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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL

outlining the progress made in implementing Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning

Second report

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1. INTRODUCTION

This is the European Commission's second report to the European Parliament and the Council as required under Article 14(2) of Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (the 'MSP Directive'). It gives an overview of progress made by the Member States in implementing the MSP Directive since 2022[1], when the first Commission report was published. In line with the reporting obligations under Article 14(2), it provides a factual and analytical overview of progress.

The report focuses on:

- progress made by the Member States in terms of adopting, reviewing and updating their maritime spatial plans (MSPs);
- implementation of the MSP Directive's key planning requirements, including the ecosystem-based approach, consideration of environmental, economic, social and safety aspects, land–sea interactions, coherence with other policies, stakeholder involvement, use of data, and cooperation within the EU and with third countries;
- emerging patterns, as well as differences between and challenges common to the Member States, as maritime spatial planning moves from the initial adoption phase to subsequent planning cycles.

The Commission's analysis shows that MSP directive implementation is reaching maturity across the EU. Currently, 20 of the 22 coastal Member States have adopted at least one MSP, with many already reviewing, revising or making targeted updates to their plans. Several Member States are entering their second or third planning cycle, indicating a shift from initial MSP preparation to routine implementation, monitoring and adaptive revision.

This report is primarily based on the MSPs and related documentation submitted by Member States, information available through the European Maritime Spatial Planning Platform, and evidence gathered through a supporting study[2] produced for the Commission, an implementation dialogue[3], Commission documents[4], as well as projects and other sources[5]. Together, they provide the analytical basis for the assessment presented here.

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1 COM/2022/185 final Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council outlining the progress made in implementing Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning

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

3 Implementation dialogue on the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive with Commissioner Costas Kadis - Oceans and fisheries.

4 Evaluation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, SWD(2025) 50.

5 For example, see Zaucha et al. 'Implementing the EU MSP Directive: Current status and lessons learned in 22 EU Member States', *Marine Policy*, 2025.

2. IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS SINCE LAST REPORT

2.1. Adoption and review of the MSPs

Article 15(3) of the MSP Directive requires Member States to establish MSPs by 31 March 2021 and to notify the Commission and the Member States concerned within three months of the MSP being published (Article 14(1)).

This section summarises progress made in implementing the MSPs since the previous Commission report, covering the period from 3 May 2022 to 1 January 2026.

Despite the 31 March 2021 deadline set in the MSP Directive, timelines and approaches to MSP adoption and revision continue to vary across the EU. As of the evidence-gathering cut-off date, **20 of the 22 coastal Member States** have adopted their MSPs, with adoption having accelerated significantly since 2022. Eight Member States adopted their plans between 2022 and 2024, while Portugal and Denmark completed adoption and initial updates in the same period[6]. To ensure implementation of the MSP Directive, the Commission initiated eight infringement cases[7] between 2021 and 2023, six of which were closed after the Member States in question successfully adopted their MSPs. **Greece and Croatia**[8] are yet to adopt a plan covering all marine waters, although work on this is ongoing in both Member States. The Commission is working closely with both Member States to assist them in adopting their MSPs as quickly as possible.

Delays in meeting the 2021 deadline mainly stemmed from lengthy procedures (e.g. environmental assessments and coordination between institutions), complex governance, COVID-related disruptions, and political or geopolitical factors. In some cases, delays were largely administrative, with adoption taking place shortly after the deadline.

Most 'early adopters' are now engaged in review or revision cycles. Several Member States have already launched full reviews (e.g. Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, France, Netherlands, Sweden), while others have completed interim evaluations or have scheduled upcoming reviews (e.g. Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland).

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6 Bulgaria (2023), Denmark (2023), Estonia (2022), Spain (2023), France (2022), Italy (2024), Cyprus (2023), Portugal (Azores subdivision, 2024), Romania (2023) and Sweden (2022).

7 Between 2021 and 2023, infringement cases were launched against Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy Cyprus, Portugal and Romania owing to their failure to establish MSPs and submit them to the Commission as required under the MSP Directive. In 2023, the cases against Bulgaria (INFR(2022)2025) and Spain (INFR(2022)2027) were closed. The cases against Cyprus (INFR(2021)2227), Portugal (INFR(2023)2042) and Romania (INFR(2021)2224) were closed in 2024. The case against Italy (INFR(2021)2223) was withdrawn from the Court in December 2024. Only the cases against Croatia (INFR(2021)2225) and Greece (INFR(2021)2226) remain open.

8 As regards Greece, on 27 February 2025, the Court of Justice of the European Union delivered its judgment in the case C-128/24 (*European Commission v Hellenic Republic*), finding that Greece had failed to fulfil its obligations under the MSP Directive. Greece approved a national spatial strategy for the marine space in April 2025, including maps of marine areas. A timeline has been agreed for the adoption of the full Plan, which is still pending.

Overall, there has been a shift from initial adoption to targeted updates, to the first full review cycles. At the same time, the two remaining Member States yet to adopt an MSP are continuing to work towards this.

Table 1: Current status of MSP adoption and revision processes for the 22 coastal Member States[9]

Member State	Adoption date of current plan	Previous plans	Revision processes and supplementary allocation plans
Belgium	May 2019	First MSP adopted: March 2014	Preparation of Belgium's 3rd MSP (2026-2032) ongoing - Revision of MSP started in 2023 and workshop was followed by public consultation. New plan to be adopted in 2026.
Bulgaria	May 2023	/	Feasibility study carried out in 2023 and 2024. Formal update is scheduled for completion by the end of 2027.
Croatia	Ongoing process	/	/
Cyprus	December 2023	/	Not currently being reviewed.
Denmark	2023[10]	/	Amended in 2024 (a formal supplement to the MSP), primarily to integrate new offshore energy and biodiversity targets, and in 2025 - an amendment to the Act on maritime spatial planning introducing a scheme for temporary test and research projects outside designated areas.
Estonia	May 2022	/	Monitoring and annual action plan review ongoing. Formal review process scheduled for 2026-2027 under the five-year review cycle required under national law.
Finland	December 2020	/	Revision started Jan/Feb 2024; plan to be updated/adopted by 2027.
France	Second part (strategic documents): November 2025	First part: 2019 Second part: May 2022 /	After the national strategy was approved in June 2024, France recently revised the strategic part of its MSPs to designate new areas, in particular for offshore wind farms and "strict" protection areas, and to make other related amendments.
Germany	September 2021	First MSP plan adopted: 2009	A site development plan outlining a maritime sector strategy for offshore wind energy was published in 2025. Ongoing mid-term revision of German MSP to be finalised in 2026.
Greece	Ongoing process	/	/
Ireland	June 2021	/	South coast designated maritime area plan

[9] More detailed information as well as links to national plans can be found on Countries | The European Maritime Spatial Planning Platform.

[10] Denmark submitted its first Maritime Spatial Plan for public consultation for a period of six months in 2021. The draft plan was legally binding from the moment it was published for consultation. It was issued as an executive order in 2023.

Member State	Adoption date of current plan	Previous plans	Revision processes and supplementary allocation plans
			(DMAP) adopted in Oct 2024 (designates offshore renewable energy areas to help deliver 5 GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030).
Italy	September 2024	/	Not currently being reviewed.
Latvia	May 2019	/	Interim evaluation report adopted in October 2024. Review process due to start in autumn 2025.
Lithuania	September 2021	First MSP adopted: June 2015	Plan due to be reviewed in 2030. A 2024 thematic plan and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) outlined offshore wind farm locations and links to shore.
Malta	July 2015	/	Initial internal review undertaken. Continued implementation ongoing while awaiting governmental direction on next steps.
Netherlands	March 2022	First plan adopted: 2009[11] Second plan adopted: December 2015[12]	The partial revision of the North Sea Programme (2022-2027) is ongoing to address higher offshore renewable energy targets, among other topics. Draft partial revision submitted to Parliament on 22 April 2025; public consultation from 19 May 2025; finalisation expected in 2026.
Poland	April 2021 with a technical change in December 2022[13]		Interim evaluation published 9 May 2025; decision to update taken; ministry is seeking funding; wide-ranging update to start in 2026 (subject to budget availability) and expected to take 2.5-3 years.
Portugal	December 2019 (mainland and Madeira) and October 2024 (Azores)	/	Allocation plan for offshore renewable energy (PAER, 2025) automatically ties in with the *Plano de Situacão do Ordenamento do Espaço Maritimo Nacional* (PSOEM).
Romania	November 2023	/	Not currently being reviewed.
Spain	February 2023	/	Review launched in 2024; all five plans for each of the five Spanish marine subdivisions must be revised by the statutory deadline of 31 December 2027.
Slovenia	July 2021	/	Not currently being reviewed. Next formal revision expected in 2031 with preparatory work to begin in 2029.
Sweden	February 2022	/	Plans reviewed in order to, among other things, meet new Offshore renewable wind

11 The North Sea policy document covering 2009-2015.

12 The second spatial plan, the North Sea policy document covering 2016-2021, is an update to the 2009-2015 document.

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

Member State	Adoption date of current plan	Previous plans	Revision processes and supplementary allocation plans
			energy development targets and create marine protected areas – plan amendment proposals submitted to the government in January 2025.

2.2. Implementation of the requirements for maritime spatial plans laid down by the MSP Directive

The following sections provide an assessment of how Member States have implemented the minimum requirements set out in the MSP Directive. The analysis is structured around the relevant provisions of the Directive and examines the approaches taken in the national MSPs and the related implementation frameworks.

The MSP Directive establishes a flexible framework, allowing Member States a wide margin of discretion as to how they implement its requirements in line with their national constitutional arrangements, administrative structures, legal systems and specific maritime features. As a result, Member States have adopted various different planning models, governance arrangements and technical solutions to give effect to the Directive's provisions.

The comparative observations and references to differing levels or forms of implementation in the following sections are therefore descriptive and analytical in nature. They are intended to facilitate comparison, identify trends and highlight implementation patterns across the EU. Where different approaches have been chosen, there is no suggestion that this constitutes non-compliance or unsatisfactory implementation.

2.2.1. Article 5(1) – Application of the ecosystem-based approach

Generally speaking, the Member States have referred to applying an ecosystem-based approach (EBA) to maritime spatial planning, in line with Article 5(1) of the MSP Directive. In practice, however, the extent to which EBA has been applied and how consistently this has been done varies significantly between countries and depends on different constitutional, administrative and regulatory set-ups. EBA is widely referenced as a guiding principle in MSP objectives and is implemented mostly through accompanying environmental assessment procedures.

Across the EU, the strategic environmental assessment[14] (SEA) has emerged as the primary means of giving effect to the ecosystem-based approach. Environmental baselines, pressure analyses, alternatives assessment and mitigation measures are typically structured around ecological components and human pressures, often drawing on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive[15] (MSFD) descriptors and monitoring frameworks. In many cases, the SEA –

[14] In accordance with Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.

[15] Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)

together with appropriate assessment[16] where relevant – is the main source of evidence that ecosystem interactions, cumulative pressures and environmental limits have been considered at strategic level.

Most MSPs therefore apply EBA procedurally, rather than through explicit ecosystem-based zoning rules or thresholds included in the written description of the plan. The extent to which EBA influences spatial decisions varies considerably. In a number of Member States, SEA findings have demonstrably informed zoning choices, safeguards, conditions or exclusions for specific uses (notably offshore energy, extraction and navigation). In others, EBA considerations remain at a more general level, with environmental constraints expected to be addressed primarily at the project authorisation stage through subsequent environmental impact assessments.

Member States generally anchor EBA implementation in existing EU environmental frameworks, in particular the MSFD, Natura 2000 legislation and national marine monitoring systems. Alignment with good environmental status (GES) objectives is frequently cited, but only some plans translate this alignment into structured, descriptor-based assessment frameworks or cumulative impact analyses that directly steer planning choices[17]. Elsewhere, references to ecosystem functioning and resilience are largely narrative. The application of EBA also reflects differences in governance models. Centralised systems tend to rely on national-level environmental assessments to incorporate ecosystem considerations. Meanwhile, multi-level or federal systems distribute EBA implementation across national and sub-national processes, sometimes resulting in uneven application across sea basins. Sea-basin or façade-based planning approaches have helped some Member States tailor ecosystem assessments to regional ecological conditions, supporting a more place-based application of EBA.

Examples of good practice[18]:

- Ireland applied an objectives-led SEA that tested every NMPF (National marine planning framework) policy against strategic environmental objectives covering all aspects of the SEA Directive (biodiversity, human health, water, climate, landscape, cultural heritage, etc.). The SEA provides evidence of a full screening/scoping trail, iterative testing using SEA objectives, and integrated Natura impact statement (NIS) and appropriate assessment (AA). The SEA Statement explains how consultation and

[16] In accordance with Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (this is the codified version of the original Directive 79/409/EEC) and Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

[17] This observation is supported by the Commission's evaluation of MSFD implementation. The final report (COM(2020)259) notes that progress on setting threshold values for determining GES has been slow and that there is considerable variation in terms of how Member States define and determine GES across descriptors, indicating that descriptor setting remains incomplete and uneven as a basis for assessment.

[18] Refer to the supporting study for further national examples. A strong example of a multi-country approach to SEA integration is the "Strategic ecosystem-based planning for sustainable future of the Baltic Sea" project (SEABAS) currently being funded by the Interreg Baltic Sea Programme.

assessment changed the NMPF. This is an example where SEA clearly influenced the plan's content.

- Denmark's 2023 SEA assesses each MSP amendment against all 11 MSFD descriptors, using descriptor-specific pressure tables to examine how removing aquaculture and extraction areas or expanding offshore renewable energy and CO_2-storage zones affects GES. This structured approach strengthens the direct link between pressure analysis, GES objectives and final zoning decisions.
- Estonia's SEA combines MSFD pressure analysis with cumulative-impact modelling (PlanWise4Blue)[19]. Model outputs showing high risks to birds and bats - especially from clustered wind-farm development in the Gulf of Riga - led to the relocation of wind-energy areas and the introduction of targeted mitigation for mining, aquaculture and defence activities.

Overall, the latest revisions to MSPs illustrate that clear progress has been made in terms of implementing Article 5(1), with more systematic use of environmental data, cumulative pressure analysis and links to MSFD objectives. At the same time, the practical application of the ecosystem-based approach remains uneven between countries. This reflects, in part, differing national interpretations of the concept and the absence of a more operational framework at EU level. While ecosystem-based considerations are widely addressed through SEA and related procedures, there is scope in future planning cycles to more systematically translate these analyses into clearly articulated spatial provisions, decision-making criteria and monitoring arrangements within the MSPs themselves.

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

Overall, Member States have systematically addressed environmental, economic, social and safety aspects when preparing and implementing MSPs, in line with Article 6(2)(b) of the MSP Directive. Environmental considerations have generally been given the most attention and have been incorporated consistently in MSPs, illustrating strong links with SEA processes and alignment with obligations under EU environmental legislation. Economic aspects have primarily been addressed through the spatial organisation of key maritime sectors, notably offshore renewable energy, maritime transport, ports and other blue economy activities (such as aquaculture). Meanwhile, social considerations have been incorporated more unevenly, often through stakeholder consultation (for example with the fisheries sector) and via high-level planning objectives rather than through dedicated analytical frameworks. Safety aspects, particularly maritime safety and defence-related constraints, have commonly been reflected in spatial designations, routing measures and exclusion or restriction zones.

Examples[20] of safety considerations in MSPs:

Safety requirements are embedded in several MSPs. Ireland requires project-level navigation and search-and-rescue risk assessments (using tools such as the toolbox developed by the International Organization for Marine Aids to Navigation (IALA)), aligned with national emergency and defence planning. France's façade plans include dedicated risk-analysis

[19] PlanWise4Blue | The European Maritime Spatial Planning Platform.

[20] *Please refer to the supporting study for further examples.*

sections and action sheets on maritime surveillance and response capacity. Sweden promotes sea traffic management systems - expected to reduce collisions and groundings by over 60% - and identifies port and navigation-channel upgrades needed to address safety gaps. These examples show how maritime spatial planning can enhance maritime safety through structured assessment and coordination with specialised authorities.

Recent developments indicate that there has been a gradual shift away from a descriptive approach to a more structured consideration of the trade-offs between objectives. In several Member States, MSP revisions have increasingly sought to balance the desire to accelerate offshore energy deployment with the need to protect biodiversity, allow fisheries to coexist with other sectors and ensure navigational safety. Safety considerations are gaining prominence in the light of growing competition for sea space and the need to protect critical infrastructure, while economic and environmental objectives are now more explicitly set out at MSP level than they were in the first planning cycle.

Despite this progress, differences persist in terms of the scope of socio-economic and safety analyses and the extent to which they are put into practice. Environmental aspects have more established methodologies and better data availability, whereas social impacts and cumulative socio-economic effects are often addressed qualitatively. Overall, maritime spatial planning is increasingly used as a strategic framework to reconcile environmental, economic, social and safety considerations, though methodologies are expected to be developed further as Member States enter subsequent planning cycles.

2.2.3. Promote coherence

Since the first implementation cycle, Member States have progressively stepped up their efforts to promote coherence between maritime spatial planning and related policies, strategies and planning processes, as required under Article 6(2)(c) of the MSP Directive. All coastal Member States now explicitly recognise maritime spatial planning as a coordinating framework for aligning environmental, sectoral and spatial objectives in the marine environment, even if the extent to which different policies are consistent varies from country to country.

The most consistent approach to achieving this objective can be seen in marine environmental policies[21], which have been aligned with objectives and evidence required under the MSFD and the Birds[22] and Habitats[23] Directives. In many cases, environmental requirements are reflected in spatial designations, planning conditions or safeguarding provisions, supported by strategic environmental assessment processes. In other Member States, consistency is approached more through high-level references and procedural coordination, with concrete policy integration addressed at later stages or on a case-by-case basis.

[21] See also MSFD Evaluation (SWD(2025) 50), Part 1 – Coherence chapter.

[22] Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (codified version)

[23] Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

Most Member States explicitly reference linkages with the MSFD and Water Framework Directive[24] (WFD), often by aligning environmental objectives and spatial designations. In some cases, the same authorities oversee the implementation of both the MSP Directive and the MSFD, which facilitates the exchange of data and expertise.

Example of good practice[25]: France uses a fully integrated instrument at façade level (*Documents Stratégiques de Façade*, DSF), which simultaneously serves as the MSP and the strategic framework for implementing the MSFD. Environmental obligations (Natura 2000 network, MSFD objectives, WFD obligations) are incorporated into the DSFs' use maps and façade-specific action plan (comprising thematic action sheets) ensuring that spatial guidance and management measures are brought together in one single planning document.

Beyond environmental policy, maritime spatial planning is now more robustly used to improve coordination with energy, maritime transport, port development and coastal-planning frameworks. Recent plan revisions and targeted updates show a trend towards developing a clearer understanding of how maritime spatial planning interacts with national sectoral strategies, particularly where there are significant spatial implications. Differences in governance structures, planning cycles and legal mandates continue to influence alignment, but maritime spatial planning is increasingly recognised as a stable reference framework for managing these interactions.

In certain cases, and especially in crowded areas, coherent planning also requires thought to be given to the joint use of space by different stakeholders. Synergies and co-location opportunities are increasingly being considered in several Member States, including through emerging approaches to multi-use areas, typically involving offshore renewables and aquaculture, or combining energy infrastructure and biodiversity objectives. While mechanisms to assess interactions exist in all Member States, such approaches remain largely exploratory and rely on project-based experimentation rather than formal planning procedures. A true 'multi-use-by-design' approach would also require strong commitment from and early involvement of the stakeholders concerned.

Overall, experience from implementing maritime spatial planning points to a gradual move away from formal consistency checks towards more substantive coordination. While the Member States have differing approaches, there is a common trend towards embedding coherence in routine governance arrangements, supported by inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, shared data systems and iterative plan reviews. This trend is expected to continue as maritime spatial planning matures and as Member States enter subsequent planning cycles.

2.2.4. Land-sea interactions

All Member States have addressed land–sea interactions in their maritime spatial planning frameworks, as required by Articles 4(2) and 6(2)(a) of the MSP Directive. However, the depth, scope and intensity of the land–sea interactions vary significantly between countries, reflecting differences in constitutional arrangements, administrative powers and regulatory traditions,

[24] Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy

[25] Refer to the supporting study for further examples.

particularly regarding the division of responsibilities between marine and terrestrial planning authorities.

Most Member States treat land–sea interactions as a cross-cutting consideration instead of addressing them through a fully integrated planning approach. MSPs commonly identify key interfaces such as ports and shipping access, energy and grid connections, coastal protection, environmental pressures originating on land, and ecological connectivity along the coastline. SEA processes frequently supported the integration of these interfaces by highlighting the cumulative effects of marine and coastal policies and the need for consistency between them.

More advanced approaches have been observed where institutional arrangements enable close coordination between maritime and terrestrial planning systems. In these cases, MSPs provide clearer guidance on aligning offshore uses with onshore infrastructure, coastal development frameworks and environmental management objectives. Several Member States have given land–sea interactions greater consideration in recent updates to their MSPs, notably in response to the increased deployment of offshore renewable energy, port development and climate adaptation needs.

By contrast, in Member States with more fragmented governance structures or strong separation between terrestrial and marine planning competences (where MSPs cover only the exclusive economic zone), land–sea interactions were often addressed through overarching references, with implementation largely left to project-level decision-making and sectoral permitting processes.

2.2.5. Stakeholder involvement and public participation

All Member States have put in place arrangements to ensure stakeholder involvement and public participation in maritime spatial planning, in line with Articles 6(2)(d) and 9 of the MSP Directive. Public participation is universally anchored in statutory planning and environmental assessment procedures, ensuring minimum and legally compliant opportunities for consultation. Since maritime spatial planning involves significant environmental considerations and impacts, Member States must apply the principles of the Public Participation Directive[26] when involving stakeholders and the public in the maritime spatial planning process, notably when carrying out the strategic environmental assessment.

Beyond these baseline requirements, approaches to stakeholder engagement vary significantly across national contexts, reflecting differences in constitutional structures, administrative traditions, planning cultures and regulatory frameworks.

Stakeholder involvement in the Member States has generally evolved from a predominantly formal consultation exercise into a more structured and, in some cases, continuous engagement model. The first generation of MSPs relied largely on public consultations conducted during the preparatory phase of the MSP and the strategic environmental assessment process. More recent plans and ongoing reviews have increasingly complemented public consultations with

[26] Directive 2003/35/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 providing for public participation in respect of the drawing up of certain plans and programmes relating to the environment and amending with regard to public participation and access to justice Council Directives 85/337/EEC and 96/61/EC.

targeted sectoral consultations, thematic workshops, bilateral exchanges and digital tools, such as interactive mapping platforms[27].

There is a clear trend towards strengthening cross-sectoral engagement, particularly among authorities and stakeholders in the fields of energy, maritime transport, environment, fisheries and coastal development. In several Member States, permanent or semi-permanent advisory or coordination bodies, as well as interministerial committees, have been established to support implementation and follow-up, allowing stakeholder dialogue to extend beyond the adoption phase and into monitoring and review. Where such arrangements exist, they contribute to greater transparency, predictability and shared ownership of MSP outcomes.

Examples of good practice:

- Cyprus illustrates a well-designed and transparent consultation process. It comprises two nationwide consultation phases which combine city-by-city presentations with an online platform for written submissions and makes all draft maps publicly accessible. Importantly, input led to tangible changes to the MSP. For example, aquaculture units were relocated to avoid conflicts with energy infrastructure, dedicated cable-landing zones were introduced to reduce navigational risks, and multi-use areas were formalised to manage coexistence between activities such as energy, transport, tourism, cultural heritage and defence. A consolidated comments-and-responses report documented how feedback shaped the final plan, ensuring full traceability.
- In the Netherlands, fisheries stakeholders are involved in maritime spatial planning through a structured and continuous engagement process, operated in particular when the North Sea MSP was revised linked to offshore renewable energy expansion. Beyond statutory public consultations, fisheries organisations such as VisNed (Dutch fisheries association) and POV (Dutch fisheries producer organisation) participate in dedicated sectoral dialogue and targeted exchanges. This process addresses fisheries concerns, such as access to fishing grounds, safety, and coexistence, as well as environmental and energy objectives, support for transparency and informed trade-offs. Challenges remain, including spatial conflicts, safety risks, and data gaps. Innovative solutions, such as dynamic zoning and collaborative research (e.g. Offshore Wind Ecological Programme (Wozep)), are being explored to balance competing interests. The Dutch approach aligns with the MSP Directive and involves international cooperation with neighbouring North Sea countries.

At the same time, the depth, continuity and balance of stakeholder involvement remain uneven. While institutional stakeholders and well-organised sectoral actors – particularly large-scale maritime industries – are generally well integrated into planning processes, the inclusion of local communities, small-scale fisheries, aquaculture operators, smaller economic actors and civil society organisations remains far more variable and often limited to ad hoc consultations, rather than being embedded in a systematic and sustained way throughout the planning cycle. Capacity constraints of administrations and stakeholders, differing mandates across levels of

[27] European Commission study on stakeholder involvement in MSP, 2023 – https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/media/document/15560.

government and the complexity of MSP processes remain barriers to more consistent and inclusive engagement in some Member States.

2.2.6. Use of best available data and data sharing

Maritime spatial planning in the Member States is underpinned by broad and increasingly structured use of data, in line with Articles 6(2)(e) and 10 of the MSP Directive. All MSPs draw on a combination of existing environmental, socio-economic and sectoral datasets and rely, in particular, on data generated under EU legislation, notably the MSFD, the Birds and Habitats Directives, and relevant sectoral frameworks, complemented by sea basin-level or EU-level sources such as EMODnet, the Copernicus Marine Service and the European Atlas of the Seas.

In most cases, authorities organise data use through dedicated national processes or platforms that consolidate input from different competent authorities and monitoring systems.

The strategic environmental assessment (SEA) commonly serves as the primary mechanism for organising and validating environmental data which is then integrated into MSPs. Environmental baselines, pressure analyses and cumulative impact assessments typically rely on MSFD monitoring data, Natura 2000 inventories, national seabed mapping, fisheries and shipping datasets, and sector-specific information (e.g. offshore energy, ports, cables). Several Member States specifically draw on MSFD descriptors, indicators and assessment cycles which serve as the environmental backbone for how data is used for their MSPs, while others draw on these more indirectly, to serve as contextual evidence to assist in the development of MSPs and permitting decisions.

Many Member States have invested in national or regional marine data infrastructure to support maritime spatial planning. Example of such infrastructure include marine geoportals, shared GIS platforms and decision-support tools that allow spatial overlay of uses, constraints and environmental sensitivities. In some cases, these systems are designed to support not only the preparation of MSPs but also SEAs, Appropriate Assessments and subsequent project-level authorisations, improving consistency across planning and licensing stages.

At the same time, significant variation in data comparability and in the operational use of data can be seen between Member States, reflecting differences in data availability and technical capacity. In several cases, data limitations are explicitly acknowledged in MSPs or SEAs, notably in relation to ecosystem services, cumulative pressures, climate change impacts and socio-economic interactions. Where data gaps exist, MSPs commonly apply precautionary approaches, defer detailed analysis to subsequent planning cycles, or rely on project-level assessments to refine evidence.

Examples of good practice:

- Spain uses the INFOMAR platform to harmonise datasets and permitting criteria for maritime spatial planning, MSFD and coastal-management authorities, facilitating operational alignment across policy domains.

- Baltic and North Sea Member States in particular make systematic use of regional datasets and tools developed under HELCOM–VASAB, OSPAR and EU-funded maritime spatial planning projects.

2.2.7. Cooperation between Member States and at sea basin level

Cooperation between Member States in maritime spatial planning has been further strengthened, in line with Articles 6(2)(f) and 11 of the MSP Directive. Cooperation is a standard feature of maritime spatial planning processes, particularly in shared sea basins, and is embedded through a combination of formal procedures, regional frameworks and project-based collaboration. However, the degree and type of cooperation, and its practical influence on planning outcomes, vary significantly between sea basins and countries.

Most Member States have mechanisms in place to consult, coordinate and exchange information with neighbouring countries. Typically, these take the form of SEA and MSP consultations, bilateral meetings and participation in regional sea-basin structures. Cross-border consultations under the SEA framework remain the most systematic and legally robust channel for cooperation, ensuring early notification, exchange of documentation, and consideration of transboundary environmental effects. In several cases, these processes have helped to better align evidence bases, environmental assessments and planning assumptions between countries.

Beyond formal consultations, cooperation is frequently organised through existing regional governance frameworks, such as the HELCOM–VASAB MSP working group in the Baltic Sea, OSPAR-related structures and the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative in the north-east Atlantic, as well as through coordinated implementation of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management protocol of the Barcelona Convention. These frameworks provide common principles, guidance and forums for dialogue which, in turn, help to align spatial planning approaches, particularly on environmental objectives, shipping and offshore energy. In addition, EU-funded projects and platforms play a complementary role by facilitating joint studies, shared methodologies and pilot applications, especially with regard to cumulative impact assessments, ecosystem-based approaches and cross-border data use[28].

Example of good practice:

The Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) - Launched in 2023 by the Netherlands and France, the GNSBI brings together nine countries bordering the Greater North Sea (BE, DK, FR, DE, IE, NL, NO, SE, UK). Its aim is to improve the coherence of maritime spatial planning and marine management throughout the basin by aligning priorities in areas such as offshore energy, fisheries/aquaculture, shipping and nature conservation, and by supporting an ecosystem-based, cross-border approach for optimising how shared waters are used. Working alongside existing forums such as the North Seas Energy Cooperation

[28] The EU has provided significant financial support to the development of multi-country cooperation in maritime spatial planning over the years. For example, the Interreg Baltic Sea programme has been supporting cooperation projects on the topic for over 20 years. Other Interreg programmes have also provided funding support, including the Interreg South Baltic programme (eg. SEAPLANSPACE project,) and the Interreg North Sea programme (eg. NORSAIC project,).

(NSEC) and the Oslo and Paris Conventions for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), it strengthens coordination between ministers, authorities and stakeholders and promotes data and knowledge sharing. Six voluntary technical workstreams (governance, multi-use/co-use, nature conservation, cumulative impacts, long-term fisheries perspectives and knowledge sharing) provide a structured framework to address cumulative pressures and maintain ecological limits.

In practice, cooperation between Member States and at sea-basin level continues to have a varying impact on specific spatial planning decisions. While some Member States have been seen to align themselves on zoning choices, corridors or environmental safeguards, in many cases cooperation mainly serves to support mutual awareness and information exchange rather than delivering joint or coordinated planning outcomes. Differences in planning cycles, the legal status of MSPs, administrative powers and national priorities remain barriers to deeper integration.

2.2.8. Cooperation with third countries

Most Member States cooperate with third countries, especially where there are compelling reasons to do so, such as shared sea basins, migratory ecosystems or cross-border maritime activities. In practice, such cooperation is pursued mainly through existing structures such as regional sea conventions, international organisations and EU-projects[29] rather than through formal bilateral maritime spatial planning agreements. Member States which share a maritime border with non-EU countries in the Baltic Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and north-east Atlantic report more systematic bilateral engagement. In some sea basins, geopolitical developments have affected the continuity and scope of regional and bilateral cooperation.

Cooperation with third countries was found to be most developed at the level of strategy formulation and information exchange. Member States commonly participate in regional platforms and technical forums for the purposes of sharing data, aligning environmental objectives and discussing sectoral developments, particularly in relation to environmental protection, shipping safety, fisheries and aquaculture and emerging uses such as offshore renewable energy. These interactions help to raise awareness and improve mutual understanding but only rarely result in coordinated or jointly-agreed spatial planning solutions. In several cases, EU-funded projects or regional initiatives with a defined timeframe were the reason for cooperation, resulting in fragmented outcomes or an end to cooperation once project funding ceased.

Evidence suggests that third-country cooperation is more effective when embedded in long-standing regional structures and when linked to environmental obligations under international conventions. However, systematic mechanisms to translate such cooperation into concrete maritime spatial planning provisions or coordinated spatial planning measures remain limited.

[29] Several ongoing EU-funded projects on MSP involve non-EU countries (e.g. MEDIGREEN, NESBp). Interreg programmes, with their involvement of non-Member States on a equal basis as Member States, also offer a particular possibility to develop maritime spatial planning cooperation with third countries, and there are multiple examples of such projects in the Interreg Black Sea programme, the Interreg ADRION programme (covering the Adriatic and Ionian seas) and in the Mediterranean.

Overall, progress has been made in maintaining dialogue and sharing information. However, a continuing challenge for future planning cycles lies in the ability of Member States to more deeply and consistently integrate third-country considerations into the implementation of maritime spatial planning.

2.3. Implementation challenges

Experience from implementing maritime spatial planning gathered since the previous reporting cycle has confirmed that maritime spatial planning is now a central and well-established element of EU maritime governance. It increasingly functions as a reference framework for organising different uses of marine space and supporting policy coordination at national and sea-basin level. At the same time, there are a number of areas where the role of maritime spatial planning could be further strengthened to respond to evolving policy objectives and growing demands on marine space.

The first challenge relates to cross-sectoral coordination across different levels of government. Maritime spatial planning already provides a common spatial framework in which environmental, economic and social objectives are considered. However, increasing interactions between policies on energy, the environment, fisheries, aquaculture, transport, security and climate adaptation mean there are growing expectations for maritime spatial planning to facilitate coherence not only between sectors, but also between national, regional and local authorities. In many Member States, responsibility for the implementation of maritime spatial planning is distributed across levels of government, adding complexity to coordination processes. While coordination mechanisms are in place in most cases, their effectiveness varies, and implementation experience suggests scope to further strengthen the role of maritime spatial planning as a stable coordinating pillar linking sectoral policies, strategies, targets and implementation instruments across levels of government. In addition, growing demand for space increases the need for sectors to work in overlapping or adjacent areas and thus for planning to take a ‘multi-use by design’ approach from the outset and in close collaboration with stakeholders.

Another challenge concerns the regional and sea-basin dimension of maritime spatial planning. Cooperation at sea-basin level has become a standard feature of maritime spatial planning processes, supported by regional conventions, EU-funded projects and established cooperation platforms. Nevertheless, geopolitical considerations, differences in planning cycles, national mandates and implementation approaches can potentially limit the extent to which regional objectives are systematically reflected in spatial outcomes. Strengthening regional approaches could help to achieve greater consistency in the way shared pressures, cumulative impacts and transboundary infrastructure needs are addressed, while respecting national competences.

An additional challenge relates to the importance of making instruments more coherent with environmental policies, in particular with the MSFD and related nature conservation and restoration requirements and frameworks, as well as with climate change adaptation objectives. Maritime spatial planning processes are generally well aligned with these policies from a procedural perspective, notably through SEAs and data sharing. However, with policy objectives increasingly focusing on the condition, resilience and restoration of ecosystems as well as their adaptation to climate change, there is scope to further clarify maritime spatial planning to ensure it supports the translation of these objectives into spatial planning choices. Ways of clarifying maritime spatial planning include giving greater consideration to land–sea

interactions, coastal vulnerability, and the spatial implications of climate-driven changes, and maintaining support for the sustainable development of blue economy sectors.

Another emerging challenge relates to the organisation and use of data and knowledge. Significant progress has been made in developing marine data infrastructure and decision-support tools for maritime spatial planning, often building on EU-level initiatives and regional cooperation. As maritime spatial planning evolves, there is increasing interest in strengthening links with ocean observation and monitoring systems, in order to support adaptive planning, improve understanding of cumulative effects and enhance the evidence base for decision-making across policy domains.

Finally, the growing number of EU initiatives concerning marine space suggests a need for greater coherence and simplification across the policy landscape. Maritime spatial planning is increasingly expected to operate at the interface between multiple sectors, strategies, plans and reporting requirements. While this reflects its potential as an integrating force, it also underscores how important it is for maritime spatial planning to streamline, rather than add to, existing governance complexity. Further alignment of objectives, timelines and information flows across policies could enhance the effectiveness of maritime spatial planning as a core planning and coordination instrument.

Overall, the challenges set out above suggest opportunities to build on the solid foundations laid by the MSP Directive. Experience from successive planning cycles provides a solid basis for considering how maritime spatial planning could be further strengthened as a central pillar of EU ocean governance, including in the context of the forthcoming review of the MSP Directive and the development of the future Ocean Act, as announced in the Ocean Pact adopted in June 2025[30].

3. THE WAY FORWARD

Since the adoption of the MSP Directive, the policy and legal framework governing EU marine waters has evolved substantially. Maritime spatial planning now operates in a context in which the pace of offshore renewable energy deployment is increasing, environmental protection and restoration objectives are being strengthened, security and resilience considerations are becoming more central, and there is a growing expectation for integrated ocean governance. These developments emphasise the strategic relevance of maritime spatial planning as a key coordinating instrument, while also exposing its limitations both in terms of its design and implementation.

Maritime spatial planning is widely recognised as one of the few instruments capable of linking sectoral policies, environmental objectives and spatial decision-making across maritime domains. At the same time, experience from implementing maritime spatial planning has highlighted structural challenges. These include inconsistent interpretation of core concepts such as the ecosystem-based approach, variable treatment of land–sea interactions, uneven consideration of marine stakeholders, fragmented approaches to data and monitoring, and limited capacity to coordinate cross-border and third-country planning outcomes.

[30] COM(2025) 281; https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/european-ocean-pact_en.

In this context, a future Ocean Act has been announced as part of the European Ocean Pact which establishes a single EU framework to protect ocean health and sustainably develop the blue economy. The Ocean Act is intended as a flagship ocean governance initiative that will build on the revision of the MSP Directive. The aim of the Act will be to strengthen and modernise maritime spatial planning as a strategic tool that will serve the priorities of the Ocean Pact and their implementation, through increased cross-sectoral coordination at national level and through a better organised sea-basin approach. The findings of this implementation report will provide a timely evidence base to inform the review of Directive 2014/89/EU and the development of the future Ocean Act.

In conclusion, this report shows that maritime spatial planning in the EU has entered a new phase of maturity, while there are some persistent challenges. Many Member States are now in their second or third planning cycle and are increasingly focusing on reviewing and performing targeted updates of MSPs, and following up on their implementation. This opens up an opportunity to move towards more inclusive, holistic and target-oriented planning, with clearer decision-making rules, stronger links to monitoring and adaptive management, and improved coherence across policies and sea basins.