



ASSESSING THE BALANCE BETWEEN  
NATURE AND PEOPLE IN EUROPEAN SEAS:

# MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA



Written by the WWF European Policy Office in partnership with the WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative including WWF-Adria, WWF-France, WWF-Greece, WWF-Italy and WWF-Spain.

The WWF European Policy Office wishes to thank colleagues from across the WWF EU network for their contributions to this report. For more detailed analysis, background information on the methodology, as well as further research and results on the topics explored in this report, please consult the Technical Annex available at [wwf.eu](http://wwf.eu).

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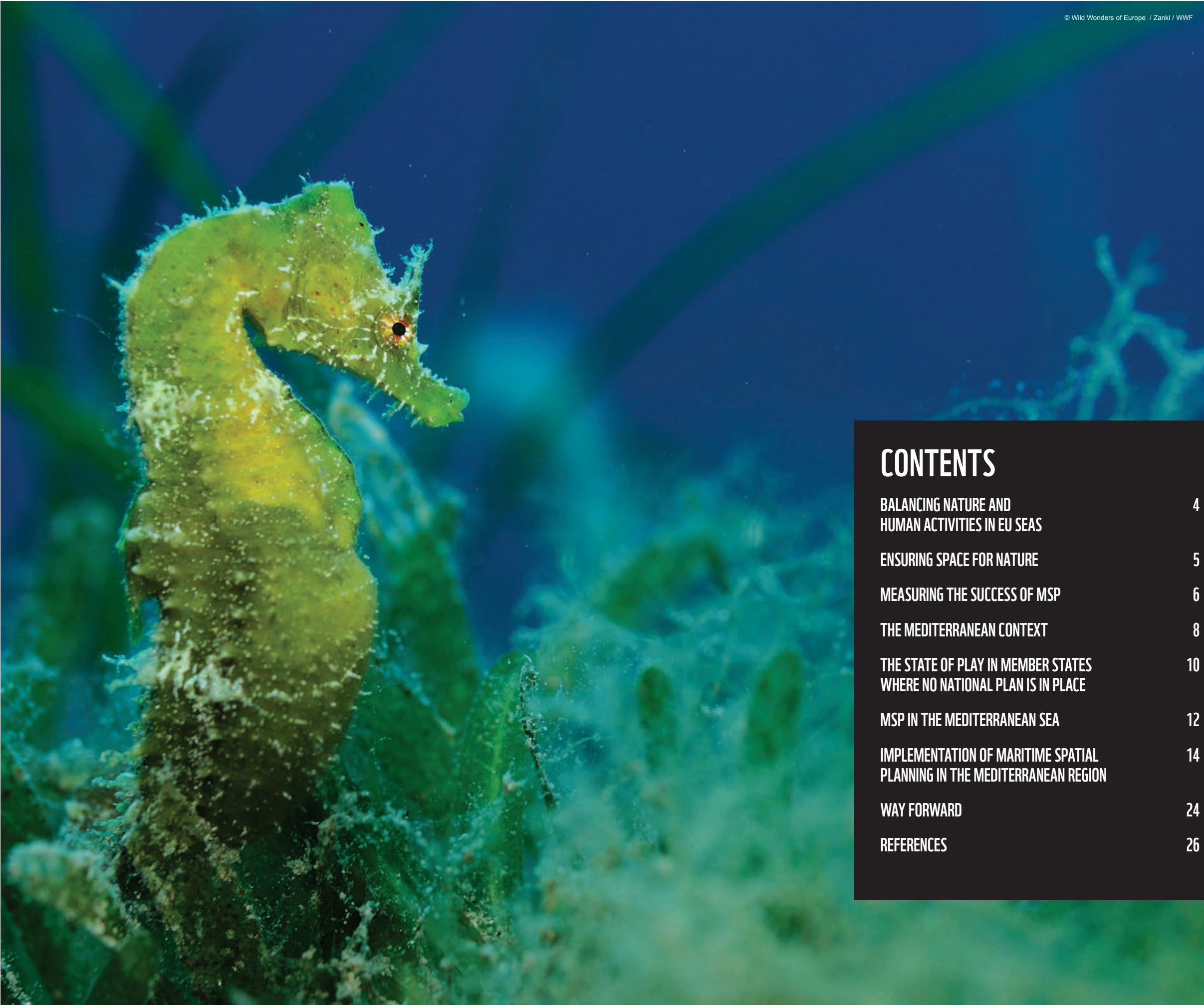
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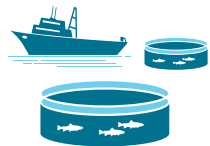
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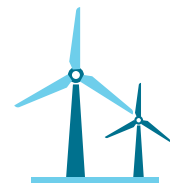


# BALANCING NATURE AND HUMAN ACTIVITIES IN EU SEAS



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.<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> 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, several other MS published their plans, including France and Slovenia, which are among the nations assessed in this report.

# 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)**<sup>4</sup> to MSP, 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.



EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF MPAs DELIVERS DIRECT BENEFITS TO INDUSTRIES LIKE FISHERIES AND TOURISM

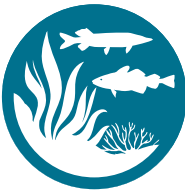
For example, the effective management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) safeguards particularly sensitive habitats, species and/or ecological processes, reduces or eliminates human pressures on marine ecosystems, and supports wider sea basin and ocean health; this, in turn, delivers direct benefits to 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).<sup>5</sup> As a planning tool to support these objectives, 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.<sup>6</sup>

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 2050 as per the European Green Deal, the European Commission is planning to increase offshore renewable energy capacity by 400% and 2400% by 2030 and 2050, respectively, in comparison to 2020 levels.<sup>7</sup> 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 2050 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 a 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 Economy<sup>8</sup>**



## 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**



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## METHODOLOGY

The analysis presented in this report is based on data compiled between December 2022 and May 2023 by the WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative (MMI) including WWF-Adria, WWF-France, WWF-Greece, WWF-Italy and WWF-Spain. WWF collected data for France, Malta, Slovenia and Spain from the nationally-adopted maritime spatial plans that are available on the European Commission’s *European MSP Platform* and official government portals.<sup>9</sup> For both Spain and France, the analysis pertains only to MSP in the Mediterranean Sea basin; for assessments of MSP in other EU regions, please consult the WWF reports *Maritime Spatial Planning in the North-East Atlantic* and *Maritime Spatial Planning in the North Sea*. In the case of Spain, the analysis focused on the final national plan published by the government in February 2023 following an extended consultation period in 2022.

At the time of preparing this report, the European Commission had already initiated legal action – infringement procedures – against Croatia, Cyprus, Greece and Italy for failing to implement the MSPD within the Directive’s timeline. After having recently followed up on this by sending reasoned opinions to Italy, Cyprus and Greece (April 2023), the Commission may refer the issue to the Court of Justice of the European Union, which has the power to impose financial sanctions against the MS. WWF also collected information on the current status of the MSP processes in these countries and the results are available on pages 10-11.

Finally, throughout its analysis, WWF contacted researchers and national policymakers to ensure its assessment of MSP in the Mediterranean provides a comprehensive picture of MSP in the region. Detailed scores for each Member State assessment are available in the Technical Annex accompanying this report.



# THE MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT

The Mediterranean is the jewel of Europe's seas. Though it covers less than 1% of the global ocean surface, it is home to one in ten known marine species,<sup>10</sup> of which 28% are found nowhere else on Earth. But with temperatures rising 20% faster than the global average and sea level rise expected to exceed one metre by 2100, the Mediterranean is becoming the fastest-warming and the saltiest sea on our planet.<sup>11</sup>

The Mediterranean Sea covers 2,500,000 km<sup>2</sup> and has a high diversity of habitats: seamounts, submarine canyons, seagrass meadows, maërl beds and coralligenous communities. Despite having one of the EU's highest percentages of marine protected area coverage at 9.68%, most of these sites are so-called Paper Parks, meaning they remain without any meaningful management or conservation value.<sup>12</sup> At the time of conducting this analysis, at least 20% of the 6,000 surveilled marine species (out of 17,000) in the region are threatened with extinction, with some iconic species such as the Mediterranean monk seal listed as endangered.<sup>13</sup> Not only are the majority of MPAs ineffective, pollution and overfishing are putting over 50% of

sharks, rays and chimaeras at risk of being lost, while leaving the populations of 73% of assessed commercial stocks still overfished.<sup>14</sup>

These and other harmful human activities compound the effects of climate change, whose impacts are highly likely to grow in both magnitude and frequency.<sup>15</sup> For example, scientists have estimated a high probability that over 75% of seagrass habitats of *Posidonia oceanica* in the Mediterranean could be lost by 2050 under the current climate trajectory.<sup>16</sup> This will impact regional fisheries productivity due to the loss of crucial nursery and feeding grounds. The decimation of these habitats can also contribute to a global climate cascade, as seagrass meadows



can store up to twice as much carbon as the world's temperate and tropical forests.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, sea level rise occurs 20% faster in the Mediterranean than the global average, which may lead to substantial modification of coastal habitats and, in turn, a loss of both their functionality and biodiversity.<sup>18</sup> The region is also particularly sensitive to climate warming, with each degree of average temperature increase leading to an average 10-12% local loss of biodiversity.<sup>19</sup>

The consequences of such pressures on nature jeopardise the sustainability of the region's blue economy, which the European Commission estimates to be worth €67 billion annually (over 36% of the overall EU blue economy) and which employs at least half a million people directly or indirectly in fisheries-related jobs alone.<sup>20</sup> A 2017 WWF report<sup>21</sup> shows that erosion of Mediterranean coastlines due to climate change, in combination with human practices such as development, excessive water and energy consumption, and unsustainable management of solid waste and sewage, among others, put the future of the region's primary sector, tourism – which accounts for 11% of Member State GDP in the region – at serious risk. The fishery sector, an industry worth €4.6 billion annually and providing a livelihood for

over 180,000 people, has been in a deepening crisis, while decades of unsustainable practices have resulted in 73% of assessed fish stocks in the Mediterranean region still being overfished.<sup>19</sup> In short, the Mediterranean Sea's economic value is closely tied to assets that are either severely degraded or in rapid decline. Securing the socio-economic wellbeing of the region's growing population requires an urgent shift towards an EBA to MSP that puts nature recovery at the centre of national strategies.

Avoiding the catastrophic impacts of climate change also requires the region to speed up the deployment of offshore renewable energy, particularly floating wind and solar, and to decarbonise maritime industries such as transportation and fisheries. Furthermore, to ensure nature and coastal communities are considered when allocating space for renewable energy projects, the designation of sites for development must be part of the broader MSP discussion and not happen separately. Only in this way can Member States guarantee that climate change and biodiversity loss are jointly addressed in national strategies to successfully deliver the European Green Deal, while supporting the livelihoods of coastal communities in the region.



# THE STATE OF PLAY IN MEMBER STATES WHERE NO NATIONAL PLAN IS IN PLACE

**NB:** The information provided in this case study box was collected by WWF offices during the MSP consultation and engagement processes. Further information is available in the Technical Annex and through the WWF national offices leading the analyses.

## CROATIA

Croatia transposed the MSPD into national legislation in 2017, via amendments to the Physical Planning Act of the Republic of Croatia. However, at the time of this assessment, the planning process has not started and no stakeholder consultation has taken place. While the overall MSP strategy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the actual drafting of the national plan falls under the competencies of the Ministry of Spatial Planning and Construction. The two Ministries are in bilateral discussions to establish a working group focused on MSP that will agree on the process required to develop a comprehensive national plan.

Further to the lack of alignment between Ministries, main challenges to the MSP process so far include an absence of political leadership on the subject and the prioritisation of other policies not related to MSP by national authorities, such as earthquake preparedness. Additionally, Croatia does not have sector-specific plans for delivering the 2030 EU offshore renewable energy and MPA targets, which are essential to mitigate climate change and increase ecosystemic resilience to global warming and overfishing.

On a positive note, the Energy State Secretary has supported the “Action Plan for the Uptake of Offshore Renewable Energy Sources in Croatia”, which highlights the need to further explore Croatia’s renewable energy potential while taking environmental considerations into account.

## CYPRUS

The bill to transpose the MSPD into law was approved by the House of Representatives of Cyprus in 2017 (Law 114(I)/2017), however, the country has not yet adopted a national plan.

In June 2022, the Maritime Spatial Planning Committee approved the final draft of the national plan. The draft plan includes a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which assesses how human activities impact each other and nature, and a Special Ecological Assessment, which were both completed in December 2022; these were in turn submitted for public consultation, which ended in early 2023. The adoption of the final national plan by the Council of Ministers is expected within the first half of 2023.

According to the local planning authority (the Shipping Deputy minister), the main challenges to the current MSP process have been related to data collection and availability, particularly

concerning data related to marine habitats and species. This lack of data implies that some concessions for activities with a heavier environmental impact (e.g. oil and gas) were granted in the past. As knowledge about the ecological value of the areas where these activities are carried out is now becoming more available, it will need to be taken into account in future planning processes.

Moreover, there has been some difficulty integrating different priorities and needs of various ministries. Despite attempts to carry out a comprehensive consultation process, stakeholder participation has also been challenging, most likely due to the low levels of awareness and understanding of MSP in the Cypriot society, leaving stakeholders unable to relate to this process or perceive its importance.

Regarding protected areas, the draft national plan only includes current MPAs and Natura 2000 sites, with no consideration for which sites qualify for protection or restoration to meet the EU Biodiversity Strategy targets. At the time of conducting this assessment, studies are being carried out to identify areas to fulfil objectives to protect at least 30% of the marine and coastal area by 2030 (commonly referred to as “30 by 30”), and they will be included in future plans. The current draft plan contains a specific reference to future MPAs being automatically included in the national maritime spatial plan.

The implementation of an EBA to MSP in Cyprus requires better data collection mechanisms at the national level and improving public participation to ensure a more robust and inclusive planning process. Identification of new MPAs towards the achievement of “30 by 30” must remain a priority, together with the identification of sites for accelerated offshore renewable energy development to meet REPowerEU targets.

## GREECE

Following the initial step of transposing the MSPD into national legislation in 2018 (law 4546/2018, amended by law 4759/2020), all subsequent milestones to implement a national plan have been severely delayed. To date, the Ministry of Environment and Energy has not undertaken any concrete actions, nor announced a specific timeframe for the development and adoption of maritime spatial plans. Further, the manner in which MSP has been integrated into Greece’s hierarchical spatial planning system has resulted in “sectoral” spatial plans of a national scale prevailing over maritime spatial plans. In addition, the relationship between MSP and the regional spatial plans is not clarified by law. Greece also has no legal

framework to plan and manage its coastal zone, which is essential to ensure tourism and other coastal activities remain within ecological limits and do not jeopardise the health of marine ecosystems in the region. As a result, the integration of MSP into the national planning system fails to transpose the MSPD as intended, which means EBA considerations are not well reflected in national legislation.

These weaknesses pose serious threats to securing effective planning of Greek seas in the future, especially in light of recent developments reflecting key strategic decisions on economic growth and investment priorities. The designation of certain areas – and the approval of programmes – for the development of sectoral activities (i.e. oil and gas exploitation, aquaculture and offshore wind farms) prior to the establishment of maritime spatial plans promote a fragmented, ad hoc and partial approach to MSP.

Finally, a public consultation process has only partially taken place. The first draft of the national spatial strategy, which should have provided clear guidance for the MSP process including coordination between various tools and government agencies, was open to public consultation in January-February 2022. This was followed by a submission of opinions from other competent ministries and of two Ministry of Environment advisory boards (summer 2022). However, the draft failed to endorse key MSP elements such as an integrated approach to land-sea interactions and coordinated cross-sectoral planning – all enshrined in the MSPD.

As the process of developing maritime spatial plans has not been initiated to date, no other process of consultation or stakeholder engagement has taken place. While there was a recent announcement regarding the national strategy being finalised,<sup>22</sup> an updated draft has not been made publicly available. The government must adopt the national strategy, make good use of existing research and scientific evidence, engage networks of key stakeholders and urgently proceed with the development of maritime spatial plans.

## ITALY

The MSPD was transposed by Legislative Decree 201/2016, and guidelines with indications and criteria for the preparation of maritime spatial plans were approved by Decree of the Presidency of Council of Ministers in December 2017. Italy’s draft maritime spatial plans and SEAs were published by the competent authorities (the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport (MIT) and the Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security (MASE)) in September 2022. Following publication of the draft plans and SEAs, the MIT began a national public consultation for both, which lasted 45 days. The consultation was closed on 30 December 2022. At the time of drafting this report, the SEA process was still ongoing and the final report of the SEA Commission was still pending.

The main challenges identified throughout the whole MSP process include:

- i) the complexity of the co-design and co-planning activities as requested by the Directive when transposed into law and the governance system in place (15 regions and five ministries participate in the Technical Committee to prepare the national plans);
- ii) the extension of the planning domain (around 550,000 km<sup>2</sup>) and the variety of sea uses, marine ecosystems and coastal

activities and landscapes, which required the adoption of a unique multi-scalar approach;

iii) the difficulty of collecting and integrating the different types of data at different spatial resolution to inform MSP, as official data was provided by different competent ministries and regions as well as other sources (e.g. research studies, international databases), with some remarkable data gaps such as for small-scale and recreational fisheries;

iv) the difficulties in maintaining alignment and harmonisation with other ongoing planning and policy processes (e.g. the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) Programme of Measures, EU Biodiversity Strategy pledges, REPowerEU and its implementation in Italians seas, the Plan for sustainable energy transition in eligible areas (PiTESAI), oil and gas prospecting and exploitation).

As it stands, according to WWF’s preliminary assessment, the draft national plans do not fully contribute to the achievement of the European Green Deal’s energy transition objectives as they do not explicitly map areas for scaling-up offshore renewable energy based on explicit energy production objectives, which is a key element of both the REPowerEU Plan and the revision of the EU Renewable Energy Directive. Furthermore, while the draft plans consider the impact of climate change on coastal and at-sea activities, as well as on ecosystems, the topic is not fully addressed both in terms of analysis and of planning provisions.

In addition, WWF-Italy believes that the draft plans should be more closely related to the EU Biodiversity Strategy’s objectives, and should explicitly identify and allocate space for new MPAs to reach the “30 by 30” target based on a comprehensive assessment of the ecological importance of these areas in supporting biodiversity and ecosystem services. Despite the draft plans considering ecosystem and conservation trends and objectives quite extensively, and containing specific provisions as “natura” vocations in many Planning Units, improvements are needed. Specifically, precise identification of natural and cultural values in all Planning Units should be provided, as well as a portfolio of national and sub-area planning measures targeting environmental objectives, together with the precise identification of new areas for protection and a detailed timeline for expanding Italy’s MPA network.

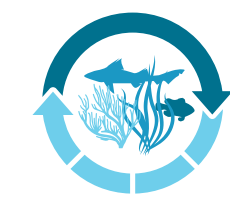
Even if the above is not an explicit requirement for the MSP Competent Authority (MIT) as the topic falls under the responsibility of a different ministry (MASE), it represents a commitment of the Italian Government within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and, as such, it should be properly addressed in the national plans, taking advantage of MASE’s role as co-author of the national plans through its direct participation in the Technical Committee.

WWF believes that the current shortcomings could jeopardise the country’s capacity to deliver on its commitments to use MSP to protect ecosystems and biodiversity, and limit or hinder the ability of MSP to be an effective tool to deliver the objectives of both the MSFD and the EU Biodiversity Strategy in Italy. Beyond the suggested improvements identified above, WWF-Italy proposes a more intense, constant and distributed stakeholder consultation process and the creation of an ad hoc technical roundtable, including environmental NGOs, to support the competent authorities in integrating and implementing an EBA in the Italian MSP process.

# MSP IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The Mediterranean region is lagging behind in applying an EBA to MSP, with a regional average score of 45% across the national plans assessed. Among all four categories, “Socio-economic considerations” scored the lowest (34%) and “Comprehensiveness of the complete MSP process” scored the highest (55%).

  
NO MEDITERRANEAN NATION IS ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL OBJECTIVE TO INCREASE THE SHARE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

  
NO MEMBER STATE HAS PLANS TO EFFECTIVELY PROTECT NATURE OR RESTORE DEGRADED HABITATS

Slovenia was the highest scoring country (56%), while Malta was the lowest (34%). France and Spain, two countries with territorial waters in more than one regional sea, both scored higher in the Mediterranean than in the other European sea basins, highlighting the social, economic and cultural importance of this region to the EU’s largest blue economies. The Mediterranean is a hub of ocean governance activities that engage a broad set of stakeholders who, the analysis shows, are invested in contributing both to national MSP and effective ocean governance in the region as a whole.

Importantly, among the MS with established exclusive economic zones (EEZs) that have either draft or implemented plans, most have their entire EEZs covered by national maritime spatial plans, which is essential to ensure the coherence of these ocean strategies. Nonetheless, the region still scores very low (12.5%) when it comes to cross-border cooperation for sound planning, monitoring and enforcement, which undermines any national effort to deliver the good environmental status of the Mediterranean Sea (see page 21). The situation is particularly dire in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean, where only Malta and Slovenia have plans in place; and only Italy and Cyprus have draft plans that were publicly open for stakeholder consultation. Without plans, it is impossible to assess how the different maritime sectors within each EEZ and across the region interact with each other and with different ecosystems, which is essential for calculating the cumulative impacts of human activities on nature.

Apart from Spain (which, in 2022, approved both a National Strategic Plan of Natural Heritage and Biodiversity, and a roadmap for the designation of 30% marine protection by 2030) and France (which has a National Strategy for Protected Areas by 2030 and published the Law for the Reconquest of Biodiversity, Nature and Landscapes in 2016), no other country has plans to protect nature or restore degraded habitats in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy targets.

Currently, no Mediterranean nation is on track to achieve the European Green Deal objective to increase the total share of renewable energy to 40% by 2030, which requires planning sites for offshore wind energy that align with the EU’s environmental standards and legislation. Furthermore, MS such as Italy and Cyprus continue to designate space for fossil fuel extraction while delaying the allocation of “acceleration areas” for offshore wind energy development. Finally, of all four MS assessed, only Spain mapped marine ecosystem services, albeit incompletely, while only France considered support to and transformation of maritime employment and industries. These shortcomings risk disenfranchising coastal communities from the just transition component of long-term sustainable ocean planning.

Presently, the region is a patchwork of incoherent national plans that are not only misaligned spatially, but also temporally. For example, while France is preparing the second version of its maritime strategies at the time of writing this analysis, Greece has yet to begin the planning process at all and is being legally pursued by the

European Commission for its lack of action to implement the MSPD. To ensure the health of Mediterranean ecosystems, secure the vitality of maritime industries – many of whom depend on a thriving sea – and deliver a sustainable blue economy, it is crucial that MS consider the findings and recommendations presented in this report, with particular focus on the need for further investment in nature.

Developing a dedicated regional working group focusing on the integration and implementation of an EBA to MSP (perhaps under the framework of an existing regional governance actor such as the Union for the Mediterranean) could ensure that neighbouring MS and non-EU countries are jointly aligned in their commitments to address the climate and biodiversity crises, and safeguard maritime livelihoods for generations to come. This would also facilitate the inclusion of red-listed species and habitats in national nature protection planning, which is crucial as many of these habitats provide essential feeding and nursing grounds for commercially-important species and act as buffers against natural disasters such as storms.

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.

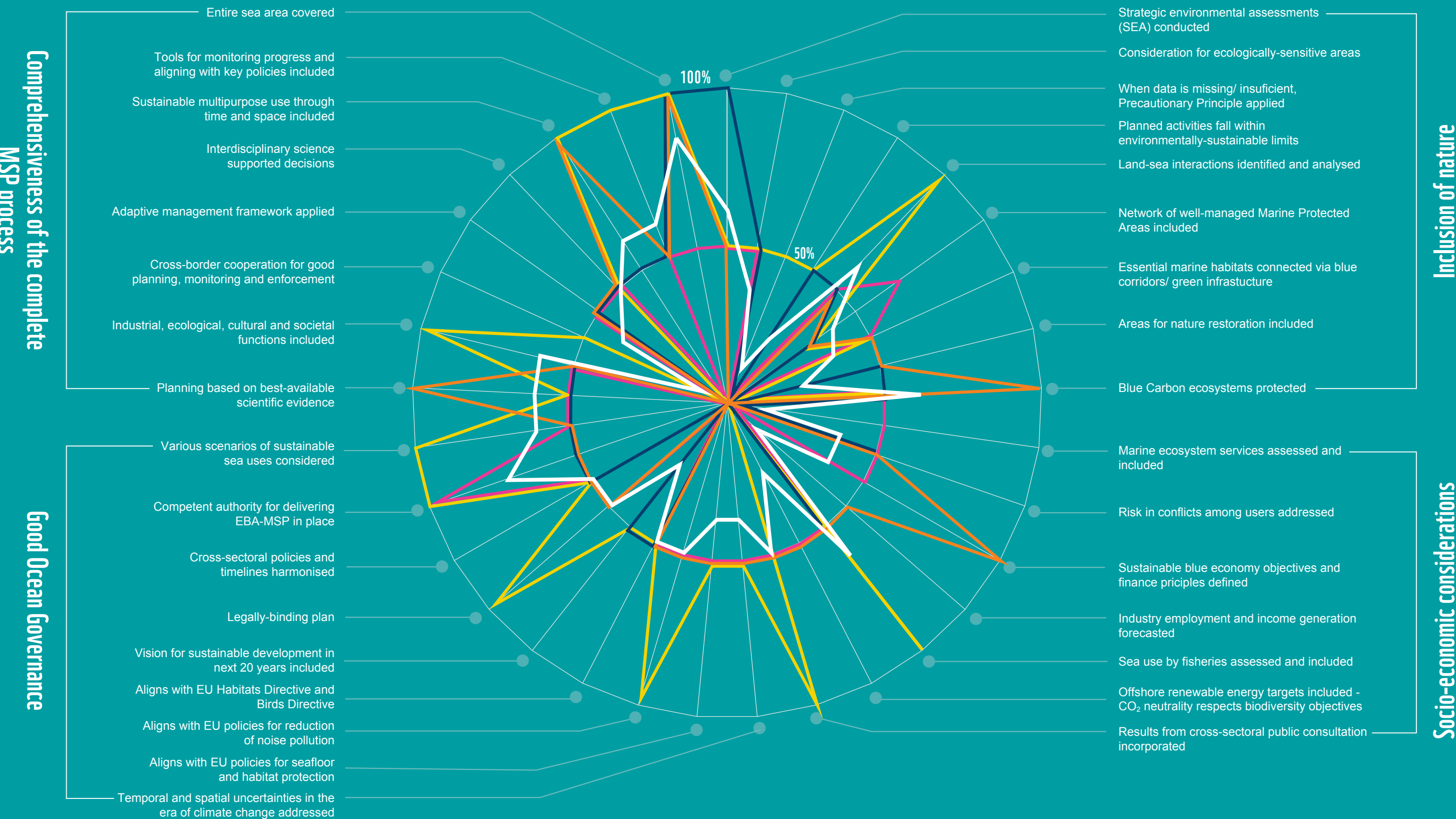
| SCORE IN %                                    | 0-10                                                                                 | 11-20 | 21-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | 61-70 | 71-80 | 81-90 | 91-100 |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| CATEGORY AVERAGE                              |  |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| INCLUSION OF NATURE                           |                                                                                      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS                     |                                                                                      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| GOOD OCEAN GOVERNANCE                         |                                                                                      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE COMPLETE MSP PROCESS |                                                                                      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| Mediterranean average                         | 40.7%                                                                                | 33.9% | 48.6% | 54.7% |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| France                                        | 37%                                                                                  | 50%   | 44.4% | 62.5% |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| Malta                                         | 42.6%                                                                                | 14.3% | 27.8% | 50.0% |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| Slovenia                                      | 48.1%                                                                                | 28.6% | 72.2% | 68.8% |       |       |       |       |       |        |
| Spain                                         | 35.2%                                                                                | 42.9% | 50.0% | 37.5% |       |       |       |       |       |        |

**NB:** The indicators in each assessment category are included in Figure 1 on page 14. The Mediterranean Sea regional score corresponds to the average of all Member States’ scores. 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.



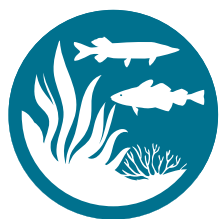
# Implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning in the Mediterranean region

Key: — Mediterranean average — France — Malta — Slovenia — Spain



**NB:** The Mediterranean score corresponds to the average of all Member States' scores. 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.





## 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).**

Overall, the Mediterranean region scores poorly on nature protection, with a regional average of 41%. In WWF's analysis, Spain is the worst scoring nation, averaging 35% and scoring zero in three out of the eight indicators in this category. Meanwhile, Slovenia achieved the highest score (48%) for environmental considerations in its national plan, as it successfully assessed land-sea interactions and completed a satisfactory cumulative impact assessment (CIA), SEA and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). An example of Slovenia's success regarding environmental considerations is the suggestion included in its EIA to reduce the number of anchorage locations near the Italian border due to a lack of information about maritime activities within the territorial waters of its neighbour, Italy. Nonetheless, the nation's MPA network is insufficient to meet the EU Biodiversity Strategy targets and no space for restoration was explicitly mentioned in the plan, which is why the country continues to score below the 50% threshold for a successful EBA.

Despite all four national plans including an SEA, only Malta fully included spatially-specific and inclusive proposals for mitigating impacts of harmful human activities in line with the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, compensate and restore). Spain, for example, did not include spatially-specific or exhaustive mitigation measures to prevent maritime sectors from negatively impacting marine ecosystems. Nonetheless, a positive example from the region comes from France, where the authorities have mapped *Posidonia oceanica* ecosystems,

which are well known carbon sinks both within MPAs and along the whole French Mediterranean coast. This is an essential first step to ensure nature is considered in regional efforts against climate change.

Regarding marine protection, where MS have been assessed on their success to effectively protect at least 30% of their marine areas by 2030 as per the EU Biodiversity Strategy, Spain scored the highest (67%) among the group. Spain's success derives from the government's decision to designate all Spanish Natura 2000 sites as "Priority Zones for Biodiversity Protection" (where no other activity can take place if it negatively impacts another sector present in that location) and to further develop and approve a master plan for the Spanish network of MPAs in order to ensure successful designation of "30 by 30". Despite the quality of this protection, Spain's MPAs only cover approximately 12% of all Spanish waters.<sup>23</sup>

Neither Slovenia nor Spain included any reference to nature restoration activities, despite this being a critical aspect of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. While France and Malta mention restoration in their plans, only France includes spatially-specific actions, such as the passive restoration plan for seagrass meadows currently being implemented in French waters. Given the critical status of Mediterranean marine ecosystems, it is essential that all MS speed up restoration actions and actively minimise harmful human activities that are compounding the already dire impacts of climate change on marine habitats and species.



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## Failing to meet 30 by 30

The EU Biodiversity Strategy has set a target of protecting at least 30% of European marine and coastal areas by 2030, of which 10% needs to be under strict protection (i.e. where human visitation, activities and impacts are strictly controlled and limited). However, at the time of conducting this analysis, less than 10% of the Mediterranean Sea is covered by protected areas.<sup>23</sup> This is both insufficient to achieve the Strategy's targets and to safeguard biodiversity at the regional level. Regarding country-specific performance, Malta and Slovenia scored zero under this assessment's indicator for the extension of areas under protection and strict protection within a country's EEZ (indicator 6b, available in the Technical Annex).

Not only is the spatial coverage of MPAs lacking, most sites have inadequate management plans to ensure that conservation measures and connectivity between sites will be successfully delivered, which are essential for good ecological functionality and productivity. This is the case in France, where MSP authorities have not worked closely enough with conservation managers to secure effective protection of designated sites, leaving only 0.09% of French MPAs in the Mediterranean Sea effectively protected.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that, unlike the other Mediterranean MS under assessment, France has successfully designated 30% of its marine and coastal areas to be protected, however, these areas do not include 10% for strict protection. Conversely, while Spain has designated just 12% of its EEZ as MPAs (which reflects 28.5% of Spanish waters in the Mediterranean), these are given priority over other maritime activities and offshore wind farms must be avoided in these areas, making the quality of protection in Spain notably higher.

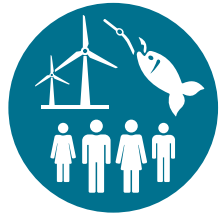
However, neither French nor Spanish authorities have taken measures to ensure connectivity of protected sites across national borders, possibly due to disagreements about the border location between parties, which jeopardises the overall efficacy of protection across the sea basin and reveals a lack of cross-border cooperation when it comes to safeguarding the health of migrating species. International cooperation and coherent MPA governance structures are vital for thriving biodiversity in the Mediterranean, as the region includes both MS that must comply with EU maritime legislation and countries outside the EU who have not started their MSP processes and who have yet to collect knowledge on the state of their marine ecosystems.

In the Central and Eastern part of the sea, only two out of the six assessed countries, Slovenia and Malta, currently have a maritime spatial plan in place. The situation is particularly bad in Croatia and Greece, where national authorities have yet to start the planning process despite already being two years past the MSPD deadline at the time of conducting this analysis. Without a comprehensive strategy that considers all maritime activities with a forward-looking approach, the Eastern Mediterranean is left with industry-specific strategies that do not consider the cumulative impacts of human activities and their effects on nature. Further, it leaves the door open for more fossil fuel extraction projects, which are not aligned with the EU's pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Against the backdrop of dramatic species decline and environmental degradation, the Mediterranean must be both protected and restored in line with the targets agreed by all MS in the EU Biodiversity Strategy, as a healthy sea is the foundation for the ecosystem services that provide food security, jobs, climate regulation and human wellbeing. For example, successful protection of 30% of the Mediterranean Sea in specific areas and sustainably managed maritime activities could see the biomass of sharks increase by up to 45%, while commercial species like groupers could increase by 50% and European hake could double.<sup>24</sup> Such outcomes hinge on the establishment of effective management measures in the remaining 70% of the Mediterranean Sea to adapt, rather than merely relocate and concentrate, fishing activities. For instance, bluefin tuna, the most iconic and commercially valuable fish of the Mediterranean, was heavily overfished and populations nearly collapsed in the early 2000s, but thanks to successful management and key protection measures, the species was able to achieve a substantial recovery of its biomass in a relatively short time.<sup>25</sup>

While delivering 30% protection by 2030 is no small feat considering it took 30 years to achieve today's coverage of under 10%, doing so must now be a priority. Effectively restoring and protecting the Mediterranean Sea is a precondition for securing the region's economic future and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.





## 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.**

This is the worst-scoring category in the Mediterranean Sea, with a regional average of only 34%. Not only is the average the lowest, it is also the category in which the MS scored the most zeros. Malta, the country with the poorest performance, only scored higher than zero in indicators 11 (risks between maritime sectors) and 14 (fisheries activities at sea). France is the only country whose average scores are above the threshold of what is needed to achieve partly-successful implementation of social and economic aspects of an EBA. This is because it scores 100% in indicator 12, which examines whether sustainable blue economy objectives and finance principles were defined, and also considered how jobs and income in different industries would change over time (indicator 13), which is an essential component for supporting a just transition across sectors to achieve the European Green Deal.<sup>26</sup> Spain was the only country that assessed marine ecosystem services (albeit only within MPAs) and designated sufficient space for offshore renewable energy to comply with EU targets; however, biodiversity was not always taken into account during the decision-making process.

Stakeholder consultation was poor across the region. Only Slovenia scored 100% due to its MSP documents being prepared with a broad range of stakeholders and for keeping consultations open to participants from neighbouring countries via public debates and follow-up consultations on specific MSP topics, which was a unique approach in the region. By contrast, Malta scored zero due to a stark absence of transparency during the national plan's drafting process and a very short window for stakeholders to comment on the proposed text during the consultation phase. The overall lack of public participation in the planning process is a huge misstep for the Mediterranean, as the region relies heavily on small-scale enterprises in sectors such as tourism and fisheries which make significant contributions to the regional blue economy: capture fisheries, for example, were estimated to support approximately 194,000 direct and 500,000 indirect jobs along the value chain in the region in 2018.<sup>14</sup> Unless the MSP consultation process is transparent

and open for comment, MS risk sidelining important communities such as small-scale fishers, which represent 82% of the EU Mediterranean fleet and around 59% of all onboard employment in the region.<sup>14</sup>

As a whole, results in this category reveal that despite all four MS having economies and communities that contribute the whale's share to the EU blue economy, and who thus depend heavily on marine resources, none were successful in considering all industries and stakeholders in their national plans. This is an abysmal failure, both in terms of having a balanced allocation of space to different maritime sectors and in preparing a forward-looking vision to steer those sectors towards more sustainable models, including circular approaches to production and improved long-term job security. As the Mediterranean MS were among the largest national contributors to the EU-27 Blue Economy in 2022, they have the power to shift capital away from harmful activities (such as fossil fuel extraction and use of environmentally-damaging fishing gear, for example) and instead develop sustainable financing mechanisms that harness the power of markets to strengthen environmental, social, and economic resilience in the region.



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## The challenges of folding fisheries into MSP

Fishing is an inextricable part of Mediterranean cultures and traditions. In 2020, fisheries in the region generated over €2.9 million and employed around 194,000 people on-board and 500,000 people along the value chain.<sup>14</sup> No less than 58% of the EU fishing fleet is found in the Mediterranean, and small-scale coastal fisheries (i.e. vessels under 12 metres in length) represent 82% of these activities.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, the future of this sector is uncertain: some of the resources upon which it depends have become increasingly scarce. Unsustainable fishing contributed to total fish stocks falling by over a third in the past half-century and, despite commendable efforts, 73% of stocks are still overfished in Mediterranean waters.<sup>19</sup> The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>28</sup> climate change and the rise in operational costs (mostly due to increased fuel prices, given vessel dependency on fossil fuels)<sup>29</sup> have further exacerbated fishers' financial vulnerability, many of whom already earn less than the national minimum wage.<sup>28</sup> Adding to these challenges, the increasing competition for space at sea and the process of planning maritime activities are perceived by many in the fishing industry as further risks to their livelihoods, as fishing could be restricted to make way for new and expanding activities such as offshore wind.

Granting fishers' adequate access to fishing grounds is, of course, an essential purview to sustaining the industry and supporting the livelihoods associated with it. Rather than a threat, MSP is an essential tool to defend these interests, as it serves to guarantee fishers' continued access to the resources they rely on via its robust stakeholder consultation processes and the determination of preferential or reserved access to certain areas.

However, what makes the sector's inclusion in MSP so important is also what makes it so difficult: differences between vessel sizes, species targeted, and how, when and where a fisher operates create a diverse and complex planning landscape for Mediterranean fisheries.<sup>30</sup> Changes to just one of these factors for one vessel can require a complete change in operations. For instance, some fisheries can sustainably operate within certain MPAs, even benefiting from the replenished and robust fish populations protected areas deliver.<sup>27</sup> Others, however, would need to change gear, target species, or both, to be allowed to continue fishing in a given MPA. In such cases, they may move away from that MPA and start fishing elsewhere, leading to increased concentration of fishing activities and competition for space and resources at sea, unless the right management measures are put in place to adapt to this redistribution. This complex seascape is exacerbated by the overwhelmingly coastal and small-scale nature of Mediterranean fisheries, as many would struggle to displace their activities further out to sea.

Fishers know the intricacies of their fishing operations best. This makes it essential to incorporate their local, traditional and ecological knowledge into MSP processes to ensure decisions take account of the full scope of planning impacts to fisheries (and other industries). Further, while all fishers may share a common objective of securing their livelihoods by putting seafood on our plates, the unique needs of operations across diverse vessel sizes, gear types and within different ecosystems must be folded into the purview of MSP without aggregating the sector as a single entity. In this way, the different voices in fisheries are heard with the same relevance and importance as the voices of different sectors like shipping, tourism and nature conservation, to name only a few.

Balancing this array of socio-economic interests with the action so urgently needed to protect and restore marine ecosystems, as well as sustainably plan other activities in the Mediterranean, is a notable challenge. One way to support this is to promote fisheries co-management: where a fishery is governed by decisions made jointly by relevant stakeholders, such as fishers, authorities and scientists, as has been done, for instance, in Catalonia since 2018.<sup>31</sup> This approach can significantly strengthen voices from the fisheries sector in MSP discussions as it facilitates the establishment of robust positions and recommendations that are supported by fishers, scientists, authorities and civil society alike. Decision makers can, in turn, ensure that MSP incorporates both the environmental and socio-economic dimensions of a given fishery.

The Mediterranean Sea has bustled with life for centuries, both above and below its waters. MSP is now a decisive tool to steer fish populations away from the cliff edge unsustainable fishing has pushed them to while restoring a balance for the benefit of ecosystems, communities and economies.





## 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 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.**

This is the second-highest scoring category (49% regional average) and the one with the highest national average score (72% in Slovenia). However, the regional average is still below the 50% threshold for a partly-successful EBA to MSP. Malta, whose national plan is not legally binding, was the lowest-scoring country in the region (28%); it is also the only one whose MSP authorities didn't take into account the MSFD objective of achieving the good environmental status of EU seas when planning the different maritime activities.

No national plan has successfully addressed the spatial and temporal uncertainties of climate change (see case study on opposite page), despite the region's vulnerability to sea level rise and temperature increases. Furthermore, none successfully designated areas for maritime activities based on environmental data collected via the MSFD reporting process; this is very shortsighted for a region whose human activities have led to the significant loss of habitats such as seagrass meadows which sequester carbon and help replenish species upon which fisheries depend. Only Malta and Slovenia included references to a long-term vision for sustainable development of maritime activities, however, in neither case were clear objectives put in place to assess

progress towards delivering a sustainable blue economy in harmony with EU climate neutrality by 2050.

Positively, the majority of plans in the region are led by an authority with the mandate and capacity required for a successful EBA to MSP, which is essential for political accountability and enforcement. However, the inter-ministerial consultation process is not always clear to stakeholders; specifically, it is not always known who is in charge of ensuring that different sectors are equally considered throughout the process of allocating space at sea to various activities.

Finally, all plans successfully included multiple scenarios for how numerous at-sea activities can become more sustainable. For example, in Slovenia, the European Commission supported an MSP project<sup>32</sup> that focused on developing and analysing development scenarios with different sector priorities that were then presented and discussed with stakeholders at the local level. This is a good example of how the European Commission can help authorities develop improved maritime spatial plans in the near future, particularly in MS where authorities continue to delay the process.



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## Overlooking the role of blue carbon to tackle climate change

For WWF, actions addressing the temporal and spatial uncertainties of climate change are a key indicator of good ocean governance. The complexity of the problem requires a broad range of stakeholders to jointly agree on how to protect and restore oceanic ecosystems, whose capacities to absorb and store excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere – blue carbon – are key allies in climate mitigation.

The value of blue carbon is now starting to be widely recognised by international institutions such as the UN and countries across the globe.<sup>33</sup> However, despite the EU's desire to be a global leader in climate action, maritime spatial plans in the region have given little attention to safeguarding the resilience of these habitats and instead grossly ignore the cumulative impact of human activities on vulnerable species. In the case of the seagrass species *Posidonia oceanica*, for example, the increasing loss and fragmentation of meadows in the Mediterranean sea basin (50% decrease in shoot density over the past 20 years) may have led to a substantial reduction (between 11% and 52%) in capacity to sequester and store carbon.<sup>16</sup> Positively, in France, the strict enforcement of spatial measures forbidding the anchoring of yachts longer than 24 metres in *Posidonia* meadows has reduced the impact of anchoring by over 60% in the last three years.<sup>34</sup>

Under 'business as usual' scenarios, by the time ecological restoration will be required in the EU, essential blue ecosystems may be so damaged by human activities that their recovery will no longer be possible, either because scientists will lack the knowledge to do so or because it will be too expensive.<sup>35</sup> It is, therefore, crucial to ensure that nature restoration goes hand-in-hand with securing the increased resilience of marine ecosystems against climate shocks and destructive human activities.

The best way to achieve this is by designating strictly protected areas, as the total absence of human interference helps boost ecosystem resilience and supports the role of various habitats as climate refuges for species migrating towards colder waters. Identifying these sites is, however, difficult to do, because researchers are still uncertain about how climate change will impact ecosystems over time. Further, despite restoration efforts, some ecosystems may not be resilient to changes in climate and disappear. Therefore, dynamic assessments of the initial status of these ecosystems are needed to define areas and methods to effectively safeguard the Mediterranean's unique biodiversity.

In the Mediterranean, various research projects<sup>36</sup> are developing the tools necessary to identify areas where passive and active restoration are not only possible, but enhance the capacity of ecosystems to remain resilient to the impacts of climate change over time. It is crucial for this dynamic approach to be reflected in national MSP frameworks to jointly address the climate and biodiversity crises the region is facing. One way to do this is by aligning the MSPD and the MSFD, taking into account the latest science when designating space to various human activities. Further, MS must prioritise the marine protection and restoration targets enshrined in the EU Biodiversity Strategy, as these are key to deliver a resilient, productive and healthy Mediterranean Sea.





## 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.**

While MS performed the best across all indicators of this category, achieving a 55% regional average, it is noteworthy that this score is still little over 50%. Slovenia was again the leading performer (69%). Spain (38%) was the only country in the region to score below 50%, due to its lack of mechanisms or structures for cross-border cooperation which limits capacity to effectively coordinate its maritime space (indicator 28). In addition, Spain's national plan does not adequately address how activities evolve over time and does not consider the possibility of establishing areas that can be simultaneously accessed by multiple activities to effectively manage marine space over time (indicator 31).

Positively, all four nations' plans successfully included an intersectional approach to science, meaning they considered both the latest environmental data and the range of social, economic and cultural views that reflect communities'

identities when allocating space to different at-seas activities. However, none of the MSP planning processes considered the cumulative impacts of human activities at the sea basin level and how these may affect maritime activities and nature conservation across borders. All the Mediterranean MS have thus missed an essential component of MSP that helps minimise harmful activities and ensures economies can reap the full benefits of sustainable long-term planning.

A key recent development has been the establishment of the "Community of practice on MSP for the Mediterranean", under the umbrella of the Westmed initiative and with the support of the EU (see case study on opposite page).<sup>37</sup> This group is an immensely important step forward to support the replication of best practices and identify solutions for cross-boundary planning issues that consider both EU and non-EU countries.



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## The need to improve cross-border cooperation

The Mediterranean region requires a regional governance mechanism that facilitates transboundary cooperation and coordination of maritime strategies between MS and non-EU countries, with the aim of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of implementing important national maritime policies. Such policies include the MSFD, whose primary objective is to deliver the good environmental status of EU seas. While the Barcelona Convention partially covers this role, particularly through the EBA process and through the Protocol on integrated coastal zone management, a regional organisation such as the existing Union for the Mediterranean, with its mandate to support a sustainable blue economy in the region, could also be very effective for supporting an MSP-focused regional cooperation mechanism.

MSP can act as a connecting thread for planning all human activities in shared marine spaces in a way that is environmentally sustainable and prevents conflicts between sectors, both geographically and over time. This conflict-resolution aspect of MSP is particularly important as, up to now, most strategic maritime discussions occur separately within each sector and don't usually consider how the development of one will impact another.

The "Community of practice on MSP for the Mediterranean" represents a first step towards improved regional cooperation between MS. However, there is a need to further involve countries outside the EU, particularly from the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean, in order to be more effective in delivering a region-wide EBA to MSP. Addressing the sea basin's current separate stakeholder consultation processes, which have no scope for international input and do not allow MS and neighbouring countries to align their strategic objectives and actions, will also be key for ensuring coherence between maritime spatial plans in the region. Without a joint approach to ocean planning, the Mediterranean, as a whole, is left with a fragmented strategy and national maritime spatial plans that fail to either assess or consider the cumulative impacts of human activities on ecosystems.

Joint planning is also key to ensure that the designation of protected areas mirrors the reality of the status of our seas beyond human-made borders, such as where the migration corridors of marine species occur. Further, joint planning can support offshore renewable energy development that is not only efficient from an energy perspective and national grid connectivity standpoint, but also minimises the negative impacts of new infrastructure on nature. By not having a regional cooperation framework for jointly tackling MSP, the Mediterranean region risks its ability to deliver on the European Green Deal.

As the entire Mediterranean Sea's water temperatures increase with climate change, countries must combine their efforts and cooperate to build a climate refugia plan (considering biological productivity, sea temperature and endemic species variations, among others) that provides greater protection to the region. MSP that is reinforced by strong cross-border cooperation represents the best opportunity to bolster the Mediterranean's resilience in the face of climate change.



# WAY FORWARD

The Mediterranean Sea is simultaneously one of our planet's most biodiverse marine ecosystems and facing unprecedented dangers due to climate change, unsustainable human activities and lack of political will to implement an ecosystem-based approach to ocean planning. While the complexity of social, economic and environmental systems may be behind the delays to implement MSP in many Member States, progress to bring national plans forward is urgently required to keep the EU on track to meet its climate and biodiversity targets while safeguarding the wellbeing and livelihoods of those living in the region.

It is important to acknowledge that WWF's assessment is incomplete, as four Member States had not finalised (indeed some hadn't even started) their MSP processes at the time of analysis. **If the unfinished plans (four out of eight) had been counted as zeros in the analysis, the regional average score for an ecosystem-based approach to Maritime Spatial Planning would plummet from 45% to 22%.** It is especially noteworthy that, apart from Slovenia and Malta, all Member States in the Central and Eastern

Mediterranean remain without a national plan despite their heavy reliance on marine-related tourism. Their failure to prioritise environmental conservation and management actions (both safeguarding the natural capital on which their economies depend) over exploitative industries (such as oil and gas) in public policies is deeply concerning in light of the environmental and climate pressures afflicting these waters.

The continued absence of an ecosystem-based approach to maritime strategies across the Mediterranean Sea will make it increasingly difficult for the EU and its neighbours to overcome the impacts of climate change, which are not only diminishing the productivity of fisheries in the region but also permanently altering coastlines due to erosion and sea level rise. To support a sustainable blue economy and safeguard the wellbeing of Mediterranean nature and people, all eight Member States must take swift action to dramatically improve their national plans in the case where they are already in place, and to complete the planning process with robust and ambitious measures where plans are still missing.



## WWF calls on the Mediterranean Member States to

- Immediately commence (where the MSP process has yet to begin) and promote meaningful and effective stakeholder engagement, while ensuring the transparency and monitoring of planning for better governance of the adopted maritime strategies.
- Establish a well-managed and well-connected network of Marine Protected Areas as part of national maritime spatial plans; the network must cover at least 30% of national marine and coastal areas by 2030 in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy, including areas for restoration of vulnerable or valuable ecosystems, and take into account climate refugia which should be aligned with EU's 10% strict protection target.
- Designate, in a participatory way, areas for offshore renewable energy development and halt fossil fuel extraction in line with REPowerEU targets; scaling of offshore renewables must be done with due consideration for both short and long-term impacts on nature, avoiding ecologically-sensitive areas.
- Map, monitor and protect blue carbon ecosystems, including seafloor habitats, to ensure the integrity and long-term benefits of carbon sequestration are maintained as nature-based solutions against climate change.
- Engage in constructive dialogue with the fishing sector and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, and involve it in the decision-making process to ensure marine biodiversity is preserved, socio-economic benefits derived from the sector are maintained, overfishing is drastically reduced, and any potential risks of increased fishing effort due to fishing ground access restrictions are adequately assessed.
- Establish a regional sub-group or technical working group – ideally under the framework of a regional governance institution such as the Union for the Mediterranean – with relevant representatives from all Mediterranean countries, civil society and regional experts to co-define solutions for cross boundary planning issues both within and outside of the EU.
- Upload national maritime spatial plans to the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet), which is a centralised gateway of marine data that allows users to access and download maps in a harmonised format, which is essential for supporting a regional approach to planning.



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

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