Notes from 9th MSP Planners' Forum

22.10.2026.

Online

MSP 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 9th meeting concentrates on nature restoration in maritime spatial planning (MSP).

News from VASAB and HELCOM

VASAB:

VASAB Secretariat has had a busy summer session with events like Interreg BSR Project Platform and Small Project Kick-offs (Berlin and Kiel, respectively on 9-10 June and 16-17 June), ESPON Seminar "Mind the gap: Addressing cognitive distance to territorial cohesion" in Limassol (Cyprus) on June 17-18, EU Macro-regional and Sea basin Strategies Days 2026 in 8-9 July in Brussels, and, most importantly, VASAB Young Planners' Summer School in the last week of August in Gdansk. The Secretariat is looking forward to the upcoming week in Gdansk with Baltic ReSeaLand project kick-off, 1st VASAB-DG meeting, 99th VASAB CSPD/BSR meeting taking place.

Regarding EUSBSR developments, Norway has officially become the ninth full member of the EUSBSR, marking an important milestone in strengthening regional cooperation. As a full member, Norway will participate in the Strategy's joint strategic leadership and decision-making, contributing to shared priorities and addressing common challenges, particularly in the areas of security, resilience and regional development. To mark this milestone, an official launch event was held on 16 October in Oslo, bringing together Norwegian authorities, European Commission representatives and EUSBSR stakeholders to discuss opportunities for deeper cooperation.

New project: CoPlanCoast – a 24-month BlueActionBANOS project (Nov 2026 to Nov 2028) on restoring and protecting coastal nature in the Baltic and North Sea area. Four community-led Living Labs test local restoration and nature-based climate adaptation, and link that work to regional and local spatial planning so it lasts beyond the project. It also builds ocean literacy by collecting local history of people and nature, and spreads lessons across the region.

HELCOM:

HELCOM informed about **the upcoming HELCOM Ministerial Meeting**, scheduled for 4 November 2026 in Warsaw, where new and renewed regional policy commitments for Baltic Sea marine environment protection are expected to be adopted. In preparation for the meeting, an interim assessment of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) has been carried out, showing that 27 of its 199 actions have been completed. An interim assessment of the Regional Maritime Spatial Planning Roadmap also indicated good progress, with only two of its 27 actions neither implemented nor under implementation. The HELCOM Regional Action Plan for Benthic Habitat Restoration is expected to be adopted at the Ministerial Meeting.

Preparations are also underway for the **fourth Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS 4)**. Related to MSP, offshore wind energy development is an important topic, for example the data collection which is currently being

discussed under relevant HELCOM bodies. Opportunities to strengthen regional data sharing and cooperation between environmental assessment and MSP processes were highlighted. Discussions are also ongoing on potentially integrating MSP perspectives into future projections of human pressures and environmental impacts.

HELCOM is working on revising the regional MSP framework with recommendations related to maritime spatial planning, coastal zone management and terrestrial planning in coastal areas. A task force has identified preliminary priorities and a proposed structure for the framework, which will be further discussed within the HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group.

News from countries

Denmark

Denmark's MSP is guided by a political agreement from 2023, setting the framework until 2033. One of the main priorities is increasing strictly protected marine areas to 8% by 2028 and 10% by 2030. Political negotiations on additional protected areas are expected to begin in winter 2026, with a subsequent agreement triggering a revision of the Danish MSP. Other ongoing activities include the development of a cumulative impact assessment tool called HAVANA and preparations for Denmark to take over the co-presidency of the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) together with Norway in November 2026. Denmark also hosted the Nordic MSP Forum in September, focusing on data sharing, while the upcoming European Ocean Act remains another important priority.

Regarding nature restoration, the Danish MSP does not include specific restoration measures. Restoration activities may take place in Danish marine waters, provided they do not interfere with designated sea uses. Such projects are primarily initiated by municipal and national authorities, with permits issued by authorities under the Danish Ministry of Environment.

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

Estonia is currently implementing its MSP while also reviewing how well the plan is working in practice and whether it remains relevant. The review is already underway and will be completed by autumn 2027, after which it will be submitted to the Government for information.

Several practical issues are currently being dealt with, including shipping through offshore wind areas, where a corridor is foreseen but its exact location still needs to be determined, and finding suitable routes for offshore connection cables. Another important issue is marine spatial data, particularly the availability, cross-sectoral use and regular updating of different data layers.

Estonia is currently preparing its National Restoration Plan with the involvement of thematic expert groups covering different ecosystems, including marine waters, rivers and lakes. Estonia has moved from identifying possible restoration measures towards specifying their scope, costs and priorities. For the marine environment, the draft includes measures related to seabed habitat mapping and assessment, restoration and conservation of marine habitats, nutrient pressures, pollution prevention and hazardous wrecks. From an MSP perspective, an important question is how restoration objectives can be integrated into spatial planning and decision-making on infrastructure and other uses of the sea.

Finland

Finland is currently preparing an updated maritime spatial plan, which for the first time is undergoing a statutory Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) under Finnish legislation. The draft MSP and environmental report are being developed in parallel and will undergo national and transboundary consultations in Spring 2027. Estonia,

Poland, Sweden and Denmark will participate in the transboundary consultation, while Germany, Latvia and Lithuania will receive relevant information and materials without formally participating.

Regarding nature restoration, Finland is preparing its National Restoration Plan separately from the MSP process, with public consultation on the draft having taken place during summer 2026. Specific marine restoration sites have not yet been identified or incorporated into the MSP update. Despite both processes being coordinated within the same ministry, their integration remains limited. The potential implications of the upcoming European Ocean Act and the need to strengthen links between nature restoration and MSP were highlighted as important considerations for future planning.

Åland

Åland's first maritime spatial plan was adopted in 2021 and is indicative rather than legally binding. Privately owned waters are not included in the MSP and are instead addressed through municipal land-use planning. Due to limited resources, Åland amended its Water Act in June 2026, extending the MSP revision interval from six to ten years, with the next update scheduled for 2031. In parallel, the Sunnanvind project is developing a master plan for offshore wind energy north of Åland, with preparations for an auction process ongoing. Key priorities for the next MSP revision include better integration of privately owned waters, land-sea interactions and ecosystem services mapping.

Regarding nature protection and restoration, Åland currently has approximately 3.4% of its marine waters protected and continues working towards the 30% protection target by 2030. The high proportion of privately owned waters presents challenges, as conservation measures largely depend on voluntary commitments. Åland is developing a roadmap for marine biodiversity protection and restoration, while its contribution to Finland's National Restoration Plan has been completed and submitted, awaiting finalisation of the national process.

Germany

For Mecklenburg-Vorpommern the current Spatial Development Programme has been in force and under implementation since June 2016. It is currently under revision to adress new framework conditions and requirements, for example, climate change, energy transition and flood protection. In the context of MSP, the revision also introduces a new category for marine areas reserved for aquaculture. Regarding pressing issues, the worsening geopolitical security situation calls for a greater focus on resilient spatial planning and new requirements, including those relating for the protection of critical infrastructure. About nature restoration – the Gennaker offshore wind farm is scheduled to begin operations in 2028. Following a legal dispute between the project developer and the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), the project will include a comprehensive accompanying research program focusing on birds (e.g., cranes) and bats.

In the German EEZ, the main focus is currently on monitoring and evaluating the existing MSP. An evaluation concept was published earlier in 2026, followed by consultations with relevant federal ministries. The assessment is now underway, with a draft report expected in November and the final report by the end of 2026 or early 2027. Although there is no legal deadline for the evaluation, its results will provide an important basis for possible future MSP revision.

Regarding offshore wind energy, the second update of the Site Development Plan 2025 was published in early October. The preliminary draft of the next update of the Site Development Plan has been published on 22nd October 2026. The planned changes concern the North Sea EEZ, with no new designations foreseen in the Baltic Sea. A key element of planning is what is known as 'over-capacity'. This allows the grid connection to be utilized more effectively, thereby saving costs. Furthermore, for the newly designated wind farm sites, the BSH is planning for a

lower power density, which improves electricity yields. The international notification is planned for the beginning of next year.

Regarding nature restoration, the process is led by the Federal Ministry for the Environment and the relevant environmental agency, while MSP authorities participate alongside other federal stakeholders.

Latvia

Latvia is currently updating its maritime spatial plan, with work focusing on finalizing the description of the current situation chapter, which will include updated information on various maritime sectors and environmental conditions. Planning criteria and the analysis of potential conflicts between sea uses are also being revised in cooperation with the national coordination group, preparing the basis for scenario development and zoning. Work continues developing multi-use regulations and a centralized licensing procedure. A key challenge is accommodating potentially expanded marine protected areas while maintaining the total area designated for offshore wind energy investigation, which will also require adjustments to shipping routes. The MSP update will also contribute to SEABAS project pilot activities on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA).

Regarding nature restoration, Latvia's National Nature Restoration Plan is awaiting further consideration by the Cabinet of Ministers pending a socio-economic assessment. Marine restoration priorities of the Plan include improving the condition of stony reefs, addressing various knowledge gaps concerning, for instance, seabird habitats and investigating invasive alien species. In the MSP context, five investigation zones of nature values have contributed to the development of marine protection area and measures through the LIFE REEF project, including restrictions on activities (potentially) harmful to marine habitats.

Lithuania

Lithuania's MSP is integrated into the National Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2021. In September 2026, work began on a monitoring report assessing the implementation of spatial planning solutions, which is expected to be completed by the end of the year. The results will help identify future priorities and potential amendments after 2030. Implementation activities include the southern expansion of Klaipėda Port, with design proposals completed and construction permitting underway. Regarding offshore renewable energy, the government approved an infrastructure development plan in January 2026, while the Environmental Impact Assessment for Lithuania's first offshore wind farm was completed in July. Preparations for Lithuania's upcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU and discussions on the European Ocean Act are also important priorities.

Regarding nature restoration, the current MSP includes only general provisions without specific restoration measures. Lithuania's National Nature Restoration Plan is being finalised, focusing on marine habitat restoration, pollution reduction and environmental monitoring. Particular attention is given to deteriorating reef habitats, with proposed measures including targeted fishing of invasive round gobies and technical solutions to reduce wave impacts on sensitive habitats. The plan also incorporates measures to improve the ecological status of the Curonian Lagoon and is expected to be submitted to the European Commission by the end of 2026.

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

Poland is preparing for updating the MSP – Plan adopted in 2021. The preparation consists of many steps, taken to make sure we prepare enhanced Plan. It was started with a thorough assessment of the binding plan. Parallelly the relevant documents and materials have been collected – like studies, recommendations and notions – anything what we considered as a valuable input.

Poland is also 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. The new regulation simplifies the structure of an MSP. The new Polish MSP is expected to be clearer and easier to read.

MSP is also taken into account in the Polish draft National Restoration Plan prepared in line with Nature Restoration Regulation. This draft has been accepted by the Minister of Climate and Environment and submitted to the Working Group for Programming Government Work to start the legislative procedure.

Sweden

Sweden's MSP proposals, submitted in January 2025, are still under government consideration following the recent parliamentary elections. Meanwhile, new developments have emerged, including additional areas claimed for military defence purposes in the Baltic Proper and the Gulf of Bothnia. In July 2026, two offshore wind projects were approved by the government, while 11 others were rejected due to defence interests. A new monitoring and evaluation framework was adopted in June, with implementation now underway and strong interest from stakeholders. Sweden is also investigating possible adjustments to shipping routes in the Baltic Sea to reduce environmental impacts.

Regarding nature restoration, the current MSP does not include explicit restoration objectives, although designations requiring particular consideration of high nature values may support passive restoration by reducing environmental pressures. Sweden has also prepared its National Nature Restoration Plan, primarily building on existing measures under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and strengthening restoration objectives in marine protected areas. An initial proposal to investigate the potential role of MSP in supporting restoration, including through possible binding regulations, was excluded from the final government version. However, opportunities to strengthen the role of MSP in nature restoration may still be explored in the future.

Presentations: Nature restoration in maritime spatial planning

Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Restoration under the Nature Restoration Regulation – insights from Biodiversa+ projects by David Lusseau, Biodiversa+

This presentation focused on practical approaches to implementing the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, drawing on findings from three Biodiversa+ projects: MPA4Sustainability, REMOVE_DISEASE and RESTORESEAS. The presentation introduced a policy roadmap outlining seven recommendations across three implementation phases: preparation, delivery, and scaling and adaptation. Key priorities include using spatial risk assessments to identify suitable restoration areas, ensuring climate resilience, and developing harmonised monitoring approaches that consider biodiversity, ecosystem services and socio-ecological factors.

Particular attention was given to the importance of anticipating climate change impacts, disease and invasive species risks, as well as considering potential trade-offs between environmental protection and human activities. The presentation highlighted the value of existing marine protected areas as a starting point for identifying restoration opportunities and reducing cumulative pressures on biodiversity. It was emphasised that restoration should be approached through adaptive management, supported by reusable national toolboxes, coordinated monitoring and cross-sectoral cooperation. The importance of transboundary coordination was also underlined, particularly in shared marine ecosystems where differing national regulations and management approaches can complicate restoration efforts.

Comments from the discussion

The discussion focused on how restoration approaches developed for marine protected areas (MPAs) could be applied more broadly in maritime spatial planning. It was highlighted that MSP could support biodiversity gains by considering how different maritime activities interact and how their spatial allocation can contribute to ecosystem recovery. Regarding application at the sea basin level, it was noted that scaling up the methodologies is technically feasible, but differences in national regulatory frameworks and implementation of EU legislation could pose challenges for harmonised approaches.

PROTECT BALTIC: Evidence for smarter planning and restoration by Cecilia Nyman, PROTECT BALTIC

This presentation introduced the PROTECT BALTIC project and its ongoing work to strengthen marine protection and restoration in the Baltic Sea through improved data, coordinated regional approaches and practical planning tools. The project aims to identify gaps in marine protected area (MPA) coverage and effectiveness, develop a stronger scientific knowledge base and support evidence-based decision-making in maritime spatial planning. A key achievement presented was the first harmonised Baltic-wide overview of MPAs, identifying 3,515 protected areas covering 18.4% of the Baltic Sea marine area. However, it was emphasised that spatial coverage alone does not guarantee effective protection, highlighting gaps in management measures, monitoring and enforcement.

The presentation also introduced newly developed Baltic-wide species distribution models and maps, providing higher-resolution information to identify biodiversity hotspots, ecologically sensitive areas and potential restoration priorities. Further project outputs include assessments of ecological coherence, the Baltic Sea Ecosystem Service Model, and a Restoration Action Plan focusing on benthic habitats and species. A complementary Restoration Toolbox provides practical guidance and examples of restoration measures. Overall, the presentation highlighted how improved environmental data, regional cooperation and accessible decision-support tools can help planners better integrate biodiversity protection and restoration objectives into maritime spatial planning.

Comments from the discussion

The discussion focused on how PROTECT BALTIC tools, particularly species distribution maps and the Baltic Sea Ecosystem Service Model (BALM), could support MSP by identifying priority areas for protection, restoration and sustainable use. Questions were raised about the significant increase in identified MPAs, which was explained by the broader definition used in the project, including areas with a marine component. Participants emphasised the importance of clear definitions and comparable statistics, suggesting that MPA coverage and the proportion of areas covered by management plans would be more informative than simply counting sites or plans. The potential application of BALM in the North Sea was also discussed and considered feasible, provided that relevant species data are incorporated.

Turning Nature Goals into Space: Lessons from NESBp Survey by Magdalena Jezierska, NESBp

This presentation shared findings from a survey conducted within the Northern European Sea Basins project (NESBp), examining how nature conservation, restoration and mitigation measures are integrated into national maritime spatial plans. The survey covered ten countries from the Baltic and North Sea regions and aimed to identify concrete planning measures beyond the designation of marine protected areas. Results showed that 90% of the analysed MSP systems include some form of nature conservation provisions, although their legal strength and implementation approaches vary significantly between countries.

Regarding restoration, 60% of the analysed MSP systems included some form of restoration-oriented measures, with passive restoration being the most common approach. Such measures primarily focus on reducing human pressures, protecting sensitive areas and creating favourable conditions for natural ecosystem recovery, while active restoration measures are more frequently found in North Sea countries. The presentation also highlighted challenges related to limited MSP mandates, environmental data gaps, institutional coordination and monitoring. It was emphasised that MSP primarily plays an enabling and coordinating role in nature restoration through knowledge building, spatial allocation, policy dialogue and cross-sectoral cooperation. Effective integration of restoration objectives requires clear policy priorities, reliable environmental data and closer cooperation between MSP practitioners and nature conservation authorities.

Comments from the discussion

The discussion highlighted that some existing MSP measures may contribute to nature restoration, even if they were originally developed for other purposes. Participants emphasised the need to explicitly recognise restoration objectives in future planning processes, particularly in connection with national Nature Restoration Plans. The discussion also addressed the ongoing development of the NESBp catalogue of mitigation measures, expected in early 2027, and highlighted the potential to use existing conservation and restoration measures to support multiple policy objectives through better policy coherence.

Discussions

The discussion part was led by Kristīna Veidemane (SEABAS project platform), who presented the ongoing work on developing regional guidance for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in MSP. The presentation focused on opportunities to integrate nature restoration objectives and measures into SEA and MSP processes, particularly through the mitigation hierarchy of prevention, reduction and compensation. It highlighted the need to better connect maritime spatial plans, environmental assessments and national Nature Restoration Plans, while identifying relevant data needs and practical measures to support this integration.

The discussion explored what additional environmental data and knowledge are needed to identify restoration opportunities and support spatial planning decisions. Participants highlighted the importance of distinguishing between restoration needs and restoration potential, understanding the causes of ecosystem degradation and considering cumulative impacts. The role of MSP in addressing cross-sectoral pressures, including those originating on land, was also discussed. Particular attention was given to the relationship between MSP and SEA in preventing environmental impacts, as well as how maritime activities could be regulated within marine protected areas without compromising conservation objectives.

Overall, the discussion emphasised that MSP can play an important role in supporting nature restoration through its cross-sectoral perspective, spatial allocation of activities and application of the precautionary principle. It was highlighted that SEA should support and assess the integration of environmental objectives into MSP, rather than being solely responsible for identifying preventive measures. The exchange also underlined the need for improved environmental data, closer coordination between planning and nature conservation authorities, and clearer practical guidance on integrating restoration measures into future MSP and SEA processes.

Themes and timing for the next Planners' Forum

It is agreed that 10th MSP Planners' Forum will be held online in Spring 2027. Exact date and topic will be agreed via correspondence using the same topic survey.

Participants of the 9th MSP Planners' Forum within PASPS project:

Country	Name	Organisation
Denmark	Malte Hvidsten	Danish Maritime Authority
Denmark	Sif Flor Jensen	Danish Maritime Authority
Estonia	Lembe Reiman	Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications
Finland	Mari Pohja-Mykrä	Regional Council of Southwest Finland
Finland	Essi Kärpijoki	Regional Council of Southwest Finland
Åland	Annica Brink	Government of Åland
Åland	Maija Häggblom	Government of Åland
Germany	Philipp Arndt	Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency, BSH
Germany	Sophie Bockholt	Ministry of Economics, Infrastructure, Tourism and Labour Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
Latvia	Toms Skadiņš	Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development
Latvia	Diāna Saulīte	Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development
Lithuania	Donata Paulauskaitė	Ministry of Environment
Lithuania	Austėja Radušytė	Ministry of Environment
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