



## VALUABLE PRACTICE: Coordinating zoning for aquaculture areas and MSP

### Description

Italian aquaculture represents an important area of the national agrifood sector, contributing to the reduction of the demand for fish imports, and accounting in 2017 for 150.000 tons production (generating a value of approximately 500 million euros - 44% of seafood production in volume and more than 35% in value). Growth of aquaculture sector in Italy has been limited in recent years, in line with the overall EU trend. In accordance with European Commission COM 2021 - 236 final (strategic guidelines for the development of European Aquaculture) and the GFCM resolution 36/2012/1, Italy is currently carrying out a process of definition of Allocated Zones for Aquaculture (AZA) in its waters. Regional processes of AZAs identification are currently at different stages: a few of them are complete, the large majority at a good level of advancement but lacking of legal approval from the regional board, a few are still under development. In compliance with EU Directive 2014/89/UE, Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) represents a strategic instrument, being at the top of a tiered system of sectorial planning instruments developed by the different maritime sectors, and of objectives defined for nature conservation, landscape and cultural heritage protection. This practice proposes AZA as a valuable tool for framing aquaculture in MSP, analyzing related challenges and opportunities.

### Practice typology

(i) Measure + (iv) zoning

### Topics addressed

<b>Main</b>	C. Sustainable sea-food production [C.2. Sustainable aquaculture and shellfish production (C.2.1 Development of marine aquaculture installations; C.2.2 Development of organic marine aquaculture, IMTA, low-trophic aquaculture; C.2.3 Introduction of energy savings in marine aquaculture. Including autonomous systems and C.2.4 Multi-use of the sea space: combinations including marine aquaculture)].
<b>Secondary</b>	D. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration.

### Sectors/Activity involved

**Aquaculture**, nature protection and restoration, and landscape protection.

### Stakeholders involved

Planning units prioritized as “aquaculture” were included in areas designed as highly-suitable by processes for AZA designation, currently ongoing at the regional level. This was carried out through the consultation of specific offices of the coastal regions managing these projects. In different cases, it was possible to interact directly with technical bodies contracted by the regions to perform the analyses and assess aquaculture suitability. The national objective “promoting high quality aquaculture, and sustaining the process of AZAs identification”, and its description, were co-defined with the Ministry of Agriculture and food sovereignty, in charge of the Italian strategic guidelines for aquaculture development. Within the SEA scoping phase, specific feedbacks on AZA related contents of the plan proposals (prioritized planning units, strategic and specific objectives, and dedicated measures) were obtained from ISPRA (National Institute for Environment Research and Protection), the body which issued the Italian guidelines for AZA definition.

### Geographical scope

All three MSP Italian draft plans (Adriatic, Ionian-Central Mediterranean, and Tyrrhenian-Western Mediterranean) adopted the approach. A strategic objective at the level of maritime area was dedicated to “promoting high quality aquaculture, and sustaining

the process of AZAs identification”. Dedicated measures were identified at the national level, to support the achievement of this objective. Specific objectives and related measures were identified by coastal regions to support AZAs definition, and the integration of aquaculture with other maritime uses, and nature protection and restoration.

### Governance context

In Italy, coastal Regions are currently responsible for the identification of Allocated Zones for Aquaculture. The identification of area suitability and space availability is carried out within specific project supported by FEAMPA funds. These funds are managed by the regions, and responding to priorities which are set within the National Strategy for Aquaculture development, issued by the Ministry of agriculture and food sovereignty (MASAF). AZA are defined following the technical guidelines produced by the Superior Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA).

The Italian MSP plans proposals were co-planned from the beginning of the process between ministerial and regional entities with the support of a scientific team. The Ministry of Agriculture and food sovereignty and forests (MASAF), the Ministry of Environment and Energy security (MASE), together with the Ministry of Infrastructure (MSP Competent Authority), and each coastal Region were involved in the process.

The specific Italian MSP governance framework allowed to take into account, within the zoning phase of territorial waters, the indications of suitability for AZAs available from the FEAMP processes ongoing in the different regions. This was possible thanks to the composition of the MSP technical committee, including one representative per coastal region.

### How this MSP practice can support the EU Green Deal

Italian MSP plans identified the following objective at the national level “promoting high quality aquaculture, and sustaining the process of AZAs identification”.

The Italian MSP plans identified two dedicated measures for the completion and integration of AZA plans (these were defined at the national level and applied to all coastal regions). These two measures are aimed at:

- a) developing, adopting and implementing AZA plans, on line with MSP plans;
- b) instituting a permanent working table, aimed at supporting the integration and harmonization between regional AZA plans and MSP plans.

With respect to habitat conservation and restoration, and the biodiversity strategy implementation, the plan defined dedicated measures, aimed at:

- a) enhancing the integration between AZAs and Natura 2000 network, in line with the biodiversity strategy objectives;
- b) minimizing conflicts with the landscape, due to intervisibility of aquaculture facilities (e.g. by promoting adoption by aquafarmers of gears and plant design minimizing visual impacts; by integrating the current methodology of AZA selection by including intervisibility assessment).

A specific national measure was dedicated to energy transition in aquaculture This reads as follows:

- a) promoting the adoption of targeted solutions for increasing the use of renewable energy in the aquaculture sector, looking at the value chain and including the aspects of transformation and commercialization, and considering land-sea interactions of these activities.



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### Challenges/gaps/inconsistencies still to be addressed

The main challenge of this practice regards defining how the selection of AZAs will be “integrated” within MSP plans. Different approaches can be identified in this case, according to the coherence of AZA location and MSP prioritization (e.g. priority use; other existing use).

### Replicability /Elements which can be capitalised

- ✓ Within the analysis phase, defining the current spatial location of aquaculture facilities and hot-spots of production, and analyzing interactions (potential conflicts and synergies) among aquaculture and other key uses (tourism, navigation, nature conservation), with the aim of minimizing potential conflicts arising from future AZAs definition in areas interested by other uses;
- ✓ Identifying a dedicated strategic objective in the plan, which is: “promoting high quality aquaculture, and sustaining the process of AZAs identification”, and identifying dedicated specific objectives and measures at the regional level (e.g. one specific measure is to “locate, through spatial planning, the areas which present the higher suitability as AZA, with the aim of minimizing conflicts with other uses”);
- ✓ Identifying specific measures at the national level for promoting the integration of the sectorial planning efforts (AZA selection and management) with the MSP plans. This can be achieved by establishing permanent technical tables dedicated to this theme.