

# EMBEDDING BIODIVERSITY IN MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING

Turning Ambitions into Action with MSP4BIO

## POLICY BRIEF

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### Authors:

Ivana Stojanovic, s.Pro  
Marina Markovic, PAP/RAC

**Prepared and designed by s.Pro**  
Natascha Jaspert, Agnese Cosulich



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# KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICY MAKERS



1

Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) remains an underutilized but crucial instrument for marine conservation.

2

Biodiversity must be embedded across all MSP stages — from pre-planning to implementation.

3

Legal mandates, ecosystem-based planning, and cross-sector governance are essential.

4

The [MSP4BIO](#) ESE Framework offers a practical, science-based pathway for effective biodiversity integration.



# OVERCOMING BARRIERS

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR BIODIVERSITY-INCLUSIVE MSP

### DESPITE PROGRESS, MAJOR CHALLENGES PERSIST:

- **Insufficient and fragmented MPA coverage** undermines 30x30 biodiversity targets.
- **Legal and policy incoherence** between MSP, conservation law, and environmental directives leads to inefficiencies.
- **Weak stakeholder engagement and institutional fragmentation** reduce trust and legitimacy.
- **Lack of ecological data, tools, and monitoring** hampers evidence-based decisions.
- **Climate resilience and ecological connectivity** are rarely operationalized in MSP.



# RECOMMENDATIONS



## 1. STRENGTHEN LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS

- Make MSP legally binding and explicitly incorporate biodiversity protection.
- Align MSP legislation with EU directives (MSFD, CFP, Habitats) and national biodiversity strategies.
- Institutionalize inter-agency and cross-border coordination to promote coherent conservation strategies.
- Establish enforceable biodiversity thresholds in MSP (e.g., limits on seabed disturbance).
- Define and implement effective Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

## 2. INVEST IN KNOWLEDGE, CAPACITY AND PARTICIPATION

- Build inclusive governance: empower local communities, MPA managers, and sectoral stakeholders.
- Foster cross-border learning and exchange via regional platforms (e.g., HELCOM, Barcelona Convention).
- Ensure adaptive planning cycles, backed by monitoring and scenario-based reviews.
- Expand SEA and cumulative impact assessments across all planning stages.
- Prioritize education, capacity-building, and accessibility of spatial planning tools.

## 3. FOSTER INNOVATION AND A BIODIVERSITY-FRIENDLY BLUE ECONOMY

- Secure sustainable funding for long-term monitoring and enforcement.
- Promote data transparency through real-time open-access systems.
- Incentivize biodiversity-aligned maritime sectors (e.g., pesca-tourism, restorative aquaculture).
- Support nature-based and multi-use marine infrastructure that enhances both ecological and economic resilience.



# OPERATIONALIZING BIODIVERSITY INTEGRATION



## The ESE Framework

The Ecological-Socio-Economic (ESE) Framework, developed under the MSP4BIO project, is a powerful tool for mainstreaming biodiversity into MSP processes.

### WHAT IT OFFERS

- Step-by-step, tool-supported guidance for planners and MPA managers.
- Spatial analysis of ecosystem services, cumulative pressures, and socio-economic priorities.
- Scenario-based planning for balancing conservation with sustainable maritime use.
- A decision-support platform with tailored guidance, best practices, and interactive tools.



# CALL FOR ACTION

## FROM FRAMEWORKS TO IMPLEMENTATION



To meet EU 2030 biodiversity targets, MSP must evolve into a truly biodiversity-led tool—operational, inclusive, and adaptable across governance levels.

### POLICY MAKERS ARE URGED TO:

- Embed biodiversity targets in all maritime policies and planning approaches, updating and aligning MSP with the MSFD, EU Nature Restoration Law, within the framework of the Ocean Pact.
- Institutionalize regional approach to MSP, supporting cross-sector and transboundary coordination through platforms like HELCOM, the Barcelona Convention, and inter-ministerial bodies.
- Adopt and scale the ESE Framework in national MSP processes to guide spatial integration of conservation, ecosystem services, and sustainable uses.
- Provide dedicated training and resources to planners and authorities for the effective application of ESE methods and tools
- Leverage EU funding programs (LIFE, Horizon Europe and other) to apply MSP4BIO tools in planning, restoration, and climate adaptation.
- Invest in data, capacity, and participation, using MSP4BIO's open-access resources, trainings, and Communities of Practice to ensure long-term uptake.



**BY ACTING NOW, AUTHORITIES CAN TRANSFORM  
MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING INTO A CORNERSTONE  
OF RESILIENT, BIODIVERSE, AND SUSTAINABLE  
OCEAN GOVERNANCE ACROSS EUROPE.**



# MSP4BIO AT A GLANCE



**The Horizon Europe-funded MSP4BIO project (2022–2025) aimed to improve science-based maritime spatial planning to safeguard biodiversity across European seas.**

By developing and testing the modular Ecological-Socio-Economic (ESE) Framework, it supported biodiversity integration in six pilot sites across five sea basins: the Baltic Sea, North Sea, Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Black Sea.

MSP4BIO emphasized participatory methods and provided decision-support tools now available to planners, policymakers, and stakeholders across the EU.

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## GET IN TOUCH



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