

Maritime Spatial Planning and the European Green Deal: Insights from the Atlantic and Channel-North Sea Basins – MSP Green

On the 25th of September, the PelAC attended the workshop organised in Saint Malo. The workshop was aimed towards comparing the recommendations from the MSP green project with the pillars of the Atlantic Marine Strategy (AMS) and the working tracks of the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI). Participants were given a presentation of both the AMS and the GNSBI. Following the presentations, participants joined workshops where they were asked to assess the urgency of addressing the situation and the readiness (e.g. whether tools are available, political will and so on). The urgency could be divided into short term, medium term, and long term, as could the readiness to address it.

While comparing the European Green Deal and the two sea basins initiatives is a good idea, the exercise proved to be difficult as both strategies focused on the development of Offshore Renewable Energies (ORE) and the coordination with the EGD was minimal. Moreover, we had little time to fully understand the different working tracks, pillars, and MSP Green recommendations. This meant that each participant had their own understanding and mostly focused on setting the urgency as high every time their sector was mentioned.

General comments on the day:

The AMS does not include a pillar dedicated to fisheries. When this absence was brought up to the presenter, she emphasized that the AMS focuses on emerging blue economy activities and that fisheries are not part of them. However, she noted that during the ministerial declaration of Porto (18/10/2023) fisheries were part of the AMS, but not a pillar. It remains unclear in which pillar would fisheries be.

The Porto declaration is not available online, but here are the main items regarding fisheries: The declaration highlights that most Atlantic stocks are managed under MSY, making fisheries a sustainable practice and it vows to promote the energy transition of the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The rest of the declaration focuses on the four pillars that are the core of the AMS: Ports, Blue skills, Marine renewable energies and Healthy oceans and resilient coasts.

Regarding the GNSBI, fisheries have their own working track called “Long-term perspective of fisheries”, however, Offshore Renewable Energies (ORE) do not have their own working track as their development is at the heart of the initiative and is included in all 6 tracks. 9 Member States are part of the GNSBI (France, Ireland, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, UK and Norway). For fisheries, the goal is to create insight in key fisheries areas and socio-economic/food impacts of spatial developments in the North Sea. For 2024, it will focus on setting up the working tracks,

positioning GNSBI in the network and develop a process for long term stakeholder engagement. Their aim is to have the GNSBI governance structure working program for 2025-2027 approved at the November GNSBI ministerial meeting.

MSP green assessment of MS plans on sustainable seafood production:

Sustainable seafood production is generally well reflected in the plans assessed. Plans include multiple spatial and non-spatial provisions to enhance the fisheries sustainability. The role of MSP in supporting sustainable fisheries varies greatly from country to country, depending on the degree of integration between fisheries and planning policies at national level. The lack of information on small scale fisheries, including their spatial distribution, is a common limitation in all the assessed plans. Some MS plans adopt an integrated approach to fisheries, embedding the whole supply chain. Sustainable aquaculture is commonly considered in MS plans from the perspective of fish and mussel farming. However, differences were observed, depending on whether the activity takes place in coastal areas or in the open sea. Some aspects related to the sustainability of European seafood production were less commonly considered or missing entirely from the plans, especially algae production, management of recreational fisheries and accounting for and anticipating the impact of Climate change on seafood sectors.

In total, 6 recommendations were made in the MSP Green report:

- [SFP1]. MSP should move from an approach where fisheries are considered only in terms of exclusion from some areas to a more comprehensive planning approach, where all fisheries segments are proactively planned and managed.
- [SFP2]. MSP should more explicitly consider the needs of small-scale fisheries
- [SFP3]. MSP should support sustainable aquaculture in a way that is coherent across different spatial scales.
- [SFP4]. In addition to environmental sustainability, aquaculture and fisheries should be planned considering the broader value chain and community livelihoods in the sense of a fair and just transition.
- [SFP5]. MSP should contribute to facilitating dialogue and improving cooperation between professional and recreational fisheries.
- [SFP6]. To the best degree possible, MSP should anticipate the impacts of climate change on commercially and recreationally exploited species

When discussing SFP1, we underlined the challenges in identifying fisheries specific areas based on actual fish distribution patterns when fish distribution could be impacted by climate change.

The inclusion of coastal communities in the discussion was also welcomed as the contribution of fisheries to coastal communities is often forgotten. Food security was also not mentioned in the discussion. Overall, the PelAC was the only representative of the fishing sector in the discussion.

In the conclusion, the French national authority representative underlined that Maritime sectors were a wide variety of frameworks that made it difficult to have full coordination. She gave the example of the tourism sector that was under no legal framework compared to the fishing sector that was under the CFP. She underlined the need for a common framework. We emphasized the need for cooperation between sea basin initiatives to ensure consistent definitions, making adoption easier.