration initiatives.

Improving water quality

Healthy coastal waters are essential for thriving marine ecosystems, coastal communities and tourism – and so we are also working with local and national partners to protect and restore freshwater, marine and coastal systems. This includes supporting Surfers Against Sewage, the national environmental charity campaigning for cleaner seas, to enhance its widely used Safer Seas & Rivers app. We contributed over £100,000 towards upgrades that will expand the app's coverage of pollution alerts and incident reporting, helping people who live, work or spend time on the coast to see real-time water quality information and report pollution incidents.



Our Guiding Nature Principles for Marine

- Unlocking space for nature to thrive
- Protecting vulnerable habitats and species
- Delivering positive outcomes for nature in everything we do
- Promoting sustainable investment in nature

Protecting space for nature

In January, we acquired Dunnyneill Islands in Strangford Lough, our first purchase of land in Northern Ireland for many years. The islands offer an important opportunity for nature and wildlife enhancement. Our new coastal strategy will set out our approach in more detail as we aim to drive nature recovery across the coastal landscapes in our care.

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