NESBp
Northern European Sea Basins project

WP3 SYNTHESIS WORKSHOP REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Synthesis Workshop titled “Let’s talk a common language” took place in Gdansk end of March 2026 as part of the work package 3 “Energy transition and biodiversity in maritime spatial planning.”

Northern European Sea Basins (NESBp) project is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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Summary

With the Synthesis Workshop titled “Let’s talk a common language” in Gdansk end of March 2026, WP3’s work reached an important milestone. All tasks were presented, discussed and brought forward to a new level.

The workshop was also intended to bring together various projects and initiatives to coordinate common effort towards nature conservation and restoration and ensure sustainable energy transition. An open dialogue on the MSP’s role in nature conservation and restoration as well as keeping cumulative impact at the level which does not jeopardize healthy functioning of the marine ecosystem enriched the content of NESBp deliverables. Experts representing different sectors and target groups forged a common language which strengthens cooperation and knowledge exchange not only at project level but between European sea basins.

Project deliverables will come in 3 stages: The first product –a glossary of terms – is close to completion for June, most content will be published end of 2026 while the final policy briefs, summarizing and pinpointing the broad spectrum of topics for the end of the project in 2027. The workshop demonstrated that respective NESBp tasks are progressing as scheduled and synergy with other projects and processes is ensured.

Find the presentations from workshop here.

Session 1: Let's talk a common language

Introduction and Presentations

The workshop started on Monday with the first session related to task 3.1 "A glossary on terminology related to energy transition and biodiversity".

At first, Philipp Arndt (BSH) gave and introduction to the work in the NESBp project on the glossary of terms. After framing the projects concept and timeline, further presentations were held to widen the focus and enrich the following discussions:

- **Knowledge sharing in the North Sea, a GNSBI perspective, Sharon Tatman (GNSBI)**
- **HELCOM data manager: Presentation on data vocabularies – Technical, organizational aspects, Matthew Richard (HELCOM)**
- **PROTECT BALTIC: Towards a regional list of protection terminology, Katja Laingui (HELCOM)**
- **MEDIGREEN: MSP and the European Green Deal: a nomenclature and its application (MSP-GREEN and MEDIGREEN projects), Martina Bocci (CORILA).**

The participants were divided into 2 groups in presence and 1 online group to ensure lively and structured discussions. Discussions were guided by several main questions in order to achieve a viable result.

Discussion

The demand for the glossary from the North and Baltic countries.

The need for a glossary and a clear terminology was identified by all groups and considered an important task. A is particularly strong interest maybe in the field of MSP, touching upon many other sectors and fields of interest through the holistic perspective. Specific sectors or groups of interest may have differing needs which leads to the fact that terminology challenges cannot be addressed comprehensively within one single large group covering everything.

Given the scale and complexity of the challenge, the group concluded that it cannot be fully resolved immediately. Instead, it is important to start with a focused and pragmatic approach.

However, 3 specific issues related to terminology were highlighted:

- National traditions and specificities
- Professional or sectoral jargon
- The role of machine learning

Drawing on the experience of the Protect Baltic project, participants highlighted the importance of securing agreement among countries. Harmonisation at the sea-basin level would be highly beneficial, given the interconnected nature of marine systems.

At the same time, key differences between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea were underlined, particularly in terms of institutional structures, historical development, and working approaches. These differences make it difficult to apply a unified solution across both sea basins.

Preferable status of such a terminological platform.

The group stressed the importance of establishing a clear procedure for agreeing on terms. This could involve validation mechanisms, such as approval by an advisory board or an expert working group.

Based on all the work already happening in several projects, this can be fed into the seabasin governance processes. The responsibility should be shared. Ultimately, sea-basin institutions will need to define appropriate processes, with countries playing a central role in determining how to move forward.

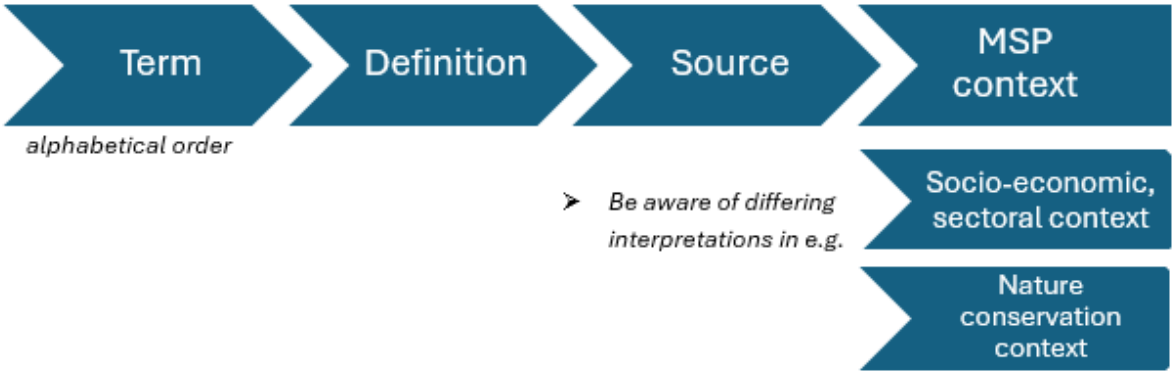
For the Baltic Sea, the HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group (H-V MSP WG) was identified as a relevant structure. In the North Sea context, the landscape is broader, involving groups such as the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI), the North Seas Energy Cooperation (NSEC), and the North Sea MSP Collaboration Group. Strong encouragement for country-level contributions was considered essential.

The vision of the glossary's structure and content.

A "living document" approach was strongly supported, allowing flexibility to continuously add and refine terms over time. A hierarchical structure was considered highly beneficial.

➔ This would ideally begin with global-level definitions, followed by European, regional, and local levels.

The idea of "one-size-fits-all" definitions was discussed as well. Instead, the group suggested starting with general definitions while clearly highlighting different interpretations depending on context.



One proposal was to begin at the international level, enabling clearer communication across borders. Recognising that it may not be feasible to cover all sectors at once, the group suggested prioritising key areas such as biodiversity, offshore wind energy, and cumulative impact assessment.

The discussion also introduced the idea of sustainability, not only in environmental terms but also in relation to the glossary itself. In this context, the concept of a Digital Twin Ocean (DTO) was mentioned as a potential infrastructure. Such a system could ensure both sustainability and transferability, allowing vocabularies developed at different levels to be interconnected.

Feasible technical solutions for maintaining, updating and administering

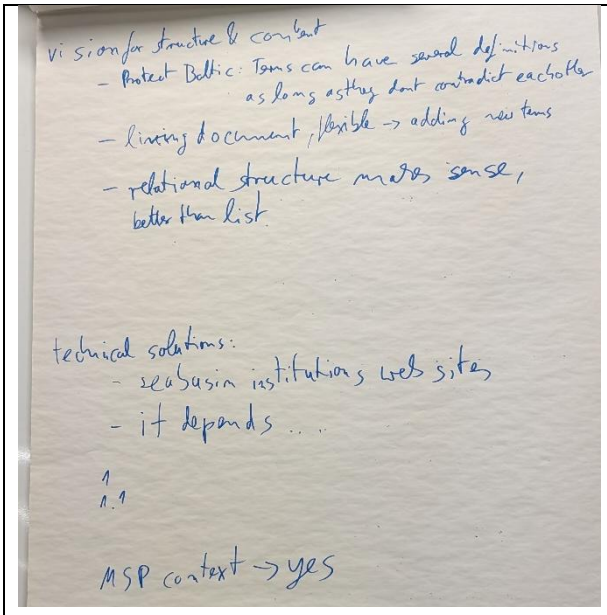
A dedicated website or platform at the sea-basin level would be a suitable solution to ensure long-term sustainability. It should be user-friendly, accessible, and not overloaded with information.

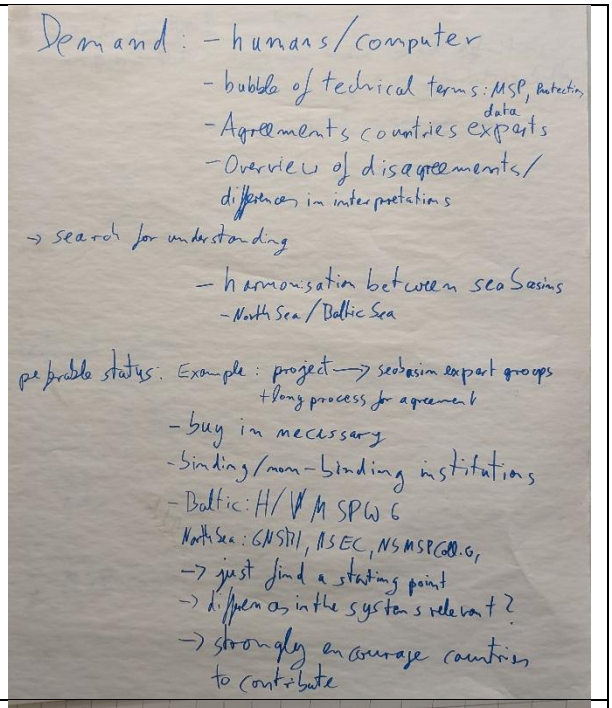
A major challenge identified was the administrative workflow, particularly how to organise data updates, maintenance, and collaboration with experts. But regular updates and review mechanisms are important and should be built in to ensure that new terms and definitions can be added as needed.

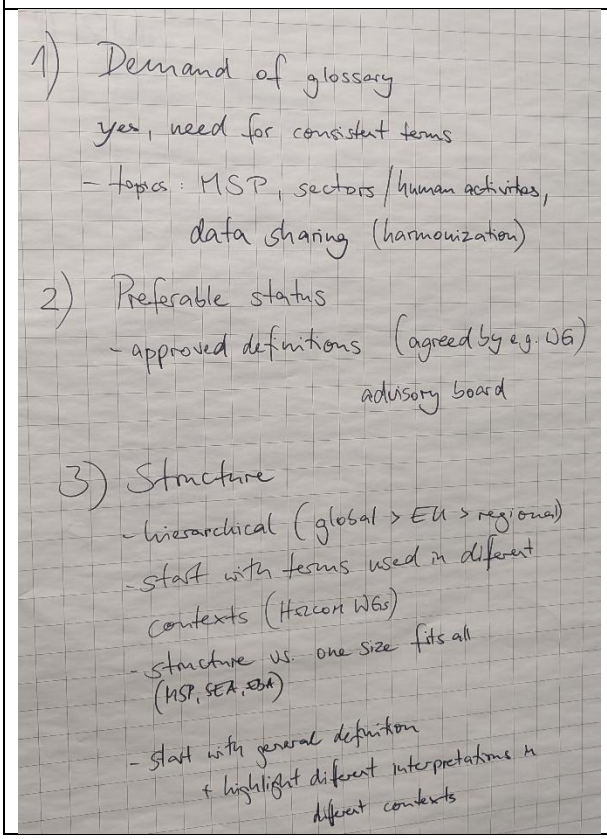
It was also suggested that HELCOM could play a role in providing guidance on how to use the glossary and how to introduce new terms. For example, by collecting proposals from different HELCOM working groups and facilitating discussions.

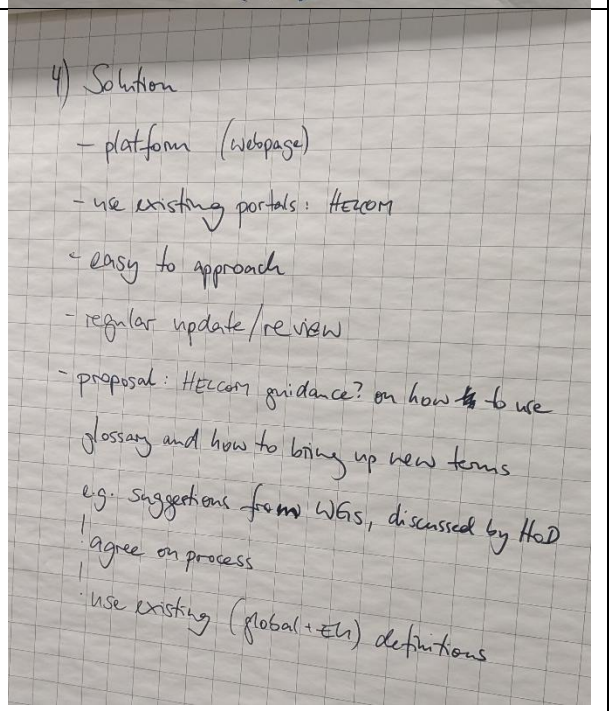
It was also agreed that while the glossary should remain rooted in the MSP context, it should provide broader explanations of terms to enhance understanding across sectors.

Annexes: Group work material.









What is the demand for the glossary from the North and Baltic countries?

Should the glossary be relevant also for other seabasins? (AM)

Prio:
1. how harmonise communication and terminology among people and sectors
2. how harmonise jargon for data sharing (AM)

No expressed Swedish demand, but the value of sharing terms has been obvious in relation with neithbouring countries. (JSC)

I also think there is no straight demand but to have the same 'understanding' on terms such as restoration/conservation (especially in the marine environment) ensures a unified approach on nature/biodiversity efforts.

👍 1

Based on my own observations from the Baltic Sea earlier, but also based on the earlier presentations there seems to be a great need for a common language, in all contexts with cross-border collaboration. So, it is both a) at a human level: understanding each other and using a shared terminology and language and translate sector and legal jargon and b) at a machine level: translation/search at a machine and designing viewing and search functions (AM).

Interesting presentation from Martina about moving from shared vocabulary to shared indicators and monitoring/knowledge building. (JSC)

👍 1

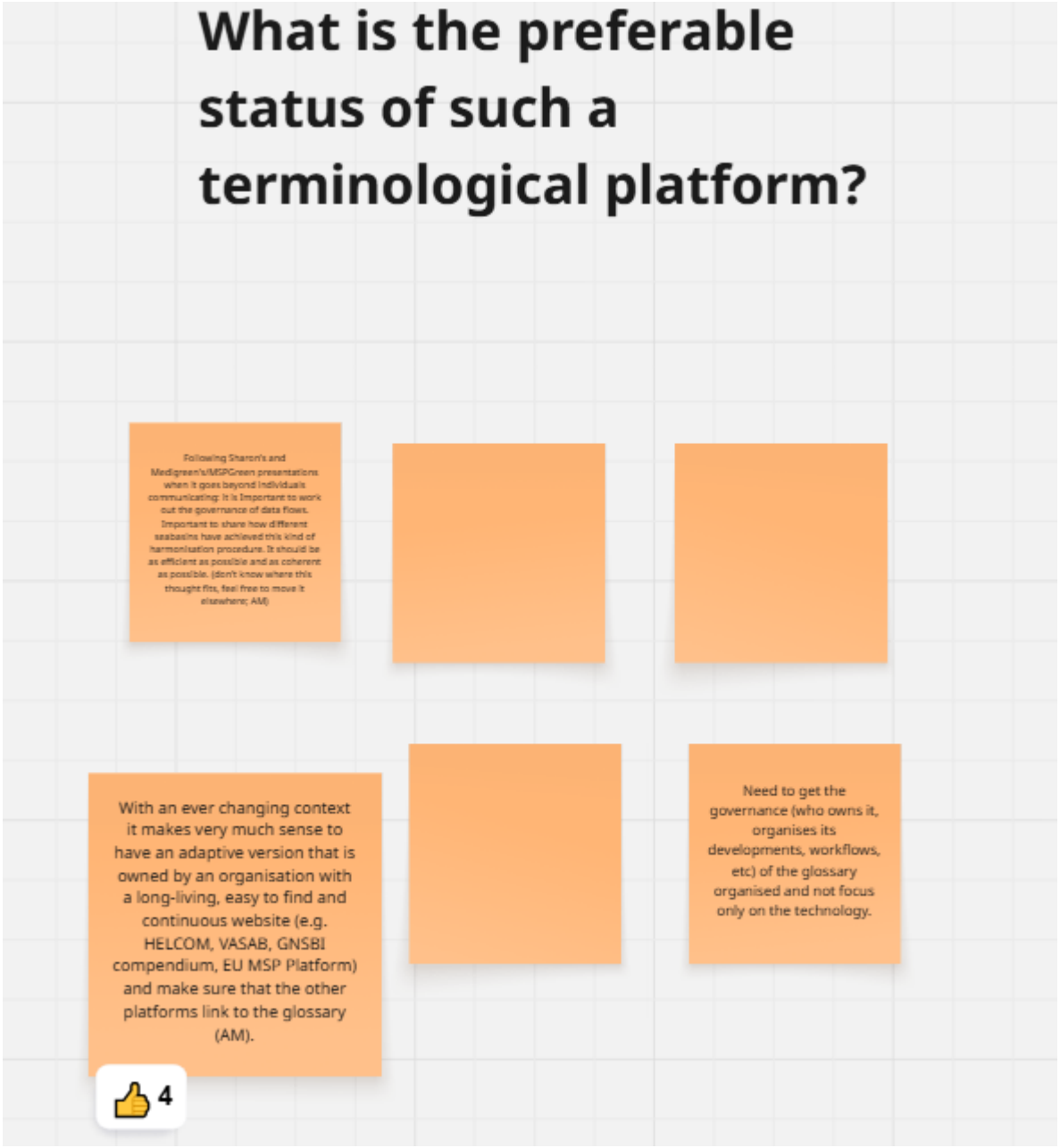
I am not aware that there is a demand in the North Sea, i.e. i don't know any organisation asking for it. But I do think that it is necessary, we need common understanding of terminology between North Sea and Baltic Sea. Maybe more a need to align sectors language rather than between countries.

As noted, we are not aware of any explicit demand, but based on experience, there could be a need to improve cross-border understanding and communication, both in the planning process and in the technical handling of input data for maps, monitoring and related materials. (MH)

Definitely neccessary for cross-border communication.

A challenge is when the same term or word combination has multiple meanings. Like "environmental assessment" being something different in the MSFD-context compared to the MSP-context. Good if the glossary is clear with multiple meanings. (JSC)

The demand is most likely to come from the EC (DG MARE?) and not countries because this is too much a technical topic which most are unfamiliar with


What is the preferable status of such a terminological platform?
Following Sharon's and Medigreen's/MSPGreen presentations when it goes beyond individuals communicating: it is important to work out the governance of data flows. Important to share how different seabasins have achieved this kind of harmonisation procedure. It should be as efficient as possible and as coherent as possible. (don't know where this thought fits, feel free to move it elsewhere; AM)
With an ever changing context it makes very much sense to have an adaptive version that is owned by an organisation with a long-living, easy to find and continuous website (e.g. HELCOM, VASAB, GNSBI compendium, EU MSP Platform) and make sure that the other platforms link to the glossary (AM).
4
Need to get the governance (who owns it, organises its developments, workflows, etc) of the glossary organised and not focus only on the technology.

What is the vision of its structure and content?

Ensure that sea basins share their structure and content methodologies and governance so we don't have different structures in different sea basins

👍 3

The fewer glossaries the better. Harmonize as far as possible. (JSC)

👍 2

Comprehensive to all stakeholders (not to scientific/poltical/ ...)

Tailor it to end-users needs and not what you think is needed. Recommendation; do a stakeholder survey

What are feasible technical solutions for maintaining, updating and administering?

automatic links to existing glossaries? (not sure whether it is technical feasible)

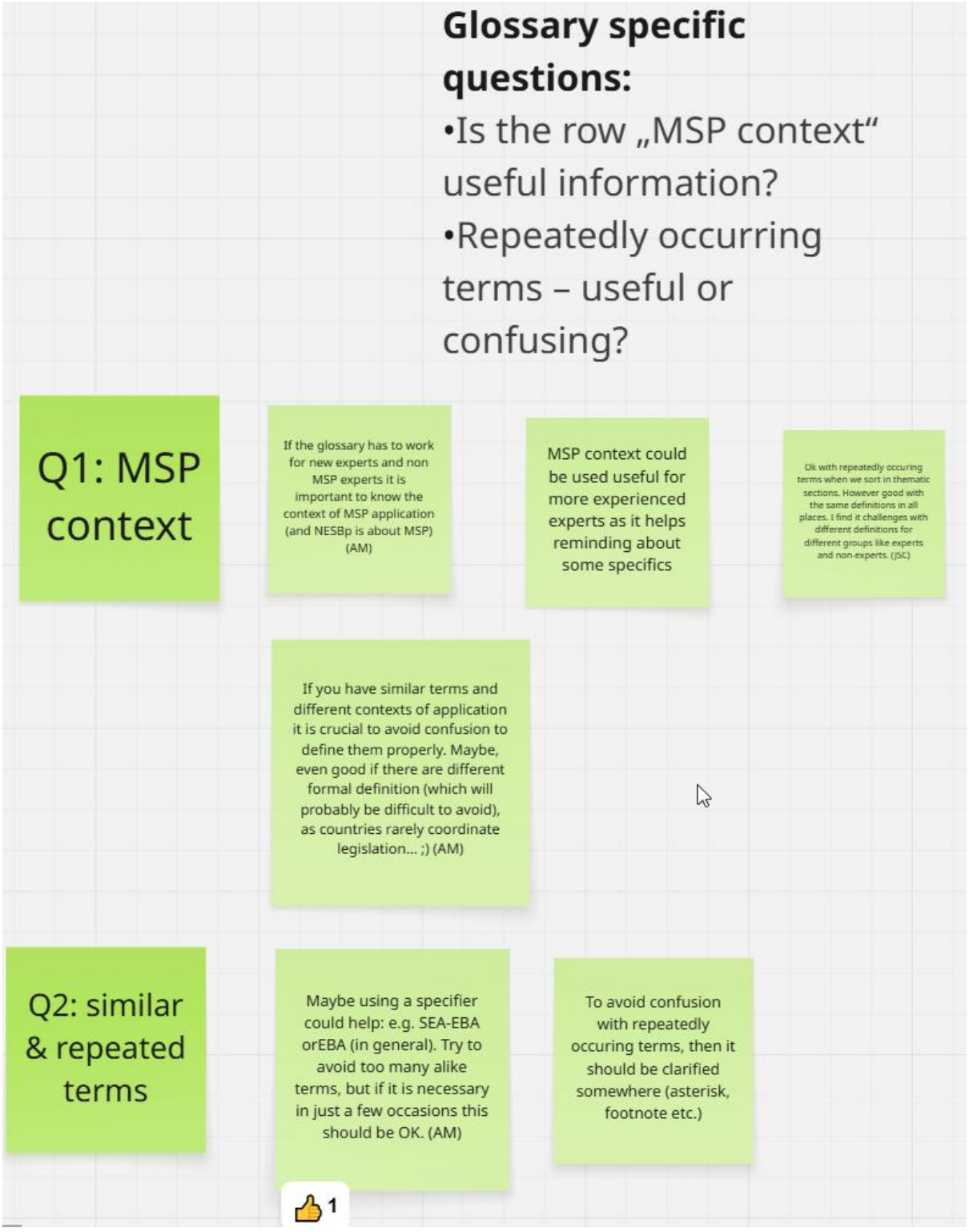
Possibly a working group on the topic to achieve this?

👍 1

Best to find a stable structure to build on like Helcom or GNSBI and link it to EDITO as a lot of resources are there at the moment?

Think about if there is a need for a secure environment (probably not if it is a glossary). if it is, then create a secure space for commercial info or otherwise data that needs to be kept out of public domain. This has consequences for protocols used.

find a place that has longevity, e.g. EDITO


Glossary specific questions:
•Is the row „MSP context“ useful information?
•Repeatedly occurring terms – useful or confusing?
Q1: MSP context
If the glossary has to work for new experts and non MSP experts it is important to know the context of MSP application (and NESBp is about MSP) (AM)
MSP context could be used useful for more experienced experts as it helps reminding about some specifics
Ok with repeatedly occuring terms when we sort in thematic sections. However good with the same definitions in all places. I find it challenges with different definitions for different groups like experts and non-experts. (JSC)
If you have similar terms and different contexts of application it is crucial to avoid confusion to define them properly. Maybe, even good if there are different formal definition (which will probably be difficult to avoid), as countries rarely coordinate legislation... ;) (AM)
Q2: similar & repeated terms
Maybe using a specifier could help: e.g. SEA-EBA orEBA (in general). Try to avoid too many alike terms, but if it is necessary in just a few occasions this should be OK. (AM)
To avoid confusion with repeatedly occuring terms, then it should be clarified somewhere (asterisk, footnote etc.)
1

Session 2: Development without damage

Introduction and presentations

The second session of the workshop was dedicated to one of the most difficult MSP questions – what are practical measures which can be introduced by MSP to support nature conservation and restoration. The session was intended to discuss the result of respective survey conducted by NESBp project within the North and Baltic Sea regions and capitalize on additional inputs from other targeted projects and regions. The goal of the session was to verify and complement information compiled for the overview of nature conservation and restoration measures and assess progress towards the project deliverable – a catalogue of mitigation measures.

The session included three presentations setting the scene for subsequent breakout sessions.

- **Questionnaire on nature protection and mitigation measures in national MSP, Magdalena Matczak (GMU).**
- **PROTECT BALTIC: Human activities, pressures and measures: a regional threat matrix and measures hierarchy, Katja Laingui (HELCOM)**
- **MEDIGREEN: The MED EU MSP plans and nature conservation: insights on available elements and gaps, Martina Bocci (CORILA).**

Discussion

The discussions, organised in two groups in presence and one online group, were intended to synthesis presented information with expert views of project participants to respond to two major questions:

- Which nature conservation measures fall under MSP remits? What are practical means to support restoration in MSP?
- What are practical means to support restoration in MSP?

Nature conservation measures and MSP remits.

Integration of nature conservation measures into maritime spatial planning is provided by the fact that MSP should apply an EBA and contribute to GES. It's also intended to enable efficient utilization of ecosystem services, at the same time ensuring their sustainable functioning. Thus, MSP in general guide human activities through areas where nature conservation requirements place certain regulation on human activities.

However, MSP is so far the only tool/approach with a wider focus. It has the potential to be a forum for cross-sector negotiation from an ecosystem-based approach perspective, which in turns requires support through regulations and the organisational structure of authorities and decision making.

The fact that in many countries MSP is not binding brings additional uncertainty in identification of nature conservation measures which can be stipulated by national MSPs. The overall governance structure does not always give MSP a strong role in relation to conservation. It is often just a guiding. It makes the task to balance between different "sectors" and "conservation" extremely challenging, as the advocacy for carrying capacity of marine and coastal ecosystems lays quite often on a single authority.

Nevertheless, MSP can support nature conservation through avoiding sensitive areas. This is often not "visible" in the plan, however, can be considered as a conservation measure. Moreover, when CIA identifies zones where ecosystem functioning might be disrupted due to high environmental pressure, MSP should provide management measures accordingly, e.g. designating conservation zones in the plan.

Conservation measures in MSP are in general guided by a hierarchical framework of measures:

- At the highest level, the ecosystem-based approach guides planning.
- Tools such as Strategic Environmental Assessment support decision-making.
- The core MSP measure is spatial planning, particularly avoiding environmentally sensitive areas.

Additionally, sector-specific measures, addressing environmental impacts on specific biotopes originating from specific economic sectors can be introduced.

In relation to sector-specific measures sectorial character of “nature conservation” was debated. While it may not have the same lobbying strength as other sectors, conservation benefits from:

- Formal designations (protected areas)
- Site-specific assessments evaluating environmental impacts

In general, four major situations describing integration of conservation measures into MSP can be distinguished:

1. **Managed conservation areas (MPAs)**
2. **Areas without conservation measures or management plans**
3. **Impacts on MPAs originating from outside their boundaries**
4. **Designated MPAs without management plans**

The first option, when marine protected areas are designated and managed is obviously the most preferrable one. In this regard, strengthening dialogue with relevant authorities to encourage the development of management plans seems essential. However, in general MSP response to the identified cases might be described as following:

- **Managed areas (MPAs with management plans):**

MSP approaches vary by country, but generally, planning aligns with the objectives of the management plan. MSP can prioritise compatible activities and introduce restrictions (= temporal or spatial limitations) in accordance with the MPA's plan.

- **Areas without management measures:**

  In such cases, MSP should be guided by the objective of achieving Good Environmental Status. Planning decisions should support this goal. Additionally, Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) (if identified) can provide useful guidance.

- **Impacts originating beyond MPA borders:**

  MSP responses should rely on tools such as Strategic Environmental Assessment and Cumulative Impact Assessment to address external pressures.

- **Designated but unmanaged MPAs:**

  While MSP cannot replace a formal management plan, it can partially compensate its absence by applying precautionary planning decisions based on available environmental data. MSP can guide activities and introduce certain restrictions where possible.

Finally, it's worth to highlight that while concrete conservation measures exist, a key challenge lies in their operationalisation within planning, particularly in a context of overlapping legislation. It requires:

- Robust environmental knowledge to identify hotspots, pressures, and areas of high ecological value.
- Designation of protected areas as one of the strongest and most effective conservation tools.

The need for a regional perspective was strongly emphasised. While some solutions are identified at national level through SEA, they are often deferred to project-level Environmental Impact Assessments. This can result in a lack of a coherent regional overview.

A regional approach is crucial to address issues such as ecological connectivity and migration corridors, enabling more effective national-level decisions aligned with broader regional needs.

Practical means to support restoration in MSP.

Nature restoration regulations at national and European levels should be integrated into MSP to strengthen planning frameworks. However, MSP as an instrument for integrated management of human activities at sea possesses limited tools for direct support of

restoration. Therefore, MSP plays more of an enabling and coordinating role rather than implementing restoration measures directly.

Three key means for indirect influence can be identified: raising awareness, building knowledge, facilitation of policy dialogue and enhancing administrative capacities.

MSP process could raise awareness about restoration with all the actors included in the process. It can facilitate the discussion across borders and sectors to understand potential coherence and avoid contradictory actions.

Improved knowledge should include better access to regionally consistent/coherent data (e.g. on ecosystem components) and identification of sensitive habitats with respective maps for restoration potential. Monitoring and knowledge sharing playes important role which might also require a joint reporting mechanism.

Political ambition setting restoration targets is the major driver. Respective goals should be clearly set, well communicated and linked to other marine restoration goals/measures and institutions. It might require establishing of national or even intergovernmental working groups/resource centres in ecological engineering, in order to elaborate weighted and practical objectives.

Assuming that MSP has limited direct tools to influence on restoration activities, it's practical contribution could be:

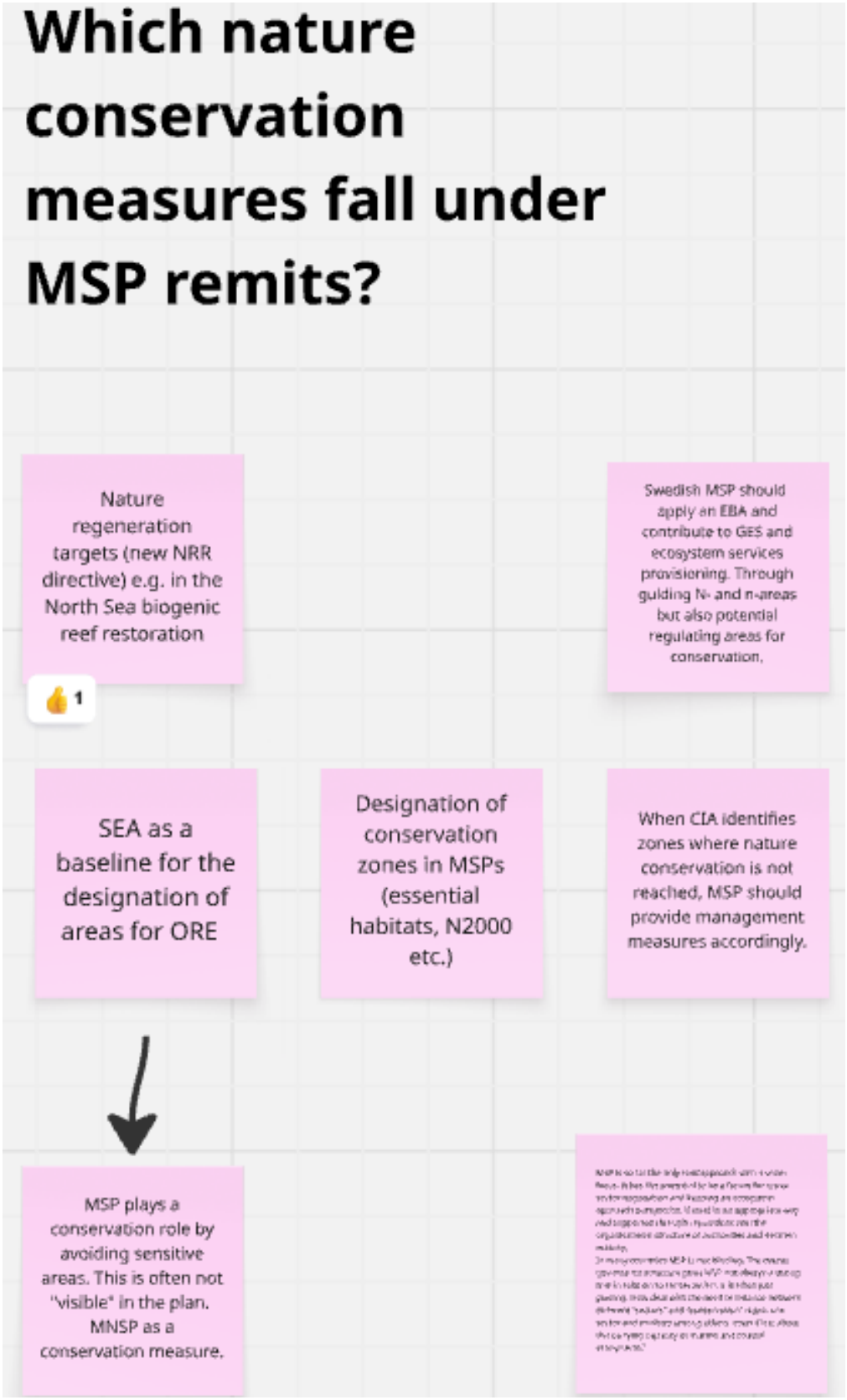
- Allocating space for restoration activities
- Raising awareness of restoration needs
- Data collection and analysis conducted within SEA processes
- The use of CIA tools to identify areas with restoration potential

One of the identified challenges is coordination within the environmental sector itself. To improve it, environmental authorities should be recommended to:

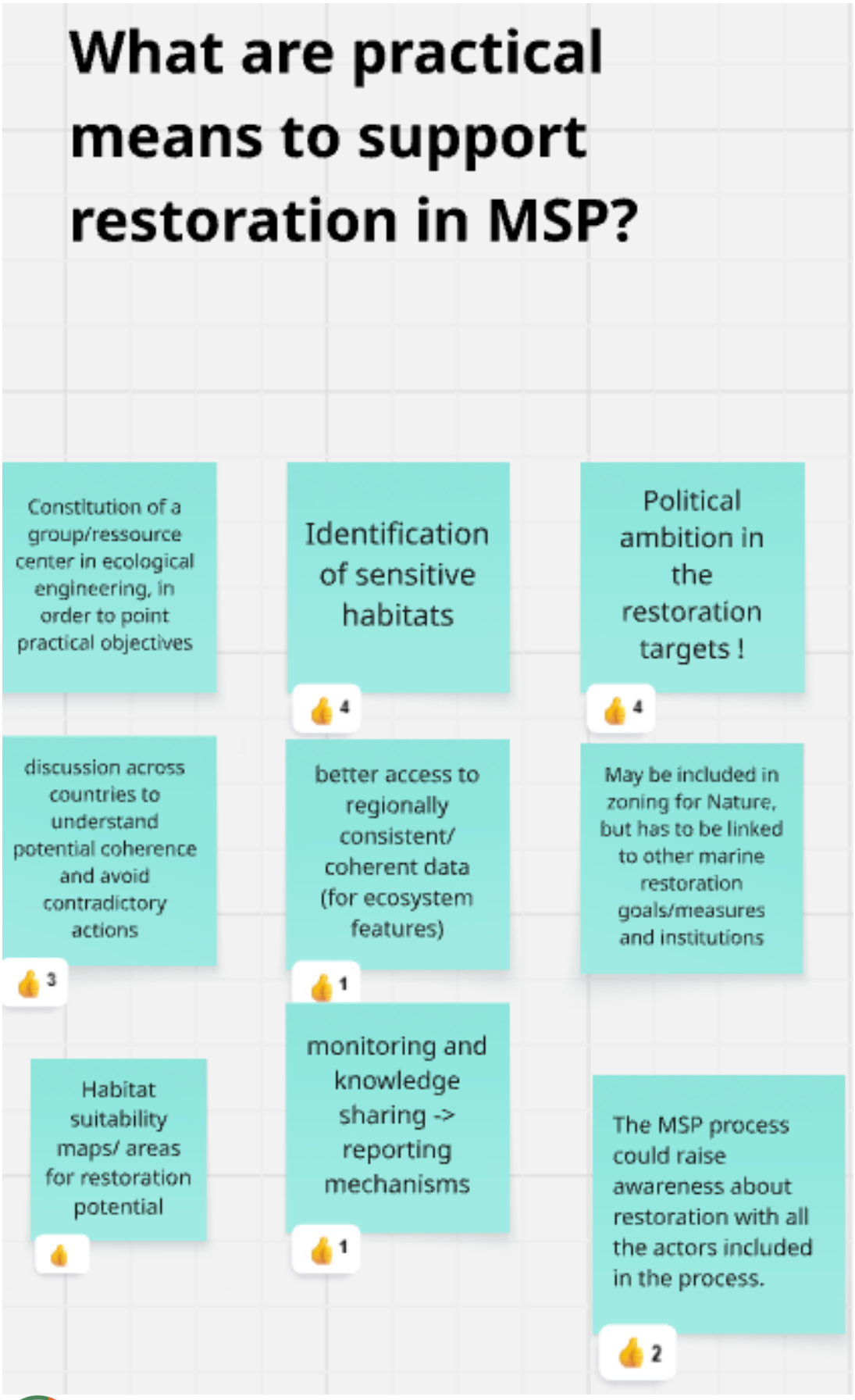
- develop clear catalogues of conservation and restoration measures
- communicate this information with planners for integration into MSP.

MSP can become a valuable partner for restoration authorities, as it provides a comprehensive overview of human activities and industrial uses at sea. However, an agreement within the environmental sector should be achieved. Learning networks, pilot projects, community-driven restoration initiatives could enhance mutual understanding.

Annexes: Group work material.



What are practical means to support restoration in MSP?



Mitigation measures

Introduction and presentations

The second session on Tuesday morning dealt with the topic of mitigation measures related to task 3.3 "Mitigation measures – a catalogue and gap-analysis on mitigation measures"

The task includes two activities: cataloguing effective and proportionate mitigation measures for the maritime economic sectors in the North and Baltic Sea basins and beyond, based on an evaluation of current practice in MSP; and gap analysis and identification of potential mitigation measures and respective research needs.

At first, Marie Dahmen (BSH) gave an introduction to the work in the NESBp project on mitigation measures, with a focus on the results of the questionnaire and the draft catalogue. In addition, a presentation on the French MSP was held by Alan Quentric to provide a practical example on how mitigation measures are integrated in MSP.

The participants were divided into 2 groups in presence and 1 online group to ensure lively and structured discussions. Discussions were guided by several main questions in order to achieve a viable result.

Discussion

MSP helps to mitigate potential impacts.

Mitigation of impacts by maritime activities is typically area-specific and can involve the spatial allocation of activities in MSP in these ways:

- Identify and avoid sensitive natural areas and biotopes
- highlight where mitigation is needed and reduce negative impacts
- guide planning decisions and integrate nature protection measures
- allow different uses to compensate for each other

In discussions it became clear that MSP has limited direct capacity to implement mitigation measures. However, it plays an important role within broader regional policy frameworks, which are often shaped by societal priorities.

It was also emphasised that mitigation should not be seen as an MSP-only responsibility. It is closely linked to processes such as Environmental Impact Assessment.

Differences between countries were highlighted, particularly in terms of:

- Institutional competencies

- The legal status of MSP (binding / non-binding)

Given the diversity of governance systems, responsibilities, and competencies, it is crucial to understand:

- Which authority is responsible for which mitigation measures
- At which planning level (national, regional, sectoral) these measures apply

The issue of mandates is central, particularly regarding what MSP can influence in sectors such as shipping or fisheries.

There was consensus on the usefulness of developing a comprehensive overview (catalogue) of existing mitigation measures across different planning levels and countries.

Such a catalogue could:

- Include a wide range of measures
- Be applicable in both binding and non-binding MSP systems
- Serve as a practical reference for planners

Integration of mitigation measures in national plans.

Mitigation measures or environmental conditions are defined in most of the analysed MSP. The integration of measures was seen necessary but different aspects of the role of MSP were discussed.

Mitigation measures should be addressed in MSP sector by sector but through a broader, integrated perspective. A key idea presented was to consider mitigation within a comprehensive "umbrella" of conservation measures. MSP would serve as a platform to integrate and coordinate these different elements:

- MPA management plans
- Biodiversity targets
- MSFD-related measures
- Sectoral measures

Participants also stressed the importance of starting with a strong environmental knowledge base, including:

- Biodiversity data
- Spatial information on ecosystems and pressures

From this foundation, mitigation measures can be developed and applied at different levels:

- Project/permit level
- MSP level

It was agreed that full standardisation is neither necessary nor desirable, given:

- Local environmental conditions
- National governance differences

However, sharing experiences across countries is highly valuable. A catalogue of measures can support this by:

- Showcasing good practices
- Providing evidence to justify measures

This is particularly useful when addressing concerns from developers or sectors who may consider certain measures too restrictive. Demonstrating that similar measures are successfully implemented elsewhere can strengthen their legitimacy.

MSP as an effective tool for energy transition and protection of the marine biodiversity.

Several priorities for improving MSP effectiveness in mitigating impacts were identified:

- Strengthening multi-level governance, ensuring coordination between local, national, and regional levels
- Better integrating local and regional needs into mitigation strategies
- Raising awareness of increasing environmental pressures requiring mitigation

A key point with regard to mitigation measures is the assessment and monitoring of their effectiveness. Mitigation and monitoring are closely interconnected, and a stepwise approach is essential. This involves:

- Prioritising measures that can be implemented immediately
- Identifying what needs to be improved or adapted over time

It was also seen useful to define thresholds for mitigation measures, to ensure consistency and effectiveness.

The planned overview (catalogue) of implemented mitigation measures will help to identify gaps, such as:

- Under-regulated sectors

- Unclear distribution of responsibilities
- Weak connections between sectoral measures and MSP

Several challenges were already identified in the workshop which need to be considered when evaluating and refining the mitigation scheme in MSP:

- Lack of clarity in national regulatory frameworks
- Differences between countries in roles and responsibilities
- Limited resources and funding for implementation

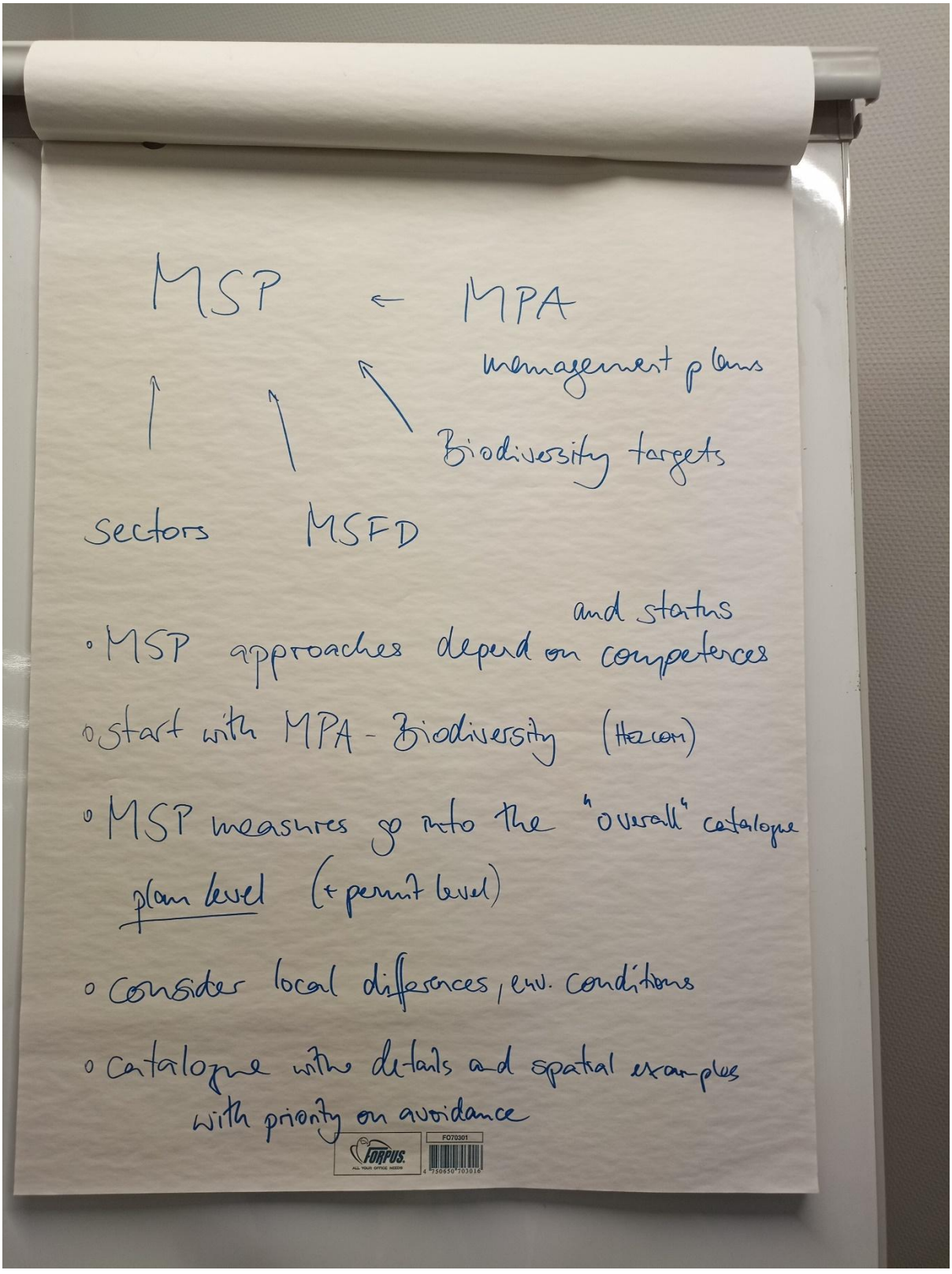
Monitoring was again emphasised, particularly the need for:

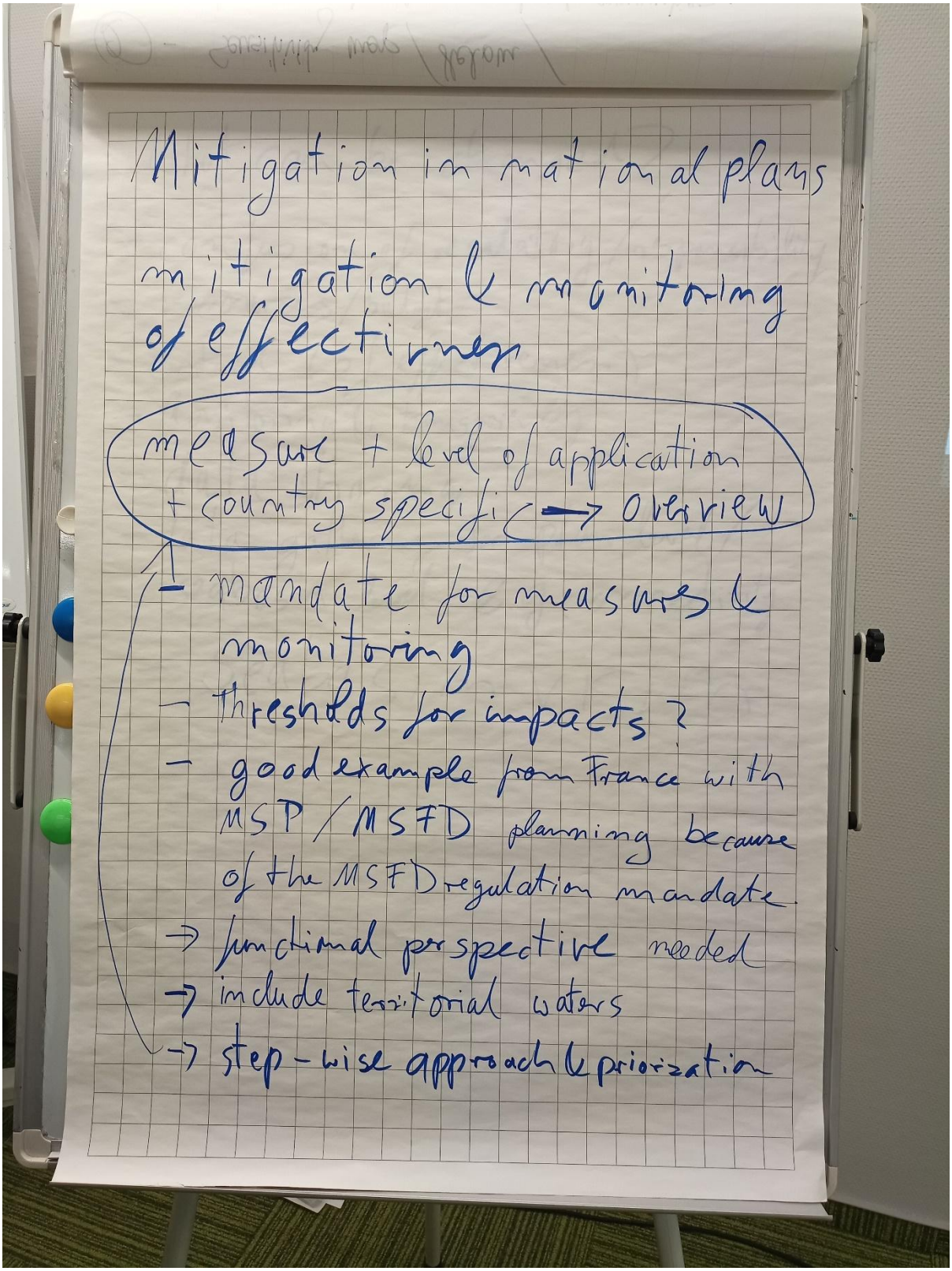
- Transparent monitoring systems
- Data sharing between stakeholders

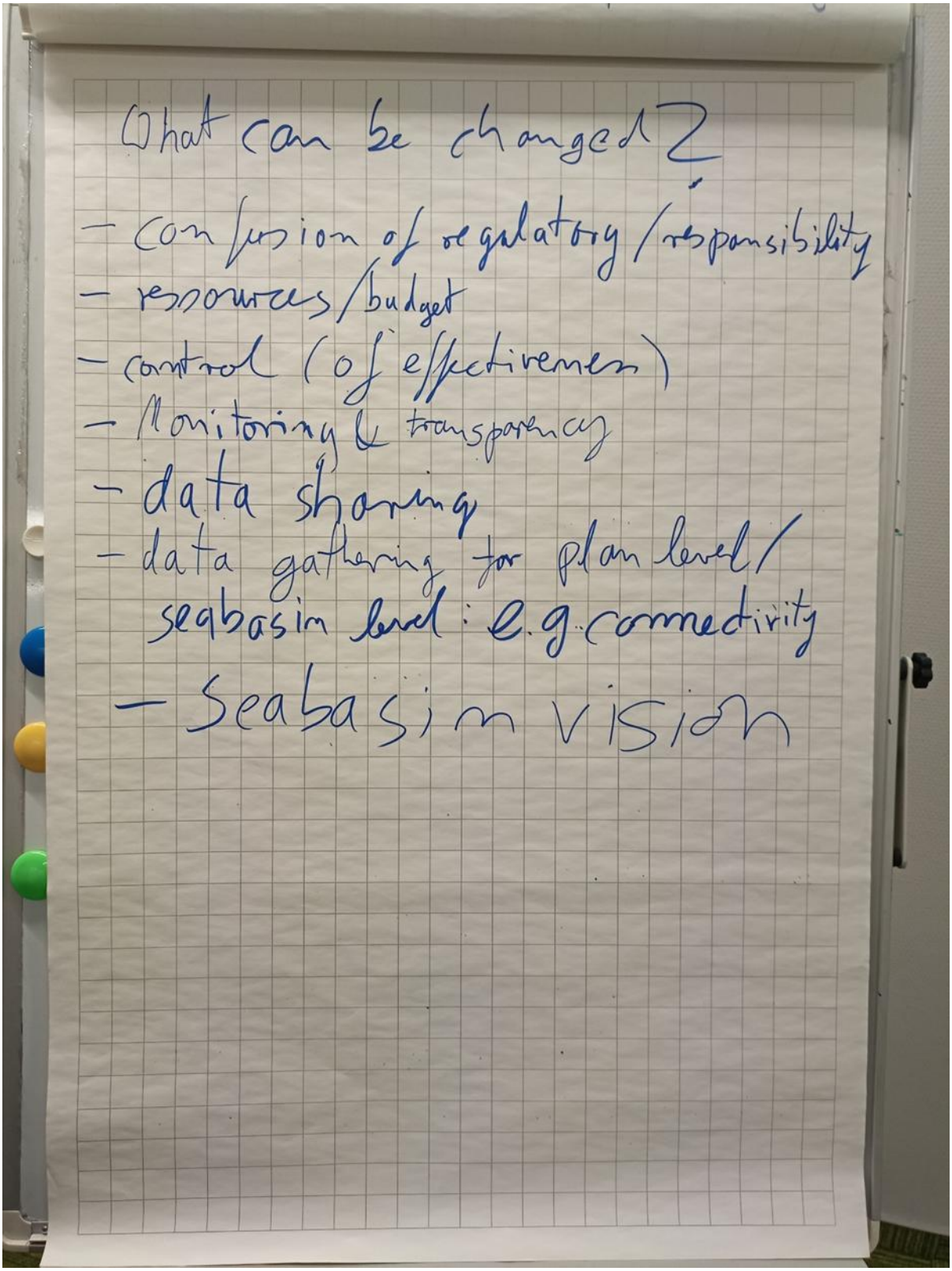
MSP often relies on existing data rather than generating new data, which can lead to knowledge gaps, especially for issues such as migratory species and ecological connectivity.

One innovative idea discussed was the introduction of economic incentives within MSP frameworks to encourage mitigation measures.

Annexes: Group work material.




Mitigation in national plans
mitigation & monitoring of effectiveness
measure + level of application + country specific → overview
- mandate for measures & monitoring
- thresholds for impacts?
- good example from France with MSP / MSFD planning because of the MSFD regulation mandate.
→ functional perspective needed
→ include territorial waters
→ step-wise approach & prioritization


What can be changed?
- confusion of regulatory / responsibility
- resources / budget
- control (of effectiveness)
- Monitoring & transparency
- data sharing
- data gathering for plan level / seabasin level: e.g. connectivity
- Seabasin vision

How does MSP help mitigate potential impacts?

Baseline assessments in combination with MSP-related SEA process & CIA can provide a wider perspective (AM)

The Swedish small n-designation aims at co-existence by highlighting which naturevalues need consideration but not how. So open for functional adaptations.

Working together with Regional conventions/International organisations. Example of mammals protection: PSSA (IMO) to reduce speed for commercial vessels.

MSP providing a systems perspective can help in supporitng trade offs/ decisions

Steer activities that may compensate for specific negative impacts (e.g. seabed disturbance) to appropriate area close-by (de-facto MPAs or nature based design activities). (AM)

MSP and SEA can highlight mitigation needs which are developed at project level at EIA-stage and regulated in licenses.

Scenario's (scenario approach) could point to to potential impacts that need to be mitigated

⇨

MSP cycles need to evaluate also the effectiveness of mitigation (or restoration) measures

👍 1

How to integrate mitigation measures in national plans?

MSP process (and maybe visualised in plans and background documents) could be used as a process to raise awareness about mitigation measures with sector administration and related stakeholders. (AM)

Stronger political environmental awareness/will could contribute to stronger mitigation in MSP and project level.

An active EBA approach in MSP including SEA and CIA to identify mitigation needs in the MSP-process.

Management has to implement mitigation (or restoration) measures & monitor its effectiveness. Remember the "R" for Response in a DPSIR Approach

Legislation first needs to provide economic incentives for mitgation measures and related technological development and installations or behavioural changes.
Then, MSP could receive a mandate to provide spatially specific provisions where such incentives apply especially strongly. (AM)

Inspiration: ICES has had a workshop on SEA and published advice to GNSBI (AM, AB): add link:https://ices-library.figshare.com/articles/report/The_Netherlands_request_on_Cumulative_Impact_Assessment_on_behalf_of_the_Greater_North_Sea_Basin_Initiative_GNSBI_/30530813?file=59316251

What should be changed in MSP to make it an effective tool for energy transition and protection of the marine biodiversity?

Make MSP stronger, or have some stronger tools, as it is very often not followed in reality... (AM)

Make sure to provide coordinated recommendations across project collaborations to the EU commission on the EU Ocean Act by June 2026!

Please provide the state-of the art of MSP presentations and conclusions from the NESBp project and this specific meeting as training material for schools and universities to educate and train future planners and marine managers. Like this, you will build a generation of more BD/CIA aware planners and managers!

Dreaming of MSP as an overarching forum, process and toolbox, that is also sectorally accepted (ministries and stakeholders!) to take integrated and forward looking spatial decisions - i.e. to become an integrated spatial planning approach - with spatial plans as a tool and the planning process as a way to share knowledge, learn, discuss, coordinate, negotiate and decide for a better future...
A second step would be to have integrated ocean management (like ICZM) as well... but that may be dreaming it too far ;) (AM)

Important to also mobilise and include coastal societies and stakeholders into a coherent discussion. But make sure it is relevant for them and they see what they can do themselves. Raise awareness and enable and thereby move from ocean literacy to ocean citizenship. (AM)

Check out the following work of ICES groups on integrated ecosystem assessments WGINOSE (North Sea) and WGIAB (Baltic Sea). Recently published reports and infographics on www.ices.dk (AB, AM)

Need for multi-level integration, also across the land-sea boundary (EBM - social-ecosystem perspective). This implies cross-linking with higher and lower planning levels (bottom-up and top-down interacting).

Priorities for the integration of mitigation measures

Sector	Avoid measures in MSP	Reduce measures in MSP	Reduce measures as permit condition
Shipping	Important to steer away shipping related negative impacts away from especially sensitive areas.		no permits
Renewable Energy		Provide economic incentives and let MSP steer where they apply	
Cables, Pipelines		Provide economic incentives and let MSP steer where they apply	
Resource extraction		Provide economic incentives and let MSP steer where they apply	

Session 3: Joint effort to reduce joint pressure

Introduction and presentations

The session started on Tuesday afternoon, related to task 3.4 "Cumulative Impact Assessment at North Sea Basin level".

Jitske Nugter (NL, MinIenW) introduced the work in the NESBp project on Cumulative Impact Assessments undertaken thus far. She presented the results of questionnaires and interviews with country representatives and four regional organisations (OSPAR, HELCOM, ICES, and NSEC). Ambitions on collaboration for CIA converge on; harmonizing spatial datasets, agreeing on common activity –pressure –ecosystem linkages, clarifying approaches to uncertainty, and developing a focused set of tools rather than proliferating new ones. Constraints are patchiness and incompatibility of spatial data across borders, lack of agreed standards for pressure computation and uncertainty treatment, and limited expert capacity stretched across many overlapping initiatives. Partners suggested to align workplans under a light coordination mechanism by the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative (GNSBI) and existing regional conventions. Key priorities should include:

- Strengthening the science - policy interface.
- Ensuring national CIAs are comparable for agreed human uses, pressures, spatial grids, and baseline ecosystem components.
- Aligning data, use regional datasets, and documenting data sources transparently.
- Making linkages and uncertainties more explicit.

After this introduction further presentations were held to widen the focus and enrich the following discussions:

- **Overview on the SEABAS platform, planned outputs, and indication of the scoping report framing the input to the platform, Janica Borg (HELCOM) and Jacek Zaucha (Maritime Institute Gdansk).**
- **BSH pressure-impact matrix, Marie Dahmen (BSH).**
- **Gaps and challenges in Cumulative Impact Assessment applications, Sebastiaan Mestdagh (GNSBI).**

The participants were divided into 2 groups in presence and 1 online group to ensure lively and structured discussions. Discussions were guided by several main questions in order to achieve a viable result. On the following pages the conversations are summarized per discission question.

Approaches to the translation of human activities (sea use in MSP) into impacts.

The SEABAS project platform will facilitate the inclusion of strategic environmental assessments into the maritime spatial planning process for the Baltic Sea region, using results from previous projects (see figure below). Ultimately, the SEABAS project platform will enable more sustainable, resilient, and collaborative MSP processes across the region and provide regional recommendations on integrating SEA in MSP by:

- SEA procedure guidance in the form of recommendations,
- CIA methodology for MSP in a guidance document,
- An online hub for tools supporting integration of SEA into MSP,
- Capacity building guidance and tools for competent authorities,
- Output of science-policy dialogue,
- Long term adoption and integration of strategy and roadmap.

Project Acronym	Approaches or methods supporting SEA scoping phase							Assessment methods			
	LSI Land-Sea Integration	MSFD Descriptors and Indicators (to be deleted)	Ecosystem Service Mapping	Environmental Objectives Identification	Defining the contents and level of detail during the scoping of the assessment	Socio-economic Considerations	Cultural Consideration	CIA - Cumulative Impact Assessment	Mapping of nature values	Evaluating significance of adverse effects	Sustainability assessment (socio-economic in SEA)
eMSP NBSR	no	Yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no
MSP-GREEN	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no
MSP4BIO	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes
PROTECT BALTIC	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
MAREA	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
ReMAP	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no
Baltic LINes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Baltic Sea2Land	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
Land-Sea Act	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
SELINA	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
MSP4More	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
NESBp	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	no	no
Pan Baltic Scope	yes	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes

Project Acronym	Tools			Common data/usage of data			Knowledge & Gaps			Mitigation
	Alternatives or Scenarios	Mapping Tools	Other	Data Harmonisation	Data Portals	New data generated	New knowledge on SEA gained	Lessons learned / good practices	Gaps / needs for further development	Mitigation measures
eMSP NBSR	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no
MSP-GREEN	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
MSP4BIO	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
PROTECT BALTIC	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
MAREA	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
ReMAP	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no
Baltic LINes	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no
Baltic Sea2Land	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
Land-Sea Act	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no
SELINA	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
MSP4More	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no
NESBp	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no	yes
Pan Baltic Scope	no	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no

Practical recommendations on building sea use-pressure-impact matrix.

A coherent approach to strengthening Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in marine spatial planning (MSP) emerges by combining methodological improvements with clearer governance and data integration.

At the core is the need to better integrate land–sea interactions within SEA. This means not only aligning terrestrial and maritime planning objectives, but also explicitly incorporating socio-cultural and economic dimensions alongside climate-related risks and trade-offs. However, this ambition is constrained by limited availability of harmonised data that bridges spatial, social, economic, and ecological domains, as well as fragmented governance structures and insufficient institutional capacity.

Methodologically, SEA can be enhanced by systematically embedding MSFD descriptors into the assessment process. These descriptors can support the quantification and scoping of environmental pressures and conditions, while also serving as a basis for linking ecological status to ecosystem services. In this context, ecosystem service mapping becomes a key analytical component, helping to spatially connect ecosystem functions with human activities and associated pressures.

A critical step lies in the scoping phase, where the contents and level of detail of the SEA must be carefully defined. This includes deciding whether and how to incorporate criteria related to ecosystem functioning—such as ecological carrying capacity—and how to assess cumulative and transboundary effects. The level of ambition in evaluating human impacts on marine ecosystems should be clearly established at this stage.

The discussion highlighted the central role of cumulative impact assessment (CIA), particularly through tools such as pressure–impact matrices. These should evolve to capture not only negative but also positive impacts, thereby better reflecting system interdependencies. There is strong consensus that CIA should be integrated proactively into MSP processes rather than deferred.

Additionally, pressure–impact matrices offer an opportunity to embed nature conservation measures and to improve communication. By simplifying complex modelling outputs and explicitly addressing uncertainties, these tools can make results more transparent and accessible to stakeholders.

Finally, there is a clear need to move toward common standards or a shared framework for SEA and CIA. Even without full methodological harmonisation, aligning key principles and structures would enable more consistent and comparable outcomes across national and regional contexts.

Uncertainties of the application of CIA in MSP.

Two main perspectives on uncertainty, that of modelers and that of policymakers. Uncertainty is an inherent part of any modelling exercise. It cannot be completely eliminated. More broadly, communication must be seen as a two-way process between:

the sender (technical experts) and the receiver (policymakers). Both sides face their own challenges. Experts tend to focus on technical aspects, such as CIA development and application, while policymakers operate within a different context, influenced by political priorities and constraints. Understanding this gap is essential. Effective communication requires acknowledging these different perspectives and ensuring that modelling results and their associated uncertainties, are presented in a way that is both clear and usable for decision-making.

For modelers this is more than just a lack of information, it can occur in different locations. Such as the model implementation can have technical errors or bugs, or the system boundary can create uncertainties as a result of what is included or excluded. Moreover the level of uncertainty can range from shallow (level 1), where alternatives are know and probabilities are possible, to recognized ignorance (level 4), where alternatives cannot enumerate and surprises are expected. The nature of uncertainty for a modeler can be epistemic, stochastic/ontological or related to ambiguity. The matrix below can assist in systematically describing uncertainty and communicating it.

Location	Level				Nature		
	1	2	3	4	Epis.	Stoc.	Amb.
System boundary							
Conceptual model							
Computer model							
Input data							
Model implementation							
Processed output							

For policymakers there are three types of uncertainty (1) substantive about the problem itself, (2) strategic about political motives, interests and social support, and (3) institutional about rules, laws and governance structure. Throughout the political cycle uncertainty plays a role that should be identified and made explicit to set realistic expectations and avoid surprises later on in the cycle. Uncertainty can occur on different levels and result in different approaches as illustrated in the table below. All these uncertainties in the political process are closely linked to the information that feeds into decision-making. In this case, we are referring to potential decisions based on model outputs from CIA.

Level	Assumption	Approach	Application
Level 1	Current system well known Future is clear	Single forecast + sensitivity analysis	Explore sensitivity of policy results
Level 2	Context, system, weights well understood	Model each future + Monte Carlo simulation, ensembles analysis, decision analysis	Estimate outcome future policies; preferred policy can be chosen based on outcomes
Level 3	Policy is robust. Likelihood future unknown, plausible futures can be specified	Scenario analyses + large number of simulations and Bayesian decision analysis	Explore uncertain aspects of future, implications of global change, possible strategies
Level 4	Unknowns can impact decisions and their effectiveness	Robust and flexible strategies; Adaptation pathways	Develop mitigating actions; identify opportunities, no-regret strategies and vulnerabilities

Recommendations and key considerations for cumulative impact assessment (CIA) in MSP from the discussions are as follows:

Strengthen communication and frameworks:

- Develop clearer guidelines or shared frameworks to support consistent and informed decision-making.
- Clearly define and communicate the role of CIA, especially its value in identifying impact hotspots and supporting strategic planning.
- Manage expectations by explaining both the capabilities and limitations of CIA.

Address uncertainty proactively and transparently:

- Treat uncertainty as unavoidable but manageable and ensure it does not delay decision-making.
- Clearly identify and communicate different types and sources of uncertainty.
- Use tools such as uncertainty matrices to classify and structure uncertainty.
- Acknowledge all forms of uncertainty, including data, methodological, political, institutional, and strategic.
- Integrate uncertainty considerations from the outset of the assessment process
- Prioritize robust and flexible strategies over false precision.
- Combine screening tools (for policymakers) with more detailed analytical tools (for scientists).
- Recognize CIA outputs as guidance rather than precise predictions.
- Account for additional uncertainty sources, including:
    - Differences in methodologies across countries and institutions
    - Use of diverse and heterogeneous data sources
    - Language barriers limiting access to relevant information

Enhance collaboration and knowledge alignment:

- Strengthen engagement with the scientific community, including researchers and expert networks.
- Link CIA work to ongoing glossary and terminology alignment efforts to clarify key concepts (e.g. “impact” vs. “effect”).

Advance strategic and forward-looking planning:

- Promote the development of sea-basin-wide future scenarios for human activities.
- Explore both:
    - Using existing national plans to inform broader sea-basin scenarios,
    - Developing shared visions for certain sectors, depending on the activity.

Potential of scenario-based approaches for CIA in MSP.

First it is needed to clarify the concept of "scenarios". The term is used in different ways, so clearly defining it is essential for effective application. Key types include:

- Predictive (likely futures),
- Exploratory (possible futures),
- Back casting (pathways to achieve a desired future).

Scenarios have the potential to be used strategically with CIA. Combining scenario approaches with cumulative impact assessment supports policy dialogue and decision-making. They can support shared understanding and alignment:

- Build a common knowledge base,
- Align perspectives on key trends and drivers,
- Enable discussion of desirable vs. undesirable futures,
- Back casting helps identify pathways to achieve goals,
- Comparing scenarios highlights trade-offs and policy implications.

Scenario-based CIA has the potential to strengthen informed, transparent, and collaborative planning processes.

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Summary

With the Synthesis Workshop titled “Let’s talk a common language” in Gdansk end of March 2026, WP3’s work reached an important milestone. All tasks were presented, discussed and brought forward to a new level.

The workshop was also intended to bring together various projects and initiatives to coordinate common effort towards nature conservation and restoration and ensure sustainable energy transition. An open dialogue on the MSP’s role in nature conservation and restoration as well as keeping cumulative impact at the level which does not jeopardize healthy functioning of the marine ecosystem enriched the content of NESBp deliverables. Experts representing different sectors and target groups forged a common language which strengthens cooperation and knowledge exchange not only at project level but between European sea basins.

Project deliverables will come in 3 stages: The first product –a glossary of terms – is close to completion for June, most content will be published end of 2026 while the final policy briefs, summarizing and pinpointing the broad spectrum of topics for the end of the project in 2027. The workshop demonstrated that respective NESBp tasks are progressing as scheduled and synergy with other projects and processes is ensured.

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