



**SMARTER DATA
STRONGER SEAS**
FACTSHEET 3

FROM SEA BASINS TO PROJECTS

PROCESS HARMONISATION FOR BETTER
ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING



THE ROLE OF INDICATORS IN ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

Monitoring indicators translate complex ecological changes into **measurable data that help to assess impacts, guide appropriate mitigation, and support prioritising actions.** They are essential at several levels, for instance:



Monitoring the environmental status of European waters



Informing national Maritime Spatial Plans (MSP)



Applying the mitigation hierarchy effectively at project level

CROSS-SEA BASIN GUIDANCE FOR MARINE MONITORING

Harmonised environmental indicators across countries are essential in Europe. They improve monitoring and help assess cumulative impacts from offshore wind and grid projects. The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) sets out 11 high-level Good Environmental Status (GES) descriptors but does not set clear quantitative targets or indicators. This has resulted in **variation of ambition and implementation within and beyond the EU, limiting comparability and hindering effective tracking of GES.** For example, the UK Marine Strategy (UKMS), building on the MSFD, uses an expanded set of 15 GES descriptors and provides measurable indicators for its waters where feasible. While this offers greater clarity for tracking progress in UK waters, significant misalignment remains across UK and EU countries.

IS HARMONISATION ACROSS SEA BASINS POSSIBLE?

The same specific indicators cannot apply to all UK and EU waters, as ecological conditions differ widely across and within sea basins. However, **better alignment across borders and monitoring levels is possible.** Key recommended actions include:



Aligning MSFD and MSP reporting cycles to reduce administrative burden



Aligning EU and non-EU regulations for comparability and environmental protection standards



Setting measurable targets and indicators linked to project-level monitoring

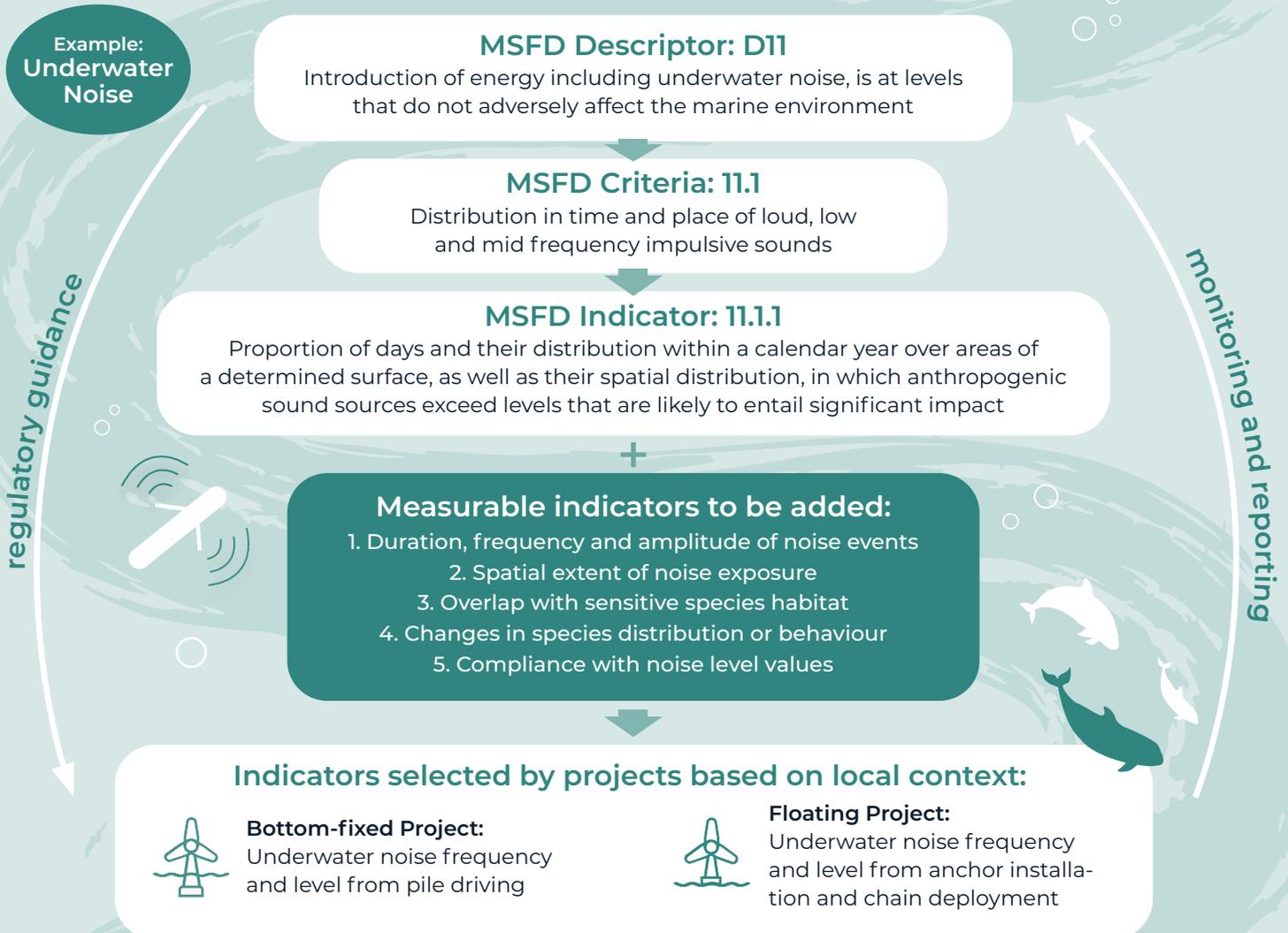


Defining clear milestones to enhance traceability and Strengthen MSs accountability

CLARIFYING REGULATORY GUIDANCE AND DATA COLLECTION

Common quantitative targets, milestones, and indicators can improve consistency across sea basins, strengthen GES monitoring, and guide national MSP. In addition, by **clarifying top-down regulatory guidance**, projects could **select site-specific indicators based on local ecological targets**, while remaining aligned with national priorities. As a result, **data collected would be relevant to the local context but still comparable at national and sea basin level** (bottom-up transmission).

THE MONITORING CASCADE: SEA BASIN TO PROJECT LEVEL AND BACK



This harmonised structure would be a first important step to improve comparability, cumulative assessments, and long-term environmental understanding. **The MSFD revision provides an opportunity to align environmental management, monitoring and data collection from the project to the European level**, by clarifying guidance, targets and data transmission processes. This harmonised approach supports responsible offshore wind and grid expansion, impact mitigation, and **more efficient data collection for both developers and authorities**.

