



Why early marine planning matters more than ever

With offshore projects facing increasing complexity and pressure, early marine planning is becoming a key factor in reducing risk. Independent insight can help ensure decisions made during development remain workable offshore.



Offshore projects are becoming larger and more complex, while the margin for error continues to narrow. Whether involving offshore wind, subsea cables, port developments or coastal protection, early decisions now carry greater consequences. Tighter programmes, increased environmental scrutiny and continued cost pressure mean assumptions made during planning can quickly become constraints offshore.

A vessel strategy, installation sequence or consenting approach that appears workable during early planning can come under pressure once weather, seabed conditions, marine logistics and regulatory expectations are fully understood.

This is changing how the offshore sector approaches planning and risk. Marine consultancy is one part of that response, but its value depends on advice being practical, independent and introduced early enough to influence decisions. Used effectively, it allows project teams to test assumptions before they become costly problems.

Planning decisions are carrying more risk

Many offshore challenges begin long before vessels are mobilised. A method statement may appear robust on paper, but the real test is whether it remains workable when weather windows close earlier than expected, vessel availability changes, equipment performance varies or seabed conditions complicate operations.

Small decisions made during planning can have significant consequences later. Adjusting an installation sequence before mobilisation may be relatively straightforward. Making the same change once vessels and crews are offshore can cost days, with each offshore day carrying both project and commercial implications.

On one offshore cable project, an independent review identified a sequencing issue before mobilisation. Adjusting the installation programme during planning helped avoid a potential vessel standby period and supported delivery of the planned campaign schedule.

Effective planning therefore needs to go beyond technical compliance. It must consider how the work will be carried out offshore, including vessel spread, weather constraints, marine coordination, logistics, team interfaces and the practical sequence of operations. This is where experienced, independent input can challenge optimistic assumptions and bring operational realities into project planning before commitments become difficult to change.

Risk is easier to manage before it becomes operational

Offshore projects have a way of exposing optimistic assumptions. A short delay in one part of a programme can affect vessel schedules, crew availability, contractor interfaces and, ultimately, safety and cost. Individually, these issues may be manageable. Combined, they can quickly reduce the resilience of a project plan.

Structured risk reviews help identify these pressure points early. Marine assurance, vessel suitability reviews and independent assessments of procedures should not be viewed as administrative exercises. Their purpose is to provide confidence that an operation is fit for purpose, rather than simply confirming that documentation is complete.

This often means asking challenging questions. Is the vessel strategy sufficiently

robust? Has the project allowed for realistic weather downtime? Are operational interfaces clearly defined? Does the schedule account for likely disruption scenarios? The answers may have implications for budget or programme, but addressing these issues before mobilisation is generally less disruptive than responding once a campaign is underway.

In a recent vessel suitability review, operational limitations were identified that could have restricted performance under anticipated weather conditions. Addressing the issue before contract award helped reduce execution risk and avoided potential changes during the offshore campaign.

Efficiency depends on practical offshore judgement

Operational efficiency is often determined by decisions that appear minor at the planning stage. The order of operations, vessel suitability, equipment mobilisation or a small change to logistics can influence the performance of a long offshore campaign.

These improvements are not always reflected in headline project plans. They often come from experience of how marine operations develop in practice, including interruptions and constraints that may not be captured in the original schedule. Reviewing vessel strategy or installation sequencing before mobilisation can remove unnecessary offshore days. Leaving those discussions until work is underway makes adjustments more difficult and costly.

For one client, reviewing the proposed vessel spread and mobilisation strategy identified opportunities to remove unnecessary vessel interfaces and simplify offshore logistics, resulting in a more efficient and resilient execution plan.

For cable projects, this practical understanding is particularly important. Installation, burial, survey, repair readiness and marine coordination all depend on a realistic view of vessel capability, seabed conditions, weather exposure and operational interfaces. Better early judgement does not remove uncertainty, but it can provide project teams with greater flexibility when conditions change.

Regulation and environmental scrutiny are now central to delivery

Modern offshore projects operate within an increasingly demanding regulatory and environmental landscape. Environmental assessment, permitting, stakeholder engagement and evidence-based decision making are no longer activities that sit separately from delivery. They are central to whether projects can progress effectively.

Projects that underestimate environmental requirements often find that delays and additional work create greater challenges than addressing those considerations



properly from the outset. Clear, well-supported information early in the process helps regulators, stakeholders and project teams understand what is proposed, why it is appropriate and how potential impacts will be managed.

This is another area where practical, independent advice can support decision-making. It helps connect technical feasibility with regulatory expectations, ensuring project plans are not only ambitious but also credible and deliverable.

On a marine infrastructure project, early engagement with regulators and stakeholders helped clarify environmental information requirements before the formal consenting phase, reducing the risk of additional information requests later in the programme.

Good advice must be independent and usable

Consultancy can sometimes be viewed as an additional project cost or layer of process. That concern is understandable. Advice that arrives too late, lacks operational grounding or does not translate into practical decisions can add complexity without improving outcomes.

Effective advice needs to be independent enough to challenge assumptions, practical enough to support project teams and timely enough to influence key decisions. It must recognise commercial pressures while

considering the wider balance between cost, schedule, safety and environmental performance.

That independence can sometimes create difficult conversations. Offshore projects are under pressure to accelerate delivery and reduce costs, and the most practical recommendation is not always the easiest one to accept. However, impartial advice provided early in the process is more valuable than reassurance that later proves misplaced.

People and experience remain key constraints

As offshore renewables and wider marine infrastructure continue to expand, access to experienced people is becoming an increasingly important consideration. Technical knowledge is essential, but so is practical offshore experience. Developing both takes time.

This is a challenge for the wider sector, not only consultancy organisations. Larger and more complex projects require people who understand engineering, marine operations, environmental constraints, vessel capability and the realities of project execution. Retaining and applying that experience will remain important to delivering projects safely and efficiently.

Data, tools and planning systems are becoming increasingly sophisticated, but they

cannot replace practical judgement. The strongest outcomes come when good data, technical expertise, experience and judgement are brought together early enough to influence project decisions.

Conclusion

The offshore sector is entering a period where early decisions matter more than ever. Larger projects, tighter programmes, increased environmental scrutiny and continued budget pressures mean there is less tolerance for assumptions that have not been properly tested.

Marine consultancy is one part of a broader move towards stronger planning, improved assurance and more disciplined decision-making before work begins offshore. When advice is timely, independent and grounded in practical experience, it can help project teams identify challenges before they become expensive to resolve.

As offshore projects become more demanding, the industry will need to place greater emphasis on planning quality and operational judgement. The projects that succeed will not simply be those with the most ambitious plans, but those that make the right decisions early enough for those plans to work in practice.

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