

## NEW ACTION: Setting the course towards reaching the 30% Biodiversity Strategy's target at sea: Coordination between overall management actions and Latvian MSP planning

### Short description

There are five nature investigation zones identified in the Latvian Maritime Spatial Plan (MSP), which is setting a background for identifying additional zones of nature conservation areas. Also, all nature conservation areas (MPAs) already stated by the national legal framework are recognised in the Latvian MSP. However, it is not enough to meet the target set by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The new action will lay the course towards reaching the 30% biodiversity protection target at sea based on the ongoing LIFE REEF project findings, which considers most of MSP nature investigation zones, that will be formalised within elaboration of a new management plan for the broader area. These management actions and limitations of sea use will be the basis to the management of conflicts between MPAs and OWF by creating new planning solutions in the Latvian MSP.

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

MoEPRD

### Action typology

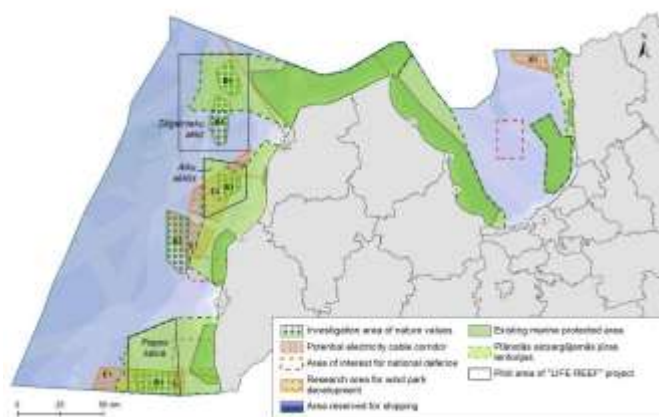
(iv) Zoning

### Topics addressed

D. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration

### Geographical scope

National scope



### Sectors/Activity involved

Nature protection and restoration

### How does the new action support the Green Deal in MSP

The new action will support the European Green Deal in MSP by reaching the 30% biodiversity strategy target at sea. Territories of marine protected areas (MPA) are included in the MSP as conditions for sea use stemming based upon the general legislation.

The total area of marine protected areas in the MSP territory of Latvia is 4363,6 km<sup>2</sup> (15.4% of total sea area). In addition, there are five nature investigation zones designated in the MSP of Latvia with a total area of 1348,5 km<sup>2</sup> (4.8%). However, the currently reserved territories for nature conservation at sea are not enough to meet the 30% protection target set out in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Therefore, the LIFE REEF (project full name: "[Research of marine protected habitats in EEZ and determination of the necessary conservation status in Latvia](#)") project is essential to investigate and identify the necessary information for decision-makers to be able to

address the 30% target. According to the results of the LIFE REEF project, changes in management plans of the existing MPA and new MPAs are being elaborated in one new management plan for all marine protected areas by the LIFE REEF project. This will serve as a starting point in the upcoming review of Latvian MSP, linking to changes in zoning through wide stakeholder involvement and cross-sectorial trade-offs.

In Latvia there are no green-blue corridors between MPA that are defined in planning documents, therefore the new action could also seek to address this issue.

There is no general thematic connection from the valuable practices in Task 3.1., but the examples from approaches in other countries are useful now, when this action is designed. Although, indirectly connected with task 3.1 is previously mentioned Latvian valuable practice on ELWIND offshore wind park development with potential conflicts between actual zoning in MSP and future restrictions set by the new MPA management plan.

Nature protection and restoration in sea space is fundamental for climate change (CC) adaptation. It greatly contributes to CC adaptation through improved biodiversity conservation, thus providing conditions to develop possible green infrastructure networks in future to enhance coastal-resilience (B.1.) and Protection of climate-sensitive marine and coastal biodiversity and ecosystems, and landscapes (B.2.).

Clear management provisions in the context of nature protection allows an opportunity for the development of other sea uses, including multi-use (A.1.4.), sustainable sea-food production (C.1.6., C.3.), as this action's objectives also contribute to the restoration and preservation of marine flora and fauna.

### Governance context

The key actor responsible for the implementation of new action would be the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia (hereinafter – MoEPRD), responsible authority of Latvian MSP. Whereas LIFE REEF project Lead partner Nature Conservation Agency is an institution subordinated to the MoEPRD, responsible for the implementation of a unified nature conservation policy in Latvia through effective management and administration of Latvia's specially protected nature territories including MPAs.

To highlight, Latvian MSP does not have the mandate to set up new protected areas. The existing MPAs are set by sectoral regulations and are included in MSP as *areas with specific restrictions* for other uses. The Investigation areas of nature values identified in the Latvian MSP can serve as a guideline for the process of defining or extending MPAs and indicate that these territories can have potential restrictions to other sea uses in the EIA process.

In relation to transboundary actions, this action aims to improve ecological conditions in Latvian EEZ waters, as a result it impacts neighbouring countries and the whole Baltic Sea ecosystem. There is also room for further discussions on how different activities, such as active shipping, fisheries and OWF can influence the protection targets of the MPA and what kind of restrictions should be applied within the management plan.

### Other stakeholders to be involved in the new action

As the new action would result in direct impact on different areas and economic sectors, it would also require close cooperation with other sector stakeholders which includes ministries, institutions, local municipalities etc.

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For example, economic sectors considered impacted:

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Fisheries sector – also fishers might be strongly affected by this new action because of marine area development with more strict regulations. Therefore, these stakeholders must be engaged in the very beginning of new action to foresee possible impacts on this industry and to balance diverging interests.
- ✓ Science and research institutions such as Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology and Institute of Food Safety, Animal Health and Environment "BIOR" would be key stakeholders throughout the development period of the new action because of best knowledge on marine nature and environment.

Also, national level authorities (different sector ministries), local municipalities and other organisations should be engaged in the process of new action development - to be involved in the decision-making process and to stay informed on new regulation development.

### Description of the new action

MPAs designation is outside of the scope of Latvian MSP but still the strategic part of the plan follows the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 targets and foresees the development of new MPA or the extension of existing ones.

In order to define new or extended MPAs, the existing information has been considered. That also includes the information on investigation areas of nature values provided in the Latvian MSP identified as priority uses of the sea area of Latvia. Until those areas have been explored, licences should not be granted for new marine uses that could potentially threaten protected underwater habitats and species. If any protected natural values are not identified, the surveyed areas or parts of them may be allocated for licensing for new marine uses. Therefore, MSP investigation areas of nature values were the basis for designation of LIFE REEF project pilot areas.

The LIFE REEF project aims to carry out detailed studies to identify nature values – particularly habitats and species that need to be protected. During the project different type of other actions have been considered, for example:

- ✓ Identification of potential marine protected sites and development of proposals for new MPAs for the Natura 2000 network;
- ✓ Assessment of the effectiveness of the MPA network (including newly assessed territories) within the Latvian marine waters;
- ✓ Development of the management plan for MPA.

LIFE REEF project results and proposals for new MPAs or MPAs extensions need to be discussed in different formal and informal stakeholder frameworks, such as MPA management plan development group, LIFE REEF project steering group, as well as Maritime and Coastal Spatial planning coordination group to ensure the most appropriate solution and balanced sea use in future.

*For information:* Maritime and Coastal Coordination Spatial planning coordination group serves as platform to ensure the regular involvement and participation of government institutions, planning regions, coastal municipalities, and non-governmental institutions in the processes of coastal and marine spatial planning, ensuring

coordination and exchange of information on sectoral policy objectives and development interests.

At the end of these activities new action firstly aims to develop the final MPA proposal to meet Biodiversity Strategy 2030 target setting 30% of marine areas in MSP - including 10% strictly protected marine areas. Secondly, to manage and protect the identified values within the proposed MPA, the management plan for MPA will be created and its provisions will directly apply to the MSP.

### Possible challenges/risks related to the new action

Conflicts can arise between different sectors, in particular economic development versus nature protection. A major challenge has already been identified by the Ministry of Economics is that the research results so far show an overlap of potential MPAs with the offshore wind farm areas planned in the Latvian MSP. This challenge reflects to these stages:

- ✓ (iii) process related tasks such as organising formal and informal discussions towards compromise or alternative solutions for OWF territories;
- ✓ (iv) zoning design, since new MPA territories will impact the existing priorities in Latvian MSP and therefore a wide stakeholder discussion should be organised to develop the best possible planning solutions for affected areas in the Latvian MSP.

This action has a high risk of conflict with the already existing developments on land to achieve other EU initiatives/goals towards renewable energy development.

### Gaps or elements that the new action does not consider

Possible gaps, also related to the implementation, within this action are:

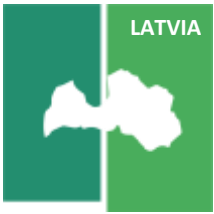
- ✓ MPA management provisions are a subject to changes in legal framework, that will have its consequences in MSP and towards economy, especially coastal fishing, tourism, shipping activities, and whole offshore renewable energy itself;
- ✓ It is worth mentioning that in LIFE REEF specific areas are studied in detail, not all Latvian EEZ. It should be considered that there are possible values on all sea waters and only detailed EIA research and proposed solutions can guarantee the implementation of foreseen use with minimal harm to the ecosystem.;
- ✓ Need to review the zoning of Latvian MSP due to LIFE REEF results, which comes together with general review of Latvian MSP and related stakeholder involvement for co-creation of comprehensive planning solution.

### Replicability /Elements which can be capitalised

It can be capitalised that the LIFE REEF project developed its research area towards achieving 30% of MPAs based on the Latvian MSP defined investigation of nature values zones, thus complementing the concept where active action follows the developed plan.

It is worth mentioning that Latvian MSP was designed based on the best available knowledge at that time, that consisted of expert evaluations and models based on theoretical assumptions not field works. Therefore, to safeguard the potential uptake of this space, precautionary principle was applied and additional conditions on nature value investigation was defined - any possible economic activity in the sea must go through EIA procedure.

Overall, the new action not only significantly pays attention to the EU-wide priorities in terms of biodiversity protection at sea, but also



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provides a framework for improved and evidence-based maritime spatial planning and its governance coordination across the country, which may be replicated in the transboundary context of the Baltic Sea.