

**VALUABLE PRACTICE: ELWIND offshore wind park development**

**Description**

ELWIND is a joint Estonian-Latvian state-run cross-border offshore wind project aiming to raise energy independence in the region by increasing production of green energy (a total of 700-1000 MW of offshore wind capacity) and improving interstate electricity connectivity (<https://elwindoffshore.eu/>).

In 2020 the Latvian Minister of Economics and Estonian Minister of Economy and Infrastructure have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the joint project of the Latvian and Estonian offshore wind farm for energy production from renewable energy sources. It established a non-binding framework for the joint management and financing of the offshore wind park (OWP) project. Environmental impact assessment (EIA) process was started as 2 separate national processes in May 2023. This is the first significant attempt to develop an OWF in Latvia since 2010 which has reached the stage of EIA. The process is still in its early phase. Therefore, it gives the opportunity to test in practice the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) recommendations for OWF development and how the conflicts within the OWF development can be solved in real life situation, learning from successes and mistakes of ELWIND project. Discussions with stakeholders within the Working group (national level institutions), thematic discussions with specific stakeholders (on best available data), public hearing meetings within the EIA process are giving opportunities for better feedback to and from society.

**Practice typology**

(i) Measure + (v) Others (implementation of the maritime spatial plan – OWF development in foreseen zoning)

**Topics addressed**

|             |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Main</b> | A. Climate change mitigation [A.1 Renewable energy production, storage and transportation (A.1.1 Development of marine renewable energy installations and A.1.7 Coordinated, transboundary initiatives)]. |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Sectors/Activity involved**

By increasing production of green energy and improving interstate electricity connectivity, ELWIND focuses on:

- ✓ Offshore renewable energy
- ✓ Cables and pipelines.

**Stakeholders involved**

The main stakeholder groups/types directly involved are administrative authorities. The stakeholder involvement includes cooperation between 2 countries. Still, each country organises their own stakeholder involvement on a national level.

The ELWIND project is being implemented by the Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Latvian Ministry of Economy, the Environmental Investment Centre, the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia and the Latvian Transmission System Operator Augstsprieguma tīkls (AST).

The working group for ELWIND project development in Latvia involves the ministries responsible for transport (shipping), defence, construction, environmental protection, energy development and maritime spatial planning (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia is the responsible authority on MSP and EIA process).

The cooperation is taking place also informally with various subnational entities, consulted by the project coordinators on data, environmental parameters, and other aspects crucial for the OWP

development.

Main purpose - stakeholders are being involved in the development of the ELWIND project by means of consultation practises and technical assistance expertise, but also foreseen in the phases of monitoring, which is supporting the MSP implementation.

**Geographical scope**

The ELWIND project is taking place in Latvian and Estonian marine waters of the Baltic Sea (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Map of ELWIND Offshore Wind Farm project. Source: <https://elwindoffshore.eu/>.

**Governance context**

The main governance sector is energy, but the project also impacts other sectors like shipping, tourism, fishing, defence. Sectors of environment and nature conservation are directly involved through the EIA process initiated in 18.05.2023., also foreseeing the involvement of general public (by public hearing and consultation sessions).

A national level working group for ELWIND project development ensures formal cooperation platform between various branches of government/relevant national authorities. The initiative is also governed on international level between responsible bodies in Latvia and Estonia.

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

The ELWIND project example shows that neighbouring countries can establish a joint project supporting the climate change mitigation efforts and improving the energy security through implementing interstate electricity connectivity.

As the project intends to create 2 new OWFs and an interconnection between Estonia and Latvia, considering the zoning prescribed by both country MSPs, it will directly support the implementation of the European Green Deal (EGD) objectives.

Until the proposal of implementing the ELWIND project, OWF development in Latvia was attempted to a limited extent. In particular, certain developers have tried to acquire the licences for OWF development, but there are no success stories and no OWF as so far, due to the incomplete knowledge of sea conditions and rigid environmental restrictions.

ELWIND project focuses on investigating all preconditions for the OWF, and after successful auction of licenses, could be the first visible action in establishing sustainable new sea uses within the marine territory of Latvia - following the guidance of the MSP.



## VALUABLE PRACTICE: ELWIND offshore wind park development

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

Lack of data and data quality variations in Estonia and Latvia is an issue. For which the ELWIND project coordinators consulted many stakeholders and were supported. As a result, the data sharing solved a part of the initial information requirements. More in depth data gathering will be taking place within the EIA process in terms of geological features and other investigations for pre-conditions of sea space.

Within the process of ELWIND implementation, not all stakeholders of relevance from a direct impact of the OWP development were consulted at an early stage e.g. local governments, small businesses in coastal areas and relevant NGOs.

That could be a possible cause of a very strong backlash from local inhabitants and the coastal municipalities near the project development area in wider public consultation meetings in the initial EIA process (in Latvia), which took place in August 2023. It should be addressed in future by organising specific tailored discussions with the stakeholders predominantly opposing the project. This backlash could be minimised if the ELWIND project coordinators would fully consider the MSP recommendations for conflict management and stakeholder involvement.

Deeper analysis of costs and benefits, the visibility (of OWF) and compensatory mechanisms would be of help to reduce the opposition to the project.

### Replicability /Elements which can be capitalised

Main approaches and concepts the study case applied that might be replicable:

- i. The procedure of formal documents for the establishment of international cooperation on a political level:
  - ✓ A Memorandum of Understanding and further national level supporting documents can create a formal ground for complex cross-border OWF and improving interstate electricity connectivity.
- ii. Formal and informal cooperation and stakeholder involvement:
  - ✓ Formal working groups for coordinating inter-institutional relations can support the project development in early phase and help with getting early feedback from responsible authorities (including those dealing with nature conservation etc.).
  - ✓ Stakeholder involvement is essential and should be as carefully specified, considering the direct impacts of action. Regular consultations with local stakeholders are crucial for acceptability of the OWF project.
- iii. Starting the process of OWF development, it is important to prepare a scoping of available information and look at the MSP practitioners work and existing cooperation with key stakeholders:
  - ✓ Proper scoping and appreciation of relevant plans and policies allows avoiding unnecessary conflicts, that are identified in planning process.