


Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources

Customer Survey 2005

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Executive Summary

Background & Objectives

- The Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources commissioned RA Consulting to assess the standard of service provided to its customers by: (i) evaluating service quality, (ii) measuring divisional compliance with service standards and (iii) establishing a benchmark against which future service delivery improvements could be assessed. The assignment involved the design, development and administration of an extensive survey of over 300 of the Department's customers. In order to inform the survey design and ensure that the research process reflected key issues, RA Consulting first undertook internal interviews with 27 Departmental personnel and facilitated focus group workshops with 30 key customers.
- The survey research exercise considered customer service from a number of perspectives which included: (i) accessibility of personnel, (ii) responsiveness and decision making, (iii) communications and consultation, (iv) understanding and expertise, (v) service delivery and (vi) service delivery improvement. A response rate of just less than 55 per cent was achieved over a three week survey period conducted in June and July 2005.

Research Findings

- In the main, research findings were relatively positive and provide a benchmark against which future service delivery commitments can be established and assessed. Notwithstanding, progress will be required across all areas if standards of customer service excellence are to be established and achieved.

Accessibility

- The research findings suggested that access to Departmental personnel can be described as good with customers indicating that, in general, they were aware of the identity of their contacts and found them to be accessible. Direct dial telephone numbers and e-mail addresses were also made available as required. Respondents pointed to scope for improvement in respect of responsiveness to phone calls, e-mails and other written correspondence, however, it should be emphasised that assessments of performance in these areas were generally positive. As might be expected, perceptions in respect of the performance of different sectors varied and differences can be explained, at least in part, by the nature of the interactions and the numbers of personnel/customers involved.

Responsiveness & Decision Making

- In considering 'responsiveness and decision making' sentiment was largely positive in respect of responses on routine issues, but less so where the Department was required to address what were described as complex, specialist or other issues for which a policy position had not been formulated. Up to a quarter of respondents pointed to a requirement for improvement in these areas. While the Department's ability to provide timely responses can be affected by the necessity to engage in consultation or gather inputs from third parties, a significant minority (between 18 and 29 per cent) indicated that the time taken to arrive at decisions or issue outputs was slower than they would

have expected. Respondents also seemed unsure as to whether Departmental personnel were exercising their decision making authority.

Communications & Consultation

- Views in respect of what might be termed ‘proactive communications’ (i.e. the provision of feedback, updates, etc.) pointed to scope for improvement, though over half of respondents did express satisfaction with the Department’s performance in this area. Consultation arrangements were considered to be effective by over three fifths of respondents but over 10 per cent expressed dissatisfaction and 27 per cent were unsure or failed to offer a considered opinion. Interestingly, despite the existence of an appeals procedure, over 15 per cent indicated that they were unaware of it and 12 per cent suggested that they would not be confident that appeals would be considered impartially.

Knowledge & Expertise

- In view of the Department’s mandate and associated requirement for personnel to develop specialist and technical expertise, we were anxious to determine whether respondents felt that sufficient knowledge and expertise was available within the organisation. The majority of respondents indicated that outputs emanating from the Department were sufficiently comprehensive and over half suggested that personnel were anxious to understand their requirements. Importantly, less than 15 per cent disagreed with the two related statements and a smaller number (12 per cent) suggested that knowledge deficits existed. The significance and potential problems associated with long learning curves must also be considered, however, a relatively modest number (16 per cent) of respondents indicated that new or replacement personnel were slow to gain an appreciation of key issues.

Service Delivery

- On the more manageable aspects of customer service, the Department was considered to provide customers with very high level of satisfaction. In general, customers found personnel to be polite, courteous, professional and helpful. Though in less numbers, respondents also indicated that personnel were organised and committed to helping them achieve their objectives. Almost three fifths also suggested that a sense of teamwork and partnership existed between them and their contact personnel within the Department.

Improvement & Scope for Further Improvement

- Over a quarter (28 per cent) of respondents also indicated that they had noticed customer service improvements over the course of the past 18 months with the largest subcategory (53 per cent) pointing to improvements within the Marine sector. This perhaps reflects the impact associated with the development and publication of service standards, many of which apply to Marine.
- Despite what may generally be described as a relatively positive rating of customer service performance, it should be emphasised that the aggregate results do tend to obscure higher levels of dissatisfaction which are evident when sectoral performance is considered. These figures are highlighted in this report, however, it should be emphasised that the nature of e.g. output requirements, customer interactions and the

work itself, as well as number and nature of transactions, can serve to impact on customers perceptions. Accordingly, in comparing and contrasting satisfaction levels for the different sectors, the nature and context of work undertaken should first be considered.

1. Background & Methodology

- 1.1 The Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources has a particularly broad mandate which incorporates responsibility for (i) communications, (ii) energy, (iii) marine and (iv) natural resources. In accordance with this mandate, the organisation's mission is: 'to promote the sustainable development, management and regulation of the communications, energy, marine and natural resources sectors in support of national economic and social policy objectives'.
- 1.2 The Department's obligations arise in areas ranging from television broadcasting to maritime transport, and from renewable energy to mineral exploration. A number of State bodies also fall under the aegis of the Department; these include such organisations as the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, the Central and Regional Fisheries Boards, the Commission for Energy Regulation and the Marine Institute.
- 1.3 The organisation's customer base reflects the diversity of its mandate and statutory responsibilities. Customers include members of the Oireachtas, other public servants and members of the public, as well as representatives of the various organisations and bodies whose interests merge, in one way or another, with those of the Department.
- 1.4 The Department is committed to continuously improving service quality and has identified a number of related objectives in its Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan. Customer service obligations also arise under *Sustaining Progress* and the Quality Customer Service (QCS) initiative which stipulates that the Department is required to evaluate the extent to which it has been successful in meeting its customer service commitments.
- 1.5 Qualified consultancies were invited to tender and requested to identify how they would support the Department by designing, developing and administering its 'Customer Survey 2005'. RA Consulting was selected to assist the Department in undertaking an extensive process of consultation which included interviews with internal employees, focus group workshops and the development and administration of a survey of 319 customers.
- 1.6 The assignment terms of reference stipulated that the survey research results and associated report should:
 - (i) Establish a customer satisfaction rating for the Department
 - (ii) Provide a measure of divisional compliance with service standards, and
 - (iii) Offer a benchmark against which future standards of service delivery can be assessed.
- 1.7 The terms of reference also emphasised a necessity for the research report to provide important information regarding customer perceptions and whether they believe that the Department is meeting its commitments/their expectations. Similarly, the analysis was required to assess whether the Department's customer service efforts are adequate, realistic and appropriately focused while identifying recommendations for change and a refocusing of effort as required.

Research Methodology

- 1.8 The research methodology was designed around a three stage process which included (i) interviews with internal personnel within the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, (ii) focus group workshops with external customers and (iii) the design, development and administration of a survey research questionnaire among a population sample of 319 customers.
- 1.9 The internal interview and external focus group workshop stages were designed to ensure that the consultants gained an appreciation of the nature of interaction and services provided to customers as well as the nature of customer service issues arising. RA Consulting was anxious to ensure that the survey research questionnaire was comprehensive and provided for a meaningful review of customer service, i.e. as opposed to a high-level assessment of satisfaction. In addition, we were also anxious to ensure that the methodology reflected the requirement for consultation as outlined in the QCS initiative.
- 1.10 RA Consulting met with a total of 27 personnel representing the Department's different sectors as part of the internal interview process. In the main, such interviews were conducted on a group or workshop basis and were designed to identify the nature of customer service issues arising. Specifically, the interviews covered issues relating to customer profiling, the nature of services provided, customer issues arising, extent and frequency of interaction as well as scope for customer service improvements.
- 1.11 Four focus group workshops took place with a total of 30 of the Department's customers. Focus groups were organised along sectoral lines (covering Communications, Energy, Marine and Natural Resources) and between 5 and 11 customers participated in each of the related workshops. Agendas were prepared and circulated to invitees for their advanced consideration and covered specific issues such as communications, accessibility and responsiveness, as well as more general issues including service delivery strengths, weaknesses and scope for improvements.
- 1.12 The survey research questionnaire was designed and developed on the basis of background research, interview and focus group findings. A number of themes were integrated into the questionnaire (*cf.* appendix A) and related to e.g. the accessibility of Departmental personnel, responsiveness and decision making, communications and consultation, understanding and expertise, service delivery, etc.
- 1.13 The survey population numbered 319 and included all those who were considered to be 'regular customers' of the Department, i.e. those who would be in position to provide an informed view of customer service, related issues and scope for improvement. The questionnaire was administered as a web-based survey to 304 members of the population sample and as a postal survey to the remaining 15¹. Respondents therefore received an e-mail with a URL link to the survey website or a hard copy (postal) questionnaire with a reply paid envelope.
- 1.14 The overall response rate was just under 60 per cent (59.9 per cent) with 61.5 per cent achieved in respect of the web based survey and 28.5 per cent achieved in respect of the

¹ These were customers for whom the Department did not have e-mail addresses.

postal survey. The valid response rate was slightly lower (overall 54.8 per cent or 56.25 per cent for the web-based survey). This arose as some members of the population sample accessed and viewed the survey questionnaire but failed to record any responses.

- 1.15 Invitations to participate in the survey research process were issued on June 30th, 2005 and respondents were provided with a 3 week response period. Reminders were also issued to those who had not completed the web based questionnaire on day 7 and 18 of the response period.
- 1.16 Research results were coded and an analysis of the findings was undertaken. These results and findings are outlined in sections 4 to 9 of this report while interview and focus group research findings are presented in sections 2 and 3 respectively.

2. Internal Interviews

- 2.1 As indicated, internal interviews focused on issues such as e.g. the nature of customer interactions and service provided, strengths and weaknesses in the provision of services as well as obstacles or challenges to service delivery excellence.
- 2.2 A number of key customer service issues were highlighted as part of the internal interview process and may be categorised under the following broad headings:
- Responsiveness and timeliness
 - Quality of outputs and policy decisions
 - Communications and consultation
 - Accessibility of personnel
 - Courtesy, and
 - Continuity
- 2.3 **Responsiveness/Timeliness:** Different views were offered in respect of the Department's performance as it related to responsiveness and the timeliness of service provision or outputs. The emergent view suggested that responsiveness and timeliness was project or task specific with high levels of responsiveness on routine issues but poorer performance in respect of more complex issues.
- 2.4 Where sectors or units were responsible for dealing with general information requests, responsiveness was considered to be high. In addition, the identification of performance indicators and timelines for processing e.g. certification and licence applications was considered to have led to performance improvements since mid-2004. Notwithstanding, it was felt that the Department's responsiveness in respect of complex queries, applications or policy issues would be considered to be poor.
- 2.5 **Quality:** It was suggested that the quality of the outputs and policy recommendations emanating from the Department would generally be considered (by customers) to be good, i.e. consistent, well researched and impartial. However, depending on their varying perspectives, such outputs or recommendations might conflict with customers' vested interests². Accordingly, though outputs may be considered to be impartial and well researched, it was felt that this might not necessarily translate into high customer satisfaction levels.
- 2.6 The Department's role in corporate governance and as licensor means that it is responsible for granting or refusing consent to applicants and prospective licensees. In this context, it was felt that customer satisfaction levels may be affected by application outcomes.
- 2.7 It was also suggested that quality of service varies in accordance with the status of different customers with e.g. ministers or other 'political' customers benefiting from superior levels of customer service while the needs of other customers perhaps receive a lower priority.

² E.g. the interests of commercial fishermen versus anglers or licence applicants versus objectors.

- 2.8 **Communications:** Interviewees offered varying views in respect of the effectiveness of customer communications. Consultative arrangements were considered to be good³ and it was also suggested that the Department had effective and established arrangements in place for consulting with fragmented groups.
- 2.9 **Accessibility:** Interviewees expressed the view that Departmental personnel were generally accessible but indicated that customer frustrations arose where (i) general queries/complaints were misdirected (to the Department instead of e.g. ComReg) or (ii) where customers/receptionists were unsure about the responsibilities of different personnel.
- 2.10 In the latter case, it was suggested that calls were sometimes transferred between a number of personnel before being forwarded to the appropriate person. Accordingly, the customer service experience would be undermined as questions arose in respect of the Department's professionalism.
- 2.11 Where parties are advised that it is the responsibility of e.g. ComReg or the Commission for Energy Regulation to deal with appropriate complaints, it was suggested that callers may perceive the Department to be shirking its responsibilities. Such callers may or may not be customers of the Department.
- 2.12 **Courtesy:** There was a suggestion that some staff may not be sufficiently courteous and that this may relate more to mannerisms than intention, i.e. their manner may be interpreted (incorrectly) as being 'gruff'. While the necessity for courtesy was recognised, it was suggested that underperformance was not generally addressed by the organisation.
- 2.13 **Continuity:** The practice of transferring personnel between units/sectors/divisions either on promotion, or after a specific period of time, was believed to undermine customer service levels. Despite the introduction of the knowledge management system, it was suggested that the loss of knowledge, experience and expertise gives rise to inefficiencies and increases customer frustrations.
- 2.14 **Other Issues:** A number of other issues were raised as follows:
- It was suggested that many routine queries could be addressed without recourse to the Department if customers referred to the website as an information source.
 - Customer frustrations could be reduced if the IT system allowed e-mail 'auto replies' to be sent to external customers where personnel were away from the office for protracted periods⁴.
 - Greater provision of arrangements for the completion of web-based customer transactions would promote efficiency. Similarly, the implementation of a customer relationship management (CRM) workflow system⁵ could enhance organisational responsiveness.

³ Partly due to an obligation to consult on e.g. legislative change.

⁴ It is understood that this facility has been disabled in order to reduce the level of 'spam' received.

⁵ Which logs, tracks, escalates and expedites tasks in accordance with predefined process stages and timelines. Such a system would ensure that all actions items are prompted to facilitate timely completion and enhanced efficiency.

3. Focus Group Workshops

3.1 A number of key customer service issues were raised and discussed during facilitated focus group workshops; these may be summarised under a number of broad headings as follows:

- Accessibility of personnel
- Professionalism and courtesy
- Responsiveness
- Communications
- Consultation
- Staff deployment and expertise
- Other

3.2 **Accessibility of Personnel:** Customers' access to Departmental personnel was seen to be good and focus group participants indicated that they were clear about who their relevant contacts were. Direct dial telephone numbers and e-mail addresses were available and it was suggested that personnel generally returned telephone calls and e-mails promptly.

3.3 **Professionalism and Courtesy:** Personnel within the Department were considered to be professional and courteous in their dealings with customers. There was no suggestion that customers' expectations were not being met and participants indicated that Departmental personnel were generally seen to be 'willing', 'helpful' and operating with an 'external focus'.

3.4 **Responsiveness:** The Department was generally considered to be responsive where customer issues and queries were routine or where clear decision making or related precedents existed. Notwithstanding, criticism arose in respect of the Department's ability to offer timely responses in respect of complex/technical questions or policy issues. It was acknowledged, however, that external or third party delays impacted upon an ability to provide timely or conclusive responses/direction.

3.5 It was suggested that personnel lacked responsibility/autonomy or were reluctant to commit to policy positions until such time as they had been approved by more senior Departmental personnel. In this respect, it was felt that decisions were delayed due to a necessity to achieve internal authorisation and furthermore, that decision making was not rewarded but avoided. A number of participants also expressed dissatisfaction with what was considered to be a lack of transparency in decision making and the (perceived) absence of an appeals process⁶.

3.6 **Communications:** Similar to the views expressed in respect of 'responsiveness', customers perceived that performance in the area of 'communications' varied. It was suggested that personnel were good at responding to routine communication or information requests, but poor at offering proactive communications or feedback. The Department was criticised for not providing customers with advanced notice of information requirements and for being slow to respond to requests for information which were made by customers. In this respect, it was suggested by some participants that communication flows were largely 'one-way', i.e. from customers to the Department.

⁶ It should be emphasised that an appeals procedure has been established and is outlined in the Department's 'Customer Service Action Plan 2004 – 2006'.

- 3.7 Information content on the Department's website was considered to be good, however, regular updates on key issues were felt to be lacking⁷. There was also a suggestion that information requests were sometimes delegated to junior personnel who might not appreciate the context of customer queries raised. It was also suggested that the context for the Department's information requests (particularly parliamentary questions) was sometimes felt to be lacking. A number of customers indicated that they would like to receive more (proactive) feedback on information provided and on the status of key issues.
- 3.8 **Consultation:** Though consultative processes have been established, customers indicated that they are required to make written submissions and are generally not afforded the opportunity to meet with the Department to clarify or elaborate on points contained in such submissions. They also indicated that an absence of feedback on submissions gives rise to questions about the value of consultative processes and whether their submissions are actually considered and fully understood. A number of participants also suggested that the outcome of consultative processes sometimes seemed to have been predetermined.
- 3.9 **Staff Deployment & Expertise:** The development of technical or specialist expertise on the part of Departmental personnel was seen to be of critical importance, however, the loss of related experience (upon promotion or the redeployment of personnel) was considered to create significant problems for customers. A requirement for the establishment of succession planning and knowledge transfer arrangements was considered to be important and likely to become more so in the context of decentralisation. A number of customers indicated that they would welcome the establishment of secondment arrangements which would provide for the temporary transfer of Departmental personnel to customer organisations. A minority also indicated that work-life balance arrangements (particularly job sharing and part-time working) adversely affected continuity and their ability to contact relevant personnel.
- 3.10 **Customer Relationship:** Some customers (operating under the aegis of the Department) indicated that the nature of the relationship was less than positive. The Department was described as a 'watchdog' rather than a partner in the achievement of joint objectives. Despite the existence of Boards of Directors, a number of relevant organisations indicated that they were not provided with the autonomy necessary to achieve their objectives. Instead, they suggested that there was a requirement to secure Board as well as Departmental approval before proceeding with key priorities.
- 3.11 **Other:** A number of participants questioned whether the Department was adequately resourced or had difficulty redeploying personnel as short-term demands arose in particular areas. There was also a suggestion that despite commitments contained in the Customer Service Action Plan, there was an absence of temporal performance indicators which would ensure that decisions (on policy matters) were provided at an early stage. Greater 'face to face' interaction between the Department and customers was considered to be important for the purpose of establishing trust and rapport.

⁷ One participant indicated that minutes of management meeting (providing useful customer information) were no longer available on the website. Another suggested that updates on the status of exploration and mining licences should also be made available on the website.

4. Survey Research Findings

4.1 In designing the survey research questionnaire, we were anxious to investigate customers' perceptions and experiences in a number of areas, broadly reflecting those which emerged during the interview and focus group stages. Customer service was considered from a number of perspectives ranging from accessibility of personnel to consultation and from understanding and expertise to responsiveness.

4.2 Respondents were drawn from a range of public and private sector organisations which reflected the broad nature of the Department's responsibilities and associated interactions. The percentage of respondents falling into each category is summarised below:

- Government Departments, Office and State Agencies	21.0 per cent
- Other public sector organisations	27.0 per cent
- Private sector organisations	37.5 per cent
- Representative bodies or 'lobby' groups	6.5 per cent
- Other	8.0 per cent

4.3 Frequency of Interaction: Though the population sample was selected with a view to ensuring that only regular or frequent customers were invited to participate, a significant proportion of respondents (32 per cent) described themselves as interacting with the Department only occasionally ('a few times per year') or 'once or twice per year'. Notwithstanding, the majority of respondents (67 per cent) indicated that they had either ongoing or frequent interaction with the Department.

4.4 Distribution: In addition to the overall (valid) survey response rate of 54.8 per cent, the rate achieved for the various sub-categories or sectors was also high and served to ensure that findings were not biased by significantly higher or lower response rates within particular sub-categories. A small number of respondents (less than 0.7 per cent) were reclassified where they had suggested that were categorised under one sector (e.g. marine) but interacted predominantly with another (e.g. communication). Such reclassifications took place to ensure that perceptions and feedback related to the sectors which they interacted with on a regular basis. The response rates achieved (by sector) were as follows:

- Communications	58.6 per cent
- Energy	65.5 per cent
- Marine	54.0 per cent
- Natural Resources	48.0 per cent

Accessibility of Personnel

4.5 In evaluating customer service, we first considered respondents' views in respect of the accessibility of personnel. Were customers aware of the identity of those assigned to deal with their issues/queries, were direct dial phone numbers and e-mail addresses provided and did personnel respond to correspondence/phone calls in a timely manner? Though focus group feedback suggested that personnel were accessible, we were anxious to validate this and determine the extent to which frustrations arose due to the misdirection of calls or queries (as highlighted during the internal interview stage).

- 4.6 Almost 90 per cent of respondents indicated that they were aware of the identity of their contact personnel and 85 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ‘In dealing with the Department, I find that the personnel who I am in contact with are generally accessible’. More importantly, less than 5 per cent disagreed with this statement while 10 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 4.7 Respondents also indicated that direct dial telephone numbers and e-mail addresses were provided to them as required with over 87 per cent either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the related statement.
- 4.8 Rather than only considering the accessibility of personnel and provision of contact particulars, we were also anxious to determine customers’ experiences when personnel were required to respond to phone calls, e-mails or other written correspondence. Just less than three quarters or 74 per cent of respondents indicated that phone calls were responded to in a timely manner while fewer (just 61 per cent) indicated that Departmental personnel respond to e-mails and written correspondence in a timely manner. This suggests scope for improvement, particularly in light of related Customer Charter commitments.
- 4.9 In an attempt to gain an overall appreciation of customer satisfaction in the specific area of accessibility of personnel, we asked respondents to indicate how they would rate the performance of the Department on a scale of 1 to 10, (where 1 equalled ‘poor’ and 10 equalled ‘excellent’). Respondents gave the Department a mean score of 7.30 which suggests that there is scope for improvement, however, it is important to emphasise that over 74 per cent of respondents rated the accessibility of personnel at 7 or above.
- 4.10 The relative importance of accessibility in the context of customer service was also considered. Again, respondents were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 equalled ‘not important’ and 10 equalled ‘critical’) the importance which they attached to ‘accessibility to personnel’. In general, it was seen as very important and accorded a mean score of 8.89.

Table 4.1 – Accessibility of Personnel

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.1 I am aware of the identity of contact personnel (n=167)	1%	2%	7%	56%	33%
4.2 Departmental personnel are generally accessible (n=166)	1%	4%	10%	59%	26%
4.3 Direct dial telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are available (n=165)	1%	3%	8%	55%	32%
4.4 Contact personnel respond to phone calls in a timely manner (n=166)	2%	7%	16%	54%	20%
4.5 Timely responses received re. e-mails and written correspondence (n=165)	5%	5%	18%	53%	8%

- 4.11 To generate a more accurate picture of the Department’s performance, we considered the organisation’s sectors individually. Interestingly, 97 per cent of respondents who dealt with Natural Resources indicated that they were aware of the identity of contact personnel; this compared to a figure of 89 per cent for the sample as a whole and 81 per cent for customers of the Communications sector. This is likely to be explained by the nature of work undertaken within Natural Resources and the fact that the sector deals with a smaller number of customers on an ongoing basis.
- 4.13 Though personnel were generally considered to be accessible, the Communications and Energy sectors were felt to be more accessible (93 and 94 per cent of respondents ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’) than Marine and Natural Resources (71 and 87 per cent respectively).

Table 4.2 – Identity & Accessibility

Accessibility of Personnel	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q. 4.1: I am aware of the identity of contact personnel	1%	2%	7%	56%	33%
Communications (n=42)	2%	2%	14%	55%	26%
Energy (n=36)	0%	0%	6%	61%	33%
Marine (n=58)	2%	3%	7%	50%	38%
Natural Resources (n=32)	0%	3%	0%	61%	36%
Aggregate Rating Q.4.2: Departmental personnel are generally accessible	1%	4%	10%	59%	26%
Communications (n=42)	2%	0%	5%	64%	29%
Energy (n=36)	0%	0%	6%	61%	33%
Marine (n=57)	2%	7%	19%	52%	19%
Natural Resources (n=31)	0%	6%	6%	61%	26%

- 4.14 As one might expect, 92 per cent of respondents indicated they were provided with direct dial telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for their contacts in the Communications sector. This compared to an aggregate figure of 87 per cent for the organisation as a whole. Though the Department’s Customer Charter includes a commitment to ensure

that all correspondence includes a contact telephone number and e-mail address, the results indicate that some customers are either unaware that such information is provided or perhaps that internal compliance with this commitment could be improved. This is worthy of investigation in order to ensure that Charter commitments are being honoured in all cases.

Table 4.3 – Contact Particulars

Accessibility of Personnel	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q.4.3: Direct dial phone Nos. & e-mail addresses available	1%	3%	8%	55%	32%
Communications (n=41)	2%	0%	5%	63%	29%
Energy (n=36)	0%	3%	14%	47%	36%
Marine (n=57)	2%	7%	11%	54%	26%
Natural Resources (n=31)	0%	0%	3%	55%	42%

4.15 Though the organisation has committed to respond to phone call and voicemails promptly, just 60 per cent of Marine’s customers indicated that this was the case. This compared to an aggregate figure of 74 per cent and figures of 81, 78 and 87 per cent respectively for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

Table 4.4 – Telephone Contact

Aggregate Rating Q.4.4: Personnel respond to phone calls in a timely manner	2%	7%	16%	54%	20%
Communications (n=42)	2%	0%	17%	62%	19%
Energy (n=36)	0%	8%	14%	50%	28%
Marine (n=57)	3%	12%	25%	44%	16%
Natural Resources (n=31)	3%	6%	3%	68%	19%

4.16 As with responsiveness to phone calls, respondents also pointed to scope for an improvement in responsiveness to e-mails and written correspondence. Though Natural

Resources were considered to perform well in this regard (87 per cent satisfaction versus an aggregate figure of 61 per cent), the performance of other sectors suggested that Charter commitments were not being realised.

Table 4.5 – E-mail & Postal Contact

Accessibility of Personnel	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q.4.5: Timely responses on e-mails & written correspondence	5%	5%	18%	53%	8%
Communications (n=42)	2%	2%	19%	62%	14%
Energy (n=36)	6%	8%	14%	44%	28%
Marine (n=57)	8%	9%	25%	44%	14%
Natural Resources (n=30)	3%	0%	10%	70%	17%

- 4.17 In summary, though customers were aware of the identity of their contact personnel and indicated that they were generally accessible, perceptions would suggest that there is scope for an improvement in responsiveness to phone calls, e-mails and other written correspondence.
- 4.18 When asked to rate the accessibility of personnel within the different sectors on a scale of 1 to 10 ('poor' to 'excellent'), respondents offered the following ratings of performance and importance:

	Performance Rating	Importance Rating
Communications	7.5	8.9
Energy	7.5	8.6
Marine	6.8	9.0
Natural Resources	7.8	9.1

5. Responsiveness & Decision Making

- 5.1 Responsiveness in decision making and on policy matters is obviously important and can serve to impact significantly upon the quality of customer service received. With this in mind, we were anxious to determine whether customers found personnel to be responsive in this regard and whether decision making authority was being exercised.
- 5.2 At the internal interview and focus group workshop stages, participants had indicated that the Department was considered to be responsive when requested to deal with routine issues but less so where policy positions had not been formulated. This suggestion was borne out in the research results.
- 5.3 Seventy six per cent of respondents indicated that the Department provided them with timely responses to routine queries or requests (13 per cent disagreed) while just 46 per cent agreed with the statement ‘The Department provides me with timely responses to complex queries or requests’. In this case 25 per cent disagreed while 28 per cent indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed, or felt that the question was not applicable to them.
- 5.4 In a similar vein, we asked respondents to indicate whether they received timely responses to specialist or technical queries or requests. In this case 54 per cent indicated that they did receive timely responses from the Department while 16 per cent disagreed and almost 30 per cent indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed or that the question did not apply to them.
- 5.5 In view of the suggestion that challenges arose where personnel were requested to provide information in the absence of clarity on policy positions, we asked respondents to consider the following statement: ‘In the absence of agreed guidelines or a formal policy position, I still receive timely responses from the Department’. Interestingly, 48 per cent indicated that they did receive timely responses under such circumstances while just 21 per cent disagreed and 31 per cent suggested that the question did not apply or that they neither agreed nor disagreed. Though there is obviously scope for improvement, the results indicate that this issue is perhaps not as problematic as the interview and workshop feedback would have suggested.
- 5.6 Respondents were also asked to consider whether they felt that Departmental personnel generally exercised their decision making authority. Over 50 per cent indicated that decision making authority was exercised while almost 18 per cent disagreed. Again, this suggested that though there is scope for improvement, the Department’s ability to progress and respond on policy issues was not as poor as first suggested in interviews or facilitated discussions.
- 5.7 Respondents were asked to consider whether the time taken to arrive at decisions was reasonable in view of consultation or other input requirements. Forty seven per cent of respondents indicated that the time to arrive at decisions was not considered to be excessive in view of consultation or related requirements while 29 per cent disagreed and 15 per cent suggested that they neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 5.8 In an attempt to highlight the requirement to gather inputs from third parties and assess whether associated delays were acknowledged, we asked respondents to indicate whether

response times were considered to be reasonable in view of such factors. Respondents were found to display some understanding with 18 per cent suggesting that the Department’s responses were not received within reasonable timeframes and the balance suggesting either that this did not apply in their cases or that responses were received within reasonable timeframes (42 per cent).

- 5.9 As customer service sentiment can sometimes be determined, not on the basis of the outcome associated with applications but rather the reasons for such outcomes, we asked respondents to indicate whether, upon request, they were provided with the rationale for the Department’s decisions. Over 61 per cent indicated that they were provided with the basis for decisions while 13 per cent disagreed. Approximately 9 per cent indicated that this did not apply to them while 16 per cent suggested that they neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 5.10 Asked to provide an overall assessment of performance in respect of responsiveness and decision making, respondents gave the Department a mean score of 6.49. Only 56 per cent of respondents gave the Department a score of 7 or above on a ten point scale ranging from poor to excellent.
- 5.11 The importance associated with receiving good customer service in the area of responsiveness and decision making was considered to be high and accorded a mean score of 8.82 by respondents.

Table 5.1 – Responsiveness & Decision Making

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
5.1 I am provided with timely responses to routine queries (n=159)	2%	11%	5%	58%	18%	6%
5.2 I am provided with timely responses to complex queries or requests (n=166)	6%	19%	16%	35%	11%	12%
5.3 I am provided with timely responses to specialist/technical queries (n=165)	3%	13%	19%	41%	13%	11%
5.4 In the absence of a policy position, I still receive timely responses (n=166)	3%	18%	20%	39%	9%	11%
5.5 Considering consultation requirements, decisions are timely (n=165)	8%	21%	15%	38%	9%	9%
5.6 Considering 3 rd party input requirements, responses are timely (n=165)	6%	12%	25%	34%	8%	15%
5.7 Personnel exercise their decision making authority (n=165)	4%	14%	18%	40%	12%	14%
5.8 Where requested, I receive a rationale for Depts. Decisions (n=165)	2%	11%	16%	48%	13%	9%

5.12 When the performance of the Departments sectors was assessed, Communications and Natural Resources were considered to be good at providing timely responses on routine issues (83 and 86 per cent respectively) but scope existed for all sectors (particularly Marine) to provide more timely responses to complex queries or requests. Natural Resources were seen to be relatively good at providing timely responses to specialist/technical queries while scope for improvement was felt to exist in respect of Marine.

Table 5.2 – Responsiveness to Routine, Complex & Specialist Queries

Responsiveness & Decision Making	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 5.1: Timely responses received on routine queries	2%	11%	5%	58%	18%	6%
Communications (n=42)	0%	7%	5%	71%	12%	5%
Energy (n=34)	3%	3%	3%	50%	24%	18%
Marine (n=54)	6%	20%	7%	50%	15%	2%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	10%	3%	62%	24%	0%
Aggregate Q. 5.2: Timely responses received on complex queries or requests	6%	19%	16%	35%	11%	12%
Communications (n=42)	2%	19%	14%	43%	7%	14%
Energy (n=34)	3%	12%	24%	29%	12%	21%
Marine (n=54)	13%	26%	15%	28%	11%	7%
Natural Resources (n=29)	3%	17%	14%	45%	14%	7%
Aggregate Q. 5.3: Timely responses received on specialist/technical queries	3%	13%	19%	41%	13%	11%
Communications (n=42)	2%	10%	24%	43%	12%	10%
Energy (n=29)	0%	3%	10%	45%	14%	28%
Marine (n=54)	7%	22%	15%	35%	13%	7%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	14%	14%	52%	17%	3%

5.13 Seventy two per cent of Natural Resources’ customers indicated that they received timely responses in the absence of a policy position compared to an aggregate of 48 per cent. Notwithstanding, customer dissatisfaction was not as high as might first be considered as a high proportion of respondents indicated that they ‘neither agreed or disagreed’ with the related question or that it did not apply to them. An exception to this arose in respect of Marine where 36 per cent of respondents indicated that there was scope for improvement.

Table 5.3 – Responsiveness in Absence of Policy

Responsiveness & Decision Making	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 5.4: In the absence of policy, I still receive timely responses	3%	18%	20%	39%	9%	11%
Communications (n=42)	0%	17%	21%	45%	5%	12%
Energy (n=34)	3%	6%	24%	26%	12%	29%
Marine (n=54)	7%	29%	17%	31%	11%	4%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	11%	18%	61%	11%	0%

5.14 Customers were not overly sympathetic where delays arose due to consultation requirements but were more understanding where third party inputs (e.g. from other Departments, authorities, etc.) were required. Exceptions arose in respect of Marine where customers were more critical of perceived shortfalls in responsiveness.

Table 5.4 – Responsiveness & Consultation Requirements

Responsiveness & Decision Making	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 5.5: Considering consultation requirements, decisions are timely	8%	21%	15%	38%	9%	9%
Communications (n=41)	5%	24%	10%	49%	7%	5%
Energy (n=34)	9%	9%	15%	32%	15%	21%
Marine (n=54)	11%	28%	20%	24%	9%	7%
Natural Resources (n=29)	3%	17%	10%	55%	7%	7%

Table 5.5 – Responsiveness & 3rd Party Inputs

Responsiveness & Decision Making	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 5.6: Considering 3 rd party input requirements, responses are timely	6%	12%	25%	34%	8%	15%
Communications (n=41)	2%	2%	29%	46%	7%	12%
Energy (n=34)	6%	9%	29%	18%	15%	24%
Marine (n=54)	9%	20%	22%	30%	6%	13%
Natural Resources (n=29)	3%	14%	21%	45%	7%	10%

5.15 Personnel within the Natural Resources sector were felt to be most likely to exercise their decision making authority (62 per cent agreed and 7 per cent disagreed) while those in Energy were felt to be least likely (44 per cent agreed and 12 per cent disagreed). In the case of Energy however, the highest proportion of respondents (26 per cent answered ‘don’t know’ or ‘not applicable’.

Table 5.6 – Responsiveness & Decision Making

Responsiveness & Decision Making	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 5.7: Personnel exercise their decision making authority	4%	14%	18%	40%	12%	14%
Communications (n=41)	5%	14%	17%	40%	10%	14%
Energy (n=34)	0%	12%	18%	32%	12%	26%
Marine (n=54)	7%	19%	15%	33%	17%	9%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	7%	24%	55%	7%	7%

5.16 Respondents felt that they were more likely to receive a rationale for decisions from Natural Resources (76 per cent) but less so from Marine (54 per cent). Interestingly, the number of respondents who indicated that they were not likely to receive an explanation for decisions also varied considerably by sector and ranged from 3 per cent (Natural Resources) to 23 per cent (Marine).

Table 5.7 – Rationale for Decisions

Responsiveness & Decision Making	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 5.8: Where requested, I receive a rationale for Depts. Decisions	2%	11%	19%	48%	13%	9%
Communications (n=41)	0%	12%	19%	52%	10%	7%
Energy (n=34)	0%	9%	12%	47%	12%	21%
Marine (n=54)	6%	17%	17%	37%	17%	7%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	3%	17%	66%	10%	3%

5.17 Finally, when asked to provide an assessment of sectoral performance and the importance associated with ‘responsiveness and decision making’, the following ratings were offered:

	Performance Rating	Importance Rating
Communications	6.7	8.9
Energy	6.7	8.8
Marine	6.0	9.0
Natural Resources	7.0	8.4

6. Communications & Consultation

- 6.1 In view of the nature of customers' interactions with the Department, together with the associated requirement for effective communications and consultation, we asked respondents to consider e.g. whether they were kept informed and received meaningful updates in respect of key issues, whether consultative arrangements and appeals processes were effective and whether they/their representative bodies were provided with necessary information.
- 6.2 Over 61 per cent of respondents indicated that they received meaningful updates in response to their information requests while just 11 per cent disagreed. By contrast, satisfaction was somewhat lower when customers were asked to consider whether they were kept informed on the progress of key issues. In this case, just over 53 per cent indicated that they were kept duly informed and 19 per cent disagreed. Similarly, 55 per cent of respondents indicated that they (or their representative bodies) received important communication updates from the Department while 17 per cent disagreed.
- 6.3 As information flows are often two-way, customers were asked to consider whether the Department provided them with sufficient time to respond to its information requests. Over 54 per cent indicated that they were accorded sufficient time while 18 per cent indicated that this was not the case. Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they were provided with sufficient details to respond effectively to information requests and a slightly higher number (63 per cent) agreed that this was the case while 13 per cent disagreed.
- 6.4 Consultative arrangements were seen to be effective by over 62 per cent of respondents with a relatively modest 10 per cent indicative that they were ineffective. Though 65 per cent of respondents stated that they were confident that submissions made as part of consultative processes were considered by the Department, 11 per cent disagreed with the related statement. Similarly, though 49 per cent of respondents indicated that meaningful feedback was available to them (or their representative bodies) as part of the consultative process, 13 per cent indicated that they felt that this was not the case.
- 6.5 Despite the existence of an appeals procedure, feedback received during the facilitated workshop stage served to indicate that at least some customers were not aware of such provisions. This view was borne out in the research findings which suggested that just over 41 per cent of respondents felt that they were free to appeal the Department's decisions with 16 per cent disagreeing. Significantly, the remaining 44 per cent indicated that they were unsure.
- 6.6 In view of its importance, we were also anxious to consider customers perceptions relating to their faith in the appeals process. Just 36 per cent indicated that they were confident that any appeals would be considered impartially while 12 per cent indicated that they felt this would not be the case. Again, a very high percentage (53 per cent) indicated that they were unsure.
- 6.7 Customers' overall assessment of service in the specific area of communications and consultation was 7.3 (mean score) on a ten point satisfaction scale. In this case almost 75 per cent of respondents provided the Department with a satisfaction rating of 7 or above. The importance associated with receiving good customer service in the specific area of

communication and consultation was considered to be high and accorded a mean score of 8.87 by respondents.

Table 6.1 – Communications & Consultation

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
6.1 I am provided with meaningful updates to information requests (n=153)	2%	9%	16%	52%	9%	12%
6.2 I am kept informed of progress on key issues (n=155)	4%	15%	21%	43%	10%	8%
6.3 Important updates are provided to me/my representative body (n=155)	3%	14%	20%	45%	10%	8%
6.4 I am provided with sufficient time to respond to information requests (n = 154)	5%	13%	21%	44%	10%	7%
6.5 I am provided with sufficient details to respond to information requests (n=154)	3%	10%	18%	49%	14%	7%
6.6 Consultation arrangements are effective (n=155)	1%	9%	17%	47%	15%	10%
6.7 My submissions to the consultative process are considered (n=154)	2%	9%	14%	49%	16%	11%
6.8 Meaningful feedback is available as part of the consultative process (n= 55)	1%	12%	23%	40%	9%	14%
6.9 I am free to appeal the Department's decisions as appropriate (n=155)	5%	11%	16%	36%	5%	28%
6.10 I am confident that any appeals would be considered impartially (n=154)	5%	7%	22%	28%	8%	31%

- 6.8 Considering sectoral performance, customers who made information requests were generally satisfied with the quality of response received, however, dissatisfaction rates did range from 2 per cent (Communications) up to a relatively high 20 per cent (Marine).

Table 6.2 – Communications Updates

Communications & Consultation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 6.1: I am provided with meaningful updates to info. requests	2%	9%	16%	52%	9%	12%
Communications_(n=41)	0%	2%	5%	73%	7%	12%
Energy (n=33)	3%	9%	15%	33%	15%	24%
Marine (n=51)	4%	16%	28%	41%	6%	6%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	7%	11%	64%	7%	11%

6.9 The Department was not considered to be as good at ‘proactive’ communications with between just 43 per cent (Marine) and 66 per cent (Natural Resources) of customers agreeing that they were kept informed of the progress of key issues. Similarly, between 10 (Natural Resources) and 25 per cent (Marine) suggested that they (or their representative bodies) were not provided with important communication updates.

Table 6.3 – Communications Updates & Progress

Communications & Consultation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 6.2: I am I am kept informed of progress on key issues	4%	15%	21%	43%	10%	8%
Communications (n=41)	2%	15%	15%	54%	7%	7%
Energy (n=33)	3%	9%	27%	24%	21%	15%
Marine (n=52)	8%	23%	21%	37%	6%	6%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	7%	21%	59%	7%	7%
Aggregate Q. 6.3: Important updates are provided to me/my representative body	3%	14%	20%	45%	10%	8%
Communications (n=41)	0%	12%	27%	46%	7%	7%
Energy (n=33)	3%	12%	18%	33%	18%	15%
Marine (n=52)	6%	19%	14%	44%	10%	8%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	10%	24%	55%	7%	3%

- 6.10 Some customers were also critical of the amount of time provided to respond to information requests received from the Department, albeit less so of the Communications and Energy sectors (8 and 6 per cent respectively) and more so of Marine and Natural Resources (31 and 20 per cent respectively). This is somewhat surprising as the Non-Commercial State Sponsored Bodies operating under the aegis of the Department are likely to have greater obligations to provide information but fall almost equally under the Communications, Marine, Energy and Natural Resources Sectors.
- 6.11 Customers generally felt that they were provided with sufficient details to be able to respond to information requests however, there was scope for improvement in respect of Marine where 20 per cent of respondents disagreed with the related statement.

Table 6.4 – Response Times & Particulars

Communications & Consultation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 6.4: I am provided with sufficient time to respond to info. requests	5%	13%	21%	44%	10%	7%
Communications (n=40)	3%	5%	17%	58%	8%	10%
Energy (n=33)	0%	6%	18%	49%	18%	9%
Marine (n=52)	10%	21%	25%	33%	6%	6%
Natural Resources (n=29)	3%	17%	21%	41%	14%	3%
Aggregate Q. 6.5: I am provided with sufficient details to respond to requests	3%	10%	18%	49%	14%	7%
Communications (n=41)	0%	12%	22%	46%	10%	10%
Energy (n=33)	0%	3%	15%	52%	21%	9%
Marine (n=51)	8%	12%	22%	41%	12%	6%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	10%	10%	62%	14%	3%

- 6.12 Importantly, consultation arrangements were generally felt to be effective (2 to 3 per cent dissatisfaction) for customers dealing with Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. Notwithstanding, those dealing with Marine were significantly less satisfied and recorded a dissatisfaction rate of 25 per cent. In a similar vein, customers generally felt that their submissions were considered though the exception related to Marine where 23 per cent disagreed with the related statement.

Table 6.5 – Consultation Arrangements

Communications & Consultation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 6.6: Consultation arrangements are effective	1%	9%	17%	47%	15%	10%
Communications (n=41)	0%	2%	22%	51%	10%	15%
Energy (n=33)	0%	3%	18%	46%	18%	15%
Marine (n=52)	4%	21%	15%	40%	14%	6%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	3%	14%	55%	21%	7%

Table 6.6 – Consultation Considered

Communications & Consultation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 6.7: My submissions to the consultative process are considered	2%	9%	14%	49%	16%	11%
Communications (n=40)	0%	5%	8%	70%	5%	13%
Energy (n=33)	0%	6%	24%	36%	18%	15%
Marine (n=52)	6%	17%	14%	35%	19%	10%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	3%	10%	59%	21%	7%

- 6.13 Similar trends were also found in respect of perceptions relating to (i) the availability of feedback as part of the consultative process and (ii) appeals provisions. Twenty three per cent of Marine customers indicated that meaningful feedback was not available to them (compared to between 7 and 12 per cent for other sectors) while 22 per cent suggested that they did not feel free to appeal the Department’s decisions (compared to between 6 and 13 per cent for the other sectors).

Table 6.7 – Feedback & Appeals

Communications & Consultation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 6.8: Meaningful feedback available as part of consultative process	1%	12%	23%	40%	9%	14%
Communications (n=41)	0%	7%	24%	42%	7%	20%
Energy (n=33)	0%	12%	18%	30%	15%	24%
Marine (n=52)	4%	19%	33%	33%	8%	4%
Natural Resources (n=29)	0%	7%	10%	62%	7%	14%
Aggregate Q. 6.9: I am free to appeal the Department's decisions as appropriate	5%	11%	16%	36%	5%	28%
Communications (n=41)	5%	12%	20%	32%	0%	32%
Energy (n=33)	0%	6%	24%	27%	6%	36%
Marine (n=52)	8%	14%	12%	39%	6%	23%
Natural Resources (n=29)	3%	10%	10%	45%	10%	21%

6.14 Confidence in the Department's appeals process was very low with ratings of just 42, 30 27 and 50 per cent respectively for customers categorised under Communications, Energy, Marine and Natural Resources. The range is also striking with almost twice as many respondents from Natural Resources versus Marine agreeing with the statement: 'I am confident that any appeals would be considered impartially'.

Table 6.6 – Appeals & Consideration

Communications & Consultation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	D. Know N/A
Aggregate Q. 6.10: I am confident any appeals would be considered impartially	5%	7%	22%	28%	8%	31%
Communications (n=41)	5%	5%	20%	37%	5%	29%
Energy (n=33)	0%	6%	24%	24%	6%	39%
Marine (n=52)	7%	12%	23%	17%	10%	30%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	4%	21%	39%	11%	25%

6.15 Sectoral performance and the importance of effective 'communications and consultation' was rated as follows:

	Performance Rating	Importance Rating
Communications	6.8	8.6
Energy	7.1	8.2
Marine	6.1	8.8
Natural Resources	7.3	8.4

7. Understanding & Expertise

- 7.1 Given the broad nature of the Department’s mandate, together with the requirement for personnel to develop expert knowledge in specialist and technical areas, we were anxious to determine whether customers believed that the Department possessed sufficient understanding and expertise to support and assist them effectively.
- 7.2 Respondents were asked to consider whether outputs emanating from the Department were sufficiently comprehensive or whether all relevant issues were considered prior to the issuing of outputs. Over 70 per cent of respondents indicated that outputs were sufficiently comprehensive while 11 per cent indicated that this was not the case and the remainder neither agreed nor disagreed.
- 7.3 Importantly, almost 62 per cent of respondents indicated that personnel within the Department were anxious to understand their issues or requirements while 12 per cent suggested that this was not the case. On the fundamental question as to whether customers felt that Departmental personnel had the knowledge necessary to support them with their requests or requirements, 63 per cent indicated that personnel did possess the requisite knowledge while 12 per cent suggested that important knowledge was lacking.
- 7.4 On the related question of learning curves and whether ‘new or replacement personnel manage to gain an appreciation of key issues without undue delay’, 46 per cent of respondents indicated that this was the case whereas 16 per cent indicated that the time taken to develop an appreciation of key issues was longer than they would have expected.
- 7.5 In providing an overall assessment of customer service in the specific area of understanding and expertise, respondents gave the Department a mean score of 7.02 on a ten point scale from ‘poor’ to ‘excellent’ and 67 per cent of respondents gave the Department a rating of 7 or above.
- 7.6 In respect of the importance accorded to ‘understanding and expertise’, respondents gave it a mean score of 8.70 and 96 per cent attributed an ‘importance rating’ of 7 or above.

Table 7.1 – Understanding & Expertise

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
7.1 Outputs from the Department are sufficiently comprehensive (n=151)	3%	8%	18%	63%	8%
7.2 Personnel are anxious to understand my issues/requirements (n =150)	4%	8%	26%	47%	15%
7.3 Personnel have the knowledge to support me with my requests (n=150)	1%	11%	24%	52%	11%
7.4 New/replacement personnel appreciate key issues without delay (n=150)	3%	13%	38%	37%	9%

7.7 In considering the relative performance of the Department’s different sectors, we see less deviation from the aggregate results than was the case with other survey questions. Between 66 per cent (Energy) and 78 per cent (Natural Resources) of respondents agreed with the suggestion that outputs emanating from the Department are sufficiently comprehensive. Greater differences were found in respect of the degree to which personnel were considered to be ‘anxious to understand’ customer issues. Seventy nine and 82 per cent of customers said that personnel within the Communications and Natural Resources sectors (respectively) were anxious to understand their issues or requirements whereas this compared with 47 per cent for both Energy and Marine. Notwithstanding, the percentages who disagreed with the related statement were more modest and ranged from 4 per cent (Natural Resources) to 18 per cent (Marine).

Table 7.2 – Outputs & Understanding

Understanding & Expertise	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q7.1: Outputs from Department are comprehensive	3%	8%	18%	63%	8%
Communications (n=38)	3%	8%	18%	67%	5%
Energy (n=32)	3%	0%	31%	50%	16%
Marine (n=51)	4%	12%	14%	65%	6%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	11%	11%	71%	7%
Aggregate Rating Q7.2: Personnel are anxious to understand my issues	4%	8%	26%	47%	15%
Communications (n=39)	0%	11%	11%	58%	21%
Energy (n= 32)	9%	3%	41%	31%	16%
Marine (n= 51)	6%	12%	35%	39%	8%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	4%	14%	64%	18%

7.8 With the exception of Energy, customers were reasonably satisfied that personnel within the different sectors had the knowledge necessary to support them with their requests or requirements. Again, the majority of respondents did not say that personnel lacked the relevant knowledge but did indicate that they were not entirely sure by choosing to ‘neither agree nor disagree’ with the relevant statement. Fifty per cent were unsure about

the knowledge held by personnel within the Energy sector compared to between 11 and 21 per cent for the other sectors. Importantly, a lower figure (between 9 and 14 per cent) indicated that they felt that personnel across sectors did not have the requisite knowledge.

Table 7.3 – Understanding & Knowledge

Understanding & Expertise	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q7.3: Personnel have knowledge to support my requests	1%	11%	24%	52%	11%
Communications (n=39)	0%	13%	21%	56%	10%
Energy (n= 32)	0%	9%	50%	25%	16%
Marine (n= 50)	4%	10%	20%	56%	10%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	14%	11%	68%	7%

7.9 New or replacement personnel were felt to be less likely to ‘appreciate key issues’ in the Marine and Natural Resources sectors (26 and 15 per cent dissatisfaction) compared to Communications and Energy (10 and 13 per cent) while the percentages indicating that this was not a problem were not particularly high and ranged from just 39 to 51 per cent.

Table 7.4 – Understanding & Learning

Understanding & Expertise	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q7.4: New/replacement personnel appreciate key issues	3%	13%	38%	37%	9%
Communications (n=39)	0%	10%	39%	41%	10%
Energy (n=31)	0%	13%	39%	36%	13%
Marine (n=51)	8%	18%	35%	33%	6%
Natural Resources (n=28)	4%	11%	39%	39%	7%

7.10 Sectoral performance and the importance of effective ‘understanding and expertise’ was rated as follows:

	Performance Rating	Importance Rating
Communications	7.2	8.9
Energy	7.3	8.4
Marine	6.6	8.9
Natural Resources	7.3	8.4

Service Delivery

- 8.1 Quite apart from technical knowledge and expertise, we were also anxious to determine customers' perceptions relating to routine courtesy and professionalism. Such factors should be seen as fundamental elements in any effective customer relationship and once present, can generate significant levels of goodwill and mutual cooperation. Asked whether they were treated with courtesy by the Department, 96 per cent indicated that personnel were courteous while just one respondent suggest that this was not the case.
- 8.2 Over 86 per cent of respondents indicated that they found Departmental personnel to be professional (just 3 per cent disagreed), while 72 per cent suggested that they found staff to be organised. In a similar vein, 85 per cent suggested that personnel were helpful (2 per cent disagreed) and almost 61 per cent indicated that they shared a productive or effective working relationship (teamwork) with the Department (13 per cent disagreed).
- 8.3 As to whether there was a perceived sense of partnership amongst customers, 56 per cent indicated that they worked with the Department to pursue common objectives, while almost 15 per cent suggested that they didn't share such a relationship. Similarly, 61 per cent suggested that they felt personnel within the Department were committed to helping them achieve their objectives while 15 per cent disagreed.
- 8.4. Respondents gave the Department a mean score of 7.32 for general service delivery in areas relating to courtesy, helpfulness, professionalism, etc. Over 74 per cent of respondents gave the Department a performance rating of 7 or above under this heading.

Table 8.1 – Service Delivery

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
8.1 When dealing with the Dept., I find staff to be polite and courteous (n=148)	1%	0%	3%	57%	39%
8.2 When dealing with the Department, I find staff to be professional (n=148)	0%	3%	11%	57%	29%
8.3 When dealing with the Department, I find staff to be helpful (n=148)	1%	1%	13%	56%	29%
8.4 When dealing with the Department, I find staff to be organised (n=148)	0%	5%	22%	56%	16%
8.5 There is a sense of teamwork between my contact and I (n=148)	3%	10%	26%	43%	18%
8.6 There is a sense of partnership between my contact and I (n=148)	3%	12%	29%	38%	18%
8.7 Personnel are committed to helping me achieve my objectives (n=147)	3%	12%	25%	46%	15%

8.5 Sectoral ratings relating to staff professionalism were also very positive and ranged from 94 per cent (Energy), to 95 per cent (Communications), to 96 per cent (Marine) and 100 per cent (Natural Resources). With very few exceptions, staff across all sectors were also considered to be ‘polite and courteous’ and ‘helpful’.

Table 8.2 – Professionalism & Courtesy

Service Delivery	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q8.1: I find staff to be professional	1%	0%	3%	57%	39%
Communications (n=39)	3%	0%	3%	44%	51%
Energy (n=31)	0%	0%	7%	55%	39%
Marine (n=50)	0%	0%	4%	72%	24%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	0%	0%	54%	46%
Aggregate Rating Q8.2: I find staff to be polite and courteous	0%	3%	11%	57%	29%
Communications (n=39)	0%	0%	10%	54%	36%
Energy (n=31)	0%	3%	7%	58%	32%
Marine (n=50)	0%	6%	14%	64%	16%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	0%	11%	50%	39%
Aggregate Rating Q8.3: I find staff to be helpful	1%	1%	13%	56%	29%
Communications (n=39)	0%	0%	8%	59%	33%
Energy (n=31)	0%	0%	13%	55%	32%
Marine (n=50)	2%	4%	20%	56%	18%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	0%	7%	54%	39%

8.6 In general, staff across all sectors were considered to be ‘organised’ though sentiments were not as strong as was the case with views in respect of professionalism, courtesy and willingness to help. In this case, those in Marine were considered to be slightly less organised (66 per cent agreed) than their colleagues in Communications (74 per cent), Energy (78 per cent) and Natural Resources (75 per cent).

Table 8.3 – Organisation

Service Delivery	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q8.4: I find staff to be organised	0%	5%	22%	56%	16%
Communications (n=39)	0%	5%	21%	56%	18%
Energy (n=31)	0%	0%	23%	52%	26%
Marine (n=50)	0%	10%	24%	56%	10%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	4%	21%	61%	14%

8.7 Respondents’ views in respect of ‘teamwork’ with were less positive and satisfaction ratings ranged from 75 per cent (Natural Resources) to 72 per cent (Communications) to 59 per cent (Energy) and 46 per cent (Marine). Dissatisfaction was also highest in respect of Marine (20 per cent) compared to between 3 and 8 per cent for the other sectors.

Table 8.4 – Teamwork

Service Delivery	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q8.5: There is a sense of teamwork between my contact and I	3%	10%	26%	43%	18%
Communications (n=39)	3%	5%	21%	54%	18%
Energy (n=31)	0%	3%	39%	36%	23%
Marine (n=50)	0%	20%	26%	28%	18%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	4%	21%	61%	14%

8.8 In respect of questions relating to (i) ‘partnership’ and whether personnel were (ii) ‘committed to helping customers achieve their objectives’, personnel in Natural Resources were granted the highest satisfaction ratings of 75 and 68 per cent for the respective questions. This compared to a 48 per cent satisfaction rating with the ‘sense of partnership’ between customers and personnel in Marine and a 51 per cent satisfaction rating with personnel in Energy and the degree to which they were ‘committed to helping customers achieve their objectives’.

Table 8.4 – Commitment & Partnership

Service Delivery	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
Aggregate Rating Q8.6: There is a sense of partnership between my contact and I	3%	12%	29%	38%	18%
Communications (n=39)	3%	10%	31%	44%	13%
Energy (n=31)	0%	3%	45%	29%	23%
Marine (n=50)	8%	22%	22%	26%	22%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	4%	21%	61%	14%
Aggregate Rating Q8.7: Dept. committed to helping me achieve my objectives	3%	12%	25%	46%	15%
Communications (n=38)	3%	5%	24%	58%	11%
Energy (n=31)	0%	10%	39%	32%	19%
Marine (n=50)	8%	22%	14%	40%	16%
Natural Resources (n=28)	0%	4%	29%	54%	14%

8.9 Overall service delivery performance and importance, by sector, was rated as follows:

	Performance Rating	Importance Rating
Communications	7.6	8.7
Energy	7.5	8.4
Marine	6.7	8.9
Natural Resources	7.8	8.5

9. Improvement

- 9.1 In the context of the publication of specific commitments, service standards and associated performance indicators⁸, respondents were asked to consider whether they had noticed any improvement in service over the course of the past 18 months. Over 28 per cent indicated that improvements were evident while the remaining 72 per cent suggested that they had not noticed any changes.
- 9.2 Where respondents indicated that service had improved, they were asked to indicate the nature of such improvements. Responses varied, however, consistent themes pointed to improvements in responsiveness, cooperation and the accessibility of personnel.
- 9.3 Respondents were also asked to consider whether they had been any deterioration in service and though the number who pointed to a deterioration was relatively low (12 per cent) a number of themes were repeated and related to (i) decentralisation, (ii) staff changes and loss of expertise and (iii) delays in decision making. The full text of comments provided is attached at Appendix B.
- 9.4 When sectoral performance was considered, by far the greatest improvement was noticed by customers of the Marine sector. Fifty three per cent of customers falling into this category indicated that they had noticed an improvement in customer service over the course of the past 18 months compared to just 19 per cent for Energy, 32 per cent for Communications and 38 per cent for Natural Resources. This finding may be explained, in part, by the Department's commitment to specific performance indicators and service standards, many of which relate to maritime issues, certification and licensing.

⁸ As outlined in the Department's 'Customer Service Action Plan, 2004 – 2006'.

10. Conclusions & Recommendations

- 10.1 In general, the results of the Department's 'Customer Survey 2005' were reasonably positive and provide a solid foundation upon which ongoing and sustained improvements in customer service can be built.

Accessibility

- 10.2 The accessibility of Departmental personnel was found to be good with just 5 per cent of respondents indicating that personnel were not as accessible as they would expect. Importantly, 87 per cent of respondents indicated that direct dial telephone numbers and e-mail addresses were made available to them which suggests that in general, the Department is honouring its commitment to provide such details to customers.
- 10.3 Expectations were also largely being met in respect of responses to telephone calls or messages with just 9 per cent suggesting that there was a requirement for improvements in this area. However, respondents were less satisfied that the Department's commitment to respond to e-mails and written correspondence in a timely manner was being met.
- 10.4 Despite the general sentiment which suggested that Departmental personnel were accessible, further scope for improvement can be found when the individual performance of different sectors is considered. In this context, we recommend that further analysis should be undertaken to determine why expectations and/or dissatisfaction levels are markedly higher among customers of the Marine sector. Without the benefit of further analysis, we can only surmise that this may relate to e.g. the nature of interactions, outputs and relations. In working to continuously improve overall performance, important lessons may be learned by considering the reasons for relatively higher satisfaction levels within the other sectors. Such analysis should include a review of: (i) internal work systems, processes, procedures and efficiencies, (ii) interaction, reporting and governance arrangements and (iii) an assessment not of satisfaction levels⁹, but of the specific *reasons* for customer dissatisfaction and systems/actions/solutions required to address them.
- 10.5 The achievement of a mean score of 7.30 (out of 10) for 'accessibility of Departmental personnel' suggests that customers are reasonably satisfied but also indicates scope for improvement if standards of excellence are to be achieved. Also, with the range extending from 6.8 to 7.8, there is little scope for complacency within any of the Departments individual sectors.

Responsiveness & Decision Making

- 10.6 Though the Department was considered to be relatively responsive when dealing with routine issues (76 per cent agreed), considerable scope for improvement was found to exist in respect of responsiveness on complex, specialist or other issues for which policy positions had not been agreed. The Department has committed to 'endeavour to comprehensively answer correspondence within 20 working days', however, the results would indicate that customers are either dissatisfied with the (20 day) timeframe itself, or feel that responses are not received within this period. Up to a quarter of respondents

⁹ As these have been established and are outlined in the current analysis.

indicated that they were dissatisfied with the level of responsiveness on such issues and this increased to 39 per cent when the performance of individual sectors was considered.

- 10.7 The impact of a failure to agree policy positions may be explained, in part, by the suggestion that personnel are slow to exercise their decision making authority. This view was held by 18 per cent of respondents and rose to 26 per cent when sectoral performance was considered. As policy formulation and decision making is fundamental to organisational performance, we recommend that an evaluation of current approaches (to policy/decision making) should be undertaken with a view to identifying and addressing any structural impediments.

Communications & Consultation

- 10.8 Though consultation arrangements were considered to be effective by 62 per cent of respondents, 10 per cent disagreed and over 27 per cent were either unsure or failed to offer a considered opinion. In addition, 11 per cent were also sceptical about the value of consultation processes and indicated that they felt that their inputs were not considered. These figures rose to 25 per cent and 23 per cent respectively when the opinion of Marine sector customers was isolated.
- 10.9 Similarly, less than half of respondents agreed that ‘meaningful feedback was available as part of the consultative process’ and 13 per cent suggested that such feedback was not available¹⁰. This finding was validated by similar sentiment expressed in relation to the statement: ‘When requested, the Department provides me with the rationale for its decisions’ (13 per cent disagreed)¹¹. Furthermore, a considerable minority seemed to (i) be unaware of the existence of an appeals process (16 per cent) or (ii) lacked confidence in the appeals procedure (12 per cent). Such high levels of cynicism on the part of at least some respondents warrants further investigation with a view to restoring faith in the consultative process and promoting more effective customer relations. Likewise, if the Department is to honour its commitment to ‘encourage feedback, appeals and the impartial investigation of complaints’, such negative sentiment will need to be addressed in a structured and considered manner. While recognising that details have been published, we recommend that a greater awareness of the Department’s consultation arrangements and appeals procedures should also be promoted.
- 10.10 Though the Department was considered to be relatively responsive when dealing with routine issues, scope for improvement was found to exist in respect of more ‘proactive communications’, i.e. the provision of feedback, updates, etc. Various commitments have been promulgated to promote information sharing, however, almost one fifth of respondents indicated that they were not kept informed of the progress of key issues, while 17 per cent indicated that important updates were not provided to them or their representative bodies. In this context, we recommend that internal systems and procedures should be developed to ensure that proactive communicative arrangements can be established for the benefit of all parties. The importance associated with effective communications and consultation should not be underestimated and was awarded an importance rating of 8.87 by respondents.

¹⁰ This figure rose to 23 per cent amongst customers of the Marine sector.

¹¹ Again, this figure rose to 23 per cent when results for the Marine sector were considered.

Knowledge & Expertise

- 10.11 Despite the technical and specialist knowledge requirements associated with much of the Department's work, respondents were reasonably satisfied that personnel possessed the skills and expertise necessary to support them in discharging their responsibilities. Though a relatively significant number (12 per cent) suggested that personnel lacked the knowledge necessary to support customers with their requests, we had expected that this figure to be higher in view of specialist knowledge requirements. Similarly, while 16 per cent suggested that new or replacement personnel were slow to gain an appreciation of key issues, this figure could also have been higher for the same reason. Again, these figures suggest room for improvement and increased to 26 per cent when sectoral performance was considered. While it is anticipated that the new knowledge management system will serve to promote knowledge transfer and capability development, we recommend that greater emphasis should be placed on induction and related training for new/replacement personnel.
- 10.12 Over 71 per cent of respondents agreed that 'outputs from the Department were sufficiently comprehensive' while a relatively modest 12 per cent disagreed. This suggests that the Department is generally meeting its commitment to 'provide customers with comprehensive information' and can continue to work towards higher levels of performance into the future. Importantly, 62 per cent of respondents indicated that 'personnel were anxious to understand their issues/requirements' which suggests that while this figure can be improved upon, the prevailing culture is largely positive.

Service Delivery

- 10.13 The Department's commitment to be courteous and helpful is being achieved with 85 per cent of respondents indicating that personnel are helpful and 96 per cent indicating that they are polite and courteous. Such positive performance figures also serve to emphasise a strong customer relations ethic or culture which is obviously an important foundation for the realisation of continuous improvement objectives. Significant numbers also indicated that personnel were professional (86 per cent) and organised (72 per cent).

Improvement & Scope for Further Improvement

- 10.14 Finally, though the numbers pointing to an improvement in service over the past 18 months was not overwhelming (28 per cent), more than half (53 per cent) suggested that there had been an improvement on the basis of their interaction with the Marine sector. This is a welcome development and is likely to relate to the development, publication and achievement of specific service standards. In recognising that work on the development of key performance indicators has been undertaken, we recommend that this approach should be adopted on a more widespread basis throughout the organisation.

Customers' Perspective

- 10.15 In general terms it can be said that customers believe the Department is achieving service standards¹² as they relate to: (i) the accessibility of personnel and (ii) service delivery (courtesy, professionalism, etc.). Notwithstanding, mixed views were found to exist in

¹² Outlined in the Department's Customer Charter and Customer Service Action Plan.

respect of responsiveness, decision making, communications and consultation. Related performance was described as good when routine matters were considered, but requiring improvement where complex issues/queries were raised. Similarly, expectations regarding 'proactive' communications were not being met and awareness of the Department's appeals procedure lower than one might have expected.

- 10.16 While customers indicated that they would be better served if shortfalls identified in the survey research process were addressed, they did not point to any additional customer service requirements. Though question 9.4 asked respondents to 'identify any other areas in which there was scope for customer service improvement', no responses or views were recorded. This suggests that all improvement requirements are limited to those identified above and that customers' expectations can be met by addressing related issues.

Department's Perspective

- 10.17 The results indicate that the Department has further work to do if it is to satisfy customers' requirements, particularly in areas relating to 'responsiveness/decision making and 'communications/consultation'. While consultation arrangements have been established, faith in related processes needs to be established and appeals procedures require further promotion. We believe that important benefits would be gained by: (i) ensuring that consultative processes are (and are seen to be) open, transparent, impartial and meaningful, (ii) providing parties (proactively) with details of the outcome of consultative processes, (iii) ensuring that the rationale for the Department's decisions is offered, and (iv) engaging in meaningful dialogue with parties wishing to investigate the reasons for particular outcomes. While the benefits associated with such arrangements should be obvious, time, resource and related considerations should not be underestimated. Structural and cultural factors relating to the accountability, authority and decision making responsibilities of personnel also need to be considered if consultative feedback arrangements are to be fully effective.
- 10.18 The service standards outlined in the Department's Customer Charter and Customer Action Plan relate predominantly to (i) responsiveness (telephone and written correspondence), (ii) professionalism and courtesy, (iii) provision of information, (iv) complaints/appeals and (v) consultation/feedback. While subject areas reflect many of those investigated as part of the survey research process, many commitments lack qualitative, quantitative or temporal measures, and hence it is difficult to objectively assess performance. For this reason we do not believe that any of the service standards are overly ambitious or particularly 'stretching'.
- 10.19 Scope exists for service standards to be improved by including additional qualitative, quantitative and temporal measures of performance. These should be drafted with reference to the survey research findings so that customer requirements and expectations can be reflected and achieved. It should be acknowledged however, that such measures are referred to in the Customer Service Action Plan¹³ but that specific targets are not highlighted.

¹³ Through references to e.g. 'correspondence tracking systems', 'compliance with service standards', etc.

11. Summary of Key Findings & Recommendations

Key Findings

- 11.1 Accessibility of Departmental personnel was considered to be good and contact particulars were generally made available to customers. Phone calls were generally responded to in a timely manner though customers indicated that there was scope for an improvement in responsiveness to e-mails and other written correspondence.
- 11.2 Responsiveness and decision making was considered to be good when performance on routine issues was considered but poor where complex, specialist or similar matters were raised by customers.
- 11.3 Customers indicated that they would like the Department to adopt a more proactive approach to communications though over half felt that current arrangements were satisfactory. While many also suggested that consultative arrangements were effective, a significant minority pointed to a requirement for improvements or indicated that they lacked faith in consultative processes.
- 11.4 Departmental personnel were generally considered to possess sufficient technical or specialist knowledge and expertise. However, learning curves and the loss of personnel (upon transfer and promotion) was felt to give rise to problems.
- 11.5 Personnel within the Department were described as being courteous, professional, polite and helpful. Sentiment also extended to suggest that the prevailing culture within the Department was positive and that personnel are committed and anxious to assist customers with their requirements.
- 11.6 Performance ratings were found to differ significantly between sectors with higher levels of customer satisfaction expressed in respect of Natural Resources and lower levels in Marine. Notwithstanding, customers did point to improvements over the past 18 months and indicated that such improvements were most obvious within Marine.

Summary of Recommendations

- 11.7 Further analysis should be undertaken to determine the reasons for higher levels of customer dissatisfaction within the Marine sector. A formal review should be undertaken to consider: (i) internal work systems, processes, procedures and efficiencies, (ii) interaction, reporting and governance arrangements and (iii) the specific reasons for customer dissatisfaction and appropriate systems/actions/solutions required to address them.
- 11.8 Current practices and protocols surrounding policy formulation and decision making should be examined with a view to determining whether (i) perceived impediments do, in fact, exist and (ii) structural, cultural or organisational changes are required to support more effective decision making.
- 11.9 Details of the Department's consultation arrangements and appeals processes should be promoted and internal systems should exist to ensure openness, transparency and impartiality. Similarly, details of consultative processes should be made available

- (proactively) to customers and dialogue should be entered into (as appropriate) to promote an understanding of the rationale for the Department's different positions and decisions.
- 11.10 Internal systems and processes should be established to anticipate customers' information requirements and promote more 'proactive' communication on appropriate matters. The same should apply in relation to information posted on the Department's website.
- 11.11 Greater emphasis should be placed on induction and related training for new and replacement personnel. Staff should also be encouraged to use the new knowledge management database so that 'learning curves' may be reduced and capability development may be promoted.
- 11.12 Greater emphasis should be placed on development of, and reporting upon, qualitative, quantitative and temporal measures of performance. Such measures should exist to ensuring that clear service standards become more commonplace across the organisation. The benefits associated with the introduction of associated measures and KPIs in the Marine sector should be seen as highlighting potential benefits.

Appendix A

Customer Survey 2005

Survey Questionnaire

Department of the Communications, Marine & Natural Resources

Customer Survey 2005

The Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources is committed to continuously improving the quality of service which it provides to customers. In this context, RA Consulting has been commissioned to design, administer and report the results of the Department's 'Customer Survey 2005'.

As only aggregate survey results will be shared with the Department, your confidentiality and anonymity will be fully preserved.

The outcome of this review will provide a comprehensive assessment of your service delivery experience and scope for improvement. Feedback will also be used to establish customer service benchmarks and to identify associated performance targets.

Thank you for contributing to this important survey

1. Department/Office/Organisation

From the options below, please indicate which type of organisation you represent:

- Government Department, Office or State Agency
- Other public sector organisation
- Representative body or 'lobby' group
- Private sector organisation
- Other: _____

2. Frequency of Interaction

Please indicate the frequency with which you interact with the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources:

- Ongoing, i.e. regular weekly contact throughout the year
- Frequent, i.e. regular monthly contact
- Occasional, i.e. a few times per year
- Seldom, i.e. once or twice per year

3. Extent of Interaction

Please consider the following Sectors within the Department and indicate the extent of your interaction with each:

	Exclusively	Mainly	In Equal Measure	Occasionally	Seldom/Never
Communications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Natural Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Communications: Telecommunications, broadband, digital media, postal, television & radio broadcasting

Energy: incorporating - oil, gas, electricity, peat - regulation & corporate, capacity & security of supply, sustainable & renewable energy.

Marine: Incorporating - maritime safety, Irish Coastguard, marine environment, maritime transport, marine tourism, leisure & research, seafisheries, seafood, aquaculture, coastal & fisheries infrastructure & coastal zone management.

Natural Resources: Incorporating - inland fisheries, hydrocarbons & minerals exploration & development & geological survey.

4. Accessibility

Based on your own experience in dealing with the Department, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

4.1 I am aware of the identity of Departmental contact personnel who can assist me with my queries or requirements.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.2 In dealing with in the Department, I find that the personnel who I am in contact with are generally accessible.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.3 Direct dial telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are made available to me as required.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.4 Contact personnel in the Department respond to phone calls in a timely manner.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.5 Contact personnel in the Department respond to e-mails and written correspondence in a timely manner.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.6 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for an improvement in accessibility, i.e. access to personnel, responses to communications, etc.

4.7 Using the scale below (1 = 'Poor' and 10 = 'Excellent'), please provide an overall assessment of customer service in the specific area of accessibility of Departmental personnel.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- -----									
Poor									Excellent

4.8 Please indicate the importance you attach to receiving good customer service in the area of accessibility to Departmental personnel. (1 = 'Not Important' and 10 = 'Critical')

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- -----									
Not Important									Critical

5. Responsiveness & Decision Making

5.1 The Department provides me with timely responses to routine queries or requests.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.2 The Department provides me with timely responses to complex queries or requests.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.3 The Department provides me with timely responses to specialist/technical queries or requests.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.4 In the absence of agreed guidelines or a formal policy position, I still receive timely responses from the Department.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.5 The time taken to arrive at decisions is reasonable in view of consultation or other input requirements.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.6 Where inputs are required from third parties, responses from the Department are received within reasonable timeframes.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.7 Personnel within the Department generally exercise their decision making authority.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.8 When requested, the Department provides me with the rationale for its decisions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.9 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for an improvement in responsiveness/ decision making, i.e. ability to meet deadlines, responsiveness to queries raised, timeliness of decision making processes, etc.

5.10 Please provide an overall assessment of customer service in the specific area of responsiveness/decision making.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- -----									
Poor									Excellent

5.11 Please indicate the importance you attach to receiving good customer service in the area of responsiveness/decision making.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- ----- -----									
Not Important									Critical

6. Communications & Consultation

6.1 The Department provides me with meaningful updates in response to my information requests.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6.2 I am kept informed (as appropriate) on the progress of key issues.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know/ Not Applicable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6.3 Insofar as can be reasonably expected, important communication updates are automatically provided to me/my representative body.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know/ Not Applicable

6.4 Insofar as can be reasonably expected, the Department provides me with sufficient time to respond to its information requests.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know/ Not Applicable

6.5 The Department provides me with sufficient details to respond effectively to its information requests.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know/ Not Applicable

6.6 Arrangements for consultation between the Department and I (or my representative body) are effective.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know/ Not Applicable

6.7 I am confident that submissions made as part of the consultative processes are considered by the Department.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know/ Not Applicable

6.8 Meaningful feedback is available to me (or my representative body) as part of consultative processes.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know/ Not Applicable

6.9 I am free to appeal the Department's decisions as appropriate.

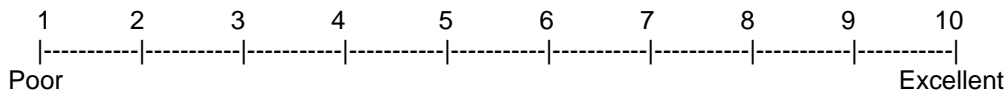
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know/ Not Applicable

6.10 I am confident that any appeals would be considered impartially.

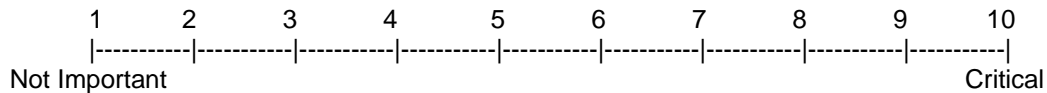
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree Don't Know/ Not Applicable

6.11 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for an improvement in communications/consultation, i.e. responses to information requests, updates on key issues, outcome of consultative processes, etc.

6.12 Using the scale below, please provide an overall assessment of service in the specific area of communications/consultation.



6.13 Please indicate the importance you attach to receiving good client service in the area of communications/consultation.



7. Understanding & Expertise

7.1 In general, outputs emanating from the Department are sufficiently comprehensive, i.e. all relevant issues are considered.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7.2 Personnel within the Department are anxious to understand my issues/requirements.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7.3 Personnel within the Department have the knowledge necessary to support me with my requests/requirements.

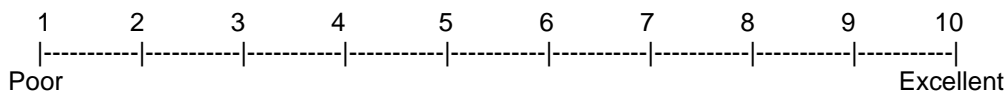
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7.4 New/replacement personnel manage to gain an appreciation of key issues without undue delay.

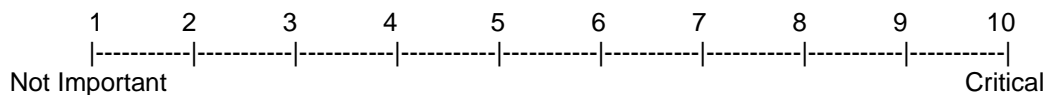
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7.5 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for an improvement in understanding and expertise, i.e. understanding of issues, knowledge of requirements, comprehensiveness of outputs, etc.

7.6 Using the scale below, please provide an overall assessment of customer service in the specific area of understanding and expertise.



7.7 Please indicate the importance you attach to receiving good customer service in the area of understanding and expertise.



8. Service Delivery

8.1 When dealing with the Department, I find staff to be polite and courteous, i.e. I am treated with the courtesy which I would expect from a customer oriented organisation.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8.2 When dealing with the Department, I find staff to be professional.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8.3 When dealing with the Department, I find staff to be helpful.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8.4 When dealing with the Department, I find staff to be organised, i.e. sufficiently prepared for meetings/discussions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 9.2 If yes, please identify the nature of such improvements and their relative importance.
- 9.3 If any aspects of the service which you receive have deteriorated, please indicate what these are, and provide a view as to why there may have been a deterioration.
- 9.4 Please identify any other areas in which there is scope for customer service improvement and the relative importance associated with improvement in these areas.
- 9.5 Please use the space below to offer any additional thoughts or comments.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contribute to this important initiative

Appendix B

Customer Survey 2005

Respondents' Comments

Accessibility – Communications

4.6 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for an improvement in accessibility, i.e. access to personnel, responses to communications, etc.

In recent months regional coordinators have been appointed to administer the group broadband scheme resulting in a system where the Dept personnel send queries to the coordinator and on to myself who has then to reply to the coordinator who then passes the information on to the dept. Are they serious!

Access to personnel

In the area of Broadband, which is the focus of my interaction with the Dept., there is a preponderance on its part to use consultants of various disciplines, especially legal, and as a consequence, there is a reluctance to deal directly with my authority even though it is also a public authority and a part of our overall system of government.

In the event that staff are out of the office it would be useful to have access to mobile numbers.

If the person you want is on annual leave/sick etc. then it may be difficult to get information or an answer

Better procedures re: voicemail messages or diversion to secretary when person is on leave or otherwise absent. Cover when person is absent.

On occasion, it is difficult to find the name of the contact person who deals with particular issues. Perhaps an internal contact list with numbers and email addresses and area of responsibility would be helpful.

Accessibility – Energy

They never formulate policy, therefore are not available to comment, because they have nothing to say.

Timely response to letters and follow-up on those letters is an area for improvement

Accessibility is assisted by close proximity to office - this could be lost by proposed decentralisation. Sense of good accessibility is enhanced by proximity.

An online telephone directory with direct dial numbers
Advance notice of personnel going on long duration vacations.

I normally provide information to Dept. and rarely seek help or information from Dept.

I am never in contact by telephone, exclusively by email.

We receive zero written correspondence from DCMNR, Energy (Marine ok). Responses to written correspondence from us are given at face to face meetings requested by us. In the absence of these meetings there would be no response to queries or feedback on issues of significant commercial importance. This would not be tolerated in private industry.

X seems to be the main contact person. He is very busy and often is unable to respond as quickly as we would wish. Greater resources are required in his department.

Accessibility – Marine

Response to communications

Automatic responses to e-mails indicating when the matter will be dealt with, and if not be the respondent, by whom. Delays in resolutions should be acknowledged before the deadline passes.

Whilst response acknowledging correspondence is generally (not always) received within a reasonable time period, decisions required within the correspondence not always provided in as timely a manner as is required.

I would like a reply to my correspondence as seldom if ever get any. Some sectors of the Marine are very slow to return phone calls and it can be extremely frustrating, would like to see this attended to.

Some officials are very good at responding. Others are the opposite

Very poor or no response to either written or oral communications. Very difficult to obtain straight answers to straight questions.

Contact personnel transferred 6 months ago, temp. placement put in place for a short period. No personnel appointed to position, hence no contact name.

No problem with accessibility.

Direct dialup numbers on the internet site would be useful

Response to contact and queries

The response time to written communication is very slow and the ability of the personnel to make decisions is zero.

Recent questions directed at the Minister were not responded to after 1 year, only received letters saying the Dept would send a consider response. Not received until question raised in the Dail.

There needs to be continuity of communication so that relationships can be built up. If we are continuously having to deal with different people on the same subject matters then the education process is prolonged. Continuous change of personnel prevents working relationships being developed (though it is understood that personnel within the Dept. have promotion expectations).

Timely response to e-mail & written enquiries, direct access telephone numbers including mobile phone numbers

I would appreciate an awareness of the senior appointment changes in the departments that I deal with on not such a regular basis (eg Managerial and upwards)

Specific roles, responsibilities and direct contact details for all personnel should be identified on the website. This should be provided in a manner accessible to Joe public. i.e. by function, not department.

Information on Certificates of Competency, Tickets issued etc. This would be very helpful in meeting training requirement and projecting needs in the future.

Sea Fisheries: Access to personnel, responses to communications

Deal almost exclusively with the Irish Coast Guard and all contact and communication is excellent. As a major resource and charity better press and media support from the Department would be appreciated.

Slow and sometimes no response to written correspondence

The methods of communication and access are in place, the issue is the human resources availability within the dept. and their capability to respond or made a decision.

More meetings on a face to face basis instead of talking by phone/email on most occasions

Marine Survey office. Letters not answered. No reasons given for licensing requirements which depend on the individual surveyors whims and often make no sense whatever

Private phone numbers and E-mail addresses are not volunteered.

Response from senior staff may be delayed

Currently waiting between a year and 18 months for files to be finished, approved and returned.

Infrastructural funding should be allocated and announced at the beginning of the calendar year so that the money can be effectively expended. This year, 2005, by the middle of July the 2005 allocation is still unannounced. Access to personnel fine/ no problem.

Responses have no content or action, only letters of response, i.e. acknowledgement of receipt of letters.

Holding letters which never go off hold

With electronic communication contact is very much improved

Accessibility – Natural Resources

Written correspondence to certain individuals never replied to me.

Responses to communications could be improved

Seven Heads Gas Situation - implementing planned 2006 drilling programme is being hindered by lack of progress with regard to resolving banking issues. Minister should be more involved in seeking to resolve this matter NOW

Information number which could be used to redirect queries when normal contacts / specific people aren't available

None. I find access to personnel, responses to communications as excellent. The only area of improvement is in the speed that Prospecting Licence Renewals are processed. Periodic notification of staff reassignments might be beneficial

Individuals seem to be on various leaves quite a bit

Responsiveness & Decision Making – Communications

5.9 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for an improvement in responsiveness/decision making, i.e. ability to meet deadlines, responsiveness to queries raised, timeliness of decision making processes, etc.

Group broadband scheme experience in general of the system has been poor.

Far too slow in making decisions regarding allocation of funds.

Some decisions from the Dept. may require advise etc from Depts. consultants. This is where delays occur. It is usually difficult to know who is holding up a decision.

Decisions or responses to queries on policy issues can often be slow

Little external consultation and little rationale (particularly economic rationale) given when decisions are taken. Internal discussions sometimes seem to take an unduly long time and to be somewhat circular - issues seem to be thrashed out endlessly without actually moving forward in the light of clear policy goals
More advance thinking on information requests. Understand of work involved in some PQs, need for project management

Staffing requests, funding requests

Very often industry would require a reply within hours or a few days. It can take longer with government Departments.

Responsiveness & Decision Making – Energy

Department is the downtown office of the ESB. It fears their Unions, and is paralysed to act. It viciously attacks anyone who rocks any boat, is extremely badly advised and almost always makes the wrong decisions

Department needs further recourse in order to be able to tackle the complex interacting components of energy policy and legislation.

Speed of decision making is sometimes a problem for a matter related to the commercial marketplace, particularly where inter-departmental communication is required.

It is difficult to establish from the outside how reporting lines operate within the department and where a particular staff level's authority to make decisions begins and ends.
Foreshore Licence process

Overall very good - compared to other public bodies DCMNR very responsive

The scope of my relationship with the dept is to send an email once a month.

Applying some of the rigours of private industry to the sector would improve responsiveness considerably.

Responsiveness & Decision Making – Marine

Decision making within published departmental guidelines.

Appropriate officials should be empowered to make decisions more rapidly than currently appears to be the case.

Decision making varies by individual. Response times also vary. We are generally not aware of the authority levels of individuals within the department, other than those at the highest level.

If I contact the Department with a query I expect to get a reply. Meetings can cover up to 10 important issues in one day. Don't believe this is sufficient as many of these issues would require a separate meeting. Appears sometimes that the Department have already made their decision prior to meeting with industry. If a policy is passed that we may be fully objected to Department may say that they have had consultation with industry.

There is a total lack of uniformity in the responsiveness and timeliness. Some officials are very good. Others constantly have mailboxes full, or seem to let an issue drop off their agenda if not constantly reminded. They would all have less trouble if there was a clear understanding that matters would be dealt with in a uniform manner. Regular customers of the Department should be able to flag or prioritise requests - eg have a quota of priority one items which would receive immediate attention. However, I appreciate the staffing constraints in the sections we deal with and the fact that they are overstretched.

For some 20 years the DCM&NR (under its different titles) has exhibited a strong culture of cronyism and selective treatment. It was, and is, manipulative, devious and very economical with the truth. As a result, its credibility and level of trust is very poor. In our experience, the Department entirely fails to understand that all citizens of the State are equal, and entitled to equal treatment by the State and its institutions.

Early notification of pending requests for information. We receive a request for some information with 24 hour deadline for reply, yet the request for this information had been sent to the DCMNR some weeks before.

Staff should not be constantly terrified of legal action. More support from superior staff for decision making ability of middle management.

Timeliness in responding to queries/correspondence

The personnel don't make any decisions....they are either waiting on a higher civil servant or a minister or a consultants report before g a decision.

Where guidance is sought from the Dept., the faster the query can be answered, the faster the problem from our perspective can be resolved In this regard, the Dept. is in effect a service organisation, even though its true character is probably legislative and implementation.

There is no decision making structure within the department, if the responsible person is unavailable no one is authorised to deputise and queries remain unanswered until return of the responsible person

Current Management structure is not conducive to being able to meet obligations. Currently no Deputy Chief Surveyor.

Personnel make a habit of hiding behind rules some of which are patently inappropriate.

Could put more pressure on third parties to provide information / data within deadlines to facilitate faster responses / decisions.

There may be more scope for inclusive consultative processes to ensure that proposed new regulations are workable and may be implemented easily.

Sea Fisheries: responsiveness to queries raised, ability to meet deadlines

The very fact that the Dept and the civil service generally is NOT commercial, there is often an attitude of "it will wait until tomorrow". Improvements can only be made if driven from the top downwards, otherwise attitudes will not change.

The survey office does things with no regard to real life or practicalities

At AP level there appears to be a marked reluctance to take any decisions.

Decisions in the department are rarely made, when they are they are never based are consistent level of requirements

Re 5.5 and 5.10 below; the response relates to the delay to announce funding and also the time taken to deal with foreshores applications. Announcements of scheme allocation should be by February of the year involved.

Appears to be few staff that are qualified to make decisions and appears that they are under staffed in general

A legally trained person with specialist knowledge in the Fisheries Acts should be on 'tap' at the Department
Maybe even better in time when GIS services are at an optimum

Responsiveness & Decision Making – Natural Resources

Certain sections of the Department fail to respond to correspondence - this brings the entire Department down. There are others who respond efficiently but that is not what the customer remembers!

Meet deadlines

Seven Heads Gas - PAD/Minister should take a more PROACTIVE role in facilitating the Parties to get together to resolve the debt finance issue and should impose a deadline for the issues to be resolved. PAD/Minister should consider changing the licensing terms to enforce companies to copy valuable seismic field data etc and deposit it in a secure PAD storage facility. We have wasted nearly 12 months chasing data from former operators offshore Ireland. Our time is better spent firming up drilling plans rather than chasing data. [X company] has been particularly UNCOOPERATIVE in this respect. Frequently older data can be significantly improved using modern technology whereas there is less evidence that modern acquisition technology has led to similar improvements. PIC funding should be diverted into data storage and manipulation projects - this can help facilitate new drilling programmes

Seems to be a general slowness in decision making particularly in complex areas and if other Gov't Departments involved - this is not unique to DCMNR

No specific areas identified

Provide an agreed timescale for response at the start. Decision on licence application within one/two month(s)

As mentioned above, the only area where responsiveness could be speedier is in renewals of Prospective Licences. But this is not critical because we know we have complied with requirements and we can trust that renewal will happen.

Communications & Consultation – Communications

6.11 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for an improvement in communications/consultation, i.e. responses to information requests, updates on key issues, outcome of consultative processes, etc.

Streamline the whole process for the group broadband scheme and provide adequate resources .

Think through the projects better.

Department unclear about why it made a number of requests for further information/clarification to my organisation. This resulted in an inefficient system of communication wherein the department would ask a question, we would answer it and then the department would realise that the information they needed required asking a further question. It would have been easier all-round had the department been clear about what was required in the first instance.

Responses to information requests generally work well. Consultative processes can appear to be formulaic, "box-ticking" exercises since the costs and benefits of alternatives are not generally quantified.

Information requests from the Department are sometimes vague. Requests from other Departments, such as Finance, are sometimes forwarded without any consideration as to whether they are applicable to my organisation and we have to decipher them. Sometimes the time given for a reply is unreasonably short. Other times, the forwarding of the information request from another Department is delayed within DCMNR thus eating into our response time.

The overriding consideration will be political and often the dept's hands are tied

Communications & Consultation – Energy

Cynicism rules in Dept. We customers are seen as nuisances. All their consultation is cynical, I don't believe they read it.

Consultation documents are thorough but there is rarely feedback on responses and thus it is difficult to know whether responses are read.

Faster turn around time in foreshore licence Review committee work and better transparency.

Responses above reflect the fact that I haven't had any occasions to appeal decisions etc so can't really make an informed response.

Communications & Consultation – Marine

Some kind of a standardised tracking forum should be web-accessible so that queries / problems can be monitored in terms of progress, without having to constantly hunt down the DoCMNR official(s) who you think is(are) dealing with the problem

Information provision varies considerably. In many instances where initial information provided is insufficient. Further information will be provided on request.

Issues mainly seem to come to industry attention at critical stage when very little can be done and we have insufficient time to reply. Where appropriate we should be given at least 1 month to make submissions on important issues.

I am not aware of any appeals mechanism for decisions. But generally, the problems of consultation arise more with the content of the advice rather than its communication!
A lot more transparency and completeness by DCM&NR in presenting the FULL information at its disposal; and a lot less manipulation and scheming. The term "political ad hocery" has been used to describe the method of operation in place.

Timescale for information requests normally too tight.

Staff need to be educated or experienced in the often quite technical areas in which they work. A balance between bureaucracy and ensuring competitiveness in industry needs to be promoted.

The tendering process for department contracts are very unfair and written by the personnel in each section to favour their chosen suppliers.

Reducing the timescale for inter-communications means that a problem referred to the Dept. can be dealt with more effectively.

Department should give timely advise of forthcoming amendments to relevant rules and regulations (national and international) that may affect their customers

Regular consultations (twice per annum) are vital with stakeholders.

I would be of the opinion that so called consultations are regarded as briefings rather than an opportunity to access proposals and their effects.

Perhaps more time made available to respond to major issues, especially where I need to involve others in my organisation in formulating the response

There may be scope for Seminar/Conference meetings on topics of specific interest to the sector that can learn from EU/international experience.

Sea Fisheries: responses to information requests, updates on key issues

Inadequate consultation on new legislation and regulations.

Problems within Dept: 1 job sharing (lack of continuity), 2 non commercial mindset, 3 little appreciation that the Dept has customers. Required adherence to the customer charter

More face to face meetings

The marine survey office will issue instructions, often contradictory, without reference to the customer or the suitability of their decisions for each individual application. I see no logic in having a life raft with 7 days food and drink on a licence which restricts you to 3 miles offshore when help is generally within 45 minutes away There appear to be gaps in the communications trail. While generally good not all relevant information feeds out.

Decisions appealed are met with contempt

Allocation of annual funding (by Feb not August). Speedier processing of foreshores licensing and leases for larger of pertinent infrastructural projects multi annual funding should be allocated.

Again, dedicated staff (permanent) who will not be moved on to other sections just as they get a handle on the job.

Communications & Consultation – Natural Resources

The review of the fisheries service is over 12 months overdue. This delay is unreasonable and keeping key personnel in the dark does not give the feeling of involvement in the process or trust.

Requests for reports etc., are sometime at very short notice and it can therefore be difficult to meet the deadlines set.

Licensing Rounds. Energy Strategy and Policy Making

Experience has been that department decision's are handed down and rarely has consultation appeared to influence policy

Yes. Every year a request is made by the EMD for drilling and expenditure statistics. The statistics are requested in a form that doesn't make sense.

Understanding & Expertise – Communications

7.5 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for an improvement in understanding and expertise, i.e. understanding of issues, knowledge of requirements, comprehensiveness of outputs, etc.

I feel that contact staff within the department was unclear about the technical side of the business (understandable) but were being asked to play "piggy-in-the middle" between the technical staff and ourselves, rather than the technical staff dealing directly with us. This caused a delay.

The Dept. sometimes takes the view that one cap fits all. There may be important local/regional issues. It is difficult to get the Dept. to take these differences on board.

There is a need for greater specialist expertise, not just in the technical areas covered by the Department (though the loss of key personnel on promotion or transfer can create considerable difficulties) but also in law and economics, considering the weight of EU legislation which the Department deals with - waiting for an opinion from the Attorney General's office is not always an option.

Too much staff turnover and lack of understanding of sector

Information previously is often asked for repeatedly, particularly in relation to responses to political representations. Sometimes, it appears that the staff in DCMNR just forward the query into us rather than look up their own records.

More direct analysis/absorption and representation of issues back to central govt. rather than relying exclusively on external consulting reports.

Understanding & Expertise – Energy

Newcomers try to change things in there. They get nowhere. Staff are individually intelligent, but the culture of the place is self serving and so talent goes unrecognised, unchallenged and ultimately awaits retirement

More training and further energy industry personnel secondments would be helpful provided it does not entrench semi-state ideology.

Increase level of understanding at lower levels rather than depending on few key individuals at upper echelon.

Staff leaving should have the opportunity to train their replacement.

Too rapid turnover of key staff

Understanding & Expertise – Marine

Knowledge of requirements

Maritime Transport appears to rate very low down in the scale of priorities within the DoCMNR - in terms of resources, responsiveness, and action.

We believe that most Department personnel should be more understanding of the issues facing fishermen on the ground, that is to understand that each day lost at sea by a fisherman is a step backwards.

We deal in a highly complex area of DCMNR, highly regulated and difficult to understand. The turnover in staff means that junior staff have relatively low levels of expertise (no fault of theirs) and this places a very high burden on senior staff.

It would appear that staff mobility is fairly high. At a higher level the number fully acquainted with policy (EU/National) is very low. If any such staff member moves on there would be a large knowledge deficit which would not be filled easily or quickly.

There is little or no appreciation for the effects of non-action on livelihoods of industry. More attention is paid to solicitor's letters from environmental NGOs than reasonable requests from industry.

Briefing when personnel change. Advising the customer of a personnel change when an application/process is ongoing

They don't understand how business in the private sector works. They can cost private individuals and companies thousands of euros for every week they delay in making decisions. State employees and the various sections of the department are operating at about 25% their capacity. It is impossible to get any form of decision from a government department in less than a year.

At times personnel changes mean that you have to start building a new relationship with somebody over issues which might be unusual for the Dept.

There needs to be a movement away from the philosophy that "one size fits all"! Within the marine environment there are a number of distinct sectors and sometimes the Dept. doesn't seem to recognise this fact. What is pertinent to the commercial environment isn't necessarily applicable to the leisure environment. The Dept. needs to recognise the diversity of activity that its operation influences!

Department does not appear willing to represent the interests of their customers at international conventions. It is vital that the interpretation of regulations be absolutely consistent with the regulations and consistent across the board in its application.

The needs of the recreational boating community are poorly understood by an organisation that has yet to realise that this is one of the most significant and fastest growing sector in Marine.

Some output, especially legal / regulation output should be accompanied by a laymans guide in plain English.

Access to FAQ's on the DCMNR website would facilitate better information.

Sea fisheries: Knowledge of requirements

Irish Coast Guard - new personnel to attend coast familiarisation and briefing from bodies such as RNLI.

Customer consultation is a function of understanding and expertise in the Dept - it could therefore be improved.

Personnel should be committed long term to issues. New personnel need a long hand over period (the customer should not have to educate the dept official)

Briefings on the requirements of any new relevant statutory instruments

Marine Surveyors presumably are professionals but seem incapable of being practical rather than always blaming the EU for senseless requirements.

Where staff do not understand the issues they should be encouraged to enter into dialogue rather than issuing meaningless letters

Understanding & Expertise – Natural Resources

It is important for all the branches of the Department to communicate with each other effectively. As the responsibilities stand, some are in direct conflict and this does not help with decision making.

General commercial and financial issues relating to the oil and gas industry. Field development expertise. Reservoir engineering expertise. Marketing of prospectivity expertise. Risk-Reward appreciation

Generally no issues - willingness to enter dialogue to assist understanding & learning on issues is evident and could be increased.

Depends on the area, but there has been some recent concern by my colleagues in the ability of a person in one section to advise on products and services in another section where there is a query that requires data from more than one section.

The staff are disinterested in doing any thing other than work 9 to 5 and do not keep up with developments in the industry

Engineering/technical and admin staff seem competent

New personnel may get an understanding but cannot do anything about the logjams in the system

More meetings, workshops, etc

Service Delivery – Communications

8.8 Please identify any areas in which there is scope for improvement in the quality of service delivery received, i.e. professional, courteous, organised, helpful, committed, etc.

Some staff can be abrupt during the course of meetings

Generally staff are professional and courteous. We don't always have the same objectives, but neither should we. Any difficulties that arise are usually due to absences without cover, difficulties in finding whether staff are there or not. It seems people don't always update their voicemail or use Out of Office Assistant on e-mail when they are absent. Thus it's possible to leave a message or send an e-mail which goes unanswered for some time. Generally if we know someone is out of the office we can contact someone else, but (a) it's not always apparent who is out and for how long and (b) we don't always know who the next-in-line is.

(Understandably) having to serve a political master can sometimes impact on the degree to which the Department can pursue a common objective with us.

Standards of professional courtesy are more a function of individuals rather than a departmental norm.

Service Delivery – Energy

Staff would be fine, if they working in a good environment. The ethic is socialist, power driven, and anti-competitive. Individuals are kind and indeed courteous and committed even.

Personnel very friendly but further industry background would ensure that energy industry objectives could be better understood.

Needs to be a concept of customer service fostered to ensure that the solution is not found by simply saying NO as often as possible. This includes acting on behalf of applicant with other government departments.

My dealings with personnel from the Department are very fruitful; however, often due to large amounts of work and lack of sufficient human resources, personnel have problems maintaining the high level of productivity they would like to provide.

More helpful would be great

Service Delivery – Marine

Commitment to finding a solution within a reasonable timeframe

Department officials appear to be over-cautious in dealing with key issues which affect the agencies & companies under their remit. Fear of subsequent rebuke or challenge from another quarter appears to determine the capacity of effort and decision-making. This is routinely evident.

I have agreed that the Department are helpful and professional and prepared for meetings. I believe that our expertise should be taken into consideration and that we are given more time to prepare for the meetings we attend with the Department.

DCMNR is very defensive of its decision making prerogatives and we have in many cases a somewhat adversarial situation. However, this goes with the territory to some extent and cannot be totally avoided. They could do better in my view.

The main concerns are: 1. That the Dept. responds in an early and complete manner. It is not acceptable that incomplete or, worse, no response is forthcoming. An end to cronyism.

Staff seem to be un-motivated and unconcerned at the issues of the industry. Much of this is "learnt" behaviour from observing superiors.

They just don't care....they are only interested in collecting their salaries with the minimum of effort and the maximum of perks. When dealing with personnel in state offices they are either on a day off, sick leave, travelling or on a tea break. Check the levels of absenteeism in the various departments.

When talking to departments expert on a particular subject although consensus can be reached no official action can be endorsed without referral to head of department. When talking to head of department no action can be endorsed without referral to departments expert, in either case decision making is drawn out and ultimately unsatisfactory.

Quality of interaction in this area really depends on the project and the personnel involved. Some time it is excellent, on the whole it is poor. A head in the sand attitude to most of issues we raise naturally means that the response we get is poor.

All staff are committed and dedicated and will usually respond in a reasonable time with relevant information.

Sea fisheries: Organisation, helpfulness

An abiding feeling exists that the Dept only recognises one customer - The Minister. Frequently the relationship can border on adversarial

The surveyors are totally impractical and with no consistency. The department generally never communicate updates to licence holders-usually these are discovered at the time of survey and are often senseless but are presented as a fait accompli

Lack of knowledge in certain areas is a problem. There is not always a discernable sense of urgency in dealing with issues which are important to the client.

They don't give a dam

Political -- re timely allocation of funding

Service Delivery – Natural Resources

Areas where policies conflict - Need for better training for staff newly transferred to department and for staff to stay an adequate period of time. Also for there to be a hand over period when staff changing.

In some areas there is a degree of competition where the department sees itself as in the business of selling products and services not unlike private industry.

Customer Service Improvements – Communications

9.1 In your dealings with the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources over the course of the last 18 months, have you noticed any improvements in customer service?

9.2 If yes, please identify the nature of such improvements and their relative importance

Staff more available and responsive

More responsive to my queries.

They are more understanding and open to dealing with regional and local authorities and have a better appreciation of the potential for cooperation.

More open to working with local/regional actors to achieve common goals

Easier accessibility

Understanding of issues outside the policy approach

We have had more contact at more levels - this has improved our knowledge of how the Department works and how key staff relate to each other, which has made our interactions easier.

Improvements driven by assignment of new team.

More interactions and face-to-face meetings. Sense that there is a greater desire to support the Agency

Any queries I have had were handled efficiently

Customer Service Improvements – Energy

Facilities in the Adelaide Rd. offices are superior and more cohesive than the previous offices.

I have not been involved with the Dept. for more than 5 months so the improvements are more likely to have been because of the development of my relationship with the officials

Data quality of submissions has improved and this is a highly critical issue for us.

The Department had been requested to work more closely together with our International Organisation and gave important input and guidance in international meetings

Customer Service Improvements – Marine

Reflecting a drift towards customer orientation throughout the public service - DoCMNR has delivered an improved air of concern in dealing with third parties. 'A lot done, but more to do'.

Licensing of vessels have become somewhat quicker. Extra personnel are beginning to make improvement on faster communication.

More positive approach taken re. support of seafood processing sector.

There seems to be less staff movement whereby you can build up a working relationship with the contact person.

Response to queries and requests for information

Our organisation has always had an excellent relationship with the Dept of Marine particularly due the nature of our working together upon marine safety issues

In the last 3 years we have seen some improvement in access to key personnel and some positive development where we have been asked to work with the department to common benefit.

More friendly approach - makes dealing with Dept easier.

Difficult to quantify given the enormity of change taking place and the mobility of staff within the Department.

Some early attempts at improved consultation. Long way to go!

Possibly in the very fact that they are undertaking this survey

A round-table meeting with independent surveyors allows for feed-back immediately

More communication and consultation in some areas

More accessibility, more meetings, consultation. I find that the NCMNR offer the Fisheries Boards an excellent opportunity to get all our points across within a joint working group

Customer Service Improvements – Natural Resources

More people come back to me efficiently.

Clearer division of roles and therefore easier to make contact with the most relevant person

Faster turnaround times for the award of new licences - necessary for planning and execution of work programmes in tight rig and seismic vessel market

Yes and No. Access to Technical data improved.

The Department has become more proactive in promoting activities in the Irish Offshore and are working collaboratively with industry to try and increase activity levels

Improvements through better understanding of my business challenges.

However I have been told that some services that I rarely use have reduced in price

More interested in my needs

Improved web service

Very friendly