

REPORT

Meeting: **European Marine Spatial Planning Week 2024**

Parties: **DG MARE, stakeholders**

Date: **22-24 October 2024**

Location: **Marseille, France**

Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the EU MSP Directive a week of MSP-centred events was organized. Kenn Skau Fischer and Kateryna Urbanovych attended the event on behalf of the North Sea Advisory Council.

1 A Decade of European Maritime Spatial Planning – Stakeholder Conference

Charlina **Vitcheva**, Director General of DG MARE, emphasized the MSP Directive's role in sustainable ocean management. EU's efforts – MSP Platform, cross-border projects, workshops, and expert groups – were crucial in supporting MSP implementation. Coexistence and synergies across sectors to foster a regenerative blue economy were underlined.

1.1 Session 1 – Navigate the Waves: A decade of experience with the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive

Over the past decade, MSP has advanced as a politically guided, stakeholder-driven tool, integrating ecosystem-based approaches, land-sea interactions, and climate considerations. However, full implementation of the ecosystem approach and precautionary principles remains challenging.

Global frameworks like the UN SDGs, Paris Agreement, and EU Green Deal have reinforced MSP's role in sustainable ocean management. Still, achieving coherence across EU maritime policies remains essential for a unified approach.

Main Challenges and Areas for Improvement:

- **Transboundary Cooperation:** Aligning MSP priorities across Member States and neighbouring countries remains complex, especially due to geopolitical factors. Strengthening sea basin strategies is necessary.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Effective engagement, particularly with underrepresented groups like fishers, needs improvement. Tools like stakeholder mapping, digital platforms, and local consultations can enhance participation.
- **Biodiversity and Climate Change:** Cumulative human impacts continue to threaten marine biodiversity, underscoring the need for MSP to meet Green Deal and biodiversity targets.

Future Directions:

Early stakeholder engagement, improved inter-agency cooperation, and co-creation of MSP were emphasized. The forthcoming European Ocean Pact is expected to enhance data-sharing and coordination, key for advancing MSP's socio-economic and environmental objectives.

1.2 Session 2 – Enhancing Regional Cooperation: Innovation in Maritime Spatial Planning

The MSP Directive mandates cross-border cooperation and engagement with third countries but lacks formal mechanisms for joint planning and consultation, which complicates alignment due to varying national priorities, particularly in energy and conservation. MSP adaptability is valuable, but the absence of standardized timelines and limited data beyond national waters hinder effective cooperation.

Looking ahead, existing initiatives and regional sea conventions provide a foundation for political and technical dialogue between countries.

Good practice example - Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI):

Launched in 2023, with the lead of the Netherlands, France, and Belgium, the initiative seeks to address cumulative impacts and promote multi-sector (nature, fisheries, energy) cooperation. Key actions include:

- **Fisheries Interactions:** Developing long-term strategies for fisheries co-existence with other marine uses.
- **Cumulative Impact Assessment:** Establishing a comprehensive impact framework to guide sustainable regional development. An advice request has been currently issued to ICES on the matter.
- **Nature Protection:** Collaborating with OSPAR to identify gaps in effective ecological preservation and improve the current status of the North Sea.
- **Comprehensive NS Maps:** Demands for maps have sparked valuable discussions, especially in areas with overlapping uses and ambitions.

Future Directions for Cross-Basin MSP Collaboration:

- **Strategic Planning:** National plans currently lack a strategic, long-term perspective, particularly in the spatially, economically, and ecologically constrained North Sea.
- **Holistic Approach:** Effective MSP requires a cross-sectoral, holistic approach, aligning with the MSFD and integrating various sectors within shared working groups. However, limited governance capacity poses challenges.
- **Brexit:** Brexit poses an ongoing obstacle for North Sea cooperation, particularly in fisheries and energy sectors, although active dialogue is maintained.

1.3 MSP Progress and Future Directions by Delilah AL KHUDHAIRY Director: Maritime Policy and Blue Economy, DG MARE

Achievements in EU MSP: Over the past decade, 20 of 22 EU coastal states have implemented Marine Spatial Plans.

Key Considerations:

- **Digital Transformation:** Digital tools like EMODnet and the upcoming Digital Twin of the Ocean are essential for data access and supporting MSP as a knowledge hub for policy-making.
- **Fisheries-Specific Considerations:** Spatial pressures on fisheries, particularly from offshore energy, require better integration within MSP. Fisheries organizations, through Advisory Councils (ACs), are eager to participate in discussions also on mapping of fishing activities.
- **Climate Change:** Developing sustainable strategies for climate adaptation and mitigating impacts on marine ecosystems is essential, particularly as some sectors and communities are more vulnerable and require strengthened resilience. This is the goal behind President Von der Leyen's upcoming Ocean Pact, expected next year.
- **Future MSP:** 2026 MSP directive implementation report will be crucial for assessing progress and informing future MSP strategies.

1.4 Session 3 – Data, innovation, and harmonisation within MSP

Considering data, the key challenge ahead is creating a standardized, harmonized dataset at EU level. While progress has been made by the [TEG on MSP data](#), further efforts are needed to establish a solid foundation for pan-European data to drive innovation, particularly for the Digital Twin of the Ocean.

Ensuring data availability is crucial, and sharing data openly is essential. If data is not made public, it does not exist.

Key Points:

- **Data Gaps:** Existing gaps in data, particularly regarding ocean observations and human activities at sea, do exist.
- **Biodiversity and Climate Change:** Expanding data collection on biodiversity is key to tracking resilience and meeting climate goals.
- **Fisheries Data:** Integrating fisheries data into MSP is challenging due to regional differences in data collection.
- **Pragmatic Approach to Data:** Need to act on available data rather than waiting for perfect datasets.
- **Simple interaction:** Innovations, like using large language processing, can streamline access to data for policymakers.

1.5 Session 4 – Navigating Future Seas: MSP and the European Green Deal

Kenn Skau Fischer, ExCom Chair, represented NSAC in Session 4, discussing the future of MSP within the European Green Deal and the upcoming European Ocean Pact.

Key Panel Takeaways:

- **Expanding MSP's Role:** MSP should support sectoral transitions to renewable energy, sustainable fisheries, and climate resilience within the European Green Deal.
- **Coexistence and Spatial Conflicts:** Collaboration across nations is needed to manage spatial trade-offs effectively.
- **Ocean Pact Expectations:** Need to go beyond a mere statement and deliver clear commitments, backed by robust stakeholder involvement.

ExCom Chair highlighted challenges faced by the fishing industry within the MSP framework, especially with increasing competition for marine space in the North Sea. He expressed concerns over the Ocean Pact's potential for "top-down" directives. For the future of MSP he underscored two priorities:

- **Mapping and Priority of Fisheries:** In current MSP, fisheries are constrained to zones left unclaimed by other sectors. On the contrary, MSP should reserve areas for fisheries to ensure food security and marine resource sustainability.
- **Flexible MSP plans for Climate Change:** MSP must adapt to changing fish stocks and rising sea levels through climate-smart planning and continuous monitoring.

Finally, Fischer advocated for a cautious approach to multi-use. Obstacles such as hidden infrastructure and wind farm cables complicate shared access for fisheries. He emphasized

that multi-use strategies must be practical, with safety and logistical challenges adequately addressed.

2 Presentation of final project results of MSP Green project

The [MSP Green](#) project worked on aligning maritime spatial plans with the European Green Deal (EGD) by creating a framework for plans as marine enablers of the EGD.

The project involved seven EU Member States across five sea basins, accounting for each country's unique cultural, governance, and MSP mandates. An initial assessment identified how national plans integrate EGD topics, followed by exchanges on best practices and recommendations to strengthen EGD alignment.

Recommendations focused on cross-cutting MSP issues and six marine EGD topics: climate change mitigation, adaptation, sustainable seafood production, biodiversity, blue circular economy, and zero pollution.

Sustainable Seafood Production Insights

The project noted that while most MSP plans address sustainable seafood through fisheries and aquaculture provisions, small-scale fisheries (SSF) often lack specific measures or sufficient data, limiting MSP's address of SSF challenges. Proposed actions on the topic are:

- Better integration of CFP provisions in MSP.
- Shift from exclusion-based planning for fisheries to proactive inclusion of all segments.
- Enhance small-scale fisheries representation in MSP through stakeholder engagement.
- Facilitate cooperation between professional and recreational fisheries to improve resource management.
- Plan fisheries and aquaculture with community livelihoods and the full value chain in mind.
- Anticipate climate change impacts on commercially and recreationally important species.

A full overview of results of the project is available on their [website](#).

3 Project presentation of final results of Regina-MSP

The [Regina-MSP project](#) focused on integrating regional and subregional needs and perspectives into national MSP to enhance policy coordination, stakeholder inclusion, and

data sharing. All deliverables and results are accessible on the project website. Key outcomes include:

1. **Policy Integration:** Strengthen coordination of EU policies governing maritime use to foster synergy across sectors and achieve a more integrated Maritime Policy.
2. **Ecosystem-Based Approach:** Harmonize processes between MSFD and MSPD to promote a blue economy and good environmental status.
3. **Multi-Use Concept:** Establish a clear definition of “multi-use” and facilitate shared understanding across Member States.
4. **Climate Adaptation in MSPD:** Update MSPD climate requirements to address adaptation challenges, ensuring regional authorities lead due to their climate expertise.
5. **MSPD as a Governance Tool:** Position MSPD as a central tool for evaluating and aligning future EU sectoral policies. The Commission should assess the directive to guide a more integrated MSP future.
6. **Land-Sea Interaction:** Leverage regional experience in coastal management to strengthen MSP’s focus on climate adaptation and land-sea issues.
7. **Multilevel Governance:** Increase regional authority involvement in the design, implementation, and review of MSP plans.
8. **Sea Basin Approach:** Promote a regional MSP focus per sea basin, encouraging the EU to explore regional and macro-regional strategies to support cross-border MSP.
9. **Engagement of Underrepresented Stakeholders:** Need for local stakeholders, often underrepresented in MSP, to be more involved.