



ASSESSING THE BALANCE BETWEEN
NATURE AND PEOPLE IN EUROPEAN SEAS:

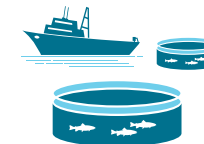
MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE BALTIC

SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS



© Stefan Rosengren / WWF

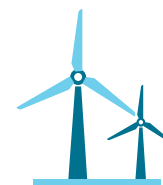
BALANCING NATURE AND HUMAN ACTIVITIES IN EU SEAS



THE EU IS THE SIXTH-LARGEST PRODUCER OF FISHERY AND AQUACULTURE PRODUCTS

Europe's marine waters are some of the busiest and most intensively exploited on Earth. The EU is the sixth-largest producer of fishery and aquaculture products, and nearly 80% of global shipping (by volume) and over 90% of installed offshore wind capacity occurs in EU seas.¹

These and other maritime sectors, such as coastal tourism, oil and gas, and shipbuilding, to name a few, have enormous impacts on EU economies and marine species. Striking the balance between sustainable human activities and healthy ecosystems is vital to alleviate the impacts of climate change via carbon storage and renewable energy. By leaving space for nature to recover, the EU can be a global champion to fight biodiversity loss and support food security for the billions of people whose seafood is connected to European waters.



OVER 90% OF INSTALLED OFFSHORE WIND CAPACITY OCCURS IN EU SEAS

Among numerous European policies that aim to secure a sustainable balance for marine spaces and resources is the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD, 2014/89/EU).² The MSPD was developed to provide an integrated planning and adaptive approach to how the EU and its Member States (MS) manage human-led activities in their waters. **Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)** is a future-oriented process that considers all economic sectors and ecological factors related to a marine area and allocates space, both geographically and temporally, to different activities and people whose livelihoods are tied to our seas for the purpose of ensuring a long-term sustainable balance between people and nature.

The MSPD set 31 March 2021 as the deadline for MS to present their maritime spatial plans to the European Commission. The objective of these plans is to detail a nation's strategies for the sustainable management of their marine areas and resources. While the MSPD initiated the much-needed conditions and means to support public policy for maritime planning at the national, regional and EU levels, its absence of clear definitions for key concepts of MSP and guidance on steps to follow for establishing national plans has resulted in a disjointed seascape of how MS seek to implement the MSPD, jeopardising the objectives for safeguarding a sustainable balance between nature and human activities across the EU.

A crucial manifestation of these gaps in the MSPD came when only six of the EU's twenty-two coastal countries (Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Latvia and Portugal) met the March 2021 deadline,³ despite some MS having some form of maritime planning in place. This meant that, officially, less than 38% of EU waters had a tentative, coherent, sustainable and forward-looking plan in place for the various maritime sectors involved. Between March and the end of 2021, however, several other MS published their plans, including the remaining Baltic nations. The maritime spatial plans of the Baltic MS, namely Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden, are the focus of this analysis.

ENSURING SPACE FOR NATURE

Holistic and integrated approaches to MSP are necessary to secure a sustainable blue economy, address the levels of environmental degradation in our seas and support the development of impact assessment tools whose scope is wide enough to consider complex maritime seascapes against the backdrop of the ecosystems within which they exist.



THE EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES ARE AIMING TO PROTECT AT LEAST 30% OF MARINE AND COASTAL AREAS BY 2030

It is in this vein that WWF advocates for an **ecosystem-based approach (EBA)** to MSP,⁴ which views maritime spaces as integrated systems that provide various resources and services to both people and the planet, and acknowledges that ecosystems have a limited carrying capacity to remain healthy against human pressures. **An EBA to MSP can transform how sea spaces are accessed and managed.** It does so by increasing national and regional abilities to integrate and adapt to multisectoral changes, thus supporting sustainable economic benefits within oceanic boundaries.

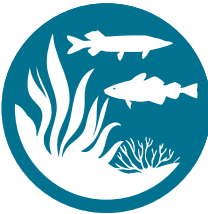
For example, the effective management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) safeguards particularly sensitive habitats, species and/or ecological processes, reduces or eliminates human pressures on marine ecosystems, and supports wider sea basin and ocean health; this, in turn, delivers direct benefits to industries like fisheries and tourism, while boosting sequestration of carbon in marine life and in the seabed. Unfortunately, this effective management is often absent in how MS manage their MPAs: many lack implemented management and restoration plans or remain without action for conservation and/or active nature restoration to deliver actual protection, while continuing to allow environmentally-harmful activities to take place. However, as part of commitments to the UN 2030 Agenda and the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the EU and its Member States are aiming to protect at least 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030, with 10% strictly protected (i.e. where human visitation, activities and impacts are strictly controlled and limited).⁵

As a planning tool to support these objectives, an EBA to MSP helps MS better balance the MSPD's ecological and socio-economic objectives, thus delivering on EU policies that put nature at the forefront of economic recovery from Covid-19, including NextGenerationEU.⁶

Furthermore, an EBA to MSP helps achieve the sustainable management of ecosystem goods and services, and maintains ecosystem integrity in the face of growing maritime sectors, such as offshore renewable energy. As part of achieving climate neutrality by 2040 as per the European Green Deal, the European Commission is planning to increase offshore renewable energy capacity by 500% and 2500% by 2030 and 2050, respectively, in comparison to 2020 levels.⁷ However, such tremendous growth depends on finding suitable space and compatibility with multi-sector usage in waters that are already crowded with other maritime activities. One solution lies in reappropriating sea areas currently designated for fossil fuels - including gas - as these activities must be completely phased out and replaced by renewable energy to comply with the 2040 climate neutrality targets. Moreover, any infrastructure development must be considered within the broader context of degrading marine health due to overexploitation of resources, pollution, acidification and habitat destruction, to name a few causes. Failure to adopt an EBA would put offshore renewable energy developments at risk of further damaging marine ecosystems and thus exacerbating the climate crisis, despite being intended as a solution to help tackle this issue.

MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF MSP

Since the establishment of the MSPD, WWF has been working with MS to ensure that the Directive's implementation aligns with an EBA. A core element of this work has been the translation of the MSPD's requirements for MSP into 33 indicators that, when all achieved, would successfully deliver an EBA to MSP. These indicators fall under four categories, each assessing a key domain of sound MSP in national maritime spatial plans:



INCLUSION OF NATURE
The plan accounts for integrating marine protection, limiting the expansion of at-sea activities, and considers the cumulative effects of human activities on the carrying capacity of marine ecosystems as essential components of securing a sustainable blue economy



SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS
The plan takes diverse at-sea human activities and socio-economic factors into consideration, including the Principles for a Sustainable Blue Economy⁸



GOOD OCEAN GOVERNANCE
The plan aligns with other EU policies and designates competent authorities to manage and enforce a high-standard EBA to MSP



COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE COMPLETE MSP PROCESS
The MSP process is based on the robust management of all maritime activities, including transboundary cooperation between national authorities for long-term sustainability, as well as an adaptive approach to monitoring and future planning

METHODOLOGY

The analysis presented in this report is based on data compiled by the WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme on Denmark, Estonia, Finland (including Åland), Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden between September 2021 and December 2021 from MSP, Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs), Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and other legal enactment documents publicly available at the time. For those countries bordering two sea basins (i.e. Denmark, Germany and Sweden), the assessment was done for both the Baltic and the North Sea, however, the results included in this report focus primarily on the Baltic Sea assessment. The complete data and methodology are available in the full report, *Assessing the balance between nature and people in European seas: Maritime Spatial Planning in the Baltic*.

THE BALTIC CONTEXT

Today, 85 million people inhabit the water-surrounded areas of the Baltic region,⁹ which is composed of eight EU Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden) and one non-EU country (Russia).

The Baltic is the youngest sea on our planet, emerging from receding ice masses only some 10,000-15,000 years ago. Governed by special hydrographical and climatic conditions, the Baltic Sea is one of Earth's largest bodies of brackish water (water that is saltier than freshwater, but not as salty as seawater). Saltwater from the North-East Atlantic blends with fresh water from the rivers and streams that run through 14 different countries into the sea basin, resulting in a delicate mixture that yields a highly sensitive and interdependent marine ecosystem with unique flora and fauna.¹⁰

These special qualities make the Baltic Sea especially vulnerable to environmental pressures, including pollution from both land-based and maritime activities that cause eutrophication, wiping out marine life in affected areas.¹¹ Additionally, the physical damage and disruption caused by maritime sector activities threaten the health of marine habitats and wildlife, including populations of species that Baltic fisheries depend on.¹² Between 2009 and 2018, the Baltic blue economy grew by over 5 billion euros, becoming the third fastest growing regional blue economy in the EU.¹³ The increasing needs for space at sea and underwater, as well as for resources, adds pressure to the Baltic's fragile ecosystems, compromising the very resources on which this economy depends. The cost to citizen well-being from the deterioration of the Baltic marine environment was already estimated to have surpassed €9 billion in 2015,¹⁴ making the annual cost of marine degradation nearly double the value of the region's blue economic growth. In short, the dire state of play of marine ecosystems makes it imperative to succeed in implementing and assessing MSP in the region.



MSP IN THE BALTIC

Although MSP in the Baltic region can be considered partly successful with the total scores of all four categories achieving an average of 49%, application of an EBA was uneven, resulting in a lack of effective transboundary harmony between national maritime spatial plans, and inadequate implementation of measures to restore and protect ecosystems.



HOW NATURE IS FACTORED INTO MSP PROCESSES MUST BE IMPROVED ACROSS THE BALTIC



NATIONAL PLANS MUST ALIGN WITH RELEVANT EU POLICIES AND KEEP SOME SEA SPACE AVAILABLE TO ACCOMMODATE CLIMATE CHANGE UNCERTAINTIES

Further, countries had different approaches to integrating social and economic concerns in their plans, with some failing to designate space for offshore renewable energy, such as Finland, while others, such as Germany, didn’t take income and employment forecasts for the various maritime industries into consideration. Table 1 showcases the score of each country and the Baltic regional average for each category of the assessment.

Latvia leads MSP implementation in the Baltic, scoring highest of all MS across the categories apart from “Inclusion of nature”. Key aspects for Latvia’s success include embracing an EBA, making full use of existing scientific knowledge, conducting robust strategic assessments and including procedures for monitoring the implementation of environmental, social and economic goals in the final plan.

Sweden has the strongest performance regarding nature inclusion (70.4%). However, while the country delivered a well-managed network of MPAs, the extent of coverage (less than 25% of its marine and coastal areas) is not in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy’s minimum target of 30%.

On the other end of the spectrum, Denmark scored lowest in both “Inclusion of nature” and “Socio-economic considerations” of MSP. The country failed to designate any space for essential blue corridors or areas for nature restoration and blue carbon ecosystem protection. Nonetheless, the country is working to implement some strictly-protected areas. If these spaces are effectively managed and protected, they can facilitate restoration of marine habitats and wildlife without the need for human intervention, allowing ecosystems to recover by themselves.¹⁵

Overall, harmony between scope and implementation of how nature is factored into MSP processes must be improved across the Baltic. Concretely, this means designating enough space for nature protection and restoration, and delivering Good Ocean Governance. Good governance of the Baltic Sea depends on two crucial components. First, MSP processes must result in legally-binding plans, which is not currently the case in Finland, Åland or Sweden. Second, these plans must align with relevant EU policies and keep some sea space available to accommodate climate change uncertainties – all MS apart from Latvia and Poland failed to achieve these measures in their national plans.

TABLE 1: Average Member State score for each Maritime Spatial Planning assessment category

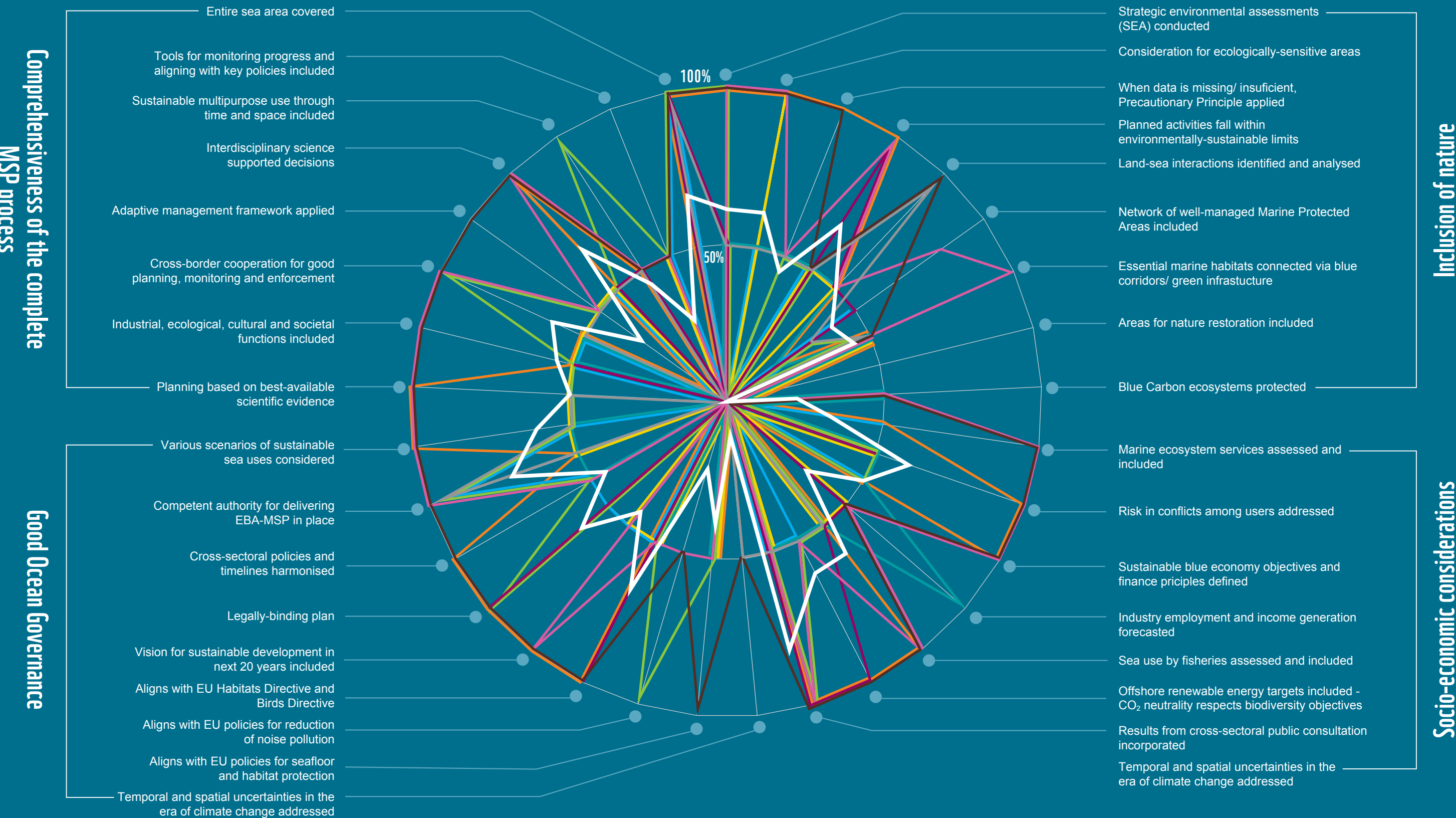
For each Member State, the worst and best scores for each category are highlighted in red and green, respectively. A high percentage score denotes a positive performance, while a score below 50% denotes a negative performance.

SCORE IN % ● 0-10 ● 11-20 ● 21-30 ● 31-40 ● 41-50 ● 51-60 ● 61-70 ● 71-80 ● 81-90 ● 91-100				
CATEGORY AVERAGE	INCLUSION OF NATURE	SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS	GOOD OCEAN GOVERNANCE	COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE COMPLETE MSP PROCESS
Baltic Average	43.4%	54.0%	46.9%	50.7%
Denmark	16.70%	28.6%	38.9%	37.5%
Estonia	57.4%	78.6%	66.7%	56.3%
Finland	29.6%	28.6%	27.8%	37.5%
Åland	40.7%	50.0%	27.8%	28.0%
Germany	31.5%	42.9%	55.6%	68.8%
Latvia	68.5%	92.9%	88.9%	87.5%
Lithuania	27.8%	50.0%	22.2%	31.3%
Poland	48.1%	28.6%	38.9%	43.8%
Sweden	70.4%	85.7%	55.6%	68.8%

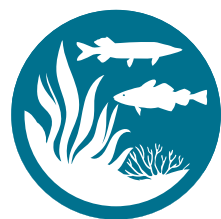
NB: The indicators in each assessment category are included in Figure 1 on page 9. The Baltic regional score corresponds to the average of all Member States’ scores plus Åland, which is an autonomous territory of Finland. For the scores, “100%” corresponds to the complete achievement of indicator goals in that category, “50%” represents a partial achievement, and “0%” corresponds to zero achievements. The complete data, scoring criteria and assessment methodology are available in the full report, *Assessing the balance between nature and people in European seas: Maritime Spatial Planning in the Baltic*.

Implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning in the Baltic region

Key: — Baltic regional average — Estonia — Denmark — Finland — Åland — Germany — Lithuania — Sweden — Latvia — Poland



NB: The Baltic regional score corresponds to the average of all Member States' scores plus Åland, which is an autonomous territory of Finland. For the scores, "100%" corresponds to the complete achievement of indicator goals in that category, "50%" represents a partial achievement, and "0%" corresponds to zero achievements. Individual graphs of each Member State's performance across the four categories of this assessment can be found in the full report, *Assessing the balance between nature and people in European seas: Maritime Spatial Planning in the Baltic*.



INCLUSION OF NATURE

The indicators in this category reflect formal requirements of the MSPD, measure marine nature conservation, consider approaches for re-establishing ocean resilience and assess whether appropriate SEAs were conducted in line with measures based on the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, compensate, restore).

The worst performance for including nature in MSP was in Denmark (16.7%), and their national plan does not reflect all of the objectives of the MSPD. While Denmark was one of the few MS to deliver their plan before the original March 2021 deadline, since the beginning of the MSP process, the nation neither prioritised nor invested in adopting an ecosystem-based approach, despite data being available to facilitate EBA processes. For instance, between 2018 and 2020 the ECOMAR project collected state-of-the-art data on the spatial distributions of maritime activities and their environmental impacts, as well as detailed analyses of Danish marine ecosystems, but these were not used.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the comprehensiveness of environmental assessments varies greatly between MS. For example, Denmark and Finland did not conduct SEAs, while Germany, Latvia and Sweden did. When combined simultaneously with a nation-wide and state-led plan, EIAs and SEAs make it

possible to establish and understand multisectoral feedback mechanisms, as well as to assess how economic activities may impact ecosystems. It is therefore worrying that MS are not basing their plans on robust environmental assessments.

While consideration for vulnerable ecological areas should be protected by the Precautionary Principle in the absence of data, this was not the case in Denmark, Finland or Lithuania. Latvia and Estonia, however, paid special attention to data gaps in their plans, avoiding conflicting spatial designations in known species migration corridors and in coastal buffer areas, for which complete data does not exist.

As prioritising nature in MSP is key to securing ocean resilience in light of the impacts of climate change and, therefore, delivering a blue economy that will sustain thriving coastal communities in the long term, the poor performance by Baltic MS in “Inclusion of nature” is notably alarming.

Environmental recovery missing from Baltic MPAs

HELCOM’s 2018 State of the Baltic Sea assessment found that 80% of benthic habitats defined in the EU Habitats Directive were ecologically threatened; some, such as coastal estuaries, were found to be critically endangered.¹⁷

To understand if the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems was prioritised in Baltic MSP, WWF assessed the connectivity, extension and management plans for the region’s MPAs, as well as planned marine restoration activities. While MSP made an effort to keep designated maritime activities within environmentally-sustainable boundaries, only three of the eight national plans established networks of MPAs that ensure vulnerable ecosystems are adequately connected. No MPA network currently meets the EU Biodiversity Strategy goal of protecting at least 30% EU marine and coastal areas by 2030, with at least 10% strictly protected. Even more worrying is the complete absence of nature restoration activities across all national plans. Restoration should include blue carbon ecosystems, which are essential for mitigating climate change.

The lack of suitable protection and restoration suggests a blatant disregard for the urgent need to reverse the status of ecological degradation, despite the fact that failure to do so will ultimately disrupt ecosystem health and functionality. This threatens the Baltic Sea’s resilience against future impacts of climate change and other anthropogenic pressures, putting the region’s food security and socio-economic development at serious risk.



SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Socio-economic considerations were assessed by measuring how different maritime activities and ecosystem services were translated into a national plan’s spatial measures. Additionally, the indicators score the plan’s ability to address conflicting sector requirements, stakeholder inclusiveness and various social and economic scenarios affecting the state of the sea.

The average Baltic performance in this category was somewhat successful, with an average score of 54%. However, there are stark differences between national scores, with Latvia achieving 100% in six out of seven indicators while Poland scored 0% in three of the seven, for example.

All MS apart from Denmark were able to address conflict risks in their plans - although some were more successful than others - with evidence of transparent processes to

consult with stakeholders and justifications for solutions to address risks uncovered during the consultation phase being publicly available.

Unfortunately, only four out of the eight MS included an account of Baltic marine ecosystem services. Accounting for ecosystem services is essential for calculating the costs of environmental degradation caused by maritime activities. In the absence of such robust assessments, nature may not be valued correctly in regional blue economy estimates.



Successfully balancing offshore renewable energy and biodiversity conservation in Latvia

A pivotal outcome from Latvia’s MSP is the successful translation of EU renewable energy targets for carbon neutrality into spatial designations that respect biodiversity recovery and resilience. Offshore energy and nature both have priority use of their respectively designated maritime areas, which means that no other activity that compromises a priority can be developed in the same space at the same time. This prevents conflicts between nature protection and offshore energy development, which has not been the case in other Baltic countries, such as Denmark.

To achieve this success, Latvia’s MSP combined robust and transboundary EIAs with a consultation process that included 17 stakeholder events, 450 participants and featured a steady core group of 30 stakeholders. These types of transparent and inclusive participatory processes that embrace an ecosystemic view to planning are essential to prevent conflicts from arising and to secure the long term socio-economic benefits of diverse maritime sectors.

Additionally, the environmental focus of the plan and its legally-binding nature grants MSP authorities the ability to apply clear restrictions on projects that may harm the environment. Latvia’s plan translates the Precautionary Principle into concrete consequences, such as by postponing license procedures for new maritime activities until reliable data on the environmental aspects has been secured. This is particularly important for offshore projects as it prevents construction of structures in areas whose sensitivity might not be fully realised yet.



GOOD OCEAN GOVERNANCE

Good Ocean Governance seeks to understand if a competent authority is in place to deliver legally-binding and forward-looking MSP, and how a national plan contributes to the fulfilment of EU policies, including the objectives of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) for good environmental status of the sea and the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy targets. This category also takes into consideration how the MSPD interacts with other important national and regional legislation, and includes specific goals for policy integration.

While the Baltic region partly achieved Good Ocean Governance (47%), six out of eight national maritime spatial plans failed to designate an area of the sea for future sustainable activity development. This is a critical misstep, as including these areas is essential to address temporal and spatial uncertainties associated with climate change, and to support the European Green Deal carbon-neutrality goal.

Baltic MSP also failed to align with important EU policies for seafloor and habitat protection, the reduction of underwater noise pollution and national cross-sectional policy timelines.

This means that MS have not reflected EU legislation in their plans, nor considered how their plans may interact with other national policies, which are essential to assess feedback mechanisms and calculate the impacts of human activities.

Finally, on the positive side, apart from Finland and Sweden, Baltic national plans are legally binding and enforceable for some public authority decisions. Apart from Lithuania, MSP is led by an authority with a high-level mandate and defined responsibility, as well as full access to data and the ability to process it.

Data sharing and cross-border cooperation – positive outcomes in Baltic MSP

The Baltic is the first EU sea basin to establish regional structures to support the implementation of the MSPD at the Member State level and establish an action plan for achieving the good environmental status of the sea by 2030 at the latest.¹⁸ Furthermore, by creating a joint working group between the environmental convention HELCOM and Representatives of the Ministries in charge of land-use planning (VASAB), the region has been able to harmonise state-level approaches to maritime planning in a publicly accessible and transparent way.

A key Baltic MSP success has been in how data is collected, reported and made available through a shared database via HELCOM. The convention's data hub is a valuable source of MSP knowledge as, in addition to storing spatial data, the environmental status of different sea areas is available in a comparable form that is updated regularly by technical experts. This data is essential for the adaptive resource management approach of learning through experience and improving future MSP.



THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE COMPLETE MSP PROCESS

The comprehensiveness of MSP relates to the completeness of data used, interdisciplinary science to support decisions, cross-border cooperation, tools to measure progress and the extent of sea area covered in establishing each national plan.

Encouragingly, six out of nine Baltic plans are based on recent data, a broad knowledge base involving interdisciplinary science and a comprehensive set of decision support tools (e.g. mental models, Marxan/Marxan with zones, carrying capacity tools). However, adaptive management has not been prioritised, with no structure for interactive or robust decision making in the face of uncertainty. Adaptive management is a systematic approach for improving resource management that promotes the active and regular monitoring of progress towards environmental, economic and social goals¹⁹ – embracing it in MSP is key to improving the sustainability of a highly diverse maritime seascape through time and space.

Monitoring tools have not been included in national plans, leaving Baltic MSP unable to reflect or adapt to EU

assessments or regional reports on environmental policy objectives (e.g. MPAs, good environmental status). The lack of agreed monitoring standards jeopardises MS' abilities to understand how ecosystems are coping with human pressures, as well as to identify and prioritise particular environmental sensitivities that develop over time and across the sea basin.

Despite regular regional and EU structures that allow for bilateral exchanges on conflict resolution recommendations, there is still a sharp difference between MS in how planning authorities address and find solutions to complications arising in their sea spaces. This suggests the Baltic nations have had difficulty including the feedback collected from MSP experts involved in regional cooperation fora and during the stakeholder consultation period in their final plans.

Challenges in area management – who owns the sea?

While Sweden had the best performance in the “Inclusion of nature” category, the nation's coastal and marine areas are not entirely covered by a single maritime spatial plan. This is due to the long-held tradition of municipal self-governance, where planning of territorial and coastal activities lies in the hands of 85 coastal municipalities.

The outcome of Sweden's diverse and complex management regime is that national MSP only applies to 48% of the country's exclusive economic zone and territorial waters. The remaining 52% corresponds either to inner coastal areas co-managed by the state and municipalities (31%) for which no maritime plan has yet been devised, or to areas exclusively managed by the municipalities (21%). Additionally, there are privately owned sea areas which are not subject to any national or municipal maritime spatial plan.

The result is that, despite national MSP acknowledging the requirements of ecosystem-based planning, the effectiveness of Sweden's plan with regard to this category is difficult to assess, as how well the plan aligns with the interests of each of the coastal municipalities will determine its success over time.

To address these gaps in maritime planning, national authorities in Sweden, as well as other MS with autonomous regions or diverse groups responsible for coastal management (such as Finland and Åland), could adopt the principle “guiding designations”. In these cases, national authorities delegate the comprehensive planning and management of coastal areas to the appropriate local or regional municipalities. With recommendations from national authorities, these groups are then responsible for designating the spatial and temporal plans for maritime activities. This approach provides a unique opportunity for participatory and cooperative MSP.

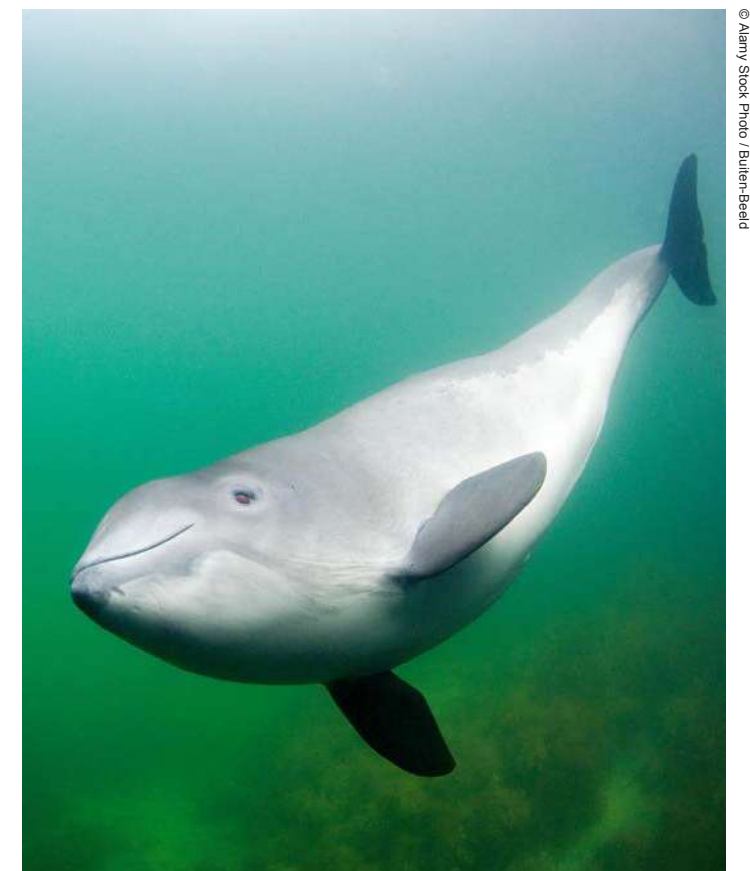
WAY FORWARD

The Baltic is the first regional sea with established maritime spatial plans from all Member States. While this assessment recognises the good first steps the Baltic countries have taken in Maritime Spatial Planning and for establishing institutional structures for further developments in maritime management, more commitment and greater effort is needed to strengthen their national plans with regard to inclusion of nature and Good Ocean Governance.

The Baltic Member States must align their MSP with EU policies that seek a sustainable and secure future for all, including the EU Biodiversity Strategy, European Green Deal, Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Strategy Framework Directive. When harmoniously applied and successfully enforced, these policies can support a sustainable blue economy and safeguard the wellbeing of the wildlife and people who call the Baltic home.

WWF calls on the Baltic Member States to

- Implement an ecosystem-based approach to MSP to meet the EU's 2030 Biodiversity Strategy commitments, align with other European policies such as the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, and achieve good environmental status for European seas as required by the MSFD by way of reducing underwater noise, maintaining the integrity of the seafloor and protecting marine ecosystems.
- Identify and designate areas suitable for marine ecosystem restoration and protection, and implement management plans to ensure nature has the resources needed to recover and thrive. These areas should include blue carbon ecosystems, which are essential for mitigating climate change.
- Ensure that spaces designated for offshore renewable energy development occur outside of Marine Protected Areas and establish how transboundary cooperation via regional sea conventions or agreements between Baltic States may reduce harmful impacts to nature by minimising the level of infrastructure needed.
- After conducting robust environmental assessments (EIAs, SEAs), ensure MSP defines blue economy objectives for all sectors that include the most sustainable long-term scenario.
- Deliver legally-binding state-led national maritime spatial plans that harmonise cross-sectoral policies and timelines. Stakeholders must be involved in all phases of the plan, and the planning authority must justify its decisions regarding space allocation and conflicting interests following stakeholder consultations.
- MSP must be based on scientific knowledge of the carrying capacity of the Baltic Sea and include a comprehensive set of decision support tools that guarantee the ecological integrity and structural components of thriving biodiversity.
- Apply adaptive management tools to continuously evolve national maritime spatial plans as new data becomes available and new pieces of legislation come into force.



REFERENCES

1. European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, 2021, The EU blue economy report 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2771/5187>
2. European Parliament and of the Council, 2014, Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2014/89/oj>
3. WWF European Policy Office, 2021, Two-thirds of EU countries fail to submit plans for sustainable management of their seas on time, <https://www.wwf.eu/?2717941/Two-thirds-of-EU-countries-fail-to-submit-plans-for-sustainable-management-of-their-seas-on-time>
4. WWF European Policy Office, 2021, Ecosystem-based Maritime Spatial Planning in Europe and how to assess it, https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_eb_maritime_spatial_planning_guidance_paper_march_2021.pdf
5. European Commission, Directorate-General for Environment, 2021, EU biodiversity strategy for 2030: bringing nature back into our lives, Publications Office, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/048>
6. European Commission, 2021, NextGenerationEU, https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en#ecl-inpage-30
7. European Commission, 2020, An EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future, https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/offshore_renewable_energy_strategy.pdf
8. WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme, 2019, Principles for a sustainable Blue Economy, https://www.wwfse.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/2019/01/wwf-principles-for-a-sustainable-blue-economy-15_1471_.pdf#:~:text=WWF%20has%20developed%20a%20setof%20%E2%80%9CPinciples%20for%20a, is%20through%20the%20development%20of%20a%20circular%20economy
9. European Commission, 2022, EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/macro-regional-strategies/baltic-sea/
10. WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme, About the Sea, <https://www.wwfbaltic.org/about-the-baltic/#nature>
11. European Environment Agency, 2019, Oxygen concentrations in European coastal and marine waters, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/oxygen-concentrations-in-coastal-and/assessment>
12. European Environment Agency, 2021, Europe's marine biodiversity remains under pressure, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/europes-marine-biodiversity-remains-under-pressure>
13. European Commission, 2021, The EU blue economy Report, <https://op.europa.eu/s/vIF5>
14. HELCOM, 2018, Economic and social analyses in the Baltic Sea region – HELCOM Thematic assessment 2011-2016, <http://www.helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/holistic-assessments/state-of-the-baltic-sea-2018/reports-and-materials/>
15. European Commission, 2022, Criteria and guidance for protected areas designations, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/publications/criteria-and-guidance-protected-areas-designations-staff-working-document_en
16. European Commission, 2022, ECOMAR, <https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/practices/ecomar-data-driven-framework-ecosystem-based-maritime-spatial-planning-danish-marine>
17. HELCOM, 2018, HELCOM Thematic assessment of biodiversity 2011-2016, http://stateofthebalticsea.helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/HELCOM_Thematic-assessment-of-biodiversity-2011-2016_pre-publication.pdf
18. HELCOM, 2021, Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), <https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-action-plan/>
19. V.Stelzenmüller et al., 2021, Evaluation of marine spatial planning requires fit for purpose monitoring strategies, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2020.111545>



OUR MISSION IS TO STOP THE DEGRADATION OF THE PLANET'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND TO BUILD A FUTURE IN WHICH HUMANS LIVE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE.

For more information:

Helena Rodrigues
Ocean Policy Officer
hrodrigues@wwf.eu

Larissa Milo-Dale
Senior Communications Officer
lmilodale@wwf.eu

Front cover photograph: © balipadma / Shutterstock

© February 2022

Paper 100% recycled

© 1986 Panda symbol WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature (Formerly World Wildlife Fund)

® “WWF” is a WWF Registered Trademark.

WWF European Policy Office, 123 rue du Commerce, 1000 Brussels.

For contact details and further information, please visit our website at www.wwf.eu



Working to sustain the natural
world for the benefit of people
and wildlife.

together possible™

[wwf.eu](http://www.wwf.eu)



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor CINEA can be held responsible for them.