

OCEaN Statement on an Improved, Robust and Timely MSP Process

Offshore wind and related electricity grid infrastructure are imperative to reach climate targets and EU energy independence. Simultaneously, marine ecosystems – which are already vulnerable – must be protected from further impacts due to stress caused by climate change and the pressures of traditional and new economic activities. This means that thorough planning is vital to allocate space to those activities which are most needed and least detrimental to the environment, in line with climate, conservation and restoration objectives.

The REPowerEU Plan calls on Member States (MSs) to identify dedicated areas where renewable energy sources (RES) could have faster permit-granting procedures and less environmental risks. For marine areas, Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is already the essential tool for an integrated spatial allocation of human activities in line with EU economic, environmental, and social objectives. It enables inclusion and assessment of a complex variety of aspects, such as interactions between traditional and emerging sectors (i.e. offshore renewable energy (ORE)) and environmental protection and restoration needs. Therefore, the members of the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN) strongly support an improved, robust and timely MSP process. This will speed up ORE, support the decision-making process for spatial allocation, and also reduce investment risks and project delays. In this context, the OCEaN members recommend the following principles to be considered by all EU MSs:

Improve application of an ecosystem-based¹ approach in MSP. An ecosystem-based, integrated planning approach is needed to allocate space for renewable offshore energy production in consideration of nature protection needs and other existing activities at sea. If applied correctly, MSP can enable such integrated planning, identify less sensitive areas suitable for energy infrastructure deployment, and contribute to reconciling often conflicting interests and the needs of marine users².

Complement environmental and socio-economic assessments for spatial designation with sensitivity mapping. Spatial designation must be based on robust impact assessments to allow activities to be located in areas where no significant impacts on the marine environment will occur and to balance the various economic interests at sea. Sensitivity mapping tools can inform planning

¹ Which has been defined as a “holistic approach with a focus on preserving/restoring marine ecosystems and maintaining ecosystem services to support human needs. It should provide spatial solutions for the management of human activities in a way that is compatible with the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) and the capacity of marine ecosystems to respond to human-induced changes” (Ansong, Gissi, & Calado, 2017, [An approach to ecosystem-based management in maritime spatial planning process](#))

² See OCEaN, 2022, [10 recommendations on how to improve Maritime Spatial Planning to reach European climate, energy and biodiversity targets](#)

decisions, along with socio-economic assessments, in order to identify best-suited locations for nature protection and energy infrastructure and define mitigation and compensation measures. MSs and the European Commission (EC) should facilitate and enable the application of sensitivity mapping across national, regional and sea basin levels and further explore tools to analyse socio-economic aspects.

Enable cross-border collaboration. Sea basins should be treated as connected entities, creating an added value of basin-scale planning that must be considered. Therefore, EC and MSs should facilitate and implement regional stakeholder cooperation to enable large-scale compensation, mitigation, and restoration measures and a harmonised and cross-basin data sharing.

Continue to implement EU nature law³ to a high standard. The ‘imperative reason of overriding public interest’ (IROPI) permits project development despite impacts on protected habitats or species, in cases of outstanding importance for the public. This is already allowed by EU nature law. MSs need to carefully consider its application on a case-by-case basis, after demonstrating such an exception’s necessity and lack of alternatives, alongside mitigation and compensation measures.

Improve stakeholder involvement and create benefits for local communities. As per EU Law⁴ requirements, MSs must engage with national and local stakeholders when developing their MSPs. Early-stage and meaningful engagement of civil society must be ensured to gain public support. Furthermore, models for the creation of local benefits are an emerging trend across Europe. They should be further developed – together with local communities.

Adopt a long-term perspective. Incorporating a long-term perspective enables planning reliability, increases planning efficiency, optimises overall resource and spatial use, and reduces impacts on nature. As changes in the marine environment may only be visible after a certain amount of time, the planning system needs to be flexible enough to respond to such new insights. Thus, a learning planning system and adaptive management are essential for ecosystem protection and should be embedded in all MSPs.

*The Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN) brings together NGOs, TSOs and wind industry organisations from across Europe. Together we work towards a sustainable deployment of offshore energy and grid infrastructure, while ensuring alignment with nature protection and healthy marine ecosystems. OCEaN is funded, convened and moderated by the Renewables Grid Initiative. Members of OCEaN are **TSOs** (50Hertz, Amprion, Elia, EirGrid, National Grid Ventures, Le réseau de transport d’électricité - RTE, TenneT), **NGOs** (BirdLife International, Climate Action Network Europe - CAN Europe, Germanwatch, Naturschutzbund - NABU, Natuur&Milieu, the North Sea Foundation - Stichting De Noordzee, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds - RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, the World Wide Fund for Nature - European Policy Office - WWF EPO) and **wind industry organisations** (Iberdrola, Ørsted, Seawind Ocean Technology, Siemens Gamesa, Vattenfall, WindEurope, Wind Energy Ireland, the German Network for Wind Energy - WAB, the German Federal Association of Offshore Wind Farm Operators BWO). The Ocean Institute is a supporting organisation.*

³ Directive 92/43/EEC, 1992, [Habitats Directive](#) and Directive 2009/147/EC, 2009, [Birds Directive](#)

⁴ Directive 2014/89/EU, 2014, [MSP Directive](#) and Directive 2001/42/EC, 2001, [SEA Directive](#)