

Marine Protection in the Eastern Baltic

Current Status, Challenges, and Forward-Looking Solutions

Date: Thursday, 25 April 2024

Theme: Marine Protection & Ocean Policies

Workshop Summary

Findings of HELCOM's State of the Baltic report - Status quo in the region in achieving the 30x10x30 targets

Cecilia Nyman from HELCOM set the scene with an insightful update on the Baltic Sea's environmental status, noting that the Baltic Sea was the first region with 10% of marine areas protected by 2020. Nevertheless, there is still a challenging road toward the "30x10x30" targets, with significant knowledge gaps that hinder effective marine conservation decision-making and therefore Marine Protected Areas (MPA) implementation. Current assessments show poor biodiversity status and widespread issues with marine litter and eutrophication. Nyman stressed the urgent need for enhanced measures and the integration of current developments into an ecosystem-based framework.

Latvian national initiative for reaching the marine protection targets

After the presentation on regional challenges and needs, **Ingrida Andersone** from the Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology presented a national approach to marine targets - the LIFE REEF project and its role in addressing key marine pressures and challenges such as eutrophication, invasive species, and the emerging impact of wind energy developments on marine ecosystems. She called for robust fisheries management to handle invasive species and emphasized the need for effective communication and collaboration in offshore wind park projects to align with marine protection goals.

The ÅlandSeaMap Project: Implementing Good Practices in Marine Protection

Karl Weckström from Åbo Akademi University introduced the ÅlandSeaMap project a good practice implemented in marine protection, which focused on identifying suitable areas for new protected areas and resulted in designating approximately 4000 hectares of MPAs. He highlighted the availability of effective tools for site selection resulting from the project, but underlined the necessity for greater collaboration with regional managers and immediate establishment of management guidelines.

Panel discussion: Examples of good practices and existing solutions in the region, Q&A session

Francisco Barboza, UTARTU, BLUE4ALL/MSP4BIO

Paul Trouth, HELCOM, PROTECT BALTIC

Ingrida Andersone, Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology, LIFE REEF

Karl Weckström, Åbo Akademi University, ÅlandSeaMap project

Maija Viska, Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology, COOL BLUE

Agnė Lukoševičienė, IGNITIS

The panel discussion representing different projects and initiatives active in the region, such as BLUE4ALL, PROTECT BALTIC, Cool Blue, MSP4BIO, Offshore Renewable Energy in the region (Ignitis) etc discussed different questions from audience and main topics that they projects are addressing such as the involvement of all stakeholders and local communities in developing tools and guidance for implementing MPAs (PROTECT BALTIC, COOL BLUE, BLUE4ALL), application of the bottom-up approach acknowledging the complexity of this task (BLUE4ALL). Questions were raised about the sustainability of the MPA related research and analysis work without public funding and ensuring that the outcomes are replicable and open-source, benefiting a wider scope beyond the specific projects (LIFE REEF and all). The work of the offshore wind energy project in the region was presented, highlighting the research and analysis on the monitoring of impacts on marine biodiversity that is being ensured by the company to make their work as sustainable as possible. The bottom up approach of BLUE4ALL project was discussed, involving the Living labs in the co-creation of marine protection and conservation tools. PROTECT BALTIC highlighted its regional character and cooperation in creating an optimization framework for MPA establishment and management, ensuring engagement of all, paying attention to so far under-represented groups of stakeholders.

Moderated discussions continued in the Interactive Breakout Sessions during which the following messages were sent informing the final action points resulting from the workshop:

1. Designing Effective MPAs: Discussions centered on overcoming existing stigma on MPAs and limitations they impose, integrating better humans and ecosystems, and the critical role of communication, education, and information in better MPA acceptance and ownership.

2. Regional Needs for Effective MPAs: Participants highlighted a need for cost-effective marine protection measures and encouraged communication of MPAs in a positive light, ensuring land-sea interactions and connectivity.

3. MPA Management Practices: Good practices were shared, such as using mussels to target eutrophication and collaborating with fishermen to design better nets. The potential for extending/integrating terrestrial with marine protected areas was discussed, along with the idea of flexible protection measures that can be revised post-regeneration.

4. Involvement of Local Stakeholders: The necessity of engaging local stakeholders early in the MPA design and implementation process was underscored. Ideas such as blue community gardens were highlighted as ways to actively involve people and enhance understanding of MPAs. The sessions also stressed the need to increase ecological information available in sea charts and refine communication strategies to ensure clarity and engagement.

5. New MPA Ideas and Projects: Discussions encouraged the development of fewer, and better-coordinated projects that address specific regional needs effectively. Designation of pan-Baltic MPAs was suggested to better address connectivity, land-sea interactions and ensure Baltic MPA effectiveness. The need for enhanced communication strategies was reiterated, with a focus on breaking down the "transparent wall" between terrestrial and marine conservation efforts to ensure a holistic approach to environmental protection.