



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/A2/CF

Subject: Call for increased policy coherence between environment and fisheries dimensions

Dear Mr. Brouckaert, dear Mr. O'Donoghue,

Many thanks for your letter of 20 June 2024.

First, I would like to congratulate you for setting up a Focus Group on impacts from ORE developments and conservation site designations (FG Spatial Dimension). This is a good practice and can most certainly feed the national maritime spatial plans (MSPs) and their revision.

Let me highlight here a few positive developments in terms of policy coherence and knowledge building that happened since my last reply to your advice on the impacts of underwater noise and offshore wind energy developments on commercial fisheries in February 2022.

In October 2023, the European Commission (hereby “the Commission”) adopted a “Wind Package” ⁽¹⁾ including a Communication on delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions ⁽²⁾, as a follow-up to the EU Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy published in 2020 ⁽³⁾. In this Communication, the Commission notably

⁽¹⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_5185.

⁽²⁾ Delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions (COM/2023/668 final).

⁽³⁾ An EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future. COM(2020) 741 final.

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committed to launch a research and innovation action to reduce the environmental impact and optimise the socio-economic impacts of offshore wind farms in 2024. A specific call for proposal under Horizon Europe will open on 17 September to this effect (HORIZON-CL5-2024-D3-02-08) ⁽⁴⁾.

The Commission has also recently launched a request for scientific advice to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to strengthen the knowledge on socio-economic and environmental impacts of offshore renewable energy.

Over the years since the adoption of the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive (2014/89/EU), the Commission has put in place several tools for coordination on MSP, environmental and fisheries policy, and stakeholders' participation in planning and implementation at EU and regional level:

- A dedicated [Member States expert group on MSP](#) that meets at least twice a year (E01682/2) and welcomes observers from different stakeholders' groups⁵. MSFD, the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the Marine Action Plan ⁽⁶⁾ and the new EU Restoration Law are discussed with Member States and DG ENV during these meetings.
- An [Assistance Mechanism](#) (team of experts on MSP) and a [European MSP Platform](#) for which the contract was renewed in 2023: funded by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), it acts as the central exchange forum for the rich knowledge generated in past, current and upcoming MSP processes and projects. The European MSP Platform allows officials, planners and other stakeholders interested in MSP to build on what is already available, avoid duplication of efforts, assist in capacity building and foster the development of new practices.
- EU-funded projects to enhance MSPD implementation and cross-border cooperation in MSP: all EU projects on MSP have been selected through public calls, open to all stakeholders to apply and advertised on Commission's websites, e.g. on the CINEA funding opportunities' page ⁷. For example, the last EMFAF call was closed for selection on 27 February 2024⁸.
- The [European Blue Forum](#): a pan-European stakeholder group and a moderated space for all users of the sea, able to come together to discuss shared challenges and priorities with the aim of finding consensus, synergies and solutions towards a common vision. I had the pleasure to launch it officially in May 2023, and I encourage you to register to the forum, in order to be informed and involved in future events.
- A [multi-use compendium](#): launched in March 2024, it compiles good practices and information on projects involving two or more sectors working together at sea.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-cl5-2024-d3-02-08>

⁽⁵⁾ The European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) and Europêche are both observers of this expert group since 2020. New observers can submit their applications via MARE-MSP-MSEG@ec.europa.eu

⁽⁶⁾ COM(2023) 102 final

⁽⁷⁾ https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/european-maritime-fisheries-and-aquaculture-fund/emfaf-calls-tenders_en

⁽⁸⁾ https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/funding-opportunities/calls-proposals/emfaf-call-proposals-implement-maritime-spatial-planning-0_en

Fisheries is one of the sectors for which we want to expand multi-use in the EU and beyond, notably through the identification of fishing zones and the inclusion of multi-use areas in national Maritime Spatial Plans.

- As mentioned in your letter, the Joint Special Group created by the Marine Action Plan brings together representatives of environment and fisheries authorities and stakeholders to discuss issues related to the implementation of EU fisheries and environmental legislation. The need to better integrate maritime spatial planning and the development of offshore renewable energy in these discussions was raised at the last meeting on 18 June 2024.

In addition to these Commission-led initiatives, on 21 November 2023, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom have started the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI), to build on current cooperative frameworks such as the North Sea's Maritime Spatial Planning collaboration group, the North Sea's Energy Cooperation (NSEC), and the Oslo-Paris (OSPAR) convention, to reinforce these, and to create synergies for optimal alignment of the ongoing work. It aims at streamlining the current legislative frameworks in place for fisheries, energy, nature and transport at EU, regional and national level, in view of developing an approach to Maritime Spatial Planning that reduces conflicts between users.

Finally, the Commission is organising a public event in Marseille, France, on 22 October 2024, to celebrate and reflect on the 10 years of the MSP Directive ⁽⁹⁾.

I believe that all the above-mentioned groups and activities represent a strong basis for coherence between the different policies that influence maritime spatial planning, including the CFP and the Special Group that you mentioned in your letter. I also hope to receive valuable inputs from the ongoing and future projects and events to which you are most welcome to contribute.

Let me thank you again for your commitment and valuable input. I am looking forward to our continued cooperation.

Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours Sincerely,

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⁽⁹⁾ <https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/>