

NEW ACTION: Designation of the innovation zone for the development of blue economy by introducing a multifunctional use concept in Latvian marine

Short description

The first interim assessment of Latvian MSP carried out in 2023 recognises that there is a need for multifunctional sea use concept, since many sectoral interests overlap. In the Latvian case, it is considered that the multi-use concept of the sea space also could serve as a potential innovation zone to foster the development of different kinds of blue economy pilot projects and test the use of multifunctional marine spaces. The new activity aims to consider not only the introduction of zoning for multifunctional sea space but also to improve the legal framework, since the existing regulations do not anticipate the coexistence of multiple sectorial actors within a single licensing area.

Project partner(s) responsible for the preparation of the new action

MoEPRD

Action typology

(iii) Process-related practice

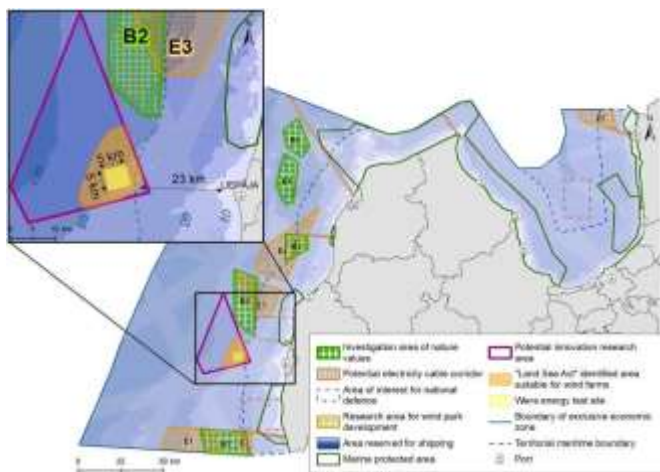
(iv) Zoning

Topics addressed

A1.4 Multi-use of the sea space: combination including energy installations; B3.3 Identification of unplanned areas to be used in future (specific uses not identified); E Blue circular economy

Geographical scope

National scope



Sectors/Activity involved

Scientific research; Marine industry / Multisector

How does the new action support the Green Deal in MSP

Thus far the Latvian Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 (Latvian MSP) has considered the multifunctional sea use concept only in theory. As there is **growing importance of the efficient use of marine space**, a solution could be to combine several sectoral activities in one location. Such **solutions, thoughtfully planned and designed, could also be more environmentally friendly**, as less marine area would be affected overall, **at the same time promoting a blue economy**.

Another issue the new action aims to cover is to consider

marine areas necessary for testing of innovative ideas, especially related to the Blue Economy. The first interim assessment of LV MSP carried out in 2023 (hereinafter – Interim Report) outlines the need to test different innovative ideas and technological solutions, to understand their prospective use in the sea area and to identify the challenges. Current considerations propose introducing a zone in the Latvian MSP as Innovation Research Areas - a testing ground open to attempt other innovative technologies.

Planned action itself is a clear EU Green Deal enabler within MSP, as design of an innovation zone enhances the coexistence of different sectoral interests in a sustainable manner, ensuring that innovative blue economy solutions can be tested and applied. These solutions in many cases could be related to such EDG themes as smart energy-effective technologies, biotechnologies, sustainable seafood production and zero pollution.

Governance context

The key actor responsible for the implementation of new action would be the responsible MSP authority in Latvia - Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia (hereinafter – MoEPRD). This actor has been given the mandate from the Cabinet of Ministers to supervise MSP implementation objectives, thus MoEPRD has the most experience on processes related to the marine planning and the content of the Latvian MSP.

As the new action is closely linked to different licensing procedures and economic sectors, it would also require close cooperation with other sector ministries:

- ✓ Ministry of Climate and Energy responsible for energy-related issues, including offshore wind farms, etc. and climate-related issues;
- ✓ Ministry of Transport, responsible for harbours and shipping etc.;
- ✓ Ministry of Agriculture, responsible for fisheries and aquaculture;
- ✓ Ministry of Economics, which is responsible for tourism sector and economic development in general;
- ✓ Ministry of Defence;
- ✓ Ministry of Culture, especially related to underwater cultural heritage, shipwrecks;
- ✓ Ministry of Education and Science, responsible for development of science, innovations etc. Energy sector – offshore wind farms and other possible marine energy initiatives might be strongly considered during the new MPA development. Therefore, stakeholders representing this field need to be engaged in the new action development.

All mentioned above are various national authorities, however the most appropriate governance system for implementation of this new action should be developed by means of a bottom-up approach, taking into consideration the general interests of society, active users of the sea space (stakeholders in different sectors, public sector, private sector, including scientists, start-ups etc.) moving towards effective legal framework on a national level.



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Other stakeholders to be involved in the new action

In general, main stakeholders to be involved are:

- ✓ Public sector (various sectoral managing authorities including Marine and Coastal spatial planning coordination group);
- ✓ Private sector (companies and start-ups in various sectors, local community, private stakeholders).

At the moment the Latvian MSP Interim Report proposes one potential area for innovation use. Concerning the particularly identified geographic location - then following stakeholders should be strongly involved:

- ✓ Local coastal municipalities are directly affected by the planned area, as they are responsible for the coastal infrastructure needed for the innovation area and are also the legal owners of the marine waters (in Latvia, 2 km of marine waters from the coast are under municipal control and from there on - under state control);
- ✓ Local entrepreneurs interested or impacted by the designation of multi-use and innovation zones in the sea;
- ✓ Local academia and researchers, scientists;
- ✓ Local or the closest port, maritime organisations, in this specific proposed zone, one of the key stakeholders is Liepāja Special Economic Zone Authority;
- ✓ Local community.

For co-definition of the planned action, it was important to include interested stakeholders and experts already during the first steps of choosing a possible area and receive opinionable feedback, as well as professional consultations. It shall act as the base for the initial framework for designation of this specific sea use. The implementation phase shall be led by MoEPRD within the formal process of reviewing national MSP, since it is the responsible national authority about MSP.

The monitoring process of the respective zoning could be organised and supervised by MoEPRD and overlooked by the Maritime and Coastal Spatial Planning Coordination group as a cross-sectoral monitoring approach.

Description of the new action

Idea of this kind of new action is based on the efficient use of maritime space, the need to test and explore new technologies and the need to protect the environment at the same time. The designation of specific zones is essential to experiment with different innovative ideas and technological solutions, to understand their potential application in marine areas and to address the challenges. The possibility of introducing innovation research zones in the maritime spatial plan is therefore being considered.

Based on various EU initiatives and experiences, also during the participation in different EU projects, MoEPRD has recognised that the most suitable combinations of multifunctional sea use activities in Europe are offshore wind farm and fisheries (C.1.6.); offshore wind farm and aquaculture (C.2.4.); offshore wind and other marine renewable energy (A.1.2.,A.1.4); marine wave energy and aquaculture; but also offshore wind farms coexisting with

or actively supporting marine conservation.

Designation of innovation research area together with multi-use includes various aspects. The prospective innovation exploration area identified in the Interim Report has been chosen because it was found to be suitable for various maritime activities. Researchers specialising in wave energy consider that part of the site could be suitable for testing wave energy technologies. During the Interreg BSR project Land-Sea-Act, in close cooperation with stakeholders, there was identified an area in Latvian EEZ suitable for offshore wind farm development that overlaps with potential wave energy sites. Also, the results modelled in the MAREA project shows this site as a potentially suitable location for various aquaculture activities such as shellfish farming, mussel aquaculture. The zone is located close to the harbour as well, which is seen as a bonus for the development of such areas. Currently, the potentially identified innovation study area is defined in the Maritime Spatial Plan as a general use area located approximately 20 km from the city of Liepāja.

Changes to the legal framework is crucial to ensure design and criteria for multi-use development in the sea area. To promote the efficient use of maritime space, it is necessary to review and assess the possibilities of co-existence of different sectors (wind energy production, aquaculture, fisheries, tourism, specially protected nature areas) in the same space, including the regulatory framework and providing specific and clear recommendations for their co-existence and multifunctional use of maritime space.

The first step to develop new action would be making amendments to the existing legal norms or developing new ones based on identified obstacles and needed changes in MSP. After that the process of updating the MSP is followed which also includes all the considerations on the compatibility of the different actions.

In Interim Report it is also outlined that MoEPRD in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Climate and Energy, the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Agriculture, should prepare and submit to the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development planned revisions in legal framework in accordance with the procedure established by December 31, 2025, amendments to regulatory acts in the Cabinet of Ministers, so that it is possible to allow multifunctional and efficient use of the sea, for example, using one licence area for more than one type of sea use.

Perspective legal norms to revise:

1. "Marine Environment Protection and Management Law" (with amendments to 31.03.2022.) - as a core law, stipulating the overall use and rights in the sea territory.
2. "Construction Regulations for Structures in the Internal Waters, Territorial Waters and Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Latvia" adopted 14th of October in 2014 by Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 631 - defines the process of issuing licenses for sustainable blue



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economy related activities.

Possible challenges/risks related to the new action

Possible challenges related to the new action includes:

1. Risks related to the chosen area that includes unknown objects/elements in the area that could restrict development of the Innovation Research Zone (for example unrecognised underwater cultural heritage, unrecognised natural values, dangerous underwater objects, etc.).
2. Unclear definitions, what will be the exact allowed activities and how they will be represented.
3. No clear vision of how and what infrastructure can be built.
4. No clear vision of how the legal framework could be formed.
5. Stakeholder reactions - intensive explanatory work needs to be done, involving stakeholders in the process planning and visioning. Thoughtful stakeholder involvement is crucial.

Gaps or elements that the new action does not consider

For now, various possible gaps and challenges have been identified:

- ✓ lack of cumulative analysis;
- ✓ In relation to limited territory, there are uncertainties about possible consequences and revitalisation of the test areas, since it is not determined how long the testing could be allowed, what are the consequences afterwards testing activity carried out, how the marine environment is stabilised (renewed) after such activities.
- ✓ inconsistent legal framework, f.e., regulations related to economic and construction activities in sea space on the national level, also needed qualifications to perform them, and scattered responsibility about different sectors within governmental authorities.

There is a lot of uncertainty with this new action, because at the moment there is no actual demand on this type of action/zoning in the sea since competition and lack of space is not an issue in Latvian EEZ in current times.

Replicability /Elements which can be capitalised

Potential elements to replicate:

- ✓ methodology how the innovation research area and multi-use territory was identified as potential for this type of use, where not only multi -se is crucial in limited sea areas but also need to test innovation;
- ✓ possible legal practice for innovation and multi-use sea spaces might be replicable, when designed.

As potential challenges for replicability could be:

- ✓ specific legal aspects in different countries could be challenging when trying to approbate this new action.