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Background

The Workshop on Strengthening ecosystem-based approach in MSP and supporting sustainable blue economy was held in Helsinki 13-15 June 2023. The workshop was jointly organized by eMSP-NBSR and MSP4BIO projects with support of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) Policy Area Spatial Planning. It served for the implementation of such objectives of the Regional MSP Roadmap 2030 as MSP for good environmental status (Objective 3), MSP for blue economy (Objective 4) and MSP for climate change resilience (Objective 5). The workshop was also considered as a milestone on the way to the revision of the Guideline on application of the EBA in MSP in the Baltic Sea region and establishing of a dialogue between MSP planners and HELCOM bodies responsible for nature conservation.

The workshop on application ecosystem-based approach in MSP opened a broad discussion on the role of marine spatial planning in protection of marine environment and practical recommendations on application of EBA in the development of national marine spatial plans. The discussion included three major topics: MSP's contribution to the establishing and maintaining a coherent Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), the role of MSP in overall progress towards Good Environmental Status (GES) and general recommendations for strengthening international framework for ecosystem-based approach (EBA) in MSP. The workshop gathered about fifty experts from the North and Baltic Sea region. Also, about a hundred participants followed the event online and contributed to discussions.

Among major issues discussed at the session on MSP's contribution to the coherent MPA network were increasing awareness on urgency to protect biodiversity among authorities and developing strong political will for integration, organization of interaction between authorities within MSP process and clarification of respective regulations. Participants highlighted that clear guidance at international and national levels as well as reliable scientific evidence and shared data would serve as a basis for stronger political will facilitating the interaction.

Considering the role of MSP in overall progress towards good environmental status of the marine environment, participants highlighted crucial role of Strategic Environmental Assessment in integrated planning of human activities in a way that cumulative environmental pressure remains within ecosystem's capacity limits. Quality Indicators, illustrating good environmental status in terms of MSFD descriptors, provide linkages between planning solutions and status of the marine environment and serve for the evaluation of the MSP's impact laying basins for adaptive management.

Further overall needs for the development of the policy framework for the implementation of EBA in marine spatial planning were discussed. Experts believed that a clear guidance accounting for the experience of

previous MSP cycles in both North and Baltic Sea basins is of high value for the next planning cycle. Participants mentioned the need for clear methodological guidance regarding estimation of cumulative impact, defining ecosystem's carrying capacity and harmonization of GES indicators across borders or in the sea basin scale. In this respect the coordinating role of regional sea conventions was highly valued. Regional sea conventions also might play a significant role in harmonization of data collection and serve as a platform for cross-border dialogue.

The role of MSP in strengthening climate change resilience was one of the key discussion points. Participants were of the view that climate change considerations should be included in all stages of planning process and considered in all planning scenarios. They pointed out that climate change brings additional uncertainty in planning scenarios which requires "extra" precaution when making planning decisions. At the same time MSP might compile and aggregate information on the sectors affected by climate change and propose solutions to mitigate the impact. Since climate change is a global process while MSP is local or regional it can be utilized as a tool to communicate the need to allocate space, including MPAs, from global perspective with local stakeholders.

Specific recommendations from the Workshop's sessions were compiled and will be considered in the eMSP and MSP4BIO project outputs, including respective policy messages. They will also be included in the HELCOM and VASAB work on the development of Baltic Sea regional framework for the implementation of ecosystem-based approach in MSP.

Thematically grouped recommendations of the workshop are given in the attachment to this document (5-2 Att.1).

Action requested

The SG is invited to:

- recall that the workshop was jointly organized by eMSP BSR project, MSP4BIO project and PA Spatial Planning;
- take note of the Workshop's outcomes;
- reflect on the potential impact of the recommendations on the revision of the Guideline on EBA in MSP.