



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES  
The Director-General

Brussels,  
MARE.A2/CF/Ares (2023)

**Subject: Reply to NSAC Advice Ref. 12-2223 on Marine Spatial Planning and Stakeholder Engagement (Ares(2023)5838809)**

Dear Mr Skau Fisher,

I would like to thank you for your *Advice on Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Stakeholder Engagement*. I really appreciate your inputs and the recommendations you provided to the European Commission and to the North Sea Member States on this very important topic. I also want to praise you for organising in May 2023 a workshop on MSP and Stakeholder Engagement, with a wide spectrum of experts from national administrations, ICES, OSPAR, environmental NGOs, fisheries, offshore wind industry, researchers, etc. Many thanks for sharing your detailed considerations from this workshop.

NSAC recommendations on MSP call for the following comments:

Funded by the EU Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), the European MSP Platform acts as the central exchange forum for the rich knowledge generated in past, current and upcoming MSP processes and projects. This platform allows officials, planners and other stakeholders interested in MSP to build on what is already available, avoid duplication of efforts, assist in capacity building and foster development of new practices.

There is a specific section on each EU Member State and each sea basin which we update regularly. The information available there can further complement my reply to you. I agree on the crucial role of innovation to support MSP and the multi-use of space for

Mr Ken Skau Fisher  
Chairman  
North Sea Advisory Council  
Louis Braillelaan 80,  
2719 EK Zoetermeer,  
The Netherlands  
Email: [admin@nsrac.org](mailto:admin@nsrac.org)

different purposes. Several projects focus on the development of multi-use across the EU (e.g. [UNITED](#) and [ULTFARMS](#)) with the support of Horizon Europe, Interreg and the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund. The [e-MSP-NSBR](#) project, active in the North and Baltic Seas, created several communities of practice and developed the concept of ‘mariparks’ - a nature inclusive maritime business area to facilitate multi-use. In addition, we are preparing a *compendium to map examples and current multi-use practices*, with a view to facilitating the design of MSPs for delivering on co-existence and reducing spatial tensions. This document will be made available on the [European MSP Platform](#).

As requested by the *Maritime Spatial Planning Directive* (MSPD) <sup>(1)</sup>, through their maritime spatial plans, Member States shall aim to contribute to the sustainable development of energy sectors at sea, of maritime transport, of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and to the preservation, protection and restoration of the environment.

MSP is an enabler for our Green Deal’s objectives at sea. The ongoing review of the *Marine Strategy Framework Directive* (MSFD) <sup>(2)</sup> offers the opportunity to increase links between the preservation of the marine environment and uses of the marine space and activities at sea, such as fisheries.

On 24 October 2023, the European Commission adopted a [Communication on delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions](#) <sup>(3)</sup>. It notably aims at strengthening maritime spatial planning as a tool to enhance regional co-operation and sustainable co-existence between offshore renewables and other industries at sea.

There is a need to better understand effects of large-scale offshore wind deployment on the marine environment and on other activities at sea, such as fisheries. The Commission research and innovation programme Horizon Europe has addressed these issues with a [dedicated support for wind energy in the natural and social environment](#). Three projects ([Wind In My Backyard](#), [JustWind4All](#), [WENDY](#)) started at the beginning of 2023.

The Commission will continue to support Member States to enhance knowledge on the cumulative effects that different human activities and multiple offshore renewable energy farms have on ecosystems at sea basin level.

I also want to highlight that the Common Fisheries Policy aims at contributing to protecting the marine environment and to increase productivity, to a fair standard of living for the fisheries sector and to stable markets, and to the availability of food supplies. Therefore we have reminded Member States several times, notably in the recent Commission’s Communication on delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions, that they should plan long-term energy developments early on, assessing their environmental, social and economic sustainability, ensuring coexistence and synergies by design with other activities, such as fisheries.

In order to reach a *regional approach* to the planning of human activities and the monitoring the cumulative impacts, the Commission has been funding cooperation projects on MSP for more than a decade. In addition, many initiatives at sea basin level

---

<sup>(1)</sup> Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning

<sup>(2)</sup> Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)

<sup>(3)</sup> COM(2023) 668 final

cover MSP. The [North Seas Energy Cooperation](#) has a dedicated support group on MSP. Under the *OSPAR Convention* for the protection of the North-East Atlantic coastal and marine environment, a technical group dedicated to the offshore renewable energy development is exploring the impacts of offshore renewable energies on biodiversity. OSPAR aims to develop in 2024 guidance to promote and facilitate sustainable development and scaling up of offshore renewable energy in a way that cumulative environmental impacts are minimised.

North Seas countries have recently initiated an integrated cooperation, the *Greater North Sea Basin Initiative*, on food, energy and nature in the North Sea, to which the Commission is closely associated.

As highlighted in the Commission's reply to the European Court of Auditors' [report on Offshore renewable energy in the EU](#) <sup>(4)</sup>, in terms of guidance, support has been given to Member States for the practical implementation of impact assessments including joint assessments on sea basin scale, building of capacity, expertise, cooperation, etc... Several guidelines were issued recently by the Commission over the past 3 years <sup>(5)</sup>.

In order to help Member States and sectors to share data and information, the Commission has developed the [European Maritime Observation and Data Network \(EMODnet\)](#). In the "Human activities" theme, current activities are mapped, while data from MSP on future activities are also uploaded. At the moment, **10 coastal Member States have uploaded the data from their MSPs** in EMODnet and more should join forces soon. We also encourage the different sectors to share their data (notably environmental data) through the [EMODnet Data Ingestion portal](#). Workshops are organised on a regular basis with the sectors to increase sharing of data. OSPAR's Data and Information Management System (ODIMS) could indeed build on these data and further explore cross-sectoral analyses and methods for assessment of cumulative effects in the marine environment, building a practical approach for regional scale ecosystem-based management.

To support a continued dialogue between sectors operating at sea, DG MARE has launched a [European Blue Forum](#) earlier this year. It is a 'safe' moderated space for all users of the sea, to exchange and identify innovative solutions to deliver on ambitious changes. Two workshops were already organised since the launch of the Forum and more will come in 2024. I can only encourage you to join this platform and to actively participate.

Offshore wind developments fall under the scope of Directive 2011/92/EU on Environmental Impact Assessment <sup>(6)</sup>. Article 6 of this Directive states that the public shall be informed early in the environmental decision-making procedures, which means

---

<sup>(4)</sup> ECA Special report 22/2023: Offshore renewable energy in the EU - Ambitious plans for growth but sustainability remains a challenge

<sup>(5)</sup> Commission Notice - Guidance document on wind energy developments and EU nature legislation. C(2020) 7730 final of 18/11/2020). Available at: [wind\\_farms\\_en.pdf](#) (europa.eu)

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION – Guidelines on State aid for climate, environmental protection and energy 2022 (2022/C 80/01) - EUR-Lex - 52022XC0218(03) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)  
Guidelines supported by EU funding and promoted through the Commission web portals:

[Planning offshore renewable energy with nature in mind Guiding principles. Guidelines developed under the LIFE programme](#) (seas-at-risk.org).

[Guidelines for implementing an ecosystem-based approach in maritime spatial planning- Including a method for the evaluation, monitoring and review of EBA in MSP](#) (CINEA 2021).

<sup>(6)</sup> Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.

that, in addition to the public consultation under the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, consultation takes place at individual project level.

DG MARE is working with ICES to ensure the delivery of a non-recurrent advice by ICES on the interactions between fisheries and offshore renewable energy production, building on several [working groups of ICES](#) and on the ICES 2023 Annual Science Conference full-day thematic session on “[Ecosystem science needed to support a new era of offshore marine renewable energy](#)”. This request builds upon the study contracted by the Commission on an [overview of the effects of offshore wind farms on fisheries and aquaculture](#) published in 2021.

Making appropriate (fisheries) data accessible to wind farm developers at the start of the planning process does indeed give relevant stakeholders a stronger voice in planning decisions. Your initiative to map out important fisheries grounds is welcome in this context.

Finally, let me assure you that the Commission remains fully committed to continue working and discussing the issue further with Member States and stakeholders.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox [MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu](mailto:MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu).

Yours faithfully,

Charlina VITCHEVA  
Director-General

c.c.: Tamara Talevska [tamarat@nsrac.org](mailto:tamarat@nsrac.org); [admin@nsrac.org](mailto:admin@nsrac.org)