NESBp
Northern European Sea Basins project

# Cumulative Impact Assessment in the North Sea & Baltic Sea

Co-funded by the European Union

Overview of ongoing activities, key actors, and collaboration needs regarding CIA work in the Greater North Sea Basin and Baltic Sea. This overview demonstrates who is doing what, where are the main gaps and overlaps, and why strategic alignment now matters.

## Current CIA landscape

The Northern European Sea Basin project (NESBp) supports cross-border cooperation on Maritime Spatial Planning in the North Sea and Baltic Sea. Across regional organisations and 14 countries. Cumulative Impact Assessment is already used for Strategic Environmental Assessment, Maritime Spatial Planning, marine management, regional assessment, and offshore wind-related work, but maturity, comparability, and methods still differ.

### HELCOM

**Helsinki Commission**

Applies Cumulative Impact Assessment for Baltic Sea holistic assessments and spatial hotspot identification.

### ICES

**International Council for the Exploration of the Sea**

Advances methods and scientific advice through WGCIAM, with SCAIRM as a key management-oriented approach.

### GNSBI - WT CIA

**The Greater North Sea Basin Initiative**

Can act as a convening platform linking countries, research institutes and sector initiatives; aligns workplans and can host knowledge and a community of practice.

### NSEC

**North Seas Energy Cooperation**

Supports offshore wind quick scans, mitigation insights, and the TIMELINES of offshore wind farm development database rather than a standalone Cumulative Impact Assessment mandate.

### OSPAR

**OSPAR Commission**

Develops regional cumulative effects assessment for the North-East Atlantic, including policy-relevant hotspot analyses.

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During the assessment of the current status of CIA activities across regional institutes and 14 countries at Northern European Sea Basins have taken part in a survey as part of task 3.4 of the NESBp. The results show that CIA is used across countries with different levels of maturity for (MSP), Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA), and marine management. The report explicitly notes that some countries already apply CIA routinely within SEAs, while others are still testing first applications or tools such as SCAIRM and Symphony.

| Country | MSP/ SEA | Tool |
|---|---|---|
| **Denmark** | In SEA and Natura 2000 assessments | Development of a digital tool for ecosystem-based analysis and CIA |
| **Estonia** | In MSP process | PlanWise4Blue, online tool |
| **Finland** | Emerging | NA |
| **France** | In MSP and local case studies | The Carpe Diem tool |
| **Germany** | In MSP as part of SEA | In-house tool in development |
| **Ireland** | In SEA and EIA for MSP and for any sectoral or regional Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) | Emerging |
| **Latvia** | SEA | SEABASS for methodological development |
| **Lithuania** | Emerging | Emerging |
| **Norway** | CIA for special value and vulnerability in terms of ecological value areas | Interactive tool for CIA, development of the ODEMM framework |
| **Poland** | In SEA for MSP | SEABASS for methodological development |
| **Sweden** | In SEA for MSP | The Symphony tool |
| **The Netherlands** | Framework for Ecology and Cumulative Impact, results can be used in CIA | SCAIRM |
| **United Kingdom** | CIA to determine the risk of cumulative impacts of proposed aggregate dredging areas | SCAIRM |

Source base: NESB Task 3.4 Summary Report (15 Dec 2025), including survey/workshop findings from HELCOM, ICES, NSEC, OSPAR and 14 countries; complemented with current project information on HELCOM SPIA/HOLAS, NSEC TIMELINES, SEABASS and EcoSensitivity/PlanWise4Blue-related Baltic work.

# From mapping to action: phase 1 recommendations for 2026

One of the results of the Northern European Sea Basins project shows in 2025 showed strong interest in forming a Community of Practice on CIA to improve alignment rather than create new activities. The main challenge is not a lack of work, but limited comparability and weak science–policy translation due to fragmented data, inconsistent methods, and constrained capacity.

There is broad consensus on the need to improve data alignment, enhance methodological transparency, and establish a common framework to increase comparability across tools. The shared ambition is to deliver sea-basin scale insights on cumulative impacts that inform policy makers. Joint pilots and case studies, building on existing structures, offer a practical way to demonstrate value for Maritime Spatial Planning, offshore wind planning, and transboundary cooperation.

## 1 Alignment and harmonisation

**Comparability requires agreed basics, not necessarily one single tool.**

- Align data formats, spatial layers, grids, terminology, and minimum CIA content.
- Increase transparency on assumptions, scope, linkages, and uncertainty treatment.
- Build on regional datasets and methods already available through HELCOM, ICES, NSEC, and OSPAR, projects, European and national tools.

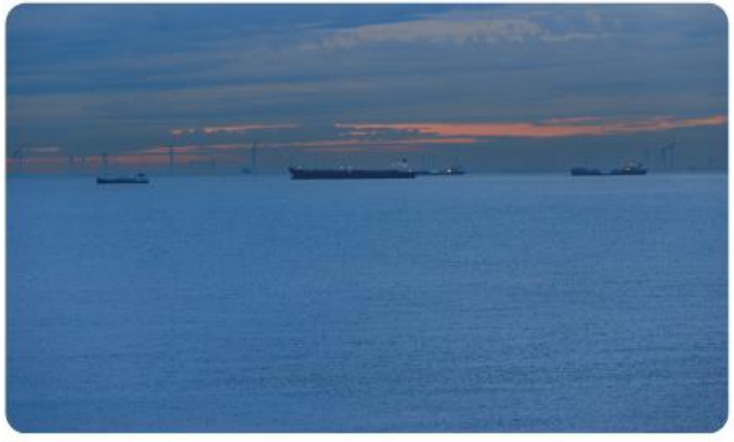
Compatible approaches beat competing black boxes.

## 2 Learning and exchange

**The fastest progress will come from concrete cases, not only conceptual debate.**

- Use joint workshops, pilots, and forward-looking analyses to compare methods and outputs.
- Exchange experience on sector cases such as offshore wind, birds, and mobile species.
- Use existing projects and fora as learning infrastructure instead of starting from scratch.

More case-based exchange, less reinventing the wheel.



## 3 Community of practice (CoP)

**CoP can connect and coordinate without becoming another heavyweight governance layer.**

- Map overlaps and gaps across working tracks, institutes, projects, and countries.
- Organise a light programme around priority topics rather than a heavy new structure.
- Keep ownership with countries, supported by HELCOM, ICES, NSEC, and OSPAR.

A community of practice, not another committee.

## 4 Science-policy interface

**CIA only helps if decision-makers understand what it can and cannot do.**

- Develop shared communication materials, plain-language explainers, and simple visuals.
- Frame CIA as decision support, not as exact prediction or definitive proof.
- Bring policymakers in earlier, especially in SEA/MSP scoping and transboundary dialogue.

From complex assessment to usable policy conversation.

## Priority topics for 2026

**Agree a common perspective on CIA** – what CIA is, what it is for, and when it should be used in policy processes.

**Improve data interoperability** – shared formats, shared layers, and transparent processing choices.

**Clarify uncertainty and linkages** – common pressure-receptor matrices and documentation practices.

**Run targeted pilots** – cross-border, policy-relevant cases that test comparability and practical usefulness.

**Strengthen communication** – outputs that ministries, planners, and non-technical audiences can actually use.

## Points for discussion

- Where do you contribute in the CIA chain: data, method, application, policy uptake, or coordination?
- Which current initiative or platform is closest to your work today?
- Which one alignment issue should this community prioritise in 2026? Which in 2027?
- What can your organisation contribute to a basin-scale community of practice?

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