



VALUABLE PRACTICE: Zoning areas for environmental and natural resources protection

Description

Based on the existing knowledge on marine habitat and biodiversity, established spatial measures for conservation, as well as spatial distribution of main maritime activities, the MSP Italian draft plans (hereafter the plans) identify planning units (PUs) with a process called zoning where, in several cases, specific uses (economic sectors or other activities such as marine protection) are prioritized. This is done with the aim to minimize conflicts, foster coexistence among uses, minimize environmental impacts and ensure marine ecosystems, biodiversity and resources conservation. In line with the methodology adapted for the plans, each PU can be attributed to one of the following typologies: Generic use (G), Priority use (P), Limiter use (L), Reserved use (R). Nature conservation is promoted by the plans with the attribution of either the P, L, R typology to PU. The MSP plans do not establish any type of new protected areas (nor strictly protected, nor not-strictly protected) but they provide indications on where those areas shall be identified and therefore pave the way for extension of marine protection in Italian marine waters. Environmental and natural resources protection have been prioritized:

- i. In PUs overlapping or including existing and planned protected areas. Existing MPAs have been assigned to L typology for nature conservation.
- ii. In areas where other protection regimes are defined, including Natura 2000 marine sites (SCI and SPA), the Pelagos Sanctuary for Mediterranean Marine Mammals, the PSSA (Particularly Sensitive Sea Area) in the Bonifacio Strait and the entire area of the Ecological protection zone of the Tyrrhenian Sea.
- iii. In correspondence with areas of high ecological value, e.g.: Ecologically of Biologically Significant Areas (EBSA), Important Marine Mammals Areas (IMMA), Cetacean Critical Habitats (CCH), Important Bird Areas (IBA), hard-bottom habitats, deep-water habitats, local emergencies (e.g. rocky outcrops), occurrence of iconic species (e.g. cetaceans, marine turtles, sea-monks).

A comprehensive set of national-level measures focusing on environmental protection and/or tackling connected sectors (e.g. fishing or maritime transport) are included in the Plans.

Practice typology

(iv) zoning

Topics addressed

Main	D. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration [D.1 A coherent network of marine protected areas (D.1.1 Establishment of new or enlargement of strictly marine protected areas (10% target) and definition of strict protection and D.1.2 Establishment of new or enlargement of N2K and OECMs (30% target))]
Secondary	D. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration [D.1 A coherent network of marine protected areas (D.1.5 Multi-use of the sea space: combination including biodiversity and ecosystem protection and D.1.6 Coordinated, transboundary initiatives) and D.2 Restoring marine and coastal ecosystems]. C. Sustainable seafood production.

Sectors/Activity involved

Coastal and maritime tourism; Maritime transport; Fishing; Underwater Cultural Heritage protection, and Landscape protection.

Stakeholders involved

The planning units designated with priority for "environmental and natural resources protection" priority within 12 NM have been identified by the competent coastal regions, and deliberated by the regional councils. Instead, the ones identified in the offshore areas (beyond the 12NM), have been designed at national level. All these PUs have been approved by the Technical Committee uncharged of the plans preparation and submitted to public consultation and to consultation in the framework of the SEA process were NGOs, general public, and associations could express their observation.

Geographical scope

All three MSP Italian draft plans (Adriatic, Ionian-Central Mediterranean, and Tyrrhenian-Western Mediterranean) have adopted this approach.

Areas where nature conservation is defined as a priority, or limited, or reserved use have an extension of 16.120 km² in the Adriatic, 39.403 km² in the Ionian-Central Mediterranean and 205.175 km² in the Tyrrhenian-Western Mediterranean (considering both territorial waters and continental shelf areas).

Governance context

The designation of Marine Protected Areas is under the competence of the Ministry of Environment and Ecological Transition. Marine protected areas can be established starting from a list of candidate areas which is provided by law. For the establishment of an MPA, updated knowledge on the marine environment, in addition to data relating to the socio-economic activities that take place in the area is needed. The Region and the local municipalities interested by the establishment of the MPA are consulted during the process of designation. An institutional body named as Unified State-Region Conference is also consulted for any designation procedure. The decree finalizing the designation is promulgated by the Ministry of Environment and ecological transition in agreement with the Ministry of Economy and finance.

29 MPAs are designed in Italian marine waters. They cover a total extension of about 2,350 km², corresponding to 1.5% of the territorial waters. 23 areas are identified as MPAs to be designed in line with the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

How this MSP practice can support the EU Green Deal

The identification of priority areas for marine conservation is a smart practice to help reaching the EGD objective of achieving a coherent network of marine protected areas. The practice can facilitate the establishment of new or enlargement of strictly marine protected areas (10% target) as well as of N2K and the establishment of OECMs (30% target). In fact, MPA designation most often do not fall within the scope of MSP. This practice can support MSP process in creating a linkage with the external process of MPA designation. For example, at regional level, consultation under MSP on priority area for nature conservation can help starting discussion and on the establishment of MPAs. The size of priority areas for marine conservation can be large enough to allow addressing the issue of connectivity between MPA as well as the issue of the scale of area of protection, to ensure effectiveness of present and future MPAs. With the identification of priority areas for marine conservation, MSP contribute to organize the sea uses in the area in order to be compatible with marine conservation, prioritizing those with lower environmental impact and addressing practices to enhance environmental sustainability. Without prejudicing any marine use (if not explicitly stated by the plan), priority for marine conservation on a PU provide a strategic orientation on the intended use of the area, that sectors need to take into consideration in their plans and strategies.



VALUABLE PRACTICE: Zoning areas for environmental and natural resources protection

Challenges/gaps/inconsistencies still to be addressed

Prioritization of marine conservation in a sea area poses issues of compatibility with other marine uses already in place or with future ones. In many cases in the Italian plans, priority for marine conservation has been associated with one or two other priority uses, generally maritime traffic, in large offshore areas, and tourism in coastal areas. In this case there is the need to identify a number of measures to enhance the environmental compatibility of economic sectors, in order to ensure co-existence with nature conservation objectives.

Replicability /Elements which can be capitalised

Identification of priority areas for marine conservation should be based on the collection of the best available knowledge on habitats and species in the planning area.

Considerations about the economic activities in place in the area and identification of opportunities for co-existence, for addressing their sustainability and eventually to promote creation of synergies could be drawn.

This practice represents an opportunity to frame the discussion on where to locate the new protected area in the larger context of MSP (generally it is a separate process).

In a climate change perspective, priority areas for nature conservation represent a tool to identify climate refugia or areas not yet protected but which are particularly vulnerable to climate change.