

ESE FRAMEWORK FOR MARINE CONSERVATION & SPATIAL PLANNING



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Enhancing decision-making across European Seas for 2030 biodiversity targets

What is the ESE-Framework?

The Ecological-Socio-Economic (ESE) Framework is a modular set of tools developed under the MSP4BIO project to prioritize marine protection within Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). It identifies management needs and is organized into three interconnected modules, complemented by policy solution pathways. This way, it provides a step-by-step, science-based methodology to help decision-makers systematically integrate biodiversity conservation needs into spatial planning processes.

Why It Matters

- 80% of Europe's marine biodiversity is in poor condition (EEA, 2023).
- 60% of Blue Economy activities overlap spatially or ecologically, creating high potential for trade-offs.
- Marine ecosystems provide critical services—climate regulation, food, livelihoods—but are under increasing pressure from fragmented governance and competing uses.

The ESE Framework addresses this through integrated, actionable guidance.

What It Provides

- Answers to key management questions
- Guidance on how to use MSP4BIO ESE modules
- Tips to use ecological, governance and socio-economic criteria
- Link to policy solutions
- Suggestions for using Decision Support Tools
- Portfolio of measures for nature-inclusive operation of blue economy sectors
- Examples of application of criteria and modules to MSP4BIO test sites

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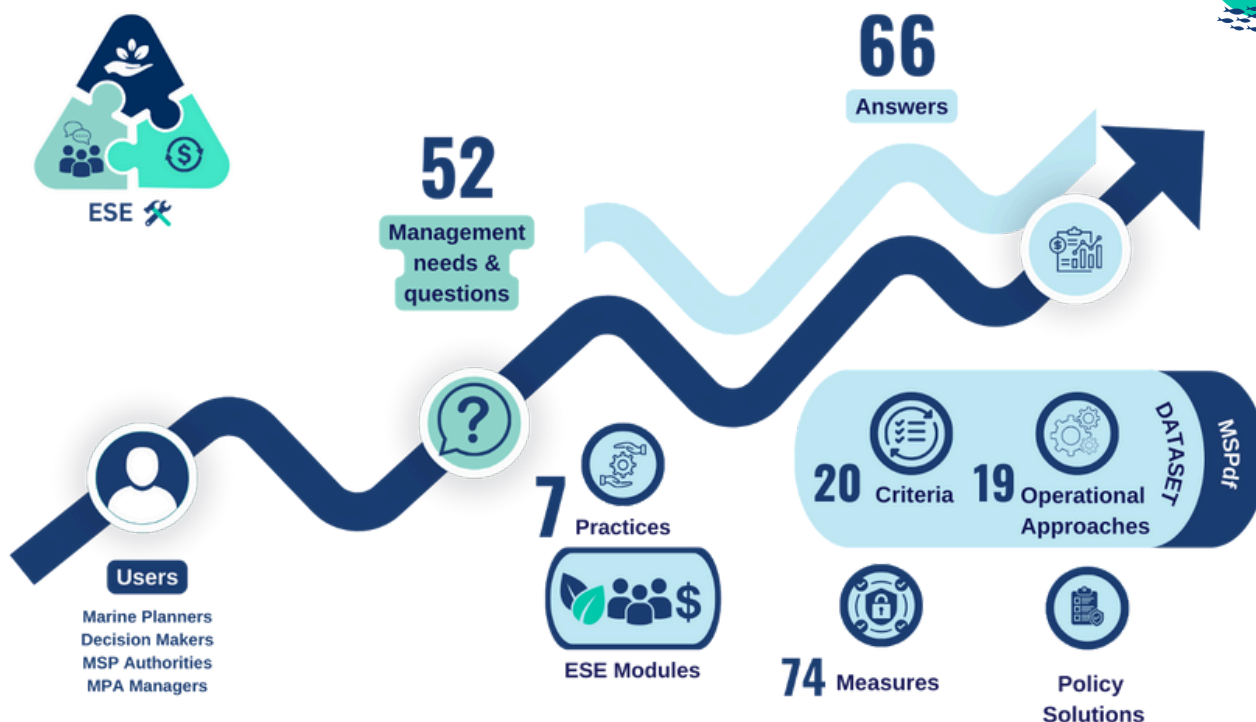
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Key Modules



The ESE Framework in Figures



Managing Trade-Offs

The ESE Framework helps navigate complex trade-offs by:

- Balancing short-term economic gains with long-term conservation goals.
- Addressing local vs. regional and stakeholder-specific interests.
- Supporting inclusive decision-making with practical tools and evidence-based insights.

MSP- MPA Integration

- **Structured Integration Approach:** A three-phase process—preplanning, planning, and implementation—supports the effective inclusion of MPAs in MSP.
- **Tailored Models of Integration:** Four levels of MPA-MSP relationships guide context-specific planning, from MPAs as drivers to sectoral layers in MSP.
- **Evidence-Based Criteria:** A checklist of 93 criteria—environmental, socioeconomic, governance, and process-related — helps identify priorities for effective integration.
- **Policy-Practice Tools:** Offers practical guidance including joint Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) and protocols for cumulative impact assessments.
- **Global Relevance:** Draws from the experience of 20 EU countries and Taiwan, making the framework scalable and adaptable for international use.

Recommendations

- Strengthen stakeholder engagement processes.
- Develop clear guidance and protocols for MSP-MPA integration.
- Conduct joint Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) for MSP and MPA projects.
- Implement standardised protocols for assessing cumulative impacts.

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