

Policy Coherence as a Platform for Better Integration of Marine Conservation in MSP and Sectoral Policies

Regional Pilots and Examples

Date: Friday, 26 April 2024

Theme: Marine Protection & Ocean Policies

Workshop Summary

Challenges and Opportunities in MSP and Nature Conservation

Riku Varjopuro from SYKE presented the work and findings from the MSP4BIO and eMSP projects on challenges and opportunities in MSP and Nature Conservation in the region, discussing the organizational setup of MSP administration across various countries and highlighting both the challenges and potential of MSP to support biodiversity mainstreaming. Key issues identified included conflicting objectives of different sectors, sectoral miscoordination, as well as ambiguities in the definition and implementation of the ecosystem-based approach, and lack of clear guidance on achieving Good Environmental Status of the marine waters.

Johanna Fox from WWF Baltic presented the outcomes of the WWF reports assessing the application of the ecosystem-based approach within MSPs in the Baltic region. The overall performance under categories such as inclusion of nature, good governance, socio-economic considerations and comprehensiveness of the complete MSP process was rated below average, with Latvia and Estonia showing above average score from the Arena 2 focus region.

Kemal Pinarbasi from HELCOM introduced the MSP4BIO Science- Policy Dialogue Think Tanks gathering different EU MSP projects, discussing the challenges faced in MPA and MSP integration such as the role of MSP in balancing various interests and the lack of a clear definition of the Ecosystem-Based Approach (EBA). Solutions proposed from the Think tank discussion among projects and together with decision makers include Protection Requirements integration in MSP, Data Sharing, Harmonization, and the alignment of cycles between MSFD and MSP to enhance biodiversity conservation within MSP.

Cross-Governmental Approaches: Baltic Sea and Finnish Pilot

Presenting the Finish regional CrossGov pilot, **Antti Belinskij** and **Suvi-Tuuli Puharinen** from the University of Eastern Finland discussed that marine-related policies could be aligned better to implement the EU Green Deal goals. They highlighted the difficulties in integrating MSP within the legal frameworks and the broader participation needed to target marine conservation effectively. Arguing that MSP could be a tool complementing shortcomings of biodiversity protection fragmented legislation, as MSP Directive is rather a tool for bringing together different interests, and does not promote any interests more than what is provided in the relevant sectoral legislation. At Member State level, the legal implications of MSP should be strengthened as well as the integration of marine conservation into sectoral policies.

MSP as a Platform for EU Green Deal Initiatives: Latvian Experience

Kristine Kedo from the Latvian Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development presented the MSP-GREEN project, which aims to integrate EU Green Deal initiatives into MSP processes. In particular, she highlighted the Latvian experience and results of the project, resulting in the general principles on biodiversity protection and offshore wind park development in MSP since adoption in 2019, in addition to the MSP GREEN project findings which were elaborated in Latvian MSP interim assessment in 2023. Findings include 2 identified “new actions” (1) Setting the course towards reaching the 30% Biodiversity Strategy's target at sea: Coordination between overall management actions and Latvian MSP planning solutions and (2) Designation of the innovation zone for the development of blue economy by introducing a multifunctional use concept in Latvian marine waters), where detailed concept for implementation should be elaborated by the end of 2024, related amendments to legislation by the end of 2025, review of Latvian MSP starting from autumn 2025.

Panel Session and Interactive Discussion

Panel discussion with all speakers and Q&A session followed, providing insights on the feasibility of considering the Baltic Sea uniformly for MSP purposes, the diversity of MSP implementation across different national contexts, and the potential for integrating offshore renewable energy within or in close proximity of MPAs. Breakout groups debated different barriers for MPA/MSP integration and potential solutions for addressing those barriers, highlighting the need to:

- 1) Strengthen MSP as a policy instrument on different levels (EU/national to local) for efficient implementation of the Ecosystem-Based Approach and better coordination with and mainstreaming of marine protection policies.
- 2) Ensure sustainable funding for better integration of MSP/EU Green Deal/MPAs/sectoral policies and better cross-sectoral cooperation (i.e. MSP authorities to be involved in MPA designation process; better integration of CFP requirements).
- 3) Improve integration of MSP process with land-based activities and planning to ensure better assessment and inclusion of Land-Sea Interactions.