

Notes from 8th MSP Planners' Forum

26.03.2026.

Online

Planners' Forum (supported by Interreg BSR [PASPS project](#)) is a platform for practical exchange for MSP practitioners, topics to discuss remain flexible and adaptive; participants of Planners' Forum can raise pressing MSP issues to be included in the agenda upon the need. The 8th meeting concentrates on scenario development in maritime spatial planning (MSP).

News from VASAB and HELCOM

VASAB:

VASAB Young Planners Summer School 2026 will be held in Gdańsk, Poland on 23 – 29 August. The Summer School will bring together young professionals and students interested in spatial planning, geography, regional development, and other studies from across the Baltic Sea Region. Participants will work in international and multidisciplinary teams, and through interactive workshops and collaborative teamwork will explore key territorial challenges. We kindly invite you to share this opportunity with young colleagues, students, and professionals in your organisation or network. More information about the programme, eligibility, and application procedure is available [here](#).

Land-Based Planners' Forum project ended on February 2026 with a final conference – launch of Land-based Planners' Forum. The event brought together spatial planning practitioners, researchers, and institutional representatives from across the Baltic Sea Region to reflect on the future of cooperation among land-based planners. The VASAB CSPD/BSR decided to continue the Land-based Planners' Forum. VASAB Secretariat, together with project partners and stakeholders, will now work on the next steps and develop an action plan to bring some of the Forum's formats into practice in the near future, while continuing to assess and refine the broader range of formats and options discussed. Read more [here](#).

New project on spatial resilience – **Baltic ReSeaLand project**. First ESPON research that covers both land and sea resilience. Follow along the recently approved project to be launched!

Meet Policy Area Spatial Planning at **EUSBSR Annual Forum** on May 12-13 in Tallinn, Estonia:

- Networking village
- From plans to reality: governing urban mobility for resilience (Day 1, Tuesday, 12 May, 15:15-16:15)
- Shifting Tides, Resilient Territories: Advancing Spatial Resilience in the Baltic Sea Region (Day 2, Wednesday, 13 May, 10:15-11:15)

HELCOM:

HELCOM reported on several ongoing activities related to maritime spatial planning and regional cooperation. The **HELCOM Ministerial Meeting** is scheduled to take place in November 2026 in Warsaw. A key ongoing process is the preparation of the fourth Holistic Assessment (HOLAS), currently in development and expected to be finalized by the end of the year, with data collection continuing into 2027.

Several **HELCOM recommendations** are under revision, including those related to marine protected areas, species conservation, and marine and coastal biotopes. In the MSP context, three key recommendations are being revised, with further discussions planned within the HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group. This process aims to establish a more comprehensive strategic planning framework covering marine, coastal, and adjacent land areas.

Additional work includes revising guidelines on transboundary consultation and public participation. Recently, two major guidelines have been adopted: the **Ecosystem-Based Approach (EBA) guideline** and the **MSP output data guideline**.

Furthermore, HELCOM is working on restructuring its country fiches into a more accessible and searchable system, improving the usability of accumulated MSP-related information across the region.

News from countries

Denmark *(not present for tour-de-table, updates sent in written form)*

Denmark's maritime spatial plan needs to be revised based on political agreements to reduce areas designated for raw material extraction and to increase strictly protected marine nature areas. In addition, there will be some minor adjustments, including to shipping corridors, so that they better align with Germany's and Norway's offshore wind developments, as well as corrections of previously mis defined area boundaries. As parliamentary election is coming up on March 24, work related to the upcoming amendment of the Danish maritime spatial plan is currently progressing a bit more slowly until a new government is in place.

Regarding scenario development, the competent authorities are responsible for presenting scenarios/proposals for the designations they wish to include in the MSP. However, comprehensive, integrated scenarios for the entire maritime spatial plan are not yet being developed. We hope this will change through our ongoing work on developing an analytical tool for calculating and visualizing the cumulative effects of the maritime spatial plan.

Estonia *(not present for tour-de-table, updates sent in written form)*

The Estonian MSP, adopted in May 2022, is currently being evaluated to determine how effectively and sustainably it has been implemented and how it is used across maritime sectors. The process examines practical experiences, stakeholder input, sectoral impacts, and whether sea-use criteria meet current needs. The MSP is still in court, but a final decision is expected by the end of April. Pressing issue – the offshore wind farm project and the other cables that are already lying in that area. The cable owner is Russia, which makes it very complicated. Regarding scenario development, when developing the Estonian MSP, scenarios were not used. However, a study of settlement development scenarios was conducted during the drafting of the Estonian National Plan in 2025, see [here](#) (in Estonian).

Finland

In Finland, the revision of the first MSP is being made and work on the first initial draft of the updated MSP has begun. It will be made available to all stakeholders in June 2026, and this is an informal phase during which all stakeholders are welcome to provide their comments on the draft. The goal is to have Finland's second MSP approved by the end of 2027.

During the first planning round Finland carried out quite an extensive scenario phase that lasted over half a year and brought together around 300 stakeholders. Another scenario phase was carried out during the development of the coastal strategy. The overarching topic for the scenarios was security and maritime safety issues.

Åland *(not present for tour-de-table, updates sent in written form)*

Due to a lack of resources, Åland is not actively working with MSP. However, they try to keep themselves updated on what their neighbouring countries are up to. Åland is working on finalising an amendment to the Water Act to update Åland's MSP plan every 10 years, in line with the MSPD. The current legislation requires updates every 6 years, but this is not feasible for them.

Regarding scenario development, there has been no experience working with it on Åland's current (and first) MSP plan from 2021.

Germany

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is currently updating its spatial development programme, which includes the MSP. The first draft of the plan has been completed, with only minor adjustments made to the MSP component. The process is currently in the interdepartmental consultation phase, after which the first stage of public participation is expected to begin. However, due to upcoming political elections, the timeline remains uncertain and the process may be temporarily paused.

In the German EEZ, the main focus is on monitoring and evaluation of the MSP. A concept for evaluation has been developed and is in the process of being published, with the evaluation itself scheduled for completion by the end of the year. It will assess the effectiveness of the plan, its environmental impacts, and the extent to which its objectives have been achieved, in line with federal spatial planning law.

Additionally, work on updating the Site Development Plan (maritime sectoral plan for offshore wind energy) is ongoing. The last site development plan was recently amended because no bids were submitted for the two tender sites of 2025 and due to delays in the production of converter platforms in terms of the grid connection systems. It is foreseen to postpone tenders until 2027. Key upcoming topics include among others spatial designations of remaining areas and sites to cover the entire EEZ of the North Sea, optimization of offshore grid connection systems and wind farm capacities, and ongoing discussions on gate capacities.

Regarding scenarios, no formal scenario approach was used in the MSP of 2021 due to capacity constraints, although alternative development options were considered during planning.

Latvia

Latvia is currently at an early stage of updating its MSP, with work having started around two and a half months ago. The main focus at this stage is on developing the Description of the Current Situation chapter, which includes characterizing various sectors and nature-based aspects. In total, 29 tasks have been identified for the amendment process, alongside the development of a communications plan to guide stakeholder engagement and coordination. A key objective is to introduce multi-use regulation to ensure more efficient use of the limited marine space. Several amendment related challenges remain, including some gaps in necessary data, the complexity of managing numerous tasks, and the need to complete work on the communications plan soon. A pressing issue is the LIFE REEF project, where integrating project results into the legal framework for marine protected areas has proven difficult due to concerns from sectors and coastal communities.

Regarding scenarios, Latvia previously developed four contrasting pathways (economic growth, marine environmental protection, balanced regional development (of Latvia), and Baltic regional integration). For the current MSP update, three new scenarios will be developed, incorporating socio-economic aspects, future trends, climate change, and marine plan objectives.

Lithuania

Lithuania's MSP is integrated into the Comprehensive Plan, which is valid until 2030 and currently remains unchanged, with no amendments planned before the end of its term. The MSP was approved in 2021, and its implementation plan was completed in 2023. Active implementation is ongoing, while any revisions are expected at a later stage.

Current news - the proposed Law on the Development of the Southern Part of Klaipėda State Seaport, which aims to accelerate port expansion, particularly addressing challenges related to land plot formation. Another important development is the offshore wind farm project, which is currently in the design phase. However, progress has been slower than expected due to rising costs, increased risks, and potential delays extending towards 2035.

Regarding scenario development, Lithuania did not apply formal scenarios in the MSP process. Instead, two alternative land-use planning solutions were considered during plan preparation. There is interest in learning from other countries' experiences with scenario-based approaches for future planning processes.

Poland *(not present for tour-de-table, updates sent in written form)*

Poland is finalizing works on regulation regarding required scope of maritime spatial plans. Adoption of this regulation will give green light to formal start of the revision of 2021 Maritime spatial plan for the internal marine waters, the territorial sea and the exclusive economic zone on a scale of 1:200000.

Regarding scenario development, they were used in MSP development process, even to the level of legally binding alternatives. For instance, in 2021 Maritime spatial plan for the internal marine waters, the territorial sea and the exclusive economic zone on a scale of 1:200000 there were two possible locations (option 1 and option 2 / alternative) for the nuclear power plant and each of the locations have different surroundings (in terms of spatial arrangements around). They are both valid now. But when the final location is set, only one of those options will become valid.

Sweden

Sweden's MSP process is currently at a decision-making stage, with plan proposals (submitted in January 2025) are now under government consideration. In parallel, a new government assignment requires revisiting feedback from the latest ESPO consultation, with potential amendments to the plans if needed.

Work is also ongoing on a monitoring and evaluation framework, which was under public consultation during the winter and is expected to be adopted before summer. Follow-up activities are planned to begin in the autumn. Additionally, Sweden has evaluated its second-round MSP process, incorporating feedback from national stakeholders and neighboring countries.

Several supporting studies are underway, including updates to the cultural heritage report, an integrated landscape and seascape analysis for all coastal areas, and a study on land-based infrastructure needs for offshore wind.

Regarding scenarios, Sweden has not applied a formal scenario approach. Instead, the process has relied on vision-setting, trend analysis, and impact assessments. A "zero alternative" (no-plan baseline) is used for comparison, alongside evaluation of different planning options, particularly for offshore wind.

Presentations: Scenario development in maritime spatial planning

Scenarios in maritime spatial planning: example of Finland by *Justus Joenaalto, Capful*

This presentation focused on the use of foresight and scenario-building to support MSP, particularly regarding security of supply and comprehensive maritime security in the Baltic Sea region. Scenarios were presented as tools to explore alternative futures up to 2035, helping decision-makers prepare for uncertainty rather than predict outcomes. The methodology combines data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and structured scenario-building techniques. Key drivers include geopolitical tensions, energy transition, technological development, and environmental change. Three main scenarios illustrate varying levels of security, cooperation, and system resilience. It was emphasized that MSP and scenario work together enhance resilience, encourage cross-sector collaboration, and shift planning beyond narrow interests. The final outcome is a comprehensive security vision for a safe and vibrant Baltic Sea, supported by proactive planning, international cooperation, and long-term preparedness strategies.

Comments from the discussion

It was asked whether the presented approach included “target-seeking scenarios,” where stakeholders are given a desired future vision and asked to develop alternative pathways to achieve it. In response, it was explained that the presented work mainly focuses on exploratory scenarios, which map out multiple possible futures rather than aiming for a predefined outcome.

It is also discussed that the best time of the MSP development process when to integrate scenario work is the very early stage to be able to integrate the scenarios fully.

A participative process for exploring local uncertainties for energy system futures offshore, under global scenario narratives by *Laura Gusatu, University of Groningen*

This presentation outlined a participatory approach to exploring uncertainties in offshore energy system development, developed within the ECOAMARE project. The main goal is to support strategic, sustainable energy planning by integrating diverse knowledge sources and stakeholder perspectives while balancing environmental, economic, and social interests. The method builds on global Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs), which are translated into European and then local (Dutch/North Sea) scenarios through a stepwise process – from broad narratives to sector-specific and spatial analyses. Key sectors include energy, fisheries, shipping, food, and nature.

The framework identifies drivers of change, uncertainties, and trade-offs, combining qualitative insights (e.g., governance, technology, societal values) with quantitative modeling of energy systems. Scenarios such as sustainability, regional rivalry, and inequality illustrate different futures shaped by cooperation levels, innovation, and policy priorities. Ultimately, the approach produces spatial representations of offshore activities, highlighting risks, synergies, and optimal areas for development, supporting informed decision-making for future energy systems.

Comments from the discussion

It was brought up whether sector-specific scenario approaches (e.g. for energy) could be applied across other sectors and then integrated within MSP to create more comprehensive, harmonized scenarios. The response was that while the current work is energy-focused, it does incorporate objectives from other sectors to identify synergies, trade-offs, and interaction pathways. It is agreed that applying similar approaches across sectors could support better integration within MSP, although relationships between sectors are not always fully aligned or synergistic.

Co-creation of governance scenarios for the Greater North Sea Basin: Experience from the NESB project *by Juul Kusters, Northern European Sea Basins project / University of Groningen*

This presentation discussed the co-creation of governance scenarios for transboundary collaboration in the Greater North Sea Basin within the NESB project. The project aims to strengthen multi-level governance, improve cross-border cooperation in MSP, and enable knowledge exchange across sea basins.

The presentation highlighted the necessity of international coordination to optimize space use, reduce costs, and minimize ecological impacts. However, current governance is challenged by fragmented planning, institutional ambiguities, differing national approaches, and limited resources. A strong sectoral focus, especially on offshore wind, also restricts innovation and long-term strategic planning.

To address these issues, the project develops exploratory governance scenarios through stakeholder co-creation. This process examines key drivers such as political willingness, institutional capacity, and perceived urgency for collaboration. It also evaluates existing governance bodies, identifying both their strengths and limitations.

Comments from the discussion

The discussion focused on clarifying the concept of governance scenarios and how they relate to exploratory future scenarios. Participants highlighted that while exploratory scenarios describe what the future may look like, governance scenarios are more about how institutions and actors respond. It was added that governance scenarios might be better understood as governance implications or designs derived from exploratory futures.

Further comments emphasized alternative approaches, such as pathway methods to map routes toward desired futures. Additionally, the importance of “willingness to cooperate” was identified as a key but complex factor influencing how governance arrangements may function in practice.

Discussions

The discussion part was led by the [NESB project](#) team – Juul Kusters, Jakub Turski and Margarita Vološina. It was organized in three breakout rooms, each holding an internal discussion and working on a Miro board. Each group had the same set of discussion questions and the Miro board template to fill, so the results could be later discussed and compared between the groups. The questions that were explored were:

- What are the values and risks of scenario development as a tool for developing governance processes and decision-making?

Comments from the discussion

It was agreed that scenarios are valuable for building a shared understanding among stakeholders and simplifying complex future uncertainties, but the process is time- and resource-intensive, making it difficult to adjust quickly or apply under tight timelines. Participants also noted that unclear terminology and differing interpretations (for example, scenarios vs. forecasts) can lead to confusion, emphasizing the need for clear communication about purpose and expectations. Overall, while scenarios are powerful tools, their effectiveness depends on sufficient resources, clarity, and careful implementation to avoid unnecessary complexity or stakeholder frustration.

- What factors increase or decrease your willingness and ability to engage in transboundary collaboration?

Comments from the discussion

The discussion highlighted that willingness to cooperate depends not only on shared goals but also on simplicity, trust, and the ability to reduce complexity and cost-factors that encourage collective action. Political will, effective leadership, and strong professional networks (such as regional cooperation platforms) were identified as key facilitators, while limited resources, competing national priorities, and institutional capacity can act as barriers. Participants also emphasized the importance of communication, trust, and a common understanding to sustain collaboration across borders.

Themes and timing for the next Planners' Forum

It is agreed that 9th MSP Planners' Forum will be held online in Autumn 2026. Exact date and topic will be agreed via correspondence using the same survey topic.

Participants of the 8th MSP Planners' Forum within PASPS project:

Country	Name	Organisation
Denmark	Malte Hvidsten	Danish Maritime Authority
Finland	Mari Pohja-Mykrä	Regional Council of Southwest Finland
Finland	Essi Kärpijoki	Regional Council of Southwest Finland
Germany	Yannik Heisel-Sure	Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency, BSH
Germany	Ulrich Scheffler	Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency, BSH
Germany	Sarah Wieschmann	Ministry of Economics, Infrastructure, Tourism and Labour Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
Latvia	Toms Skadiņš	Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development
Lithuania	Donata Paulauskaitė	Ministry of Environment
Sweden	Elin Celik	Swedish Marine & Water Management Authority
Sweden	Jan Schmidtbauer Crona	Swedish Marine & Water Management Authority
Sweden	Joacim Johannesson	Swedish Marine & Water Management Authority
Supporting organisations		
VASAB	Jana Patmalniece	VASAB Secretariat
VASAB	Tīna Šipkēvica	VASAB Secretariat
VASAB	Margarita Vološina	VASAB Secretariat
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HELCOM	Aurélia Care	HELCOM Secretariat
EU MSP Platform	Kristīna Veidemane	EU MSP Platform
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University of Groningen	Laura Gusatu	University of Groningen
Capful	Justus Joenaalto	Capful