

Med OCEaN Recommendations

to ensure nature-friendly offshore wind and grid development with robust and timely Maritime Spatial Planning

The Mediterranean basin is recognised as a biodiversity hotspot, representing 4 to 18% of the world's marine biodiversity, with an estimated 30% of species endemic to this region¹. The sea basin is also severely impacted by human activities such as overexploitation of natural resources, various types of pollution, and climate change.

The European Union (EU) established a framework for Maritime Spatial Planning with the MSP Directive in 2014². According to this Directive, EU Member States must develop national Maritime Spatial Plans (MSPs) defining the possible uses of their respective marine space, following an ecosystem-based approach³. This Directive aims to keep the collective pressure of maritime activities within levels compatible with the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) of the sea⁴.

Offshore wind energy (OWE) will play a central role in decarbonising our economy, and ultimately help the EU meet its climate and biodiversity targets. Unleashing the full potential of OWE as a domestic clean energy source requires the allocation of adequate space for OWE and the electricity grid that supports it. A well designed and collaborative Maritime Spatial Planning process can support the identification of the most suitable areas for wind and grid infrastructure, while also securing space for nature to thrive. It can also reduce potential spatial conflicts, foster synergies between human activities at sea, and speed up OWE deployment.

Members of the recently launched Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature – Mediterranean basin ([Med OCEaN](#)) therefore strongly support an improved, robust, and timely Maritime Spatial Planning process. This will significantly contribute to accelerating OWE, as well as reducing investment risks and project delays. In this context, Med OCEaN Members, a coalition which includes stakeholders from Spain, Italy, France, and Portugal, recommend the following principles to be considered by EU Member States of the Mediterranean basin and adjacent Atlantic waters.

Submit and regularly update MSPs to reflect renewables and biodiversity targets in line with the updated National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). As laid out by the MSP Directive, Member States had to publish their Maritime Spatial Plans by 31 March 2021. While the majority of Mediterranean Member States have a plan in place, some of them have not yet submitted one. To keep the EU on track to meet its climate and biodiversity targets, it is crucial that Member States submit their plans and update them regularly based on their respective renewable energy targets and in consultation with all stakeholders involved.

Moreover, there are ongoing updates of the NECPs which EU Member States are due to conclude by June 2024. In these plans, Member States are requested to lay out their national climate and energy targets, along with a description of the corresponding policies and measures required to accomplish them. It is crucial to ensure that the renewable energy goals outlined in these updated NECPs are coherent and aligned with Maritime Spatial Plans. Achieving the EU and national targets requires appropriate allocation of space for the expected deployment of OWE and electricity grids within national MSPs. This is also highlighted in new obligations in the revised EU Renewables Energy Directive⁵.

¹ Mannino et al., 2017, [The Marine Biodiversity of the Mediterranean Sea in a Changing Climate](#)

² Directive 2014/89/EU, 2014, [MSP Directive](#)

³ Ansong, Gissi, & Calado, 2017, [An approach to ecosystem-based management in maritime spatial planning process](#)

⁴ Directive 2008/56/EC, 2008, [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#)

⁵ European Parliament and Council adopted the [revised RED](#) in October 2023.

Implement an ecosystem-based approach to MSP to support the achievement of Good Environmental Status of the seas. An ecosystem-based, integrated planning approach to MSP is key to meet the EU's 2030 Biodiversity Strategy commitments⁶, reach Good Environmental Status (GES), and for the alignment with the EU Habitats and Birds Directives as well as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. If applied correctly, MSP can enable such integrated planning, identify less sensitive environmental areas suitable for energy infrastructure deployment, and contribute to reconciling the often-conflicting interests and needs of all marine users.

Establish an ecologically coherent cross-border network of effectively managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). MSPs must allocate sufficient and well-defined space for nature conservation and restoration so that biodiversity can regenerate and thrive. Therefore, it is necessary to define clear conservation objectives and management plans for MPAs and integrate this in national MSPs. This will also help to clarify the challenges of co-location with human activities.

Collect marine data continuously to guide responsive and adaptive decision-making. MSPs are not a one-time effort, but rather iterative and circular processes which need to be adapted over time. Therefore, it is important to foresee regular reviews and apply adaptive management tools to continuously improve them. To ensure an effective, science-based evaluation and review of MSPs, it is of the utmost importance to have access to non-fragmented environmental data and to support nation-wide data collection initiatives. The centralised collection of long-term environmental data, gathered through coordinated networks and based on common protocols is a good approach.

Moreover, the continuous collection of data can help to identify and address the cumulative impacts of all activities at sea. The assessments of cumulative impacts must consider all types of possible interactions, not only between human activities and the environment but also between activities themselves.

Consider multi-use in offshore wind farms from the early planning stages. Due to scarcity of space in the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent Atlantic waters, it is vital that all Member States start testing and implementing multi-use within offshore wind farms.⁷ Two or more activities could take place alongside one another, depending on the potential marine activities in the local context, socio-economic and environmental impact assessments, and maritime safety risks. Multi-use of OWE can potentially optimise how we use space and mitigate the overall environmental impact of human activities.

Improve stakeholder participation in MSP. Stakeholders must be involved in all stages of the MSP process, which is essential to ensure dialogue, knowledge exchange, and, ultimately, successful implementation of the EU MSP Directive. Sufficient time and resources should be invested into planning context-specific stakeholder engagement activities. This enables social dialogue and trust, supports the decision-making process, and avoids subsequent delays to MSP implementation.

Enable cross-border collaboration. In the frame of the MSP Directive, the European Commission and Member States should facilitate and implement regional multi-stakeholder collaborations, addressing the environmental impacts of OWE and other marine-related activities. This can be done by enabling data sharing and large-scale compensation, mitigation, and restoration measures, which should also be implemented beyond national borders.

⁶ European Commission, 2020, [Factsheet: EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy](#)

⁷ Experimental projects assessing multi-use are already being implemented in the North Sea and Baltic Sea – see Horizon 2020 funded 'UNITED project': <https://www.h2020united.eu/>



Renewables
Grid Initiative



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