



Emerging Ecosystem-based  
Maritime Spatial Planning  
Topics in the North and Baltic  
Sea Regions



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Policy Brief

# Coherence in MSP – how to adapt homogeneously in rapidly changing circumstances?



Published in January 2024

## Main message

MSP in entire sea basin needs to be coherent in adapting to rapidly changing circumstances.

## Our mission

This policy brief on Coherence in Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is based on an overview of current practices among North Sea and Baltic Sea countries. Its aim is to help maritime spatial planners and politicians to understand the impact of risks and challenges of, rapidly changing circumstances in the sea basin on MSP at a cross-border scale, and how MSPs can be adjusted accordingly. The policy brief has been developed by the M&E-learning strand in the eMSP-NBSR project through a process of a Community of Practice

## The challenge: what needs to be resolved and why?

In a period of fast changes and emerging complex (global) political and environmental challenges, plans must be regularly and quickly adapted to new circumstances. These challenges are related to

rapidly changing combination of users, occurrence of previously unknown uses (autonomous shipping, floating photovoltaic), ambitious EU goals related to the sea space development (e.g. 30% of marine areas protected) and new types of land-sea conflicts resulting from these. In addition, increased sea density use might create more intensive cross-border problems and conflicts requiring fast reactions from maritime spatial planners. These challenges call for the need for so called “fast track” MSP

## The concept: Fast track coherence

Fast track refers to the fast adjustments required within maritime spatial plans to meet new challenges, policy objectives, risks and external shocks. MSP in the entire sea basin however needs to be coherent even when fast tracked and must be carried out concurrently with on-going revision processes as well as inform these processes in a forward-looking way (rather than looking back at past MSP processes/plans). This policy brief on coherence proposes what such fast-track coherence might require, complementing “classic” coherence mechanisms.

## Recommendations for MSP planners; The six dimensions of “fast track coherence” in MSP

**CONTEXT ASSESSMENT** - when the existing plan still functions but important changes or new needs occur and need to be discussed.

**What should be considered by the relevant MSP authority:**

- Consider whether a new need or possible change is of a radical and important nature for the MSP coherence at the sea basin or cross-border scale (e.g. a need for more areas for offshore energy, for environment protection or changes in transportation patterns). This consideration can take the form of internal discussions within your MSP authority or within a national M&E group if existing. Make use of the existing guidelines, e.g. the Helcom-VASAB Voluntary guidance for assessment of cross-border coherence for identification of cross-border issues.

**What should be the action of the relevant MSP authority towards countries from the same sea basin:**

- Inform of the change using informal channels such as BSR Planners Forum, various project, EU MSP Expert Group (WG).

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES** - when the existing plan still functions but a decision has been made to change/ amend it.

**What should be considered by the relevant MSP authority:**

- Prepare written information on the decision that clearly states that the existing plan will be changed, the reason for the change, what will be changed and a description of the planning process (modus operandi, time horizon, international communication).

**What should be the action of the relevant MSP authority towards countries from the same sea basin:**

- inform the relevant MSP authorities in a formal way i.e. using existing formal structures (VASAB-HELCOM WG on MSP or MSP Expert Group) or as an e-mail to the MSP relevant authorities in a given sea basin.

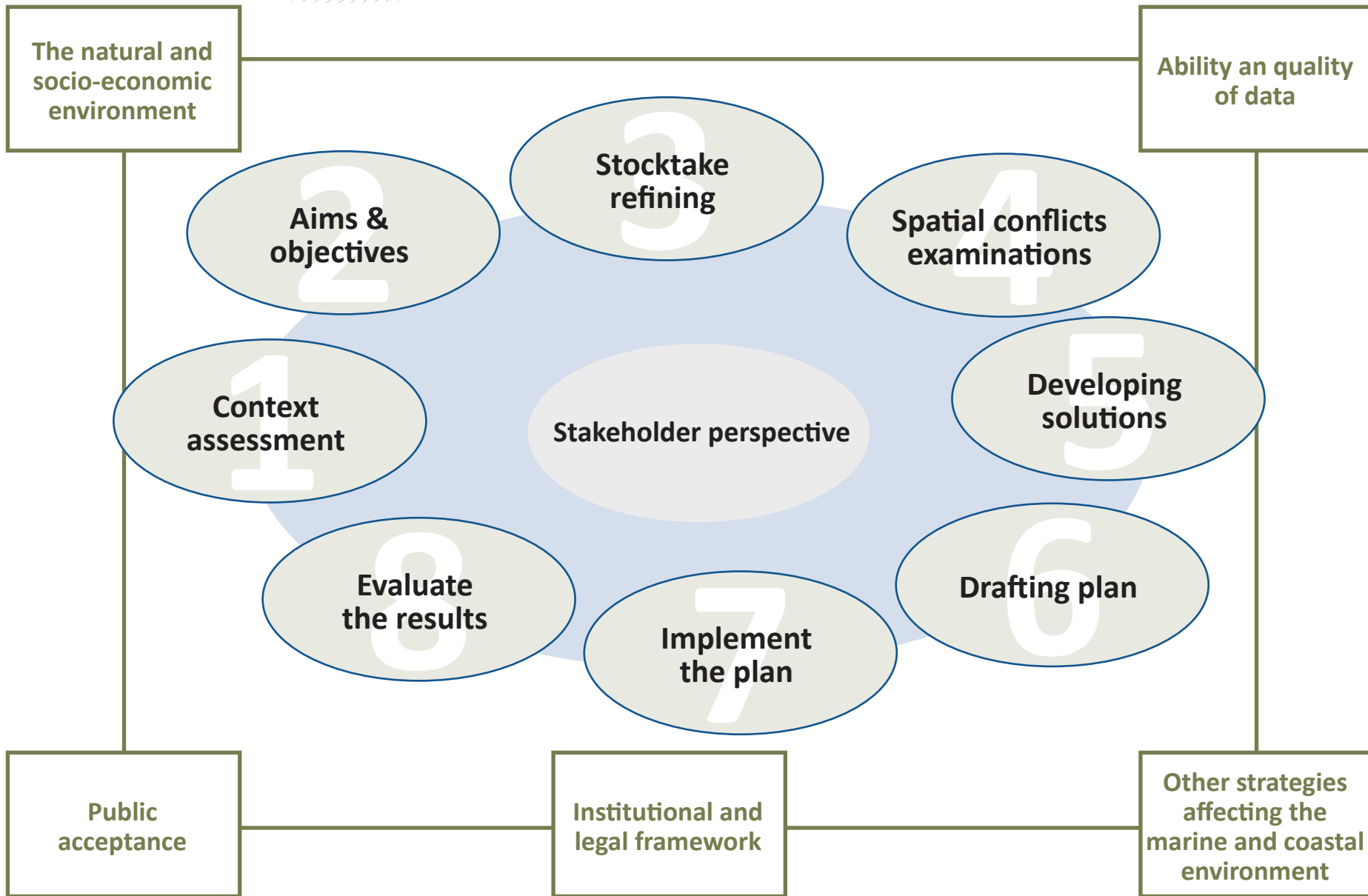


Figure 1: MSP cycle. Source: content based on figure 4 from Schultz-Zehden A., Gee K., Ścibior K. (2008) Handbook on Integrated Maritime Spatial Planning. Plancoast

- The wider MSP environment
- Specific planning area
- The MSP process

**STOCKTAKE** – when the existing plan still functions but the collection of information for a new plan has started.

**What should be considered by the relevant MSP authority:**

- Prepare a description on how cross border topics such as navigation routes, fishing, environmental connectivity, linear infrastructure, mining will be changed. You might need to screen your neighbours' plans to identify the relevant cross-border topics that might be crucial in your plan revision in addition to the above mentioned.
- Make use of the existing guidelines, e.g. the Helcom-VASAB Voluntary guidance for assessment of cross-border coherence for identification of cross-border issues.

**What should be the action of the relevant MSP authority towards countries from the same sea basin:**

- Notify this description to the relevant MSP authorities in a formal way i.e. using existing formal structures (VASAB-HELCOM WG on MSP or EU MSP Expert Group) or as an e-mail to the MSP relevant authorities in a given sea basin and ask for feedback in form of additional topics that a given country considers important in your MSP revision.

**SPATIAL CONFLICTS** - When collected information might inform discussions on new types or places of spatial conflicts.

**What should be considered by the relevant MSP authority:**

- Discuss the expectations of the neighbouring sea-basin countries towards your revision (in particular mentioned above additional topics). Identify possible challenges for your MSP i.e. cross-border spatial conflicts or synergies. This can be done as an internal discussion either within your MSP authority, within a M&E group if existing, or with your national stakeholders.

**What should be the action of the relevant MSP authority towards countries from the same sea basin:**

- Organise bilateral (or multilateral) consultation of the most important cross-border conflicts or synergies. Try to understand the nature of the problem. You might use existing on-line communication tools. Invite MSP authorities and sectoral organisations.
- Make use of the existing guidelines, e.g. the Helcom-VASAB Voluntary guidance for assessment of cross-border coherence for coherent handling of different topics in MSP.

**DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS** – When the drafting of a new plan is about to start.

**What should be considered by the relevant MSP authority:**

- Prepare draft solutions for the identified cross-border conflicts and synergies and establish a way of enforcing them in the plan.

**What should be the action of the relevant MSP authority towards countries from the same sea basin:**

- Organise bilateral (or multilateral) consultation to discuss proposed solutions for the most important cross-border conflicts or synergies. Ideally, use existing on-line communication tools for this process. Invite MSP authorities and sectoral organisations.

**DRAFTING PLAN** - When the new plan has been drafted.

**What should be considered by the relevant MSP authority:**

- Prepare a presentation on the new draft plan. **What should be the action of the relevant MSP authority towards countries from the same sea basin:**
- Invite the relevant MSP authorities to the meeting, present the draft plan and ask what parts of the plan should be translated to English. Try to work towards solutions that are satisfactory for your sea-basin neighbours.

**What should be considered by the relevant MSP authority:**

- Translate the excerpts of your plan and map of the plan into English.

**What should be the action of the relevant MSP authority towards countries from the same sea basin:**

- Place this information on the interactive map/ website
- Ask relevant MSP authorities and sectoral organisations for feedback
- This can be repeated several times in line with the specificity of the revision process.

## Recommendations for regional cooperation in MSP

**Strengthen** the MSP **regional cooperation** networks to become an efficient coordinator of human maritime activities. In the Baltic Sea Region, the Helcom-VASAB Working Group on MSP should be sustained with successful Planning Forums, in the North Sea – the North Sea Region MSP Collaboration Group. The decision on the mode of cooperation and the working method should be in line with regional traditions. With regards to sustaining cross-border coherence, they should among others support bi-trilateral cooperation mechanisms, ensure coherent spatial regional strategies, generate new data and knowledge relevant for cross-border planning, act as discussion platform on cross-border MSP related issues.

**Create** strong **cooperation links** with regional sectoral organisations of transnational/cross-border importance, for the purposes of greater coherence in planning, strengthening relations between relevant processes, and sharing information and experiences, particularly with BEMIP – the Baltic energy market interconnection plan, NSEC - The North Seas Energy Cooperation,

IMO – International Maritime Organization, ICES - International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, etc.

## Recommendation for politicians and decision makers

**Consider the broader** MSP regional context when pushing sectoral and horizontal goals related to spatial development at sea (such as renewable energy targets or MPA shares of maritime space). This can be done in different formats such as: ex-ante assessment reports, conferences or seminars with stakeholder participation from neighbouring countries and academia or consultations with regional networks such as the Helcom-VASAB Working Group on MSP or the North Sea Region MSP Collaboration Group.

## Further reading

Voluntary guidance for assessment of cross-border coherence in Maritime Spatial Planning. Version submitted to HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG 23-2021. HELCOM/VASAB (2022) download from <https://vasab.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Voluntary-guidance-for-assessment-of-cross-border-coherence-in-MSP-.pdf>

Arndt, P., Matczak, M., Zaucha, J., Gee, K. (eds) (2023). MSP in a sea of change - aim for better and connected plans. Report of the eMSP NSBR Monitoring and Evaluation Learning Strand. Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency, Hamburg, download from <https://www.emspproject.eu/results/>

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Citation: Zaucha, J., Matczak, M., Arndt, P., Gee, K. (eds) (2023). Policy Brief Coherence in MSP – how to adapt homogenously in rapidly changing circumstances? Policy brief of the eMSP NSBR Monitoring and Evaluation Learning Strand, download from <https://www.emspproject.eu/results/>

## Disclaimer:

This policy brief has been developed by the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Learning Strand within the European Union EMFAF-financed project Emerging Ecosystem-Based Maritime Spatial Planning topics in the North and Baltic Sea Regions (eMSP NBSR).





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The eMSP NBSR project, implemented from September 2021 to February 2024, provided a platform for marine spatial planners and other experts to collaboratively advance MSP practice. It addressed five urgent emerging MSP topics through a community of practice-based approach that enabled joint learning across professions and across the North Sea and Baltic Sea areas.

Project work took into account the European Green Deal, climate change and how climate-neutrality targets can be addressed in MSP.

The planners and experts were supported by a method mentoring team and a scientific advisory board.



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