European Commission

Study on the implementation by EU Member States of Directive 2014/89/EU on Maritime Spatial Planning

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List of Acronyms

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AA	Appropriate Assessment
ACs	Advisory Councils (Common Fisheries Policy)
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CINEA	European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
EBA	Ecosystem-Based Approach
EBM	EBM – Ecosystem-Based Management
EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EGD	European Green Deal
EMFAF	European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
EMODnet	European Marine Observation and Data Network
EU	European Union
GES	Good Environmental Status (MSFD)
HELCOM	Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
INSPIRE	Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community
IOC-UNESCO	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO
LSI	Land-Sea Interactions
MPAs	Marine Protected Areas
MARSPLAN-BS	Maritime Spatial Planning for the Black Sea
MSEG	Member States Expert Group on Maritime Spatial Planning
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Directive 2008/56/EC)
MSP	Maritime Spatial Planning
MSPD	Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (Directive 2014/89/EU)
NSEC	North Seas Energy Cooperation
OSPAR	Oslo/Paris Commission (Protection of the North-East Atlantic)
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes under Directive 2001/42/EC

List of Acronyms	
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNEP/MAP	United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan
VASAB	Vision and Strategies Around the Baltic Sea
WFD	Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC)
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Abstract

This report presents an EU-wide assessment of progress in the establishment and revision of Maritime Spatial Plans (MSPs) across the 22 Member States with marine waters, since the Commission's 2022 MSP Report. It examines new and updated MSPs, reviews ongoing revision processes, and analyses how Member States apply key provisions of the MSP Directive. The study also identifies the main drivers behind recent plan updates - most notably offshore renewable-energy deployment, biodiversity protection, grid and port development, defence and security considerations, and governance streamlining.

The report provides a structured overview of how MSPs address core planning requirements, including application of the ecosystem-based approach, integration of MSFD objectives, consideration of environmental, social, economic and safety aspects, coherence with other policy processes, land–sea interactions, management of interactions between uses, participation practices, data use, and transboundary and third-country cooperation. Illustrative examples highlight innovative national approaches and practical implementation pathways.

A dedicated analysis explores the contribution of MSP to European Green Deal objectives, showing strong alignment for offshore renewable energy and MPA integration, with more limited operationalisation of climate adaptation and restoration objectives. Forthcoming MSP reviews are expected to strengthen alignment and support a more strategic, coordinated and ecosystem-based use of Europe's seas.

Executive Summary

English

Introduction, objectives and approach

Since its adoption in 2014, the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD) has been playing a central role in shaping a coherent, long-term approach to managing European Member States' seas. It requires all coastal Member States to prepare maritime spatial plans (MSPs) that guide the sustainable use of marine space, balance competing maritime activities, and support good environmental status of EU marine waters.

This study provides the 2025 assessment of the implementation of the MSPD, covering the 22 maritime Member States. It follows the Commission's first implementation report published in 2022 and provides an updated overview of developments since that date. The assessment analyses how the Directive's provisions have been applied in practice and how the national MSPs contribute to wider EU priorities - notably those under the European Green Deal, including offshore renewable energy development, biodiversity protection, climate adaptation, and the sustainable blue economy. The analysis also assesses progress in cross-border cooperation, coordination with sectoral policies, and integration with environmental and planning processes.

The study is based on an extensive desk and literature review, complemented by a structured stakeholder consultation process, ensuring a robust and triangulated evidence base. The desk research systematically examined national legislation, policy frameworks, maritime spatial plans, environmental assessments, EU project outputs and academic literature. To complement this, an Integrated Consultation Strategy gathered practical insights from those directly involved in MSP. It included comprehensive stakeholder mapping, around 40 semi-structured interviews with MSP authorities and EU project coordinators, three focus groups covering all EU sea basins, and a validation workshop held alongside the October 2025 meeting of the Member State Expert Group for MSP. These consultation activities explored implementation challenges, governance mechanisms, regional specificities and emerging practices. The combined evidence ensured that findings are grounded in both documentary sources and first-hand expert perspectives.

It should be underlined that the study does not benchmark, nor aims to compare, Member States, in line with the Directive's flexible, process-based design. Instead, it identifies trends, common approaches, and shared challenges to inform future policy development and the forthcoming revision of the MSPD.

Implementation of the MSP Directive

Overall progress

All maritime Member States have now adopted, or are finalising, their maritime spatial plans. This marks a major achievement in EU maritime governance. The first planning cycle has created stable institutional arrangements for MSP, expanded cross-sectoral and cross-border cooperation, and provided a clearer foundation for long-term decisions on the use of Europe's seas.

Despite differences in administrative structures, planning traditions and sea-basin conditions, Member States show growing convergence toward a shared MSP practice.

Many are already initiating revisions or updates, demonstrating that MSP is becoming embedded within routine national planning cycles.

Governance and coordination

Governance arrangements have strengthened considerably since 2014. Most Member States have established permanent coordination mechanisms - interministerial committees, sea-basin councils, regional platforms or dedicated technical groups - that bring together authorities responsible for environment, energy, fisheries, transport and maritime affairs. These bodies increasingly underpin day-to-day implementation rather than serving as one-off consultation fora.

Applying the ecosystem-based approach

All Member States have taken into account elements of the ecosystem-based approach (EBA) within their maritime spatial plans, though the degree of operationalisation varies considerably. Most MSPs reflect MSFD objectives by incorporating ecosystem considerations such as biodiversity protection, seabed integrity, water quality and cumulative pressures. Strategic environmental assessment processes further support the EBA and the consideration of other environmental dimensions in the identification of potential impacts of spatial allocations. However, approaches differ in analytical depth: while some Member States apply structured methodologies - such as cumulative-impact assessments, ecological sensitivity mapping or scenario testing - others rely on more qualitative descriptions or sector-specific safeguards. Overall, the EBA is present across all plans, but its practical application remains uneven and continues to evolve as countries gain experience, improve data availability and align national MSPs with wider environmental frameworks.

Coherence with other policy processes

All Member States have taken steps to ensure that national MSP is coherent with related EU policy instruments, including the MSFD, the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Common Fisheries Policy. In many cases, this coherence is operationalised through concrete planning measures - such as alignment of Natura 2000 requirements with zoning rules, use of MSFD/WFD environmental status information in spatial allocations, guidance for routing in sensitive areas, and procedures for applying Article 11 of the CFP where conservation measures may affect fisheries. In other Member States, coherence is primarily ensured through high-level references and consequently case-by-case assessments.

While differences in planning cycles, governance structures and data systems continue to limit full alignment, MSP increasingly provides a stable framework through which environmental, energy and sectoral objectives can be coordinated across marine and coastal policies.

Consideration of land-sea interactions

All Member States recognise land-sea interactions (LSI) within their MSP frameworks, though the depth of analysis varies. LSI is typically addressed through requirements ensuring coherence between marine and terrestrial planning, and it is supported by SEA processes and, in many cases, by Integrated Coastal Zone Management principles. Common topics for LSI include coastal protection and climate adaptation, ports and energy infrastructure, biodiversity connectivity, and land-based pollution. Several countries have put in place coordination mechanisms between terrestrial and maritime authorities such as inter-ministerial committees or shared GIS platforms - while regional cooperation such as HELCOM–VASAB and EU-funded projects has strengthened shared methodologies.

Overall, Member States have taken steps to identify and manage key land-sea interdependencies, though approaches differ in part due to differences in governance structures and administrative capacity.

Managing interactions between activities

All Member States analyse interactions between maritime uses as part of their planning process, though approaches vary in scope and level of detail. Most countries rely on qualitative tools - such as compatibility matrices, spatial overlays and consultation processes - to identify conflicts and synergies across sectors, including offshore energy, fisheries, transport and environmental protection. Synergies and co-location opportunities are increasingly considered in several Member States, including through emerging approaches to multi-use areas - typically between offshore renewables and aquaculture, or between energy infrastructure and biodiversity objectives. While mechanisms to assess interactions exist in all Member States, the degree of methodological development and transparency differs according to governance models, data availability and analytical capacity.

Stakeholder engagement

Public participation is a well-established component of MSP. All Member States have established procedures for stakeholder and public participation consistent with their national planning systems and environmental-assessment legislation. In practice, consultation is commonly anchored in the SEA process, which offers a structured and legally mandated avenue for public notice, access to documentation, and provision of comments. In a number of countries, this SEA-based consultation is further supplemented by dedicated MSP engagement measures, including thematic workshops, interactive mapping tools, and more localised or sector-focused exchanges.

The next step is to shift from consultation to continuous engagement, making stakeholder dialogue a routine feature of implementation, monitoring and MSP review. A few Member States already go further by establishing permanent advisory or coordination bodies - for example standing MSP working groups or cross-ministerial committees - that ensure ongoing dialogue with key sectors and administrations beyond the formal consultation phases.

Data and digital infrastructures

Data availability and digitalisation have improved markedly. Several Member States now maintain authoritative MSP geospatial portals that combine legally binding spatial rules with up-to-date datasets, supported by wider EU data infrastructures such as EMODnet, the Copernicus Marine Service and regional sea-basin platforms. These tools increasingly support permitting decisions, cross-border exchange and stakeholder transparency.

Nonetheless, challenges persist at both national and cross-border level, including differences in spatial resolution, update cycles and metadata standards, which limit full interoperability between national MSP portals and EU-level data services. While the Technical Group on Data for MSP is helping to address these gaps, further investment is required to enable seamless, cross-sectoral data flows and ensure that EU-level platforms - such as EMODnet - can be used more systematically in MSP processes.

Cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation is now embedded in national MSP practice. Regional-sea conventions (HELCOM–VASAB, OSPAR, UNEP/MAP), sea-basin strategies and EU-

funded projects have provided shared methodologies, comparable evidence bases and structured dialogue. These instruments aim to facilitate coordinated exchange, mutual understanding and alignment of national approaches in cross-border cooperation. While timing differences and varying mandates still limit full coherence, cooperation has clearly matured and now functions as a routine and valued part of MSP implementation.

MSP and the European Green Deal

MSP has become an important enabler of the European Green Deal. The clearest progress concerns offshore renewable energy, where MSP provides spatial clarity for expansion and helps align national deployment pathways with wider EU energy strategies. MSPs also support biodiversity objectives by integrating sensitive areas and protected sites into plan logic. While climate adaptation is increasingly recognised - often in qualitative terms - systematic integration of climate scenarios and risk modelling is still emerging.

Overall, MSPD implementation now acts as a bridge across EU ocean, climate, energy and biodiversity policies, positioning it as a core instrument for the Ocean Pact and forthcoming Ocean Act.

Conclusions and recommendations

Main conclusions

Since the previous review in 2022, all maritime Member States have adopted or are finalising their plans, and several have moved into their second (or third) planning cycle, further embedding MSP into routine national planning processes.

Overall, the first cycle of implementation of the MSP Directive has significantly advanced EU ocean governance. Maritime spatial planning is now established across all maritime Member States and provides a coherent framework for organising activities at sea, integrating environmental objectives, and supporting long-term sustainable development. It has strengthened coordination across administrative levels, improved alignment with related EU policies, and created a more predictable environment for managing increasing spatial demands, particularly in relation to offshore renewable energy, biodiversity protection and maritime transport.

EU-level support - through guidance, regional-sea cooperation frameworks, EMFAF-funded projects, technical groups and the EU MSP Platform - has played an important enabling role by fostering shared methodologies, improving data availability and facilitating cross-border dialogue. These contributions have helped reduce some of the structural barriers to coherent MSPD implementation, even though a number of **challenges remain** and continue to require sustained action at both national and EU level.

The **flexible design of the MSPD** has enabled adaptation to diverse national governance systems, but it has also resulted in substantial procedural diversity across Member States and, in some cases, fragmented institutional responsibilities within Member States. Ensuring effective coordination across ministries, sectors and levels of government remains a central issue, particularly where planning cycles, mandates and data systems are not aligned.

Methodological and technical aspects also require further development. The application of the ecosystem-based approach, the use of cumulative-impact assessments, and the integration of socio-economic and land-sea interactions vary widely among Member States. Approaches to managing interactions between uses - including emerging multi-use concepts – also remain uneven, with most Member States relying on qualitative methods

and only a few applying structured or model-based assessments. Despite progress in data availability and the expansion of national MSP data portals, gaps in interoperability and harmonisation continue to limit coherence across sea basins.

Cross-border and regional-sea cooperation has grown steadily and provides an essential foundation for mutual learning and convergence. However, differences in planning timelines, institutional arrangements and levels of engagement still constrain the ability to achieve fully coordinated approaches across the same sea basin. Engagement with neighbouring non-EU countries adds further complexity despite the cooperation structures offered by regional-sea conventions, sea-basin strategies and macro-regional initiatives, but remains critical for coherent basin-level outcomes.

Stakeholder and public participation mechanisms are well established but uneven in depth and continuity. Ensuring sustained engagement - particularly of coastal communities, fisheries and maritime sectors - between plan cycles will be increasingly important as MSP evolves to accommodate new uses, climate pressures and emerging blue-economy activities.

Across these issues, the assessment identifies several **enabling factors** that support effective implementation when they are in place: stable inter-ministerial coordination structures, clear and binding legal mandates, integrated data systems, early and continuous stakeholder involvement, robust regional cooperation frameworks, and analytical tools that help operationalise the ecosystem-based and climate-smart approaches.

As Member States enter the second planning cycle, addressing these institutional, methodological and cross-border challenges will be essential to enhance the effectiveness, coherence and future-readiness of maritime spatial planning in the European Union.

Opportunities and recommendations

The evolving EU policy context offers several opportunities to strengthen the implementation of the MSP Directive. The European Ocean Pact and the forthcoming Ocean Act provide a strategic framework to enhance policy coherence, modernise MSP governance and support simplification efforts in a revised Directive. Advances in ocean observation - including EMODnet, Copernicus Marine Service, EOOS and emerging digital tools such as the Digital Twin of the Ocean - offer new possibilities for more integrated and adaptive data use. In addition, continued EU support through the EU MSP Platform and through ongoing EU-funded cooperation projects provides an important basis for generating transferable tools, methods and communities of practice, creating an opportunity to embed project-based knowledge more systematically into routine planning processes across Member States.

To support the revision of the MSPD in line with emerging EU policy priorities, the study proposes the following actions:

- **Strengthen guidance for MSP planners:** more practical EU and sea basin guidance on land–sea interactions, cumulative impacts, and data integration would help promote more consistent application of environmental and socio-economic considerations, supporting coherent implementation. Peer-learning and sea-basin exchanges should be expanded, supported by pilot projects to test new approaches.
- **Consolidate cross-border and regional cooperation:** Sea Basin Strategies and Macro-Regional Strategies can serve as flexible coordination platforms interacting with RSCs and other initiatives. Light practitioner-level subgroups in each basin could enable early dialogue between planners on upcoming revisions and emerging cross-border issues.

- **Support governance and administrative capacity:** within Member States, stable coordination bodies across ministries and levels of government are essential. Training programmes can help spread common MSP literacy and support consistent implementation.
- **Enhance data and monitoring systems:** further investment at EU, regional sea and Member State levels in interoperable data platforms, common standards and shared monitoring approaches—particularly linking MSP with MSFD reporting—will increase transparency and efficiency.
- **Foster participation and transparency:** stakeholder engagement should become more continuous, inclusive and interactive, drawing on digital tools and existing advisory structures such as those under the CFP to integrate technical and local knowledge more systematically.

French

Introduction, objectifs et approche

Depuis son adoption en 2014, la Directive sur la Planification des Espaces Maritimes (DPEM) joue un rôle central dans l'établissement d'une approche cohérente et à long terme pour la gestion des eaux sous juridiction nationale des États membres. Elle prescrit à tous les États membres côtiers d'élaborer des planifications des espaces maritimes (PEM) afin d'encadrer l'utilisation durable de l'espace marin, de concilier les activités maritimes concurrentes et de contribuer au bon état écologique des eaux marines de l'Union.

Cette étude constitue l'évaluation 2025 de la mise en œuvre de la DPEM dans les 22 États membres maritimes. Elle fait suite au premier rapport de mise en œuvre publié par de la Commission en 2022 et présente ainsi l'actualisation de cette mise en œuvre. L'évaluation analyse la manière dont les dispositions de la Directive ont été appliquées dans la pratique et examine comment les PEM nationales contribuent aux priorités plus larges l'Union - notamment celles du Pacte vert pour l'Europe - telles que le développement des énergies marines renouvelables, la protection de la biodiversité, l'adaptation au changement climatique ou le développement d'une économie bleue durable. L'analyse évalue également les progrès accomplis en matière de coopération transfrontalière, de coordination entre les politiques sectorielles et d'intégration aux processus environnementaux et d'aménagement.

L'étude repose sur revue documentaire et bibliographique approfondie, complétée par un processus structuré de consultation des parties prenantes, garantissant une base factuelle solide et croisée. Les recherches documentaires ont examiné de manière systémique les législations nationales, les cadres politiques, les planifications des espaces maritimes, les évaluations environnementales, les résultats des projets européens associés ainsi que la littérature académique. Cette analyse a été enrichie par une stratégie de consultation intégrée qui a permis de recueillir des retours effectifs de la part des acteurs directement impliqués dans la planification des espaces maritimes. Elle consistait en un recensement systématique des parties prenantes, près de 40 entretiens semi-structurés avec les autorités en charge de la PSM ou des coordinateurs de projets européens, l'organisation de trois groupes de discussion couvrant l'ensemble des bassins maritimes de l'UE, ainsi qu'un atelier de validation organisé en marge de la réunion d'octobre 2025 du groupe d'experts des États membres sur la PEM. Ce dispositif a permis d'explorer les défis de mise en œuvre, les mécanismes de gouvernance, les spécificités régionales et les pratiques

émergentes. La combinaison de ces éléments a garanti que les conclusions soient fondées à la fois sur des sources documentaires et sur l'avis d'experts directement impliqués.

Il convient de souligner que l'étude ne vise pas à établir un classement et n'a pas pour objectif de comparer les États membres, conformément aux principes libres de mise en oeuvre de la Directive. Elle identifie plutôt les tendances, approches communes et défis partagés afin d'alimenter les futurs développements politiques et la révision à venir de la DPEM.

Mise en œuvre de la Directive sur la planification de l'espace maritime

Bilan d'ensemble

L'ensemble des États membres maritimes ont désormais adopté - ou sont en voie de finaliser - leurs planification des espaces maritimes. Cela représente une avancée majeure pour la gouvernance maritime au niveau de l'Union. Le premier cycle de planifications a mis en place des dispositifs institutionnels stables PEM, étendu la coopération intersectorielle et transfrontalière, et fourni une base plus claire pour les décisions portant sur l'utilisation à long terme des espaces maritimes européens.

Malgré des différences dans les structures administratives, les usages en matière planification et les conditions propres aux bassins maritimes, les États membres convergent progressivement vers une pratique commune de la PEM. Beaucoup d'entre eux entament déjà des révisions ou des mises à jour, confirmant l'intégration croissante de la PEM dans les cycles nationaux de planification réguliers.

Gouvernance et coordination

Les dispositifs de gouvernance se sont nettement renforcés depuis 2014. La plupart des États membres ont mis en place des mécanismes permanents de coordination - comités interministériels, conseils de bassin maritime, plateformes subnationales ou groupes techniques dédiés - réunissant les autorités responsables de l'environnement, de l'énergie, de la pêche, des transports et des affaires maritimes. Ces instances soutiennent de plus en plus la mise en œuvre au quotidien et ne se limitent plus à des forums consultatifs ponctuels.

Application de l'approche écosystémique

Tous les États membres ont pris en compte des éléments de l'approche écosystémique dans leur PEM, même si le degré d'opérationnalisation varie sensiblement entre eux. La plupart des plans reflètent les objectifs de la Directive Cadre Stratégies pour le Milieu Marin (DCSMM) en intégrant des considérations relatives aux écosystèmes telles que la biodiversité, l'intégrité des fonds marins, la qualité des eaux ou les impacts cumulés. Les processus d'évaluation environnementale stratégique renforcent l'approche écosystémique et la prise en compte d'autres dimensions environnementales en identifiant les impacts potentiels des choix d'aménagement de l'espace. Toutefois, les approches diffèrent par leur profondeur analytique: certains États membres appliquent des méthodologies structurées - telles que les analyses des impacts cumulés, cartographie de sensibilité écologique ou des scénarios prospectifs - tandis que d'autres privilégient des approches plus qualitatives ou bien a propres aux secteurs. Dans l'ensemble, l'approche écosystémique est présente dans tous les plans, mais sa mise en œuvre demeure hétérogène et continue d'évoluer par

l'expérience accrue des Etats membres, améliorent la disponibilité de nouvelles données et que ces derniers alignent leurs PEM nationales avec des cadres environnementaux plus larges.

Cohérence avec les autres processus politiques

Tous les États membres ont pris des mesures pour assurer la cohérence de leur PEM avec les instruments politiques de l'UE, notamment la DCSMM, les directives Oiseaux et Habitats, ainsi que la politique commune de la pêche (PCP). Dans de nombreux cas, cette cohérence se traduit par des mesures de planification concrètes - tels que l'alignement des exigences Natura 2000 avec les règles de zonage, l'utilisation des informations DCE/DCSMM pour les affectations spatiales, des orientations pour les voies maritimes dans les zones sensibles ou les procédures d'application de l'article 11 de la PCP lorsque des mesures de conservation peuvent avoir des incidences sur la pêche. Dans d'autres États membres, la cohérence repose davantage sur des références de haut niveau, impliquant une évaluation au cas par cas.

Si les différences entre les cycles de planification, les structures de gouvernance et les systèmes de données continuent de limiter un alignement total, la PEM constitue de plus en plus un cadre stable permettant de coordonner les objectifs environnementaux, énergétiques et sectoriels dans les politiques maritimes et littorales.

Prise en compte des interactions terre-mer

Tous les États membres reconnaissent les interactions terre-mer dans leurs PEM, mais avec des niveaux d'analyse variables. Les interactions terre-mer sont généralement abordées à travers des exigences de cohérence entre planification marine et terrestre, soutenues par les Evaluations Environnementales Stratégiques (EES) et, dans de nombreux cas, par les principes de gestion intégrée des zones côtières. Les thématiques les plus fréquentes incluent la protection côtière et l'adaptation climatique, les infrastructures portuaires et énergétiques, la connectivité écologique et la pollution d'origine terrestre. Certains Etats ont mis en place des mécanismes de coordination entre les autorités terrestres et maritimes, tels que des comités interministériels ou des plateformes SIG communes, - tandis que la coopération régionale (HELCOM–VASAB, projets financés par l'UE) contribue à harmoniser les méthodologies.

Gestion des interactions entre activités

Tous les États membres analysent les interactions entre les différents usages maritimes dans le cadre de leur processus de planification, bien que les approches varient en termes de portée et de niveau de détails. La plupart des Etats s'appuient sur des outils qualitatifs, tels que des matrices de compatibilité, des superpositions spatiales et des processus de consultation pour identifier les conflits et synergies entre secteurs, notamment entre les énergies marines renouvelables, les pêches, le transport maritime ou la protection de l'environnement. Les synergies et les possibilités de coexistence sont de plus en plus prises en compte, notamment grâce à des approches émergentes de *multi-usages des espaces* (par ex. énergie renouvelable–aquaculture ou infrastructure énergétique–biodiversité). Si tous les États membres disposent de mécanismes d'évaluation des interactions, le degré de développement méthodologique et de transparence varie en fonction des modèles de gouvernance, de la disponibilité des données et des capacités d'analyse.

Participation des parties prenantes

La participation du public constitue un élément bien établi de la PEM. Tous les États membres ont mis en place des procédures conformes à leurs systèmes nationaux de planification et à leur législation en matière d'évaluation environnementale. En pratique, les consultations s'appuient généralement sur le processus d'EES, qui offre un cadre structuré et juridiquement encadré pour l'information du public, l'accès à la documentation et la formulation d'observations. Dans plusieurs pays, ces consultations sont complétées par des dispositifs dédiés à la PEM, tels que des ateliers thématiques, des outils cartographiques interactifs ou des échanges ciblés au niveau local ou par secteur.

L'étape suivante consiste à passer d'une logique de consultation ponctuelle à un engagement continu, en faisant du dialogue avec les parties prenantes un élément permanent de la mise en œuvre, du suivi et de la révision des plans. Certains États membres disposent déjà d'organes permanents consultatifs ou de coordination - tels que des groupes de travail dédiés à la PEM ou des comités interministériels - qui garantissent un dialogue régulier avec les secteurs clés et les administrations au-delà des phases formelles de consultation.

Données et infrastructures numériques

La disponibilité des données et la numérisation se sont nettement améliorées. Plusieurs États membres disposent désormais de portails géospatiaux officiels pour la PEM, combinant règles spatiales juridiquement contraignantes et données actualisées, soutenus par des infrastructures européennes telles qu'EMODnet, le service Copernicus Marine et diverses plateformes de bassin maritime.

Cependant, des défis persistent tant au niveau national que transfrontalier, notamment une hétérogénéité en matière de résolution spatiale, de cycles de mise à jour et des normes liées aux métadonnées, autant d'éléments qui limitent la pleine interopérabilité entre les portails nationaux et les services européens. Si le groupe technique sur les données pour la PEM contribue à réduire ces écarts, des investissements supplémentaires sont nécessaires pour assurer des flux de données fluides et intersectoriels et pour permettre une utilisation plus systématique des plateformes européennes telles qu'EMODnet dans les processus de PEM.

Coopération transfrontière

La coopération transfrontière est désormais intégrée dans les pratiques nationales de la PEM. Les conventions marines régionales (HELCOM–VASAB, OSPAR, PNUE/PAM), les stratégies de bassin et les projets financés par l'UE ont permis le développement de méthodologies partagées, de bases de données comparables et des dialogues structurés. Ces instruments visent à faciliter les échanges, la compréhension mutuelle et l'alignement des approches nationales en matière de coopération transfrontalière. Malgré des calendriers de planification et des mandats variables, la coopération a nettement progressé et fait désormais partie intégrante de la mise en œuvre de la PEM.

La PEM et le Pacte vert pour l'Europe

La PEM est devenue un levier essentiel du Pacte vert pour l'Europe. Les progrès les plus notables concernent le déploiement des énergies marines renouvelables, pour lequel la

PEM apporte la lisibilité spatiale nécessaire pour son expansion et contribue à aligner les trajectoires nationales avec les stratégies énergétiques européennes. Les PEM soutiennent également les objectifs en matière de biodiversité en intégrant les zones sensibles et les aires protégées dans la logique de planification. L'adaptation climatique est de plus en plus prise en compte - souvent sous forme qualitative - mais l'intégration systématique de scénarios climatiques et de modélisation des risques reste encore émergente.

Dans l'ensemble, la mise en œuvre de la PEM fait désormais office de pont entre les politiques européennes pour les océans, le climat, l'énergie et la biodiversité, ce qui en fait un instrument clé du Pacte pour les Océans et du futur Acte pour les Océans.

Conclusions et recommandations

Conclusions principales

Depuis la précédente évaluation en 2022, tous les États membres maritimes ont adopté ou sont en train de finaliser leurs plans, et plusieurs d'entre eux sont désormais engagés dans leur deuxième (ou troisième) cycle de planification, consolidant ainsi l'intégration de la PSM dans les processus nationaux.

Dans l'ensemble le premier cycle de mise en œuvre de la DPEM a considérablement renforcé la gouvernance maritime européenne. La PSM est désormais établie dans tous les États membres maritimes et fournit un cadre cohérent pour organiser les activités en mer, intégrer les objectifs environnementaux et soutenir un développement durable à long terme. Elle a amélioré la coordination entre niveaux administratifs, renforcé l'alignement avec les politiques associées de l'UE et créé des conditions plus prévisibles pour la gestion croissante des demandes d'espaces, notamment en ce qui concerne les énergies marines renouvelables, la biodiversité et le transport maritime.

Le **soutien de l'UE** - sous la forme d'orientations, de cadres de coopération au niveau des bassins, de projets financés par le FEAMPA, de groupes techniques et de la Plateforme européenne sur la planification de l'espace maritime - a joué un rôle déterminant en favorisant le partage des méthodologies, en améliorant la disponibilité des données et en facilitant le dialogue transfrontalier. Ces contributions ont permis d'atténuer certains des obstacles structurels à la mise en œuvre cohérente de la DPEM, même si **plusieurs défis** demeurent et continuent de nécessiter une action soutenue tant au niveau national qu'européen.

La **conception flexible de la DPEM** a permis une adaptation aux divers systèmes de gouvernance nationaux, mais elle a également entraîné une diversité procédurale importante entre les États membres et, dans certains cas, une fragmentation des responsabilités institutionnelles au sein des États. Assurer une coordination effective entre ministères, secteurs et niveaux de gouvernement demeure une question centrale, en particulier lorsque les cycles de planification, les mandats et les systèmes de données ne sont pas alignés.

Les **aspects méthodologiques et techniques** nécessitent également un développement accru. L'application de l'approche écosystémique, le recours aux évaluations des impacts cumulés et l'intégration des dimensions socio-économiques et des interactions terre-mer varient considérablement entre États membres. Les approches de gestion des interactions entre usages - y compris les concepts émergents de multi-usage - restent elles aussi

hétérogènes, la majorité des États membres s'appuyant sur des méthodes qualitatives et seuls quelques-uns mobilisant des évaluations structurées ou fondées sur des modèles. Malgré les progrès réalisés en matière de disponibilité des données et d'expansion des portails nationaux de données PEM, des lacunes en matière d'interopérabilité et d'harmonisation continuent de limiter la cohérence à l'échelle des bassins maritimes.

La **coopération transfrontalière et régionale** s'est consolidée et constitue désormais une base essentielle pour l'apprentissage mutuel et la convergence. Toutefois, les différences de calendriers de planification, d'organisations institutionnelles et de niveaux d'engagement continuent d'entraver la mise en place d'approches pleinement coordonnées à l'échelle d'un même bassin. La coopération avec les pays voisins non- membres de l'UE ajoute une complexité supplémentaire - malgré les structures offertes par les conventions de mers régionales, les stratégies de bassin maritime et les initiatives macro-régionales - mais demeure indispensable pour garantir des résultats cohérents à l'échelle des bassins.

Les **mécanismes de participation des parties prenantes et du public** sont solidement établis, mais présentent des degrés variables de profondeur et de continuité. Assurer une participation soutenue - en particulier des communautés côtières, du secteur de la pêche et des autres secteurs maritimes - entre les cycles de planification deviendra de plus en plus important à mesure que la planification de l'espace maritime évoluera pour intégrer de nouveaux usages, faire face aux pressions climatiques et accompagner le développement de nouvelles activités de l'économie bleue.

L'analyse met en évidence plusieurs **facteurs favorables à une mise en œuvre efficace** : des instances interministérielles stables, des mandats juridiques clairs, des systèmes de données intégrés, un dialogue précoce et continu avec les parties prenantes, des cadres de coopération régionale robustes ainsi que des outils analytiques opérationnalisant l'approche écosystémique et résiliente au climat.

Au début du deuxième cycle de planification, répondre à ces défis institutionnels, méthodologiques et transfrontaliers sera indispensable pour renforcer l'efficacité, la cohérence et la capacité d'adaptation de la PSM dans l'Union.

Opportunités et recommandations

L'évolution du contexte politique européen offre plusieurs opportunités pour renforcer la mise en œuvre de la Directive. Le Pacte pour les Océans et le futur Acte pour les Océans fournissent un cadre stratégique visant à améliorer la cohérence des politiques, moderniser la gouvernance de la PEM et soutenir les efforts de simplification dans la perspective d'une révision de la Directive. Les avancées en matière d'observation marine - EMODnet, Copernicus Marine, le système européen d'observation des océans, les jumeaux numériques de l'océan - ouvrent la voie à une utilisation plus intégrée et adaptative des données. Par ailleurs, le soutien continu de l'UE via la plateforme PEM de l'UE et les projets de coopération financés par l'Union constitue une base importante pour produire des outils, des méthodes et des communautés de pratique transférables, offrant l'opportunité d'intégrer plus systématiquement les résultats de projets dans les processus de planification routiniers des États membres.

Pour accompagner la révision de la Directive, l'étude propose les actions suivantes :

- **Renforcer les orientations pour les planificateurs** : un appui plus pratique au niveau de l'Union et des bassins maritimes concernant les interactions terre-mer, les impacts cumulés et l'intégration des données favoriserait une application plus cohérente des considérations environnementales et socio-économiques. Les échanges entre pairs et entre bassins devraient être renforcés, appuyés par des projets pilotes permettant de tester de nouvelles approches.

- **Consolider la coopération transfrontalière et régionale** : les stratégies de bassin et macro-régionales peuvent servir de plateformes de coordination souples, en interaction avec les conventions de mers régionales. La création de sous-groupes de niveau planificateurs dans chaque bassin pourrait permettre un dialogue anticipé sur les révisions à venir et les questions transfrontalières émergentes.

- **Soutenir la gouvernance et les capacités administratives** : au sein des États membres, des organismes de coordination stables entre les ministères et les niveaux de gouvernement sont essentiels. Des programmes de formation peuvent contribuer à diffuser une culture commune de la PEM et à soutenir une mise en œuvre cohérente.

- **Améliorer les systèmes de données et de suivi** : des investissements supplémentaires aux niveaux de l'UE, des bassins et des États membres dans des plateformes de données interopérables, des normes communes et des approches de suivi partagées — notamment en reliant la PEM aux rapports de la DCSMM — augmenteront la transparence et l'efficacité.

- **Favoriser la participation et la transparence** : l'engagement des parties prenantes doit devenir plus continu, inclusif et interactif, en mobilisant des outils numériques et les structures consultatives existantes, notamment celles de la PCP, pour intégrer de manière plus systématique les connaissances techniques et locales.

1. Introduction

This report presents the results of the study carried out to support the European Commission (DG MARE and CINEA) in preparing its 2026 report on the implementation of Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (MSP Directive).

The study aims to assess the **state of implementation of the Directive**, providing an updated overview of how maritime spatial planning has evolved across the Union since the Commission's first implementation report in 2022. It examines recent developments in national frameworks, the adoption and revision of maritime spatial plans, and the practical application of the Directive's key provisions. The study also examines the extent to which **MSPs reflect and support the objectives of the European Green Deal** and other recent EU initiatives related to the sustainable blue economy.

The report also reflects the broader policy context in which MSP now operates and summarises the **cross-cutting issues, supporting practices and lessons learned** that can inform the forthcoming evaluation of the Directive and ongoing policy discussions linked to the European Ocean Pact[1] adopted in June 2025 and the preparation of the Ocean Act.

The report is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** summarises the methodology used for the study. **Chapter 3** provides an overview of national legislative and administrative developments since 2021, as well as an update regarding the adoption and revision of maritime spatial plans. **Chapter 4** presents a global assessment of implementation across Member States, organised around the main provisions of the MSP Directive. **Chapter 5** examines how MSP interacts with and supports the objectives of the European Green Deal. **Chapter 6** brings together the overall conclusions and recommendations, highlighting key issues affecting implementation and opportunities for strengthening MSP as the EU moves towards the Ocean Pact and the forthcoming Ocean Act.

[1] COM(2025) 281 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The European Ocean Pact, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025DC0281

2. Methodology

2.1. Approach and scope

The study was carried out between March and November 2025 to support the European Commission in preparing its second implementation report under Article 14(2) of the MSP Directive. Building on the first report published in 2022[2], it focuses on developments and progress since that date.

The analysis covers all **22 maritime Member States** to which the Directive applies[3]. It analyses how Member States have implemented the MSP Directive since 2022, with a particular focus on the adoption and revision of maritime spatial plans, the functioning of related legal and governance frameworks, and the practical application of the Directive's key provisions. It examines both the legislative and practical aspects of implementation, including governance arrangements, environmental integration, cross-border cooperation, and interactions with other EU policies such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and recent initiatives under the European Green Deal.

The work is **descriptive and comparative**. It aims to identify common patterns, gaps and supporting practices across diverse national contexts, without assessing or ranking Member States. Evidence was drawn from national legislation, planning documents, environmental assessments, EU and regional data platforms, interviews with national authorities, thematic focus groups and a validation workshop with Member States.

2.2. Sourced of evidence and analytical process

The study combined **desk and literature review** with a **structured stakeholder consultation process** to build a comprehensive and validated evidence base. All sources were triangulated to ensure factual accuracy, representativeness, and methodological coherence across tasks.

Desk and literature review

The desk and literature review formed the core evidence base. It consisted of a systematic review of national legal, policy and planning documents and complementary materials available from EU and international sources. Specifically, the review included:

- **National legislation and policy frameworks** transposing and implementing the MSP Directive, including amendments adopted after 2021;
- **Information available via the EU MSP Platform** (i.e. country profiles), EMODnet, national MSP portals;

[2] COM(2022) 185 final, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council outlining the progress made in implementing Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022DC0185

[3] For Greece and Croatia, the assessment was limited to the available legislative and procedural information, as maritime spatial plans had not yet been finalised at the time of the study.

- **Maritime spatial plans** and related documents (i.e. associated **environmental assessments** (SEA, AA), consultation reports, interim evaluations etc.);
- **Outputs of EU-funded projects** supporting MSP implementation;
- **Other relevant EU or national studies**, including the 2022 Commission Progress Report on MSPD implementation, sea-basin reports, and project evaluations;
- **Academic and grey literature** covering governance, environmental integration, stakeholder participation, and sea-basin cooperation.

The literature review provided theoretical and policy context, enabling interpretation of national practices within broader trends in EU ocean governance. A complete list of references is provided in **Annex 1 (Bibliography)**.

All information was reviewed in original languages where possible and encoded into **standard analytical templates**. These templates captured legal, institutional and procedural information for each Member State under each article of the Directive.

To support the comparative assessment, **draft country fiches** were prepared for all maritime Member States (see **Annex 2**). These summarised legal, procedural and planning information under each article of the MSP Directive and were shared with national authorities for factual validation.

Stakeholder consultation

To complement the document-based analysis, the study implemented an **Integrated Consultation Strategy**. The consultation was designed to gather practical insights from authorities and stakeholders directly involved in maritime spatial planning, and to validate preliminary findings. It was carried out through four interlinked steps:

1. **Stakeholder mapping and preparation:**

   A comprehensive mapping identified national and regional MSP authorities, coordinators of EU-funded projects, NGOs, and sectoral organisations (e.g. offshore energy, fisheries, maritime transport). The mapping ensured balanced representation across all EU sea basins (Baltic, North Sea, Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Black Sea).

2. **Semi-structured interviews:**

   Around 40 interviews were conducted with MSP authorities and EU project coordinators. Interviews explored implementation challenges, governance mechanisms, integration with sectoral policies, and innovations emerging in the second planning cycle.

3. **Sea-basin focus groups:**

   Three online focus groups were held - for the *North Sea-Atlantic*, *Mediterranean-Black Sea*, and *Baltic* sea-basins - gathering 10-15 participants per focus group including MSP authorities, regional organisations (e.g. HELCOM, OSPAR, UNEP-MAP), sectoral actors, and NGOs. Discussions focused on region-specific challenges, such as cross-border coordination, offshore renewable energy, and multi-use approaches. Each session was facilitated by one of the project's sea basin experts.

4. **Validation workshop:**

   The draft findings and recommendations were presented at a workshop held back-to-back with the October 2025 MSP MSEG meeting in Cyprus. The workshop, which

gathered 40 participants[4], enabled Member States and stakeholders to review and validate the emerging conclusions. Their feedback was used to update and correct the country fiches and in the results presented in this Final Report.

Comparative and synthesis analysis

All evidence gathered through the desk and literature reviews and through the consultation activities was consolidated through a **comparative analytical process** designed to ensure consistency and transparency.

Information extracted from national sources was first compiled in a **standardised country template**, summarising the status of implementation of each provision of the Directive and related governance arrangements. The information was then synthesised in **comparative tables**, organised by provision and thematic area (e.g. legal frameworks, environmental assessment, data use, cross-border cooperation, coherence with EU policies).

For each provision or theme, the study team prepared **summary matrices** comparing the different components of implementation across Member States. These matrices were used to identify **common patterns, emerging trends, and distinctive national approaches**, as well as contextual factors influencing implementation.

Draft comparative analyses were subsequently **refined and substantiated with evidence** from the literature review and from stakeholder feedback collected through interviews, focus groups and the validation workshop.

This iterative process allowed the study to combine factual reporting with qualitative interpretation, ensuring that findings reflect both **the diversity of national systems** and **the common developments shaping MSP implementation across the European Union**.

2.3. Limitations and interpretation of findings

The MSP Directive sets out procedural obligations and leaves wide discretion to Member States regarding how to design and implement their plans. National legal frameworks, governance systems and planning traditions therefore differ considerably, and direct comparisons are not appropriate. The study therefore focuses on identifying implementation **patterns and opportunities** for mutual learning rather than ranking performance.

While the MSP review and analysis aimed to be comprehensive, a few methodological limitations should be noted:

- Scope and detail of national sources:

  Given the breadth of the maritime spatial plans and the large number of related documents reviewed, some details may not have been fully captured. Plans often extend over several hundred pages and contain highly technical annexes. Every effort was made to extract and verify relevant information, but minor omissions or interpretation differences remain possible. This limitation does not affect the validity of the overall findings but should be considered when interpreting specific examples or quantitative estimates.

[4] 30 Member States' and EU Commission representatives, four observers, four representatives of the EU MSP Assistance Mechanism and two representatives of the study team.

- Cross-checking and extrapolation:

  Many findings were cross-checked against the original plans and accompanying documentation. In some cases, limited extrapolation was required to ensure comparability across Member States.

- Evolving policy context:

  Some Member States are in the process of revising or updating their maritime spatial plans. The findings therefore reflect the best information available at the time of drafting and may not capture very recent changes. It should be noted that the analysis considers planning documents published by end of August 2025.

- Contextual diversity:

  Member States underlined during the workshop that what may be effective or innovative in one context may not be feasible or relevant in another. National systems differ in governance structures, legal mandates, and planning traditions. The report therefore emphasises contextual diversity and mutual learning rather than identifying “best practices”. This should be borne in mind when interpreting examples or approaches described in the synthesis.

These limitations are typical of studies of this scope and complexity. They are acknowledged transparently to help readers interpret the results with appropriate caution while recognising the overall robustness of the evidence base.

2.4. Relationship with forthcoming policy work

The results of this study provide a factual foundation for the upcoming **evaluation of the MSP Directive** and the **impact assessment of the Ocean Act**. While this report remains descriptive, its conclusions and recommendations will inform the subsequent analytical steps leading to the revision of the Directive and the design of future ocean-governance measures under the Ocean Act. The findings are thus intended to contribute to **policy reflection**, not to pre-empt decisions.

3. Progress in developing and implementing the MSP Directive

This chapter provides an overview of developments in Member States' legislative frameworks, administrative arrangements, and progress in the establishment and the review of MSPs since the last MSPD review (2021). We present first the new MSPs since 2021 and reflect on the reasons for their delayed adoption; then the revised MSPs and the ongoing review processes, reflecting on the key drivers of changes and revisions.

Annex 2 presents Member State fiches that provide a consolidated overview of each country's MSP framework. Each fiche summarises the status of MSP adoption and review, recent legislative developments, the content and legal status of existing plans, and the authorities responsible. It also outlines the documents reviewed and provides a structured assessment of how each Member State addresses the main provisions of the MSP Directive. Together, these fiches serve as the detailed evidence base underpinning the comparative analysis presented in this study.

3.1. National legislative and administrative developments

3.1.1. Overview of new and updated national legislation

Member States continue to update and refine their legal and institutional frameworks for maritime spatial planning as they move into the second planning cycle.

Since 2021, **several Member States have adopted new MSP legislation or amended existing acts**[5]. The analysis revealed that, rather than substantively amending their legislation transposing the MSP Directive, or otherwise introducing substantive changes to MSP legislation, several countries adopted new governmental acts or decrees to formally adopt maritime spatial plans; others amended their core MSP legislation to clarify procedural rules or update planning cycles. Illustrative examples include Belgium, Cyprus and Portugal, each updating different procedural elements of their MSP frameworks - such as the duration of planning cycles, consultation procedures, and institutional or coordination arrangements.

In some cases, targeted amendments responded to new spatial demands or corrective needs, including Denmark's adjustments linked to offshore renewable-energy targets and Poland's revision to address concession rights. For many Member States, however, no legislative changes since the previous planning cycle were identified or reported.

Overall, legislative updates reflect national contexts and evolving policy priorities rather than a common EU-wide trend.

[5] The Member States that adopted new or updated existing legislation are: BE, BG, HR, CY, EE, FR, DE, EL, ES, IE, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SI and SE.

3.1.2. Overview of recent case law

Only a limited number of national court cases have directly addressed maritime spatial planning. Case law concerning the MSP Directive was identified in five Member States: Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Poland and Spain.

The most extensive set of decisions was identified in Poland, where courts have clarified how MSP interacts with permit procedures and spatial allocations. Across several judgments, Polish courts confirmed that:

- Temporarily suspending permitting procedures pending MSP adoption can be justified in order to ensure orderly and coherent maritime development and respect emerging plan frameworks[6];
- Refusing permit applications in situations of overlapping or competing spatial claims may be lawful where it safeguards transparent and fair allocation of maritime space[7]; and
- Permit decisions for offshore-wind and other sea-use proposals must be assessed against existing maritime spatial allocations and the overall spatial order established by MSP[8].

Court decisions in other Member States also touch on the relationship between MSP, environmental assessment and sectoral regulation. In Belgium, the Council of State examined challenges to Royal Decrees adopting the MSP, including arguments related to environmental protection and mitigation. In Estonia and Spain, courts considered the adequacy of strategic environmental assessment, cross-border consultation and the consistency of project-level decisions with plan-level arrangements. In Greece, the Council of State rejected a challenge brought by environmental organisations against the 2019 approval of hydrocarbon exploration in Southwest and West Crete. Although the programme was approved via a Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEIA) and Greece had no approved maritime spatial plan under the MSP Directive, the Court held that the environmental approval was lawful and the absence of a national MSP did not justify cancellation.

Taken together, these cases illustrate how MSP is increasingly being interpreted within broader environmental and planning-law frameworks, even if case law remains limited in scope and concentrated in a small number of Member States.

3.2. Provisions of new, updated and revised maritime spatial plans

Article 15(3) of the MSP Directive requires that Member States establish maritime spatial plans as soon as possible, and at the latest by 31 March 2021. Article 14(1) of the Directive also required Member States to inform the Commission and other Member States concerned within three months of the establishment of those plans.

6 III OSK 1086/21; III OSK 357/21

7 II OSK 1340/22; II OSK 1682/22

8 IV SA/Wa 1909/20; IV SA/Wa 343/22; III OSK 1973/22

This section provides an overview of the progress in the establishment of MSPs in EU Member States since the previous implementation study. It covers the period from the publication of the past Commission Report on 3 May 2022 until 30 August 2025.

Across the EU, the timing and approach to Maritime Spatial Plan (MSP) adoption and revision vary considerably. Table 1 below summarises the current status of MSP adoption and revision processes across the 22 maritime Member States.

Table 1 Overview of MSP adoption and updates in EU Member States

MS	Current plan adoption date	Previous plans	Revision processes and supplementary allocation plans
Belgium	May 2019	First MSP adopted: March 2014	Currently under review (The third draft MSP has been published but remains subject to revision). New plan to be adopted in 2026
Bulgaria	May 2023	/	Feasibility study carried out between 2023 and 2024. Formal update is scheduled for completion by the end of 2027
Croatia	Ongoing process	/	/
Cyprus	December 2023	/	Not currently being reviewed
Denmark	2023[9]	/	Amended in June 2024, primarly to integrate new offshore energy and biodiversity targets
Estonia	May 2022	/	Monitoring and annual action-plan review ongoing. Formal review process scheduled for 2026-2027 under the five-year review cycle set by national law.
Finland	December 2020	/	Revision started Jan–Feb 2024; plan to be updated/adopted by 2027
France	First part 2019 Second part May 2022	/	Currently revising the strategic part of its MSPs to designate new areas, in particular for OWFs and “strong” protection areas. Public-consultation (5 May–5 Aug 2025). Updated plan to be adopted in Autumn 2025
Germany	September 2021	First MSP plan adopted: 2009	A Site Development Plan outlining a maritime sector strategy for offshore wind energy was published in early 2025. Germany just entered a monitoring and evaluation process of its MSP, which is expected to be completed in 2026.
Greece	Ongoing process [10]	/	/
Ireland	June 2021	/	South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) adopted in Oct 2024 (designates ORE areas to help deliver 5 offshore wind by 2030)
Italy	September 2024	/	Not currently being reviewed

9 Denmark sent its first Maritime Spatial Plan into public consultation for six months in 2021. The draft plan was legally binding from the moment it was published for consultation. It was issued as an executive order in 2023.

10 Greece approved a National Spatial Strategy for the Marine Space in April 2025, including maps of marine areas. This is not a full plan (Greece was at the time of assessment preparing its MSPs), but rather a set of strategic directions for MSP.

MS	Current plan adoption date	Previous plans	Revision processes and supplementary allocation plans
Latvia	May 2019	/	Interim evaluation report adopted in October 2024. Review process planned to start in autumn 2025
Lithuania	September 2021	First MSP adopted: June 2015	Plan foreseen to be reviewed in 2030. A 2024 thematic plan and SEA outlined offshore wind farm locations and links to shore.
Malta	July 2015	/	Initial internal review undertaken. Continued implementation ongoing while awaiting governmental direction on next steps
Netherlands	March 2022	First plan adopted: 2009[11] Second plan adopted: December 2015[12]	Currently being reviewed to address higher offshore renewable energy targets, among other topics. Updated plan to be adopted by 2025. Draft partial revision submitted to Parliament on 22 Apr 2025; public consultation from 19 May 2025; finalisation expected by Sep 2025.
Poland	April 2021 with a technical change in December 2022[13]		Interim evaluation published 9 May 2025; decision to update taken; ministry is seeking funding—broad update to start in 2026 (subject to budget) and expected to take 2.5-3 years.
Portugal	December 2019 (Mainland and Madeira) and October 2024 (Azores)	/	Allocation Plan for Offshore Renewable Energy (PAER, 2025) integrates automatically into PSOEM
Romania	November 2023	/	Not currently being reviewed
Spain	February 2023	/	Review launched in 2024; all five plans must be revised by the statutory deadline of 31 December 2027
Slovenia	July 2021	/	Not currently being reviewed. Next formal revision expected in 2031 with preparatory work to begin in 2029.
Sweden	February 2022	/	Plans reviewed including to meet new OWF targets and creation of marine protected areas – plan amendment proposals submitted in January 2025.

3.2.1. Adoption of maritime spatial plans

As shown in Table 1 above, the adoption of maritime spatial plans has progressed substantially across the EU since the previous Commission report (2022). As of August 2025 – the cut-off date for this study - **20 of the 22 maritime Member States** have now

[11] The North Sea Policy Document covering the period 2009-2015.

[12] The second spatial plan, the North Sea Policy Document covering the period 2016-2021, is an update from the 2009-2015 document.

[13] Following a legal threat from a Canadian oil-and-gas concession holder whose western Pomeranian Sea rights were omitted from the 2021 plan, the 2022 MSP revision—deemed a "technical change"—adjusted three basin areas to include the activities, avoiding compensation claims and requiring no new SEA or public consultation.

adopted national or sea-basin maritime spatial plans, with **Croatia and Greece** still in the process of finalising their first plans.

A significant "catch-up wave" of first-time adoption occurred between 2022 and 2024. First-time maritime spatial plans were adopted in **Sweden (2022)**, **France (2022)**, **Estonia (2022)**, **Spain (2023)**, **Bulgaria (2023)**, **Cyprus (2023)**, **Romania (2023)**, **Italy (2024)**, **Portugal (Azores subdivision, 2024)**, and **Denmark (2023)**. These plans generally present broader thematic coverage than MSPs adopted earlier by other countries including more explicit treatment of offshore renewable energy, biodiversity, coexistence rules and environmental assessment findings.

As noted above, Croatia and Greece remain in earlier stages of MSP implementation. Croatia conducted public consultation in September 2025 on the proposed Spatial Plan for the Exclusive Economic Zone. Greece adopted the **National Spatial Planning Strategy for the Marine Space (2025)**, setting the strategic framework for its forthcoming MSPs.

Main reasons for delayed adoption

Several recurring factors explain why some maritime spatial plans were adopted after the Directive's deadline of 31 March 2021. In many cases, delays stemmed from **lengthy procedural requirements**, including environmental assessments and extensive inter-institutional coordination. **Governance restructuring** and the establishment of new planning arrangements also contributed to extended timelines in some countries. **Consultation processes** were in several instances affected by the **Covid-19 pandemic**, which slowed down stakeholder engagement and public participation. In other situations, political or geopolitical considerations influenced the sequencing of planning steps. Finally, in a few cases delays were primarily **administrative**, with plans adopted shortly after the deadline once procedural steps were completed.

3.2.2. Revisions and updates of maritime spatial plans

Under Article 6(3) of the MSP Directive, Member States must review their maritime spatial plans "as decided by them, but at least every ten years". National frameworks reflect this obligation in different ways. In many countries, MSP legislation establishes a ten-year review cycle, often supplemented by interim monitoring or sectoral reporting to inform when updates may be required. In several other cases, Member States have opted for shorter review horizons - typically between five and eight years - reflecting national planning traditions and the need to align MSP with other policy or reporting cycles, such as those under the MSFD, national spatial-planning legislation, or energy and climate strategies. Interim evaluations or mid-cycle assessments are also used in some systems to determine whether a full revision is necessary and to define its scope.

With most plans now in place, a growing number of Member States have entered their **first review cycle** or initiated targeted amendments.

- **Member States currently revising their plans**

  Early movers are now entering their first review cycles: **Belgium** is currently undergoing its statutory review process for the third cycle (draft plan for 2026-2034); **France** is revising all four façade plans with adoption still planned in 2025; the **Netherlands** is currently revising to meet higher offshore renewable targets among other topics; and **Sweden** has tabled plan amendment proposals (submitted to its Government in January 2025) and plans to establish a framework for monitoring and evaluation of its MSP,

expected to be adopted by the end of 2025; **Bulgaria** commenced a review of its 2023 MSP in December 2023 with adoption expected by 2026. **Spain** has started its six-year review process (work launched in 2024) with structured multi-level engagement to prepare the statutory 2027 update.

- **Member States with planned reviews of their plans**

  Several others have scheduled reviews or completed interim evaluations: **Latvia** (interim evaluation 2024; review from autumn 2025), **Poland** (interim evaluation 2024; broader update intended 2025/26, funding-dependent), **Estonia** (review starting autumn 2025), **Lithuania** (implementation work from 2026), and **Germany** (evaluating the 2021 plan with possible expansion of nature-protection areas before deciding on a formal revision). **Malta** has carried out an initial internal review and continues implementation while awaiting governmental direction on next steps (not a formal review cycle yet).

- **Targeted updates and thematic instruments**

  In parallel, a number of Member States have begun to complement full review cycles with targeted updates or thematic instruments adopted between formal revisions. These updates respond to specific policy needs such as offshore renewable energy deployment, biodiversity protection or land–sea interface issues. Examples include amendments to **Denmark**'s MSP (2024), **Germany**'s refinement of offshore-wind areas through the 2024 Site Development Plan, **Lithuania**'s 2024 thematic offshore-wind plan**, Portugal**'s allocation plans for dredged submergence (2023) and offshore renewable energy (2025), and **Ireland**'s spatial plan for offshore renewables along the south coast (2024).

Drivers of changes and revisions

Member States revise their maritime spatial plans in response to a combination of legal requirements and policy drivers. Legal triggers besides the review obligations under Article 6(3) of the MSP Directive, include updates required by EU environmental legislation (MSFD, Birds and Habitats Directives), procedures under the Common Fisheries Policy, and new EU energy objectives such as those introduced through the Renewable Energy Directive (RED III) and the Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) (in many cases, these reflect policy objectives under the European Green Deal – see section 5 below). Alongside these statutory obligations, a wider set of operational drivers are at play - notably offshore-renewable deployment, biodiversity objectives, land-sea infrastructure needs, defence and security considerations, fisheries coexistence, transboundary coordination, and findings from monitoring and evaluations. Together, these factors shape the timing, scope and content of MSP revisions. The table below provides an overview of the main categories of drivers and how they influence plan updates in practice.

Table 2 Overview of socio-economic, environmental, geopolitical and administrative drivers for the review of MSPs

Driver category	Rationale for reopening MSPs	Review changes in practice	Implementation considerations
Offshore renewables expansion	Translate capacity targets into mapped sites and transmission corridors.	New or expanded wind areas; safeguarded cable routes and landfalls; sequencing with port works.	Plan amendments; environmental assessment where required; coordination

Driver category	Rationale for reopening MSPs	Review changes in practice	Implementation considerations
			with grid and port authorities.
Biodiversity protection and restoration	Expand/strengthen protection alongside new uses.	Additional or stricter MPAs; ecological connectivity; restoration/adaptation measures embedded in plans.	Alignment with marine environmental cycles; updated evidence to justify protection levels.
Land-sea interface and grid connections	Ensure offshore zones match onshore landing points and corridors.	Defined landfalls; reserved on-land corridors; clearer sea–land sequencing.	Early joint planning across sea/land jurisdictions; cross-agency routing work.
Governance streamlining	Improve speed/clarity of approvals and plan maintenance.	Single-window features; explicit consistency duties; bundling of minor updates.	Cycle alignment (e.g., MSP–MSFD); inter-ministerial arrangements.
Defence, security and critical infrastructure	Reconcile energy and other uses with defence areas and infrastructure resilience.	Adjusted exclusion/constraint zones; protection corridors; refined coexistence rules.	Additional consultations with defence/security bodies.
Fisheries coexistence	Clarify coexistence near ORE/protected areas while keeping binding fishing measures in fisheries law.	Mapped coexistence zones/conditions; indicative “no-fishing” areas pending CFP processes.	Coordination with fisheries procedures; clear separation of MSP mapping vs. fisheries measures.
Transboundary coordination	Secure cross-border siting and cable routes at plan stage.	Border-adjacent siting choices at plan level; documented cross-border procedures.	Targeted consultations; plan-level alignment to avoid leaving issues to project EIAs.
Sectoral pressures beyond ORE	Address ports/shipping, dredge/disposal, raw materials, multi-use/innovation.	Safeguarded port expansions/corridors; mapped dredge/disposal; adjusted extraction areas; multi-use zones.	Phased updates to manage scope; engagement with port/shipping and resources agencies.
Monitoring evaluation and review calendars	Use routine evaluations to target timely, evidence-based changes.	Focused amendments ahead of full reviews; prioritised map/rule updates.	Fixed review cycles; interim evaluations feeding update agendas.
Capacity, budgets and phasing	Match scope and pace of updates to available resources.	Phased packages of changes; pragmatically scoped revisions.	Resource planning; sequencing to match budgets and staffing.

Overall, the period 2022-2025 marks a transition from **first-time MSP adoption** towards **maturing review cycles** across most maritime Member States. Adoption is now nearly complete, with only two Member States pending their first plans. Revisions increasingly focus on evolving legislative and policy objectives – notably in the areas of offshore renewable energy and biodiversity protection – and more integrated governance arrangements, reflecting broader EU and national strategic priorities.

4. Global assessment of implementation

This chapter provides an EU-wide overview of how the main provisions of the MSP Directive have been implemented. It brings together the study's findings to describe common patterns, recent developments and the diversity of approaches across Member States.

4.1. Overview and purpose

This section summarises the main findings on implementation of Directive 2014/89/EU, drawing on the analysis of all 22 maritime MS. It does not evaluate performance but identifies common trends, challenges, and enabling factors. The analysis presented in this section draws on evidence collected through the review of national maritime spatial plans and related legal frameworks, as well as comparative analysis across Member States. It also integrates clarifications and insights provided by Member State representatives during the targeted consultation process and the study workshop.

4.2. Legislative frameworks

All maritime Member States have transposed the MSP Directive into their national legal systems, but the resulting frameworks remain diverse. This diversity reflects long-standing administrative and planning traditions rather than differences in compliance or interpretation of the Directive.

Since 2021, **17 Member States have updated their MSP legislation**, mainly to refine procedures, clarify responsibilities, and align MSP with new environmental or energy-related requirements. These adjustments are incremental and generally focus on improving planning processes rather than changing the overall approach to MSP.

A notable feature across the EU is the **variation in the legal status of maritime spatial plans**. In most Member States, plans have a **binding effect**, meaning that their spatial designations must be considered in permitting and authorisation procedures. In others, MSP functions primarily as a **strategic or guiding instrument**, with its practical effect exercised through sectoral legislation rather than through the plan itself. These differences are fully consistent with the flexibility provided by the Directive.

Institutional arrangements also vary. Some Member States place MSP under **environmental ministries**, others under **maritime or economic ministries**, and decentralised or federal systems (such as Germany and Spain) allocate responsibilities across regional authorities. The type of lead ministry appears less important than the **strength of coordination mechanisms** in ensuring coherent plan preparation.

Overall, the variety of legislative and institutional frameworks observed across the EU reflects the different governance models and planning cultures of the Member States, rather than divergent interpretations of the Directive's requirements.

4.3. Procedural and governance settings

Coordination is a central feature of MSP implementation across the EU. While procedural arrangements differ according to national governance structures, most Member States have established mechanisms to facilitate cooperation across sectors and administrative levels. These arrangements help integrate environmental, economic and social considerations into planning, although their functioning depends on national institutional contexts and available resources.

Horizontal coordination

Almost all Member States have set up inter-ministerial or cross-sectoral bodies intended to support cooperation between the authorities responsible for maritime affairs, environment, energy, fisheries, transport and other relevant sectors. These structures take different forms - formal committees, technical working groups or permanent coordination units - but share the purpose of promoting information exchange and consistency across policies. Examples include Denmark, Spain and France, where cross-ministerial committees or working groups have been established to facilitate policy alignment across sectors. Their operation and continuity vary, reflecting differences in administrative traditions, mandates and planning cultures rather than differences in implementation effort.

Vertical coordination

Approaches to vertical coordination differ across Member States and largely reflect national governance systems. Two broad models can be observed:

- **Centralised model**: a national authority leads plan preparation and consults regional and local authorities during the process.
- **Multi-level or decentralised model**: regional authorities contribute directly to planning or prepare basin-specific elements, with the national level providing strategic direction.

Multi-level systems such as Germany and Spain illustrate how explicit procedures and structured consultation processes can maintain national coherence while incorporating regional perspectives. Both models can function effectively when roles are clearly defined and supported by established mechanisms for coordination.

Common challenges

Across Member States, several recurring obstacles influence the functioning of governance arrangements. These include siloed administrative structures, overlapping mandates among authorities, limited capacity or resources for sustained coordination, and the complexity of integrating diverse sectoral priorities. These factors can affect the consistency and timeliness of plan preparation and revision.

Examples of practices supporting coordination

Member States have introduced various measures to strengthen coordination in the MSP process. Examples include the establishment of permanent inter-ministerial committees, the use of shared data portals or national marine information systems to support evidence-based coordination, and integrated approaches that consider land–sea interactions within broader coastal or maritime planning processes.

Illustrative examples

Governance mechanisms supporting MSP coordination in France

In France, maritime spatial planning is led by the Ministry for the Ecological Transition. Within the ministry, the Secretary for the Sea and Biodiversity and the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs, Fisheries and Aquaculture (DG AMPA) hold the primary responsibilities. The competent authority is therefore the minister in charge of ecological transition, biodiversity, forests, the sea and fisheries, while DG AMPA oversees day-to-day implementation.

MSP coordination is organised through several national and sea-basin governance bodies. At the sea-basin level, Maritime Façade Administrative Commissions (*Commissions administratives de façade*, CAF) serve as inter-administrative bodies responsible for developing and monitoring MSP. Each façade has a CAF established under the authority of designated préfets, with membership limited to government administrations and services. The CAFs are jointly chaired by two *préfets coordonnateurs - a préfet maritime* and *a préfet de région*. These commissions guide the preparation, adoption and follow-up of the Maritime Spatial Plans (*Documents stratégiques de façade*, DSF), which translate the national maritime strategy (SNML) at façade level and ensure coherence with coastal terrestrial planning tools. The DSF process is also coordinated with the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Two main consultative bodies support strategic guidance and multi-level coordination. At the national level, the *Conseil national de la mer et des littoraux* (CNML) provides a forum for dialogue and strategic reflection on sea and coastline policies, bringing together ministries, State agencies and professional organisations. The CNML contributes to the national sea and coastline strategy and has overseen national consultations related to MSP. It meets at least once a year and is convened by the Prime Minister or, by delegation, the Minister for the Sea. At sea-basin level, the four *Conseils maritimes de façade* (CMF) ensure coordination among State representatives, regional and local authorities, and local stakeholders throughout the MSP preparation process, as prescribed in the SNML.

Together, national ministries, coordinating *préfets* and the CNML/CMF bodies constitute the governance system ensuring coherence between MSP and national and subnational strategies, plans and policies.

The SNML (2017) also includes an objective to modernise and simplify maritime administration through a single-window system (*guichet unique*) for maritime authorisations. Across implementation, the façade-level administrative commissions and the multi-level governance structure at national and sea-basin level have been central bodies involved in the revision processes of the SNML and MSP and are systematically consulted on decisions within their scope.

4.4. Implementation of key provisions

The analysis followed the intervention logic of the MSP Directive, structured around its **key provisions** and **objectives**. Each thematic section of the report examines:

1. A short description of the provision and its intent;
2. Implementation across Member States;
3. Illustrative examples of national approaches;
4. Common challenges and contextual factors;
5. Forward-looking considerations.

This structure allows for comparability while respecting national diversity and avoiding any form of benchmarking. The examples presented are intended solely as illustrations of how individual Member States have approached specific aspects of MSP. They reflect national institutional, legal and environmental contexts, and approaches that are effective in one country may not be directly applicable or replicable elsewhere.

4.4.1. Consideration of environmental, economic, social and safety aspects

Provision

Article 6(2)(b) of the MSP Directive requires Member States to take account of environmental, economic, social and safety aspects when establishing and implementing maritime spatial plans. The aim is to promote sustainable development and growth in the maritime sector while ensuring the sustainable use of marine resources and the protection of the marine environment.

Implementation status

All Member States have integrated these four dimensions into their maritime plans, although the balance among them varies.

Environmental considerations are well-developed, supported by Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and, where relevant, Appropriate Assessment (AA) processes. There are nonetheless differences and gaps in the implementation of an ecosystem-based approach (EBA) – see next section. Many plans align environmental objectives with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) descriptors, especially for biodiversity, seabed integrity and contaminants.

Economic aspects are widely referenced through identification of key maritime sectors, yet only a few countries apply systematic and/or quantitative methods such as cost–benefit or scenario analyses.

Social and cultural values are often considered through stakeholder engagement and qualitative descriptions rather than formal or quantified indicators.

Safety aspects are consistently addressed: shipping routes, port access and safety zones around energy installations are delineated in most plans in close cooperation with maritime-safety authorities (IMO, EMSA).

Overall, Member States have fulfilled the Directive's requirements, but the analytical depth and integration of these aspects remain uneven. Approaches reflect national governance traditions, available data and sectoral priorities rather than divergent interpretations of the Directive.

Illustrative examples

Comprehensive SEA scope shaping MSP decisions

- Ireland applied an objectives-led SEA that tested every NMPF (National Marine Planning Framework) policy against strategic environmental objectives covering all SEA Directive topics (biodiversity, human health, water, climate, landscape, cultural heritage, etc.). The SEA shows a full screening/scoping trail, iterative testing using SEA Objectives, and integrated NIS (Natura Impact Assessment[14]) and AA (Appropriate Assessment). The SEA Statement explains how consultation and assessment changed the NMPF. This is an example where SEA clearly influenced the plan's content rather than validating it retrospectively.

Quantitative economic indicators used by Member States

Several Member States[15] use quantitative economic indicators to capture the relative importance of the different maritime sectors. Common approaches include:

- Macro-economic indicators, such as GDP and GVA contributions of the marine economy (e.g. tourism, ports, shipping, aquaculture).
- Employment indicators, including jobs supported directly or indirectly by maritime activities (e.g. estimating full time equivalent).
- Production and output data, such as aquaculture tonnage, fisheries landings or port output, which help determine where spatial safeguards or development areas are most justified.
- Sector-specific satellite accounts (e.g. sea accounts), which provide disaggregated economic information for maritime industries.
- Value-based spatial indicators, where the economic value of activities (e.g. fisheries catch value in seabed integrity zones) is mapped to assess spatial trade-offs.

In some cases, these indicator types help planners ground spatial decisions in economic evidence while keeping the analysis proportionate to the plan's scope:

- Ireland, for instance, uses economic indicators - such as GVA, employment and turnover - to frame the strategic economic role of Ireland's marine sector and inform sector-specific policies. For key sectors such as aquaculture, fisheries, offshore renewable energy and ports, economic values (e.g. turnover, landed value, employment, R&D investment, passenger and cargo volumes) were used to highlight sectoral importance. The Irish MSP SEA further operationalised these indicators by embedding them in a GIS-based spatial modelling process, where socio-economic datasets were grouped and weighted together with environmental and cultural datasets. This allowed the SEA to assess spatial trade-offs and informed the selection and prioritisation of NMPF policies by stakeholders.
- In Denmark, the SEA uses quantitative indicators to show the economic importance of aquaculture, commercial fishing, tourism, shipping, offshore wind and raw materials extraction (e.g. production volumes, sector values, extraction quantities). Offshore wind is highlighted as a major sector, with 14 wind farms supplying 11% of Denmark's electricity in 2019 and plans to expand capacity fivefold by 2030. During MSP preparation, economic impact assessments quantified potential (socio)economic effects of offshore renewable energy zones on fisheries and other sectors, estimated

[14] The Natura Impact Assessment (NIS) is the report prepared by or on behalf of the plan or project proponent to inform the Appropriate Assessment, recording the assessment of the potential effects of the plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, on the conservation objectives and integrity of relevant European sites.

[15] Examples include Denmark, Estonia, France, Spain, Ireland and Portugal.

losses for activities affected by strictly protected areas under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Illustrative examples

Assessing the Distribution of Social Impacts in MSP

Some Member States have begun to assess how MSP decisions affect different communities. For example, Estonia distinguishes national versus local interests as well as regional differences and maps visual-impact zones for offshore wind; Latvia uses a recreation-suitability index combined with municipal input to anticipate tourism pressures; Poland monitors indicators on conflict resolution and sectoral engagement. These approaches illustrate steps toward integrating distributional considerations and social equity into MSP.

Safety measures in MSPs

Safety requirements are embedded in several MSPs. Ireland requires project-level navigation and search-and-rescue risk assessments (using tools such as the IALA toolbox), aligned with national emergency and defence planning. France includes dedicated risk-analysis sections and action sheets on maritime surveillance and response capacity in its façade plans. Sweden promotes Sea Traffic Management systems - expected to reduce collisions and groundings by over 60% - and identifies port and navigation-channel upgrades needed to address safety gaps. These examples show how MSP can enhance maritime safety through structured assessment and coordination with specialised authorities.

Challenges identified

- Lack of integrated methodologies combining environmental, economic, social, and safety dimensions in a single analytical framework.
- Social and cultural impacts not yet systematically assessed.
- Varying treatment of ecosystem services and cumulative impacts across plans.
- Limited operational tools to assess synergies and trade-offs between uses (energy, fisheries, tourism, conservation).
- Data and indicator heterogeneity limiting cross-MS comparability.

Article 6(2)(b) - Forward-looking considerations

- Encourage exchange of methodologies for integrating environmental, economic, and social dimensions within a single analytical framework (e.g. cumulative-impact or ecosystem-service assessments).
- Promote development of shared indicators to capture socio-economic and safety aspects alongside environmental ones.
- Support continued alignment of MSP SEAs with MSFD and energy-planning assessments to strengthen coherence and efficiency.

4.4.2. Ecosystem-based approach (EBA)

Provision

Article 5 of the MSP Directive requires Member States to promote the sustainable development of maritime activities and the sustainable use of marine resources through an

ecosystem-based approach (EBA). Recital 14 further clarifies that this approach should ensure that cumulative impacts on the marine environment are assessed and that maritime spatial plans contribute to achieving or maintaining **Good Environmental Status (GES)** under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

Implementation status

All Member States refer to the EBA in their MSP frameworks, either through legal provisions, strategic objectives, or planning guidance.

In most cases, the approach is operationalised through the **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** and, where relevant, **Appropriate Assessment (AA)** processes that accompany plan preparation. These assessments typically evaluate cumulative effects, identify sensitive areas, and propose mitigation measures. Several countries align their environmental objectives with MSFD descriptors (notably D1, D4, D6 and D10[16]), creating increasing synergies between the two instruments.

Quantitative or spatially explicit methods for applying the EBA remain less common. A few Member States have developed cumulative-impact or sensitivity mapping tools to support scenario analysis and inform zoning decisions. Most others rely on qualitative assessments and expert judgement, supported by monitoring data and consultation with environmental authorities.

Consideration of **climate-change effects** within the EBA is emerging. In several Member States, national research initiatives and adaptation strategies are beginning to explore how climate drivers- such as temperature or salinity changes - may influence ecosystem sensitivity and spatial planning decisions. Examples include pilot projects such as ClimeMarine in the Baltic Sea region, while at EU level, analytical initiatives such as MSP Green are reviewing how climate aspects are addressed in existing plans and developing recommendations on how to address climate aspects.

Overall, the EBA has become a shared guiding principle across EU maritime planning systems, but its operational application and monitoring remain uneven.

Illustrative examples

MSFD integration in MSP

Denmark's 2023 SEA assesses each MSP amendment against all 11 MSFD descriptors, using descriptor-specific pressure tables to examine how removing aquaculture and extraction areas or expanding ORE and CO_2-storage zones affects GES. This structured approach strengthens the direct link between pressure analysis, GES objectives and final zoning decisions.

Estonia's SEA combines MSFD pressure analysis with cumulative-impact modelling (PlanWise4Blue). Model outputs showing high risks to birds and bats - especially from clustered wind-farm development in the Gulf of Riga - led to the relocation of wind-energy areas and the introduction of targeted mitigation for mining, aquaculture and defence activities.

[16] D1 – Biodiversity, D4 – Food Webs, D6 – Seafloor Integrity, D10 – Marine Litter.

Slovenia's SEA aligns cumulative-impact assessment with MSFD descriptors (eutrophication, biodiversity, seafloor integrity, marine litter, underwater noise) and connects monitoring measures directly to the MSFD Programme of Measures. Scenario-based comparisons ("with/without plan") help identify pressures requiring explicit management responses.

Latvia's SEA applies an ecosystem-based method grounded in MSFD GES indicators and targets. Cumulative-impact mapping and expert scoring of pressures on benthic habitats, birds, seals and commercial fish informed adjustments to zoning solutions, ensuring traceability from MSFD targets through to spatial decisions and authorisation criteria.

Cumulative-impact assessment shaping spatial designations

Germany's SEA uses a qualitative cumulative-impact assessment. For existing cumulative effects, it draws on monitoring data, expert judgement and sector-specific guidelines, and evaluates impacts on sensitive species - especially harbour porpoises and seabirds. For projected cumulative impacts, it applies a scenario-based approach that brings together pressures from offshore wind, cables, shipping, fisheries and research activities and tests future development scenarios, including simultaneous piling events and species-specific disturbance thresholds. Although not modelled spatially, this approach identifies ecological limits and pressure interactions that guide plan alternatives and influence where offshore-wind areas, cable corridors and protected zones are placed. Climate-related changes (e.g. warming, stratification shifts) are also factored in, recognising how they may amplify cumulative effects over time.

Challenges identified

- No common operational definition of the EBA for MSP practice.
- Variable data quality and analytical capacity for spatial pressure modelling.
- Limited mechanisms to translate environmental assessments into binding spatial measures.
- Inconsistent links between MSP monitoring and MSFD indicators.

Climate-change and ecosystem-service dimensions still mainly qualitative.

Article 5 - Forward-looking considerations

- Promote exchange of practical methodologies and guidance for applying the EBA in MSP, including cumulative-impact and sensitivity analyses.
- Strengthen coordination between MSP and MSFD monitoring to assess cumulative effects and progress towards GES.
- Encourage integration of climate-change and ecosystem-service assessments within EBA applications.
- Support further development and sharing of analytical tools and data platforms across sea basins.

4.4.3. Promote coherence with other processes

Provision

Article 6(2)(c) of the MSP Directive requires Member States to promote coherence between maritime spatial planning and other relevant processes such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Water Framework Directive (WFD), integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) strategies, and sectoral policies for energy, fisheries, transport, and environment. The aim is to ensure that MSP supports a coordinated and integrated approach to maritime governance and contributes to the objectives of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy.

Implementation status

All Member States with adopted MSPs have taken steps to coordinate their plans with other EU and national policies. References to MSFD, WFD, Natura 2000, the CFP and energy/climate strategies are now standard in MSP legal bases, sectoral chapters and SEA/AA documentation. However, the depth and form of coordination vary across MSPs. In some cases, coherence with other policies is mainly expressed through references to EU instruments and general statements of consistency, with overlaps largely addressed through existing permitting and sectoral procedures. In others, coordination is further developed: objectives, measures and assessment duties from related policies are more explicitly reflected in zoning rules, compatibility matrices, permit criteria and review cycles, so that EU obligations are more directly linked to where activities can occur and under what conditions.

Most explicitly reference linkages with the **MSFD and WFD**, often by aligning environmental objectives and spatial designations. In some cases[17], the same authorities oversee both MSP and MSFD implementation, facilitating exchange of data and expertise.

Coherence with **energy policy** - especially the deployment of offshore renewables - has become increasingly central to MSP. Many Member States have established formal coordination mechanisms between MSP authorities and energy ministries to manage spatial targets for offshore wind and grid infrastructure in line with national energy-climate plans.

Fisheries, transport, and nature conservation frameworks are generally integrated through inter-ministerial committees and stakeholder processes, though the intensity of coordination varies. Some Member States use shared GIS platforms or common assessment tools to support alignment across policy areas.

[17] For instance, in France, Spain, Slovenia and Sweden.

Illustrative examples

Several Member States provide practical examples of how coherence between MSP and other policy processes is promoted in practice:

- France uses a fully integrated instrument at façade level (Documents Stratégiques de Façade, DSF), which simultaneously serves as the MSP and the strategic framework for MSFD implementation. Environmental obligations (Natura 2000, MSFD objectives, WFD constraints) are translated across the the DSF's vocation maps and façade-specific action plan (composed of thematic action sheets) ensuring that spatial guidance and management measures are brought together in one unified planning document.
- Finland aligns its MSP review cycle with broader land-use planning cycles under the Land Use and Building Act, helping ensure coherence between MSP, MSFD and national coastal-management processes.
- Denmark synchronises MSP with major sectoral planning processes (energy, environment, transport) and with MSFD updates, supporting coherence of environmental and sectoral decisions across marine policies.
- Spain uses the INFOMAR platform to harmonise datasets and permitting criteria for MSP, MSFD and coastal-management authorities, facilitating operational alignment across policy domains.

These examples illustrate how different Member States have incorporated alignment mechanisms into their planning systems - through data integration, cycle harmonisation, shared governance structures, or operational translation of environmental obligations.

Challenges identified

- Desynchronized planning and reporting cycles between MSP, MSFD, WFD, and national energy strategies.
- Institutional fragmentation where responsibilities are divided across ministries.
- Limited integration of social and economic policy objectives beyond energy (e.g. tourism, fisheries).
- Incomplete harmonisation of datasets and indicators across policy domains.

Article 6(2)(c) – Forward-looking considerations

- Support further alignment of MSP with MSFD, WFD and climate-energy planning cycles, including through joint reporting and shared monitoring indicators.
- Promote mechanisms for systematic coordination between MSP authorities and sectoral ministries, particularly on offshore-renewable-energy deployment.
- Facilitate interoperability of data and knowledge platforms to underpin coherent decision-making across EU marine policies.

4.4.4. Land-sea interactions

Provision

Article 7 of the MSP Directive requires Member States to take into account **land–sea interactions (LSI)** when establishing and implementing maritime spatial plans.

In this context, LSI refers to the interconnected environmental, social and economic processes that link land and sea, including how (land or sea) developments affect coastal communities, ecosystems, infrastructure and patterns of resource use on both sides of the coastline. The objective of addressing LSI in MSP is to ensure that maritime plans are coherent with relevant terrestrial plans and policies, so that decisions on land and at sea are mutually supportive.

Implementation status

All Member States recognise the relevance of land–sea interactions in their MSP frameworks, but the **approaches and analytical depth** vary substantially.

In practice, LSI is mainly operationalised through legal requirements on compatibility or coherence between marine and terrestrial plans, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) processes and, in many cases, by referencing or applying Integrated Coastal Zone Management principles. Commonly addressed aspects include coastal protection (e.g. climate adaptation, erosion and sediment management), energy and infrastructure (e.g. energy cables, pipelines and ports), biodiversity connectivity and land-based pollution.

Several Member States have established formal coordination arrangements between maritime and terrestrial authorities to support LSI. These include **federal-regional coordination mechanisms**[18], **inter-ministerial technical committees**[19]**,** and other coordination bodies involving municipalities and regions[20]. Other Member States rely more on structured consultation and bilateral collaboration across sectors[21]. The application of sector-based LSI analyses, plan-led programmes and the use of **integrated planning platforms** have also supported the consideration of LSI. This involves the use of shared GIS databases linking terrestrial and marine datasets[22].

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18 For example, Belgium uses regular federal-Flemish coordination mechanisms (minister-to-minister consultations and an Advisory Committee) and periodically reassesses whether activities are better located on land or at sea.

19 For example, Italy's Technical Committee composed of six ministries and fifteen maritime regions, and Portugal's interministerial working group.

20 For example, France's *Conseils maritimes de façade*, which bring together the State, regions and municipalities, including a dedicated LSI commission for MSP consultation in the South Atlantic façade.

21 Examples include the Netherlands' structured engagement of local authorities in LSI discussions, making use of the Wadden Sea Forum and systematic bilateral coordination with provinces and municipalities across sectors. The Dutch MSP also highlights provincial–national collaboration to implement the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, covering protected-area designation, management and nature-recovery measures in transitional environments such as dunes, islands and coastal waters. Bulgaria identifies land-based pressures through stakeholder consultations, while Romania assesses land–sea interactions via its Maritime Spatial Plan Committee in close cooperation with the Coastal Zone Management Committee.

22 Examples of the use of integrated planning platforms include Germany's Automatic Identification System (AIS) data analysis for shipping considerations in MSP, Denmark's fully digital MSP, Italy's *SID – Il portale del mare* with map layers on coastal and maritime tourism and coastal risks, Cyprus' GIS/conflict-matrix approach, and Portugal's national geoportal with mapped administrative constraints.

At regional-sea level, work under the **HELCOM and VASAB frameworks have** supported a shared understanding of LSI and the methodological options for addressing them, while facilitating the exchange of experience among planners across the Baltic Sea Region[23]. Under VASAB, coordination is further ensured through the work of CSPD/BSR[24] and broader strategic guidance, including the implementation of the VASAB Vision 2040[25]. In parallel, EU-funded MSP projects, such as **MSP-MED**, MARSPLAN II and **REGINA** have further strengthened collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Overall, all Member States have taken steps to identify and address key land–sea interdependencies, with the extent and manner of integration varying in line with differences in legal force, governance arrangements and administrative practice.

Illustrative examples

Approaches to strengthen land-sea interactions (LSI)

Across Member States, different pathways are used to reinforce land-sea interactions in maritime spatial planning. Among them, these text box present two key pathways: (1) plan-led LSI enhancement programmes and (2) LSI integration through local or regional mandates. Together, these approaches improve data use, coordination, and governance at the land–sea interface.

Plan-led LSI enhancement programmes - Some countries use national or regional programmes to deepen the analytical and procedural basis for LSI. These include:

- **Finland:** *The Interaction Plan 2024-2027* outlines an expansion of data collection, renewed scenario work, ecological mapping, and targeted engagement efforts to strengthen LSI analysis in the second planning cycle. These enhancements aim to refine sectoral roadmaps, integrate new offshore wind and blue biotechnology value chains, and better align with the Coastal Strategy.
- **Estonia:** Coordination is supported through the preparation of pilot coastal thematic spatial plan(s) to address in more detail the land-sea interactions and reconcile local interests (e.g. tourism and landscape) with national priorities (e.g. offshore energy).
- **Sweden:** Coordination on LSI is supported by the KOMPIS[26] project, a structured yet flexible programme led by the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, which aimed to help municipalities integrate marine spatial planning into their land-based planning. Through KOMPIS, municipalities received grants via county

23 The document *Lessons, stories and ideas on how to integrate Land-Sea Interactions into MSP* developed under the Pan Baltic Scope project and the *Regional Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap 2021-2030*, which explicitly includes an action under the LSI heading: "Explore good practices and application of planning and policy instruments for coordination of land-sea interactions across different levels and sectors".

24 Between Ministerial Conferences, VASAB is steered by the Committee on Spatial Planning and Development of the Baltic Sea Region (CSPD/BSR), composed of senior ministry and regional representatives. The Committee, established in 1995 (preceded by the Group of Focal Points, 1992–1994), provides a forum for knowledge exchange, supports common spatial policy, promotes projects, and cooperates with pan-Baltic organisations (CSPD/BSR website)

25 The VASAB Vision 2040 (VASAB Vision for the Territorial Development of the Baltic Sea Region in 2040) sets a long-term perspective for a vibrant, resilient, and well-connected Baltic Sea Region, integrating land and maritime spatial elements while respecting regional diversity. It promotes sustainability, cooperation, and joint stakeholder actions to address challenges across sectors, levels, and borders (Vision 2040 website)

26 KOMPIS – municipal planning in national collaboration.

administrative boards to support inter-municipal collaboration, local inventories, and the inclusion of marine considerations in comprehensive planning.

Local and regional mandate-based approaches to LSI - Other countries integrate LSI primarily by assigning or expanding legal mandates for coastal and marine planning at sub-national level. Some examples include:

- **Sweden**: Municipalities have statutory responsibility for spatial planning of internal and territorial waters under the Planning and Building Act (2010:900). Regional planning is carried out by county administrative boards (e.g. Stockholm, Skåne). Currently, around 60 municipalities are already integrating marine areas, especially those near the coast. The national *KOMPIS* programme (as above) further strengthens municipal capacities for marine area planning.
- **Slovenia**: The MSP defines a "coastal strip" (minimum 100 m on land and 150 m seaward, excluding ports/marinas). The four coastal municipalities determine boundaries and manage land-side parts of this strip according to their spatial-planning competences. While the MSP sets guidance for this zone, operational spatial planning remains a municipal competence, ensuring direct involvement at the land–sea interface.

Challenges identified

- Absence of a common definition and methodology for analysing land–sea interactions.
- Limited integration of socio-economic and cumulative effects at the land–sea interface.
- Data gaps where terrestrial and marine information systems use different spatial resolutions or legal bases.
- Administrative fragmentation between terrestrial and maritime authorities, especially in decentralised systems.
- Weak institutional links between MSP and coastal-zone-management frameworks.

Article 7 – Forward-looking considerations

- Develop shared guidance on defining, mapping and assessing land–sea interactions, including socio-economic and cumulative effects.
- Strengthen coordination between terrestrial spatial-planning and MSP authorities through joint working groups or shared data platforms.
- Encourage the use of integrated coastal-zone-management principles and digital spatial infrastructures covering both land and sea.
- Promote exchange of good practice on addressing LSI through regional-sea initiatives and EU-funded cooperation projects.

4.4.5. Identification of the spatial and temporal distribution of activities and uses

Provision

Article 8(1) of the MSP Directive requires Member States to identify the spatial and temporal distribution of relevant existing and potential activities and uses in marine waters. The objective is to establish a comprehensive spatial framework that supports sustainable

development, reduces conflicts between maritime sectors, and facilitates coexistence and synergies among uses.

Implementation status

All Member States have mapped maritime activities and uses within their planning areas. Most MSPs include a spatial inventory of existing uses (e.g. shipping, fishing, energy production, aquaculture, tourism, environmental protection) as a basis for developing spatial scenarios and identifying potential future allocations. In several cases, these inventories were developed through integration of data from national authorities, regional-sea initiatives and EU datasets such as EMODnet, Copernicus Marine Service and the European Atlas of the Seas.

Approaches vary in **scope and detail**. Some Member States apply a zoning-based model with clearly delineated functional areas (e.g. energy zones, shipping corridors, nature-conservation areas), while others adopt a more flexible or indicative approach, describing compatible and priority uses through guidance maps. Differences also exist in the legal weight of maps: in some systems, the plan's spatial layers are legally binding, while in others they are indicative or advisory.

The **temporal dimension** of activities is less systematically addressed. In most cases, plans distinguish between current and potential future uses but do not specify the timing or sequencing of developments. A few Member States have begun linking MSP to national energy or infrastructure strategies that include time horizons (e.g. 2030 or 2050), thereby indirectly introducing temporal perspectives into plan implementation.

The use of **digital spatial data infrastructures** has expanded significantly. Many countries maintain online marine spatial data portals where plan layers, environmental data and sectoral uses are stored and regularly updated. These systems often build on INSPIRE-compliant standards and enable interoperability with other EU marine data platforms.

Overall, the Directive's requirements have been met in formal terms: all Member States identify and map maritime uses. However, the **degree of analytical detail, temporal integration, and interoperability** still varies depending on national governance traditions, data availability and the maturity of marine spatial planning systems.

Illustrative examples

Integrating time into MSP decision-making

Finland provides an example of how the temporal dimension can be fully integrated into MSPs. Its 2030 plan, with a long-term vision to 2050, uses sector-specific roadmaps that recognise seasonal patterns (e.g. fish migrations, summer tourism peaks), phased development (e.g. offshore wind expansion), and environmental change. The plan applies adaptive management through GIS layers, enabling spatial allocations to be updated as projects evolve or new information becomes available. This approach ensures that time-based compatibility between uses is systematically considered alongside spatial planning, providing flexibility to respond to ecological and socio-economic shifts.

Challenges identified

- Absence of a common typology of maritime uses and activities across Member States.
- Differences in spatial resolution, metadata standards and legal status of mapped uses.
- Limited treatment of temporal aspects (seasonality, future scenarios, decommissioning).
- Difficulties capturing emerging or small-scale activities (e.g. nature restoration, marine tourism).
- Variable update frequency and interoperability between national and EU-level data platforms.

Article 8 – Forward-looking considerations

- Promote development of shared typologies and metadata standards for mapping maritime activities and uses.
- Encourage inclusion of temporal dimensions (e.g. seasonal and projected future uses) in MSP datasets and plans.
- Support continued development of interoperable digital data infrastructures and regular data updates.
- Facilitate exchange of experience on translating mapped uses into effective zoning and management measures.

4.4.6. Managing the interactions of activities

Provision

Article 6(2)(a) and Article 8(2) of the MSP Directive requires Member States to take into account **interactions between activities and uses** when establishing and implementing maritime spatial plans. This includes identifying potential **conflicts, synergies and cumulative effects** between different maritime sectors and ensuring that marine space is used efficiently and sustainably.

Implementation status

All Member States have considered interactions between activities as part of their MSP process, but the approaches used to analyse, visualise and manage these interactions differ significantly.

Most countries first identify potential spatial overlaps during the mapping stage and then evaluate **compatibilities and conflicts** through consultation with sectoral authorities, advisory councils and stakeholder forums. Conflict and synergy matrices, expert workshops and spatial overlays are the most common tools. These approaches are generally qualitative, relying on expert judgement and stakeholder input to identify where uses can co-exist or require spatial separation.

Some Member States have developed more systematic or **quantitative methods** to assess sectoral interactions. Examples include multi-criteria analyses[27], cumulative-impact modelling[28], or GIS-based conflict maps[29] that estimate potential spatial overlap and intensity of use. These methods are often applied for key sectors such as offshore energy, fisheries, shipping and nature protection.

Consideration of **synergies and co-location opportunities** is increasing, particularly between offshore renewables and aquaculture, or between energy and biodiversity objectives through multi-use areas and artificial-reef concepts. However, such approaches remain largely exploratory and rely on project-based experimentation rather than formal planning procedures.

Overall, Member States have established mechanisms to consider interactions among maritime activities, but the degree of methodological rigour, transparency and cross-sectoral coordination varies.

Illustrative examples

Structured cross-sector interaction within a flexible MSP framework

Ireland's National Marine Planning Framework applies policy-based sectoral priorities without binding spatial zones, with the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan providing more specific designations for offshore renewable energy. Notably, each sectoral chapter includes a dedicated "Interaction with other activities" section, outlining potential synergies, overlaps, and conflicts. For example, the ports and shipping chapter highlights links with aquaculture, offshore renewable energy, and protected areas, while the offshore renewable energy chapter points to opportunities such as co-location with aquaculture, multi-use with petroleum platforms, and the role of ports in supporting offshore energy. It also notes potential biodiversity benefits from offshore wind areas functioning as de facto no-take zones.

France's façade plans include *cartes des vocations* - maps that indicate preferred or compatible uses within each maritime zone. These are complemented by descriptive fiches that identify which activities are encouraged, conditionally compatible or require monitoring. Although non-binding, these tools provide clear, area-based signals about coexistence possibilities and help guide permitting and coordination among sectors without imposing strict zoning or exclusivity.

Challenges identified

- Lack of common definitions and indicators for assessing sectoral interactions.
- Predominance of qualitative approaches and limited use of quantitative or model-based tools.
- Variable capacity to translate analysis of interactions into binding plan measures.

[27] Examples include the Swedish MSP, where a broad multi-criteria analysis was undertaken to examine the interactions and dependencies among competing uses of marine space.

[28] For example, In Estonia, sensitivity mapping combined with the PlanWise4Blue SEA tool supported the evaluation of overlapping activities and cumulative impacts, helping to minimise conflicts and enhance synergies.

[29] The Cypriot MSP incorporated conflict-analysis heat maps to identify spatial overlap hotspots and support zoning.

- Limited evidence on socio-economic trade-offs and long-term cumulative effects.
- Need for systematic monitoring of how planned interactions evolve over time.

Article 6(2)(a) – Forward-looking considerations

- Encourage exchange of methodologies for assessing sectoral compatibilities, conflicts and synergies, including model-based and cumulative-impact approaches.
- Promote systematic documentation of how conflicts are resolved and how co-location options are integrated in MSP revisions.
- Support development of EU-level typologies and indicators for tracking the evolution of sectoral interactions over time.
- Facilitate research and pilot projects on multi-use concepts and socio-economic trade-off assessment in MSP.

4.4.7. Stakeholder involvement and public participation

Provision

Article 9 of the MSP Directive requires Member States to establish means of **public participation** by informing and consulting **relevant stakeholders**, **authorities and the public** concerned at an early stage in the development of maritime spatial plans. It also requires that stakeholders and the public have access to final plans once adopted. The aim is to ensure that MSP is transparent, inclusive and reflective of the diverse maritime interests and knowledge sources across society.

Implementation status

All Member States have put in place procedures for stakeholder and public participation in line with their national planning systems and environmental-assessment legislation. Consultation practices typically build on existing **SEA** processes, using the same frameworks for public notice, documentation and feedback. Stakeholders are generally consulted through written submissions, online platforms and public meetings at national or regional level.

The scope of engagement varies according to governance structures:

- **Centralised systems** often rely on national-level consultations coordinated by the competent authority;
- **Decentralised systems** use regional workshops or coastal-zone forums to collect input.

Stakeholder participation usually involves sectoral representatives (e.g. fisheries, energy, transport, environmental NGOs), public administrations, academia and coastal municipalities. In some Member States, engagement activities also include local communities and the civil society[30]. Furthermore, in several cases, standing working groups or inter-ministerial committees provide ongoing dialogue throughout the plan-development

[30] Examples include Cyprus, Sweden, Estonia and Finland.

process[31], while in others, engagement is mainly concentrated during the formal consultation stage.

Several Member States have used **digital consultation tools**, such as online map viewers or interactive feedback portals, to improve accessibility and transparency[32]. However, the depth and continuity of participation remain uneven. Many authorities reported challenges in engaging local communities, small-scale economic actors and the general public, particularly where MSP processes are highly technical or managed at the national level.

Some Member States have made notable progress in conducting stakeholder consultations, establishing MSP working groups or interministerial committees, and forming advisory bodies that span multiple levels of governance. Outreach events and engagement activities have also strengthened dialogue with local communities and the wider public. These efforts have contributed to greater ocean literacy, fostered debate, and increased awareness of MSP among the authorities, broader stakeholders and the public. Overall, while Member States have generally complied with the Directive's procedural requirements, the **quality, inclusiveness and continuity** of stakeholder engagement vary depending on institutional capacity and national administrative approaches. An in-depth analysis of the differences in approaches to stakeholder consultation undertaken by different EU Member States in the first round of MSP was conducted in 2024, providing further insights into the participation in MSP processes[33].

Illustrative examples

Broad and inclusive participation

Denmark provides an example of transparency in its consultation process. Ministries, municipalities, industry bodies, NGOs and research institutions were involved, and the process also received input from under-represented groups, including disability organisations and the Youth Climate Council. Stakeholders were identified transparently based on legal mandates and use of the marine space, the full consultation list was published online, and cross-border partners were consulted throughout the process.

Integrated consultation channels with clear influence on spatial decisions

Cyprus illustrates a well-designed and transparent participation process. Two island-wide consultation phases combined city-by-city presentations with online platforms for written submissions, and all draft maps were made publicly accessible. Importantly, input led to tangible changes in the MSP: aquaculture units were relocated to avoid conflicts with energy infrastructure, dedicated cable-landing zones were introduced to reduce navigational risks, and multi-use areas were formalised to manage coexistence between activities such as energy, transport, tourism, cultural heritage and defence. A

[31] Examples include France's CNML/CMF, the Netherlands' North Sea Consultative Body, Ireland's Stakeholder MSP Advisory Group, Germany's Scientific Advisory Board, Italy's Technical Committee and Slovenia's Working Group on MSP.

[32] Examples include Bulgaria's national consultation portal and email submissions; France's online platforms, Géolittoral and *Je participe*, providing access to maps, planning documents, environmental reports, and interactive mapping tools; Italy's central online platform with access to all documents and spatial data; Cyprus's Ministry website for electronic submissions and public access to zoning and maps; and electronic feedback options in Poland, Lithuania, Finland, and Denmark.

[33] Pound, D. and Williams, A., (2025). Enabling Maritime Spatial Planning – enhancing stakeholder participation. Lessons from MSP delivery to date. A report produced for the European MSP Assistance Mechanism, July 2025., Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, doi:10.2926/7361955

consolidated comments-and-responses report documented how feedback shaped the final plan, ensuring full traceability.

Challenges identified

- Consultation intensity and methods vary widely between Member States.
- Limited engagement of local communities and small-scale maritime sectors.
- Short consultation periods linked to SEA timelines.
- Limited feedback mechanisms showing how stakeholder input influenced plan outcomes.
- Need for resources and capacity to maintain engagement during plan implementation.

Article 9 – Forward-looking considerations

- Encourage exchange of good practice on early, continuous and multi-level stakeholder engagement throughout the MSP cycle.
- Promote transparent feedback mechanisms demonstrating how consultation results inform plan revisions.
- Support development of inclusive participation methods and capacity-building for both authorities and stakeholders.
- Foster wider use of digital participation tools and social-mapping approaches to increase reach and accessibility.

4.4.8. Use of best available data and data sharing

Provision

Article 10 of the MSP Directive requires Member States to base their maritime spatial plans on the **best available data** and to organise the **sharing of relevant information** between authorities and stakeholders. The provision aims to ensure that MSP builds on sound evidence and that data collected for other EU instruments - such as the MSFD, WFD and INSPIRE Directive - are reused effectively.

Implementation status

All Member States use existing national and European data sources to inform MSP. The most common inputs include hydrographic, environmental and socio-economic datasets from national mapping agencies, environmental institutes and sectoral authorities, complemented by regional-sea or EU-level sources such as **EMODnet**, **Copernicus Marine Service**, and the **European Atlas of the Seas**.

Many Member States have developed **dedicated data portals or geospatial platforms** to host and visualise MSP information. These often combine plan layers, environmental datasets and sectoral uses within an INSPIRE-compliant framework. Several authorities also use shared portals jointly with MSFD or ICZM processes to avoid duplication.

While all plans rely on authoritative datasets, **data harmonisation and accessibility remain uneven**. Differences persist in spatial resolution, update frequency and metadata

standards, reflecting variations in institutional capacity and the maturity of national data infrastructures. In some countries, restrictions linked to data ownership or commercial sensitivity limit public access to certain layers (e.g. defence, energy or fisheries data).

Regional-sea initiatives (HELCOM Map and Data Service, OSPAR Data and Information System, UNEP/MAP InfoMAP) have facilitated exchange of geospatial data and supported cross-border comparability. In addition, the Technical Expert Group (TEG) on MSP[34] data supports the EU MSP process by promoting effective data management, facilitating the availability of data and the sharing of information between Member States, and providing access to data on the state of the marine environment in connection with established maritime spatial plans. Notably, the ReMAP project[35] is developing interoperable data tools to monitor and assess maritime spatial plans, building on existing infrastructures and supporting cross-border comparability. It directly draws on the work of the TEG on MSP data by extending its harmonisation efforts and applying them in practical assessment tools for use by Member States. Overall, Member States have made substantial progress in improving access to marine spatial information and ensuring that MSP builds on reliable data.However, full interoperability between national and EU-level data systems remains a long-term objective.

Illustrative examples

Data and information sharing approaches

Member States apply a range of approaches to organise best-available data and enable information sharing for MSP. Denmark publishes its plan as live WMS/WFS services through a dedicated Marine Spatial Data Infrastructure, allowing users to integrate the data directly into their own GIS systems. Finland bases its plans on extensive ecological datasets from the VELMU programme, made available through an open map service. Estonia uses the online tool PlanWise4Blue to visualise cumulative pressures by linking environmental datasets and an impact matrix with planned activities. Spain relies on long-term monitoring under Estrategias Marinas and the national INFOMAR GIS to consolidate marine data. Ireland provides open access to all planning datasets through marineplan.ie, aligned with national open-data standards. Portugal hosts MSP layers and supporting information on a geoportal aggregating data from multiple national agencies.

Challenges identified

- Differences in spatial resolution, metadata quality and update cycles between national data systems.
- Limited interoperability between MSP, MSFD and sectoral datasets
- Constraints on data sharing due to ownership and confidentiality.
- Uneven integration of socio-economic data compared with environmental information.
- Need for sustained technical and financial capacity to maintain data infrastructures.

34 **Technical Expert Group (TEG) on Data for MSP**

35 ReMAP website

Article 10 – Forward-looking considerations

- Promote common data and metadata standards for MSP consistent with INSPIRE and EMODnet frameworks.
- Support regular updates and long-term maintenance of national MSP data portals.
- Encourage integration of socio-economic datasets alongside environmental layers to support balanced planning.
- Strengthen data-sharing arrangements across borders and between EU marine policies.

4.4.9. Cooperation among Member States and at sea basin level

Provision

Article 11 of the MSP Directive requires Member States to cooperate with one another to ensure that maritime spatial plans are coherent and coordinated across marine-region boundaries. This cooperation should cover the entire sea-basin area and may take place through existing regional institutional structures or bilateral and multilateral mechanisms. The objective is to promote consistent planning approaches, avoid transboundary conflicts and enhance the sustainable use of shared marine resources.

Implementation status

All Member States with adjacent marine waters engage in some form of transboundary cooperation. In most cases, this cooperation builds on **established regional-sea conventions, initiatives or cooperation mechanisms,** and is further supported by **EU-funded projects.** Key arrangements by sea basin include:

- **Baltic Sea: Cooperation is structured around the HELCOM–VASAB MSP Working Group,** the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and MSP-related projects such as BalticScope, Pan Baltic SCOPE, MSP-GREEN and BalticLINes. The **Capacity4MSP** initiative further supports cross-border coordination.
- **North Sea and Atlantic Ocean coordination** through the North Sea MSP Collaboration Group, the North Seas Energy Cooperation (NSEC), the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) and the MSP Member State Expert Group. Projects such as eMSP NBSR, NorthSEE, NORSAIC and SEANSE also strengthen transboundary planning. In the Atlantic, cooperation is framed by the **Atlantic Strategy** and the **Atlantic Action Plan 2.0**, complemented by projects such as **SIMNORAT**, **SIMAtlantic** and **MSP-OR**.
- **Mediterranean cooperation** under the Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP) is further supported by initiatives such as **WestMED**, **EUSAIR**, and EU-funded projects, including **SIMWESTMED**, **SUPREME**, **MEDIGREEN**, **GreenMED** and **REGINA**.
- **Black Sea** collaboration has been mainly anchored through **MARSPLAN-BS I & II projects**, with shared data/monitoring and a pilot cross-border plans within the Black Sea Commission context.

Cooperation through regional sea-basins frameworks and EU-funded projects have been central to advancing transboundary cooperation by providing shared methods, data platforms and opportunities for dialogue and joint learning. Such efforts have also promoted **capacity building**, **information exchange** and **alignment of planning methods**. In some cases, EU-funded projects have led to longer-term follow-up initiatives and formalised

cooperation structures. These include the North Sea Collaboration Group (preceded by the NorthSEE project) and the Baltic MSP Planners' Forum, which was initiated under the Pan Baltic Scope project, continued through Capacity4MSP, and is currently facilitated by the VASAB Secretariat under the PASPS project[36].

SEA and Espoo procedures also provide structured, legal channels for cross-border consultation on key issues such as shipping routes, offshore wind, energy corridors, and ecological interactions, often leading to tangible plan adjustments. Additionally, several Member States have conducted **bilateral consultations** on shared maritime boundaries to discuss plan content and potential interactions between uses (e.g. shipping, energy, fisheries, environmental protection). Sea-basin projects funded through the EMFF/EMFAF have played an essential role in facilitating dialogue, testing tools and promoting capacity building.

The intensity and institutionalisation of cooperation vary between sea-basins. In well-established frameworks (e.g. Baltic Sea, North Sea), cooperation is continuous and supported by technical working groups. In other sea basins, cooperation remains project-based or limited to specific topics. Nevertheless, the overall trend shows growing regional dialogue on methodologies, particularly regarding cumulative-impact assessment, data harmonisation and cross-border consultation procedures.

Illustrative examples

The Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI)

Launched in 2023 by the Netherlands and France, the GNSBI brings together nine countries bordering the Greater North Sea (BE, DK, FR, DE, IE, NL, NO, SE, UK) to improve coherence of maritime spatial planning and marine management across the basin. The initiative aligns priorities across offshore energy, fisheries/aquaculture, shipping and nature conservation, and supports an ecosystem-based, cross-border approach to optimise shared sea space. Working alongside existing fora such as NSEC and OSPAR, it strengthens coordination between ministers, authorities and stakeholders and promotes data and knowledge sharing. Six voluntary technical workstreams - governance, multi-use/co-use, nature conservation, cumulative impacts, long-term fisheries perspectives and knowledge sharing - provide a structured framework to address cumulative pressures and maintain ecological limits.

Cooperation supported through EU-funded projects

EU-funded projects continue to play a major role in building cross-border MSP capacity and shared approaches.

The **Emerging ecosystem-based Maritime Spatial Planning topics in North and Baltic Sea Regions (eMSP NBSR)** project (2021–2024) strengthened cross-border MSP practice through a Community of Practice-based approach, bringing together planners, authorities and researchers. It developed practical solutions on emerging MSP challenges across five thematic strands (governance, ecosystem-based approach, sustainable blue economy, monitoring and evaluation, and data sharing). The project enhanced capacity, improved shared methods and data interoperability, and established structures for continued cooperation between North Sea and Baltic Sea countries. Fifteen organisations from nine countries (The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Finland,

[36] Policy Area Spatial Planning Support (PASPS website)

Sweden, France, Belgium, Latvia and Poland) were involved in the project. The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (*Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland)*, part of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate, acted as the driver.

The **MARSPLAN-BS** projects advanced MSP in the Black Sea region, specifically in Bulgaria and Romania. **MARSPLAN-BS II (2015-2018)** supported the MSP Directive by developing methodologies, analysing marine areas, and producing a joint MSP plan with five pilot cases (Eforie, Sfântul Gheorghe, Bourgas Port, ship routing, and aquaculture/fisheries). It also fostered regional collaboration by engaging stakeholders across the Black Sea to share knowledge and best practices. For both countries, the project provided the first structured framework for MSP analysis and practice, laying the groundwork for subsequent national planning processes. **MARSPLAN-BS II (2019-2021)** built on this progress by supporting coherent, cross-sectoral MSP in Bulgaria and Romania, in line with the EU MSP Directive. The project established a lasting cross-border cooperation mechanism and focused on strengthening national capacity, developing maritime spatial plans, promoting stakeholder participation, and enhancing data and knowledge sharing, with a particular focus on addressing land-sea interactions and multi-use planning. In practice, it played a central role in developing the technical foundations, institutional capacity and evidence base that enabled both Bulgaria and Romania to prepare their MSPs.

Challenges identified

- Differences in planning cycles, legal mandates and administrative capacity limit full alignment of MSP processes.
- Cooperation often depends on temporary, project-based funding rather than permanent institutional arrangements.
- Data interoperability and access restrictions (national classification, confidentiality) constrain cross-border analyses.
- Language and technical-terminology barriers impede efficient exchange of information.

Article 11 – Forward-looking considerations

- Strengthen permanent regional-sea cooperation structures, including regional sea conventions, sea-basin strategies and frameworks, and macroregional initiatives, to ensure continuity beyond project cycles.
- Promote alignment of planning timetables and methodologies across borders to support coherence.
- Enhance interoperability of cross-border datasets and information-sharing mechanisms.
- Encourage early and structured involvement of neighbouring non-EU countries in sea-basin cooperation frameworks.

4.4.10. Cooperation with third countries

Provision

Article 12 of the MSP Directive requires Member States to cooperate with **third countries** sharing the same marine region or sub-region. Such cooperation should build on existing

international and regional frameworks to promote coherence of maritime spatial planning across sea-basin boundaries and to support sustainable use of shared marine areas.

Implementation status

Cooperation with neighbouring **non-EU countries** has been organised through several channels, including transboundary consultations, participation in regional-sea conventions and EU-funded projects. To a lesser extent, cooperation also occurs through formal bilateral MSP processes. Transboundary consultations under SEA/Espoo procedures offer a structured approach for addressing cross-border effects, such as shipping safety and energy infrastructure. However, most activity, has taken place under established multilateral frameworks such as **HELCOM**, **OSPAR**, and **UNEP/MAP**, where EU and non-EU countries jointly participate in working groups on marine environment and spatial planning.

In the **Baltic Sea**, cooperation is facilitated through the **HELCOM–VASAB MSP Working Group**[37], and the **Nordic MSP Cooperation** under the Nordic Council of Ministers. This allows information exchange on planning progress and regional assessments.

In the **North Sea** and the **Atlantic**, frameworks such as **OSPAR**, **NSEC**, **GNSBI**, and the **North Sea MSP Collaboration Group** lead. Broader platforms like the **Atlantic Arc Commission** and the **British-Irish Council** also facilitate coordination with the UK.

In the **Mediterranean**, cooperation is channelled through the **Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP)** and its **MSP Regional Working Group**. However, this sea basin has relied more heavily on initiatives such as **WestMED** and **EUSAIR**, as well as projects such as MediGreen, MSP-MED and MSP-global. Notably, the MED MSP Community of Practice - a permanent platform supported by the WestMED Initiative - brings together MSP practitioners and stakeholders from across the Mediterranean. It provides a framework for knowledge exchange, joint learning and coordinated approaches to MSP, with a focus on issues such as the blue economy, coastal resilience and sustainable tourism.

In the **Black Sea**, joint initiatives under the **Common Maritime Agenda,** the **Bucharest Convention** and **EMFAF regional projects** have supported knowledge exchange and capacity building related to MSP.

Overall, engagement with third countries is **growing, though it remains uneven**, reflecting differences in regional governance maturity, political context and available cooperation mechanisms.

Illustrative examples

WestMED Initiative

The WestMED Initiative is a regional cooperation framework involving ten western Mediterranean countries participating in the 5+5 Dialogue: five EU Member States (France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Malta) and five Southern partner countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia). It aims to improve maritime safety and security, support a sustainable blue economy and jobs, and protect marine ecosystems. Based on an EU initiative adopted in 2017 and a 2018 ministerial declaration, it follows a roadmap

[37] The only third country involved was Russia, however, MSP cooperation with Russia has been suspended since March 2022 following its military aggression against Ukraine, and remains suspended until further notice.

built around six priorities: maritime safety and the fight against pollution, maritime cluster and skills development, sustainable production and consumption, biodiversity and habitat protection and restoration, and development of coastal communities and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.

MEDIGREEN project

The MEDIGREEN project, co-funded by EMFAF, aims to advance the European Green Deal transition in the Mediterranean Sea by using maritime spatial planning to strengthen sectoral and, where relevant, cross-sectoral responses in the semi-enclosed and ecologically Mediterranean complex basin. It focuses on how MSP can support greener pathways for key maritime uses and activities during both the finalisation and implementation of current plans and in the next planning cycle. The project reinforces the sea-basin dimension of MSP by enhancing cross-border cooperation among EU Member States and extending collaboration to non-EU countries (Algeria and Tunisia) under the Barcelona Convention, promoting coordinated, EGD-oriented marine management at Mediterranean scale.

Challenges identified

- There is limited involvement of non-EU neighbouring countries in joint MSP processes, especially in the Mediterranean and Black Sea.
- In some sea-basins, cooperation remains mostly informal or project-based, lacking permanent institutional frameworks.
- Political and administrative differences with third countries can limit continuity of engagement.
- Data-sharing and language barriers restrict technical collaboration.
- Limited funding and staff capacity in some non-EU partner countries constrain sustained participation.
- Absence of legal alignment with the MSP Directive hinders consistency of planning approaches.

Article 12 – Forward-looking considerations

- Strengthen cooperation through existing regional-sea conventions and international programmes.
- Encourage inclusion of non-EU partners in sea-basin projects and data-sharing platforms.
- Support capacity-building and knowledge exchange to align planning principles across EU and neighbouring countries.
- Explore opportunities under future EU external-action instruments to sustain transboundary MSP dialogue.

4.5. Cross-cutting implementation aspects

This section synthesises horizontal patterns that cut across specific provisions of the MSP Directive. It highlights common challenges encountered by Member States and the enabling conditions that have facilitated implementation. These observations are descriptive and

based on evidence collected across all Member States; they do not constitute evaluative judgements or recommendations.

Institutional and administrative capacity

The implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) across Member States is largely shaped by limitations in institutional and administrative capacity. As MSP is a relatively new discipline, many authorities face challenges in developing the necessary governance structures, processes, and specialised competencies to manage complex planning activities across sectors and administrative levels. Shortages of experienced personnel—both within central administrations and local authorities—pose limitations to MSP implementation.

The most significant constraint observed is the ability of national institutions to coordinate effectively, integrate planning with other policy areas, engage stakeholders, and manage multi-level inter-administrative processes – all of these aspects being dealt with by small teams of (often times) one or two experts in Member States administrations.

In line with the above, data management and inter-agency coordination at national level remain recurring procedural hurdles. Difficulties in accessing, harmonizing, and updating relevant information, along with delays in contributions from multiple authorities, complicate evidence-based decision-making and slow the planning process.

From a financial standpoint, high costs are often associated with technical requirements such as strategic environmental assessments and the engagement of consultancy services, further stretching limited resources.

Governance and inter-institutional coordination challenges

Member States face challenges in clearly defining governance structures, assigning roles and responsibilities, and ensuring coherent coordination among authorities with maritime and MSP-related competencies. Fragmented governance arrangements - whether between regional and national levels or across sectoral ministries - can pose coordination difficulties, further compounded by the need to integrate diverse sectoral policies within spatial planning.

This is linked to the limited administrative capacity issue, but also, in many cases, sectoral policies do not fully account for the spatial implications of their activities, creating a gap between strategic objectives and the practical management of maritime space. This disconnection requires active and time-intensive mediation by planning authorities and highlights the importance of coordinated planning, institutional readiness, capacity building, and awareness-raising among all entities involved.

To address these challenges, some Member States have established formal mechanisms, such as MSP committees or inter-ministerial working groups, to facilitate dialogue, align priorities, and streamline decision-making. However, even with such structures, the effectiveness of coordination depends on the institutional capacity of participating authorities to engage meaningfully, share data, and integrate planning objectives across sectors.

Gaps in policy coherence and integration

Although the MSP Directive aims to provide a coherent framework for maritime space management, national authorities must implement it in the context of multiple overlapping EU strategies and legislative documents, including the Marine Strategy Framework

Directive (MSFD), the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the Renewable Energy Directive (RED), and the EU Green Deal. These instruments often have divergent objectives, timelines, and spatial scopes, creating technical, procedural, and strategic challenges.

The Directive mandates the integration of these sectoral policies but does not establish a clear hierarchy or mechanisms for resolving conflicts. This leaves national planners responsible for finding a consensus to meet overall EU legal frames objectives, requiring high levels of institutional capacity, intersectoral coordination, and technical expertise. Furthermore, emerging policy priorities, such as climate change adaptation and the Green Deal's ecosystem restoration and carbon neutrality targets, introduce dynamic requirements that traditional MSP frameworks—often static and sector-oriented—are not well equipped to handle.

Data-related challenges

A central challenge in MSP is the limited availability, integration, and effective use of both socio-economic and geophysical/environmental data. While the MSP Directive calls for the use of the "best available data" to support evidence-based planning, the practical interpretation of this requirement has been unclear, leaving authorities uncertain about which datasets to prioritise, how to structure them, and how to integrate them into coherent planning frameworks. This ambiguity is particularly pronounced in countries engaging with MSP for the first time, where institutional experience with marine data management is limited.

The lack of standardised data and harmonized methodologies has resulted in fragmented information collection, inconsistencies across planning processes, and difficulties in linking socio-economic and environmental datasets to decision-making. Moreover, insufficient frameworks for formal data sharing—both within and between Member States—have hindered cross-institutional and transboundary cooperation, led to duplication of efforts, and slowed planning processes.

5. MSP alignment with the European Green Deal

This chapter provides an overview of the European Green Deal (EGD) and the relationship between the MSP Directive and relevant Green Deal initiatives. This includes an overview of how the MSPs themselves reflect targets and themes set out in the Green Deal, and considering how the MSPs contribute to the EU Green Deal objectives and targets.

5.1. Introduction and purpose

This chapter examines how the most recent maritime spatial plans support the objectives and policy directions set out under the EGD, published in December 2019. Most national plans were prepared and adopted before or shortly after the EGD, often based on drafts developed well in advance. They therefore cannot be expected to fully reflect the most recent climate, energy and biodiversity targets, but they already show how MSP can contribute to these wider policy goals.

The chapter does not assess legal compliance. Instead, it provides a structured overview of:

- the EU-level climate, energy, biodiversity and restoration objectives most relevant for MSP;
- the extent to which these objectives and targets are reflected, explicitly or implicitly, in national maritime spatial plans; and
- the main patterns, strengths and gaps that emerge across Member States in terms of support for EGD implementation.

The analysis builds on the EU-level mapping of European Green Deal initiatives and targets, and on a comparative review of Member States' maritime spatial plans. The assessment draws on the methodological framework developed under the EU-funded **MSP-GREEN** project[38], which proposed a structured approach for examining how existing MSPs reflect key EGD themes, including biodiversity protection, offshore renewable energy and climate adaptation. This framework was adapted and applied in this study to ensure coherence with ongoing EU-funded work and to facilitate comparability across countries.

Against this background, the findings presented in this chapter should be read as a **snapshot of a transition phase**. Current MSPs establish a baseline of spatial planning at sea and already contribute to several EGD priorities, but the full integration of newer targets and initiatives (including offshore energy expansion and nature restoration) will only be possible in subsequent planning cycles.

The chapter adopts a thematic approach organised around the main EGD pillars relevant for the marine environment and maritime uses. The analysis builds on a review of EU policies and targets, and a comparative assessment of how these objectives are reflected, explicitly or implicitly, in national maritime spatial plans.

[38] https://mspgreen.eu/

5.2. EU- level framework: Green Deal objectives and targets

5.2.1. Overview of Green Deal priority areas relevant to MSP

The European Green Deal sets an overarching framework for transforming the EU economy towards climate neutrality, environmental restoration and sustainable use of resources. While not all Green Deal components have a direct spatial expression, several priority areas are particularly relevant for maritime spatial planning, either because they involve activities located at sea or because their implementation depends on reducing or managing marine pressures.

The most relevant Green Deal priority areas for MSP include:

- **Climate neutrality and decarbonisation**, including long-term emission reduction pathways and sector-specific transition strategies. These initiatives influence the future development of offshore energy systems, maritime transport, ports and low-carbon blue-economy activities.
- **Offshore renewable energy**, identified by the EU as a key enabler of climate neutrality. The expansion of offshore wind and hybrid energy infrastructure has strong and direct maritime spatial implications.
- **Marine biodiversity protection and restoration**, including commitments to expand protected areas, strengthen ecological connectivity and restore degraded marine habitats. These objectives have explicit spatial components and require coherent spatial planning across sea basins.
- **Zero pollution and circular economy**, which include reducing marine litter, microplastics and harmful emissions. While these objectives are not primarily spatial, they influence how activities such as navigation, port operations, extraction and waste management are organised spatially.
- **A sustainable blue economy**, promoting low-impact maritime sectors, reducing spatial pressure on ecosystems, and supporting climate-resilient economic development at sea.

These priority areas form the context within which MSP can contribute to Green Deal implementation, either by providing space for key activities, reducing conflicts, protecting sensitive ecosystems, or aligning planning decisions with long-term EU policy directions.

5.2.2. EGD targets

Within the wider priority areas, a number of quantitative objectives and targets have direct or indirect implications for maritime spatial planning. These include:

- **Climate neutrality and decarbonisation**: Reduce GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030. Achieve climate neutrality by 2050.
- **Offshore renewable energy:** 42.5% minimum renewable energy in overall energy mix by 2030. At least 60 GW offshore wind by 2030. 300 GW by 2050 across EU sea basins.
- **Marine biodiversity protection and restoration**: Protect 30% of EU seas by 2030, and place 10% under strict protection.

- **Zero pollution and circular economy**: 50% reduction in marine plastic litter by 2030, and 30% reduction in microplastic releases.

These targets establish policy expectations that will shape maritime activities over the coming decades. The MSP Directive supports their implementation by managing spatial compatibility, identifying areas where environmental protection or restoration should be prioritised, and facilitating the expansion of offshore renewable energy within coherent spatial frameworks.

5.2.3. Relevance of the EGD for MSPs

Table 3 Green Deal Themes with regard to objectives/targets, relevance for MSPs, and how these may be reflected in the MSPs

Theme	Key EGD Targets / Objectives	Relevance for MSP	Type of Influence on MSP
Climate neutrality and decarbonisation	**EU Climate Law**: • Reduce GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030. • Achieve climate neutrality by 2050. • Progress towards a 2040 climate target under development.	• Influences long-term spatial demand for offshore energy, ports, shipping lanes and emerging decarbonisation infrastructure. • Shapes future co-existence needs among maritime sectors. • Is not limited to maritime activities	• Identification of existing emission levels from activities covered by MSP. • Consideration of carbon-removal and offsetting activities
Offshore renewable energy	**Renewable Energy Directive (RED)**: • Updated targets for renewable deployment (to achieve 42.5% minimum renewable energy in overall energy mix by 2030). **EU Strategy on offshore renewable energy:** • At least 60 GW offshore wind by 2030. • 300 GW by 2050 across EU sea basins. **TEN-E Regulation** • Non-binding regional goals for offshore renewable deployment to improve offshore grids and cross-border energy infrastructure.	• Strong direct spatial implications: identification of suitable areas, coexistence with other uses, environmental safeguards and cross-border coordination.	• Identification of current energy production. • Identification of potential for new renewable energy operations and activities including anticipatory spatial planning for cables, interconnectors and ports. • Consideration of spatial coherence across borders and with energy system planning.
Marine biodiversity	**EU Biodiversity Strategy**	• Requires coherent spatial designation of	• Identification of existing and

Theme	Key EGD Targets / Objectives	Relevance for MSP	Type of Influence on MSP
	• Protect 30% of EU seas by 2030. • Place 10% under strict protection.	protected areas, ecological corridors and pressures management across sea basins.	potential sites for MPAs/ecological corridors. • Identification and mitigation of any potential conflict of activities (including land-sea interface). • Consideration of cumulative impacts and progress across MSPs.
Nature restoration	**Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR):** • Binding restoration targets, including marine and coastal ecosystems.	• Introduction of new spatial needs (restoration areas, ecological connectivity). • Requires alignment with future national restoration plans.	
Zero Pollution	**Zero Pollution Action Plan:** • 50% reduction in marine plastic litter by 2030. • 30% reduction in microplastic releases.	• Influences spatial management of maritime transport, ports and waste-related activities; supports reduction of pressures on sensitive areas. • Is not limited to maritime activities	• May influence spatial management of maritime transport, port operations and waste flows. • May affect siting of activities with potential environmental pressures.
Sustainable blue economy	**Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy** (EU policies for fisheries and aquaculture and maritime transport decarbonisation initiatives)*:* • Transition to low-impact fisheries and aquaculture. • Decarbonisation of maritime transport and ports. • Support for emerging sustainable maritime sectors.	• MSP Directive enables coexistence, reduces conflicts, and guides spatial efficiency for both traditional and emerging maritime sectors.	• Potential identification of low-impact maritime activities and integrated planning of sectoral uses, including coexistence frameworks for fisheries, aquaculture, ports, tourism and emerging sectors.

summarises the main Green Deal targets and objectives that have spatial implications for the marine environment: these targets shape the future demand for sea space, influence environmental protection requirements, and frame the long-term policy context within which Member States develop and revise their maritime spatial plans. The table identifies the specific legislation and policy instruments under the EGD that set out these targets and objectives. The table then identifies how these targets and objectives may be reflected in the MSPs, as the plans need to provide spatial designations, planning rules and cross-sector coordination to support the actions to achieve them.

Table 3 Green Deal Themes with regard to objectives/targets, relevance for MSPs, and how these may be reflected in the MSPs

Theme	Key EGD Targets / Objectives	Relevance for MSP	Type of Influence on MSP
Climate neutrality and decarbonisation	**EU Climate Law**:	• Influences long-term spatial demand for offshore energy, ports,	• Identification of existing emission

Theme	Key EGD Targets / Objectives	Relevance for MSP	Type of Influence on MSP
	• Reduce GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030. • Achieve climate neutrality by 2050. • Progress towards a 2040 climate target under development.	shipping lanes and emerging decarbonisation infrastructure. • Shapes future co-existence needs among maritime sectors. • Is not limited to maritime activities	levels from activities covered by MSP. • Consideration of carbon-removal and offsetting activities
Offshore renewable energy	**Renewable Energy Directive (RED)**: • Updated targets for renewable deployment (to achieve 42.5% minimum renewable energy in overall energy mix by 2030). **EU Strategy on offshore renewable energy:** • At least 60 GW offshore wind by 2030. • 300 GW by 2050 across EU sea basins. **TEN-E Regulation** • Non-binding regional goals for offshore renewable deployment to improve offshore grids and cross-border energy infrastructure.	• Strong direct spatial implications: identification of suitable areas, coexistence with other uses, environmental safeguards and cross-border coordination.	• Identification of current energy production. • Identification of potential for new renewable energy operations and activities including anticipatory spatial planning for cables, interconnectors and ports. • Consideration of spatial coherence across borders and with energy system planning.
Marine biodiversity	**EU Biodiversity Strategy** • Protect 30% of EU seas by 2030. • Place 10% under strict protection.	• Requires coherent spatial designation of protected areas, ecological corridors and pressures management across sea basins.	• Identification of existing and potential sites for MPAs/ecological corridors. • Identification and mitigation of any potential conflict of activities (including land-sea interface). • Consideration of cumulative impacts and progress across MSPs.
Nature restoration	**Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR):** • Binding restoration targets, including marine and coastal ecosystems.	• Introduction of new spatial needs (restoration areas, ecological connectivity). • Requires alignment with future national restoration plans.	
Zero Pollution	**Zero Pollution Action Plan:** • 50% reduction in marine plastic litter by 2030. • 30% reduction in microplastic releases.	• Influences spatial management of maritime transport, ports and waste-related activities; supports reduction of pressures on sensitive areas. • Is not limited to maritime activities	• May influence spatial management of maritime transport, port operations and waste flows. • May affect siting of activities with potential

Theme	Key EGD Targets / Objectives	Relevance for MSP	Type of Influence on MSP
			environmental pressures.
Sustainable blue economy	**Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy** (EU policies for fisheries and aquaculture and maritime transport decarbonisation initiatives): • Transition to low-impact fisheries and aquaculture. • Decarbonisation of maritime transport and ports. • Support for emerging sustainable maritime sectors.	• MSP Directive enables coexistence, reduces conflicts, and guides spatial efficiency for both traditional and emerging maritime sectors.	• Potential identification of low-impact maritime activities and integrated planning of sectoral uses, including coexistence frameworks for fisheries, aquaculture, ports, tourism and emerging sectors.

5.3. MSP contribution to EU Green Deal objectives and targets

The analysis of national maritime spatial plans shows that existing MSPs already contribute (to varying degrees) to several of the priority areas identified under the European Green Deal. Because most MSPs were finalised before or shortly after 2019, contributions are generally indirect and reflect pre-existing policy frameworks rather than explicit alignment with the Green Deal. However, clear patterns emerge across Member States regarding how MSP supports climate, energy, biodiversity and sustainability objectives. Table 4 below summarises these contributions and the main gaps observed.

Table 4 MSPs contribution to EGD objectives and targets

Green Deal priority	MSP contributions	Limitations / Gaps	Likely direction in upcoming MSP revisions
Biodiversity and Nature Restoration	• Integration of Natura 2000 and national MPAs. • Use of EBA, sensitivity mapping, SEA/AA results. • Restrictions or conditions for activities in ecologically valuable areas. • Emerging use of ecological-corridor concepts.	• Rarely includes quantitative biodiversity targets. • Restoration seldom translated into spatial designations. • Cumulative impact assessments uneven across MS. • Connectivity measures not consistently operationalised.	• Stronger alignment with EU restoration obligations. • More explicit ecological connectivity and no-take/high-protection zones. • Increased use of cumulative impact tools and shared basin-level approaches.

Green Deal priority	MSP contributions	Limitations / Gaps	Likely direction in upcoming MSP revisions
Climate Adaptation and Resilience	• Qualitative treatment of climate risks (erosion, flooding, storms). • Use of hazard maps and vulnerability information in some MS. • Nature-based solutions recognised in several plans.	• Limited use of climate scenarios or long-term projections. • Adaptation targets generally absent. • Weak operational links with national adaptation strategies. • Transboundary climate risks rarely addressed.	• Integration of climate scenarios and long-term hazard assessments. • Sector-specific adaptation pathways (ports, aquaculture, tourism). • Closer alignment with national adaptation plans.
Climate Mitigation and Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE)	• Nearly all MS designate areas for offshore wind or other ORE • Some plans link spatial zones to indicative capacity needs. • Clear coexistence rules for energy, shipping, environment, fisheries. • MSP reduces spatial uncertainty and accelerates permitting.	• Quantitative targets rarely embedded in MSP itself. • Grid and port capacity often lags behind spatial designations. • Sequencing (timing, roll-out) not always reflected. • Cross-border energy alignment uneven across basins.	• Greater use of indicative capacity targets in MSP. • Integration of grid-development and port-upgrade strategies. • More formal regional coordination for cross-border ORE corridors.
Sustainable Blue Economy and Circularity	• Stable spatial framework for key sectors (fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, shipping). • Indicative areas for emerging sectors (hydrogen, CCS, digital infrastructure). • High-level sustainability objectives embedded in several plans. • Coexistence rules reduce conflict among activities.	• Circular-economy aspects only indirectly addressed. • Limited explicit spatial measures for decarbonisation of shipping/ports. • Socio-economic objectives rarely operationalised with indicators.	• Integration of decarbonised maritime transport strategies. • More spatialisation of circularity measures (reuse, dredging, waste infrastructure). • Better socio-economic metrics linked to spatial choices.

The analysis shows that current maritime spatial plans contribute in several ways to the broader objectives of the European Green Deal, although alignment is generally **indirect** because most plans were finalised before or shortly after 2019. Since 2019, revisions have become the main pathway for embedding European Green Deal objectives and targets, with several Member States now revising their plans to include offshore-wind acceleration areas and stricter protection designations.

Across Member States, MSP contributes most visibly to climate-mitigation **objectives** through widespread designation of areas for offshore renewable energy and clearer coexistence rules for competing maritime uses. Biodiversity considerations are also well embedded, primarily through the spatial recognition of Natura 2000 and other nationally designated MPAs and the integration of environmental assessments; among the biodiversity requirements, restoration objectives remain high-level rather than detailed, a

reflection of the ongoing work to define restoration requirements. Climate-adaptation challenges such as erosion, flooding or storm waves are increasingly acknowledged, but integration remains mostly qualitative, and links with national adaptation strategies vary. MSP also continues to enable a sustainable blue economy by providing predictable spatial conditions for traditional and emerging sectors, though circular economy and socio-economic objectives are only partially translated into spatial measures.

Quantitative target alignment within current MSPs is strongest in the area of offshore renewable energy. While some Member States reference indicative capacity needs (e.g. expected gigawatts), others express their ambitions in spatial terms by allocating defined surface areas (km²) for future offshore-energy development. In both cases, MSPs provide the spatial footprint needed to meet national or EU-level deployment pathways, even though explicit MSP-specific quantitative targets remain uncommon. For biodiversity protection, MSPs generally reflect the existing MPA network - including Natura 2000 and nationally designated sites - but rarely establish new quantitative commitments beyond those contained in environmental legislation. Nature restoration obligations, while acknowledged in some plans, have not yet been translated into spatially explicit or quantitative MSP measures. As a result, current MSPs align with EU targets mainly through spatial designations - surface areas reserved for energy development or protected areas - while more explicit quantitative alignment, particularly regarding restoration, is expected to emerge during the next planning cycle.

Looking ahead, upcoming MSP reviews - driven by new EU restoration obligations, expanded MPA targets, climate-adaptation requirements and offshore-energy deployment pathways - are expected to reinforce alignment with the Green Deal and move MSP from high-level principles toward more operational, measurable spatial commitments.

6. Overall conclusions and recommendations

This chapter brings together the main findings of the study and summarises the progress made in implementing the MSP Directive across the EU. It reflects the evidence presented in previous chapters and highlights the overarching trends that characterise the first generation of maritime spatial plans. The aim is not to compare Member States, but to provide an aggregated picture of how implementation has evolved over time and to identify areas where continued cooperation and guidance could support future planning cycles. The conclusions recognise the substantial progress achieved while acknowledging that approaches naturally differ across national contexts, planning cultures and sea basins. The recommendations that follow point to ways in which this shared planning framework can continue to develop in line with emerging EU policy priorities.

6.1. Overview of implementation progress

Since the adoption of the MSP Directive in 2014, all coastal Member States have established – or are close to finalising – their maritime spatial plans, marking a major step in the practical implementation of EU maritime governance. The first planning cycle has created a solid foundation for MSP across the Union and contributed to the emergence of a shared approach to managing activities at sea. As shown in Chapter 3, national frameworks have evolved steadily: most Member States have refined institutional responsibilities and strengthened coordination mechanisms. Several have launched plan revisions or updates, reflecting the increasing integration of MSP into national planning systems.

Chapter 4 shows that the Directive's provisions have been implemented across all Member States, although approaches differ according to governance traditions, administrative capacity and sea-basin characteristics. Legal and institutional frameworks now provide stable bases for planning, and formal coordination structures - both horizontal and vertical - have become more common. Most plans apply elements of the ecosystem-based approach and support policy coherence with marine and sectoral legislation; all engage stakeholders through established consultation procedures. Some Member States have notably strengthened stakeholder consultations, established MSP working groups or interministerial committees, and created multi-level advisory bodies, enhancing ocean literacy, fostering debate, and increasing awareness of MSP among authorities. Use of data has improved markedly, with many Member States investing in data portals or shared geospatial platforms, though differences in data resolution, harmonisation and update cycles persist. Cross-border cooperation is now routine at sea-basin level and supported by regional conventions or mechanisms and EU-funded projects, even if intensity and methods vary.

As discussed in Chapter 5, current maritime spatial plans contribute to several objectives of the European Green Deal. MSP plays an important enabling role for offshore renewable energy, with widespread spatial designations and alignment with national energy strategies. Biodiversity and environmental considerations are integrated into most plans, supported by environmental assessments, sensitivity mapping and protected-area designations, although the use of quantitative biodiversity targets remain limited. Climate adaptation is increasingly recognised in the plans, mainly through qualitative provisions on resilience and risk management, while more systematic integration of climate scenarios is still emerging. MSP also supports the sustainable blue economy by providing a stable framework for

coexistence between maritime uses, though circular-economy and pollution-reduction objectives are generally expressed in broad terms.

Overall, implementation reflects a maturing and adaptive process. Member States are progressing at different stages, shaped by national contexts, institutional structures and the timing of their planning cycles. Significant advances have been made in actions for preparing plans, improving coordination, strengthening evidence bases and aligning planning with EU policy objectives. The following sections build on this assessment by identifying the key issues that continue to influence implementation. These issues also point to opportunities for further development, which are explored in the final recommendations of this chapter.

6.2. Key issues in the implementation of the Directive

Challenges

Building on the assessment presented in Chapter 4, several recurring issues have emerged that shape how the MSP Directive is implemented in practice. These issues do not reflect shortcomings in compliance but rather the inherent diversity of national planning systems, sectoral structures and sea-basin contexts. Taken together, they highlight where practical hurdles remain, where efforts are uneven, and where additional cooperation or guidance could enhance coherence and effectiveness in future planning cycles. The table below summarises the key emerging patterns observed across Member States.

Table 5 Key emerging patterns

Issue	Emerging patterns
Structural diversity within a common framework	• The Directive's flexible design enabled adaptation to different governance systems, but this flexibility also produces wide procedural diversity. • The study observed that differences in national legal frameworks reflect mainly long-standing national planning approaches rather than shortcomings in compliance.
Fragmentation versus coordination	• Coordination challenges recur across several provisions (Articles 4, 6, 9 and 11). • Effective coordination mechanisms depend more on stable processes, continuity of staff and adequate resources than on the specific institutional model chosen.
Balancing policy objectives	• Tension between blue-economy growth, environmental protection, and climate goals emerges across Articles 5–7. • Most Member States address these tensions through SEA processes, sensitivity analyses and scenario work, but approaches remain predominantly qualitative, with limited use of quantitative or model-based tools to assess trade-offs.
Data and knowledge systems as a foundation	• Data-related provisions (Article 10) underpin and inform almost every other requirement of the Directive, from mapping uses to assessing impacts and monitoring progress. Data fragmentation and lack of harmonisation affect coherence of implementation across sea basins.
Scale and timing misalignments	• Planning cycles, geographic scales and legal mandates differ across sectors and regions, complicating coherence (Articles 7, 12 and 13).

Issue	Emerging patterns
Climate and future-proofing as emerging expectations	• Climate integration cuts across objectives, environmental assessment and monitoring. • Current approaches mainly qualitative; limited long-term foresight tools in place.

Based on these patterns, four major areas of challenges for the implementation of the Directive have been identified. These are presented here as a broad overview; for further information, see section 4. Moreover, it should in particular be noted that the issues and challenges vary across Member States.

Institutional and governance challenges

- Effective maritime spatial planning relies on strong institutional frameworks and governance structures, yet coordination across ministries, sectors, and administrative levels remains uneven.
- In many cases, limited administrative capacity slows implementation and can be particularly significant in terms of supporting cross-sectoral integration.

Methodological and technical challenges

- Approaches to the ecosystem-based management, strategic environmental assessment, appropriate assessment, and cumulative impact assessments vary widely among Member States, leading to inconsistencies in planning quality, scope, and outcomes.
- The consideration of socio-economic factors and land–sea interactions is often limited or treated as a contextual element rather than fully integrated into planning processes, reducing the capacity of MSP to address holistic maritime and coastal management objectives.

Cross-border and regional sea coordination challenges

- Differences in the timing of planning cycles, governance structures, and levels of engagement between countries continue to pose challenges for coherent implementation.
- International forums and initiatives – including the Regional Sea Conventions and the EU Sea Basin Strategies – demonstrate the value of coordinated approaches; however, these initiatives could be further consolidated.
- Engagement with non-EU neighbouring countries introduces additional complexity but remains more critical – though to different degrees across sea basins - for effective implementation of MSP across sea basins.

Stakeholder and public engagement challenges

- Public participation processes, though generally well established across Member States, vary significantly in their depth, continuity, and effectiveness. Often, mechanisms focus on single consultation events or plan cycles rather than long-term engagement.
- Some stakeholders engaged more intensively than others.
- A particular challenge lies in maintaining meaningful involvement of local communities and economic actors, such as fisheries, maritime industries, and tourism stakeholders, between planning cycles.

Enabling factors

Despite these challenges, the assessment also shows that many elements of the MSP framework are functioning effectively and actively supporting implementation. Across Member States, several recurrent enabling factors have contributed to smoother coordination, more coherent planning processes and stronger alignment with EU objectives. These factors reflect areas where practice has matured during the first cycle and where continued investment could deliver further improvements.

Key enabling factors for the implementation of the Directive include:

- Stable inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms ensuring policy continuity.
- Binding legal effect of plans and clear mandates for competent authorities.
- Integrated data portals and harmonised metadata standards supporting transparency.
- Early and continuous stakeholder involvement fostering legitimacy.
- Regional cooperation frameworks providing platforms for alignment and peer learning.
- Analytical and scenario-based tools helping operationalise the ecosystem-based and climate-smart approaches.

Recognising these challenges and enabling factors is essential, as it directly informs the opportunities outlined in the next section - opportunities to reinforce governance, strengthen data foundations, deepen cooperation and ensure MSP remains responsive to new EU ambitions.

6.3. Opportunities for enhanced implementation of the Directive

Marine Spatial Planning provides an **established platform** for integrating multiple, interconnected priorities at sea, including renewable energy development, nature restoration, climate adaptation, and sustainable blue-economy activities. As Europe faces growing pressures on its marine space, the implementation of the MSP Directive presents several timely opportunities to strengthen coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness across sectors and sea basins.

Based on the challenges and enabling factors for the implementation of the Directive, the following opportunities have been identified. The main **areas of opportunity** identified include the following:

Opportunity 1: The EU Ocean Pact (and forthcoming Ocean Act) as drivers for greater policy coherence, strengthened MSP governance, and simplification

The European Ocean Pact[39] adopted in June 2025 offers an important lever for **greater policy coherence, harmonised governance and simplification** in the domain of marine spatial planning (MSP) across the EU.

[39] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/european-ocean-pact_en

Strengthened policy coherence and governance

As a single, unified ocean-policy framework, it is intended to push towards greater coherence by strategically linking MSP with high-priority EU agendas, including climate mitigation, the clean energy transition, biodiversity restoration, and maritime security. This reframing is critical for **elevating MSP to a strategic, integrative tool delivering on EU-wide goals.**

Moreover, the **EU Ocean Act** (planned to be tabled by the European Commission by 2026) is envisaged as the legislative backbone to implement the Pact's priorities and, importantly, it will **build on a revised Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD)**. Such revision offers a unique opportunity to modernise MSP around emerging challenges (climate, biodiversity, increasing offshore uses) and embed coherence with other directives and policies (e.g., Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), sustainable blue economy strategy, Nature Restoration Regulation). The revision can mandate **stronger sea-basin coordination**, **cross-sector integration**, **data-sharing** and **ecosystem-based planning**.

Simplification: better assessment of administrative burdens

Furthermore, the process of revision of MSPD, requiring an evaluation of the Directive's implementation, offers a valuable opportunity not only to assess how effectively MSP has been applied in practice, but also to **quantify administrative costs and burdens** associated with its implementation. By systematically analysing these costs, the evaluation can highlight inefficiencies and procedural complexities that hinder smooth application. The evaluation can therefore inform **recommendations for administrative simplification**, improving cost-effectiveness and reducing procedural complexity for both authorities and stakeholders.

Opportunity 2: Emerging practices in ocean observation as an opportunity for enhanced data generation and sharing

Ocean observation initiatives and repositories like **EMODnet** (European Marine Observation and Data Network), **Copernicus Marine Service**, and the **European Ocean Observing System (EOOS)** are creating interoperable, pan-European systems that link regional and national monitoring efforts, which enable a standardised data collection and visualisation across Europe's seas, therefore **supporting joint planning efforts**.

In addition to this, the **resolution and coverage of spatial and temporal data** can be significantly increased with the use of new autonomous technologies (such as autonomous underwater vehicles), which provide cost-effective, real-time data from areas that were previously difficult to monitor. Moreover, initiatives like the **European Digital Twin of the Ocean (DTO)** allow scenario/predictive modelling, helping planners test their spatial policies before implementation, including e.g. via the combined use of observation and AI-driven analytics.

All these together can help MSP authorities gain a holistic, cross-sectoral data foundation to support increasingly **adaptive MSP,** regularly updating zoning decisions based on new information about biodiversity, pollution or user conflicts – thus increasing their effectiveness in meeting broader objectives set out in the MSPD.

Opportunity 3: Capitalising and further leveraging EU funding for capacity building and knowledge exchange

Member States and other MSP stakeholders have successfully participated (or are currently participating) in numerous **EU-funded projects**, particularly with support from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), Interreg, and Horizon Europe. These experiences have led to the development of sophisticated tools, advanced methodologies, and a substantial body of best practices.

Additionally, countries have reported that collaboration in these contexts has contributed to the generation of a **virtuous "community"** between the individuals responsible for their implementation. This collaboration has significantly raised the baseline of MSP expertise across the Union.

The current opportunity lies in **transitioning from project-based learning to systematic knowledge integration** by ensuring the sustained application and transferability of these valuable, tested outcomes into the routine practice of national planning teams. Moreover, the new planning cycle offers an opportunity to strategically pool and lever funding across sectors, allowing to invest in **digital and evidence-based planning tools**, while embedding capacity building, monitoring, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms that maximise both impact and sustainability of MSP projects in the next programming cycle.

6.4. Policy recommendations

Strengthen guidance for MSP planners

Member States, supported by the European Commission and regional MSP forums, have developed a variety of approaches to implement provisions in areas like ecosystem-based planning, strategic environmental assessment, and monitoring. **Sharing experiences and harmonizing guidance at sea basin level** can reduce duplication, improve consistency across jurisdictions, and strengthen evidence-based planning. The need for additional guidance on land–sea interactions and cumulative impacts has been identified to support integration of environmental, social, and economic considerations in MSP plans.

Recommended actions:

- Encourage further **exchange of experience** among Member States through peer-learning programmes and sea-basin workshops. These exchanges could draw on existing regional models and good practices (e.g., from HELCOM-VASAB), as well as existing guidelines[40].
- Consider developing additional guidance tools on land–sea interactions, cumulative impact assessments (CIAs), and multi-source data integration. For instance, developing standardised frameworks to assess how terrestrial activities influence coastal and marine ecosystems, and embed those considerations in MSP guidance documents.
- Encourage pilot projects in selected sea basins to test integrated approaches before full-scale adoption.

  Target: European Commission, regional MSP bodies, Member State authorities.

[40] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a8ee2988-4693-11ec-89db-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

Consolidate cross-border and regional cooperation

The study showed that much progress has been achieved in cross-border cooperation through formal consultations, information sharing, and initiatives such as the regional and European **MSP Expert Groups** and targeted projects. These mechanisms have established valuable channels for dialogue and knowledge exchange among Member States. Building on this foundation, there is an opportunity to further enhance coordination in areas of shared interest - such as major energy developments or conservation infrastructure - by moving from primarily advisory engagement toward more systematic, joint planning and decision-making at the sea basin level. This evolution would help manage competing spatial demands more effectively while consolidating the cooperative frameworks already in place.

Recommended actions:

- **Sea Basin Strategies (SBS)** (i.e. the Atlantic Action Plan, WestMED Initiative, Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, and the Greater North Sea Initiative) and **Macro-Regional (MR) Strategies** with a clear maritime scope (notably EU Strategies for the Baltic Sea, Danube and Ionian-Adriatic Region) could be **further capitalised as soft coordination and knowledge-sharing platforms to enhance cross-border cooperation** under the MSP Directive, and support dialogue on MSP with non-EU member states involved in these Strategies. The European Commission and Member States can use them to **align regional agendas with MSP objectives** (e.g. by inviting national MSP authorities to sit as observers on the governance boards of the SBS/MR to ensure mutual awareness of planning priorities); support basin-level MSP practitioner networks or "**communities of practice**" (as was done in the context of the MSP-MED-CoP); keep communication channels open beyond project lifetimes; coordinate MSP-relevant project pipelines and funding, and facilitate basin-wide data sharing and stakeholder dialogue.
- In addition, SBS/MR frameworks could host light, **practitioner-level subgroups per sea basin** - bringing together national MSP planners for early and informal exchanges on national planning timelines and emerging cross-border issues. Such subgroups, similar in spirit to cooperation settings used in the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative and the recently developed "community of practice" on MSP for the Atlantic, which would not introduce new governance structures but would provide regular spaces for planners to discuss upcoming revisions, anticipate spatial conflicts and share technical approaches ahead of formal consultation stages.
- Further linking these SBS/MR with **Regional Sea Conventions** and encouraging voluntary progress reviews, the Commission can strengthen coherence, transparency, and mutual learning across Member States, ensuring that maritime spatial planning contributes effectively to sustainable blue growth, environmental protection, and cross-border integration.

Target: *European Commission, Regional Sea Conventions, Sea Basin Strategies, Macro-Regional Strategies.*

Support governance and capacity

The implementation of **coordination mechanisms across administrative levels** can be effective to support the coherent development of marine space, reducing policy conflicts, and facilitating integration of MSP with sectoral policies - including energy, climate, environment, or transport.

Recommended actions:

- Building on existing examples in Member States, establish and strengthen coordination bodies at national level – such as inter-agency committees or task forces that include representatives from all relevant ministries, agencies, and local authorities to guide MSP processes.
- To fully implement the Directive's requirements on land-sea interactions, consider creating formal mechanisms for MSP authorities to liaise with authorities for river basin management, coastal management, urban planning, and infrastructure.
- Capacity building and training for MSP literacy: Provide coordinated training to staff across ministries and other administrative levels so they share common knowledge of MSP principles, methods, and tools.

  Target: National, regional, and local MSP authorities, European Commission.

Enhance data and monitoring systems

Data availability and interoperability have emerged as one of the key challenges for MSP implementation, which hinders the understanding the impact of human activities on the marine environment and communities, as well as efficient cross-border collaboration.

Recommended actions:

- Enhance **data sharing and interoperability** between existing platforms, particularly by promoting the use of common data standards (e.g., INSPIRE) across EMODnet, national MSP portals, and regional sea-basin platforms
- Continue and further advance the work initiated under the **Technical Group on Data for MSP**[41]**,** established in April 2020, in producing guidelines on necessary data and standards for MSP and their links with relevant EU policies (e.g. MSFD, INSPIRE Directive, EMODnet, etc.)
- Promote **further synergies in terms of data collection analysis** between MSP monitoring/evaluation and MSFD reporting and assessment of environmental status.

  Target: European Commission, Member State authorities.

Foster participation and transparency

Member States have largely met the Directive's requirements for stakeholder participation, establishing formal consultation processes and involving key sectoral actors. The focus now shifts to deepening engagement and transforming consultation into **sustained dialogue**. Challenges remain in ensuring representation from certain demographics (e.g., young people) and effectively integrating sectors that still hold reservations or require clearer communication on designated areas to mitigate potential conflicts proactively. In addition, there is perceived room for further co-creation and place-based planning where local knowledge informs high-level decisions. Recognising the diversity of competencies and governance structures across Member States, guidance should provide a stage-based framework for stakeholder engagement covering all planning phases - preparatory, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and revision.

Recommended actions:

- Further guidance could be provided on strategies for ongoing stakeholder engagement between plan cycles. Practical measures could include capacity-building programs to strengthen stakeholder competencies; and iterative consultation processes that ensure monitoring and evaluation results inform plan updates.

[41] https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/msp-resources/technical-expert-group-teg-data-msp

- Leveraging advanced communication tools and technology to broaden participation, (particularly among coastal communities and young people) should also be more broadly considered. Crucially, establish sustained, inclusive and constructive dialogue with all maritime sectors to reduce conflicts, clarify the implications of designated areas, and integrate their expert knowledge into planning decisions, fostering greater co-creation and plan legitimacy. This effort could benefit from further building upon existing mechanisms such as the Advisory Councils (ACs) of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to ensure expert sectoral input.

The MSP Plaform study '*Enabling Maritime Spatial Planning - Enhancing Stakeholder Participation. Lessons from MSP delivery to date*'[42] was published in November 2025. More detailed information and practical recommendations on this topic can be found there.

Target: European Commission, MSP planning authorities.

6.5. Concluding statement

Implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive has marked a major step forward in establishing a coherent framework for the sustainable use of Europe's seas. All coastal Member States have now adopted or are finalising their maritime spatial plans, and regional cooperation has strengthened considerably. At the same time, experience from the first planning cycle shows that certain elements of the framework could benefit from further clarification and stronger coordination to reflect new policy priorities under the European Green Deal and the Ocean Pact. The forthcoming evaluation and the preparation of the Ocean Act will provide an opportunity to draw on the lessons learned and to ensure that maritime spatial planning continues to evolve as an effective tool for integrated ocean governance in the European Union.

[42] Pound, D. and Williams, A., (2025). Enabling Maritime Spatial Planning – enhancing stakeholder participation. Lessons from MSP delivery to date. A report produced for the European MSP Assistance Mechanism, July 2025., Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, doi:10.2926/7361955

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Report - Policy Paper - International Guidelines

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Annex 2 – Member States fiches

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