



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



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Policy Brief

Monitoring and Evaluation in MSP – Always aim for better plans!



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Our mission

Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is being implemented across Europe in a period where the sea itself and sea uses are experiencing rapid change. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are therefore becoming increasingly important: to ensure MSP is based on an up-to-date evidence base, to ensure plans deliver on their stated objectives, and to demonstrate the benefits of MSP to politicians and the general public. This policy brief aims to support practitioners and policymakers in designing and implementing targeted M&E as part of MSP processes. It is supported by a more detailed report which can be downloaded [here](#).

The policy brief

The recommendations in this policy brief were developed by the M&E Learning Strand in the eMSP NSBR project through a Community of Practice-based approach which brought together planners, stakeholders and researchers over the course of two years (see policy brief [Communities of Practice in marine spatial planning across sea basins - making it work](#)). It is based on an overview of current M&E practice and reflects diverse M&E approaches that are already being considered or implemented in different countries. More importantly, it also reflects the many practical questions planners are asking. How can a task that many see as complicated become more tangible and effective? Here we summarise key points for consideration.

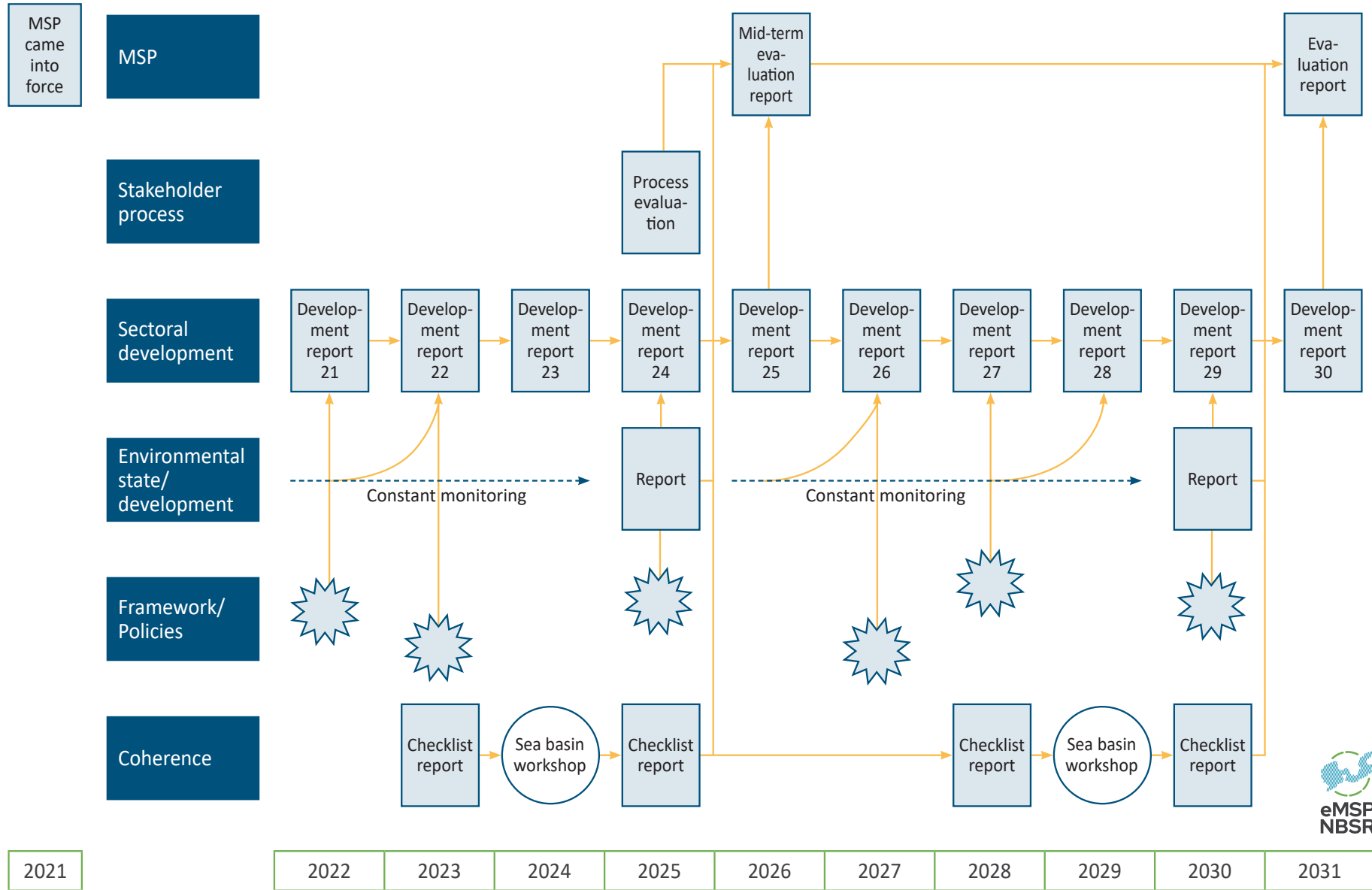


Figure 1: The eMSP NBSR conceptual framework of monitoring and evaluation

A systematic starting point

Six dimensions as part of a conceptual framework for M&E in MSP

Monitoring and evaluation are often considered complex and can be difficult for planners to tackle in practice. Thinking of M&E along six dimensions helps to break down this complexity into manageable tasks. The eMSP conceptual framework (Figure 1) shows how the various dimensions are interlinked. It illustrates which M&E activities are ongoing and which are periodic, and at what timescales they operate relative to each other. It also shows which dimensions might be linked to which M&E products. The six M&E dimensions are:

- Plan effectiveness,
- Stakeholder involvement,
- Sectoral development,
- Environmental monitoring,
- Frameworks and policies,
- Coherence.

General recommendations

Be as ambitious as possible in M&E...

Ideally, all six dimensions related to MSP should be covered in M&E approaches. Within each dimension, be as ambitious as possible in developing relevant knowledge: Know why exactly specific information is needed, what is realistic in terms of data collection and who to approach for important information – nationally and internationally.

... but tailor concepts to time and place, not least to cope with new challenges

In a period of rapid change linked to political and environmental challenges, plans must be able to quickly adapt to new conditions. This may mean streamlining processes, including M&E. Use the building blocks of the conceptual framework to tailor M&E to specific needs. At the same time, understand that applying a slim version of the M&E framework carries risks: Important evidence or opportunities for engaging with stakeholders may be missed and a fully informed forward-looking perspective may be compromised.

Always cover climate change and other grand challenges in M&E

Within each of the six dimensions, always track how the plan is responding to climate change (adaptation and mitigation). Also consider how the plan impacts on other grand challenges such as Good Environmental Status or community well-being.

Integrate M&E in plan-making

M&E should not be an after-thought. It is an essential element of plan-making, whether it is a first plan or a revision. Above all, M&E is a way of continuing discussions with stakeholders and policymakers and keeping MSP on the agenda.

Ensure that evaluation results are heard and that M&E is properly resourced

Use policy frameworks such as the EU MSP Directive to advocate for proper recognition of M&E and for its results to be widely heard – including at the political level. Enough resources must be provided for M&E if MSP is to continue to improve and achieve its objectives.

The six dimensions

Plan effectiveness – are we reaching our goals?

- Monitor and evaluate the overall effectiveness of a plan at the designation level as this is where the plan will have the most direct impact.
- Monitor the steering effects of regulations at the project level to build an information base for periodic evaluation.

Stakeholder involvement – how were stakeholders involved and how did they perceive their involvement?

- Regard M&E as a participatory process. Use it to stay in touch with stakeholders, policymakers and the public. Be clear and realistic in what you are asking stakeholders to contribute.
- Use M&E to get a more nuanced understanding of what the plan is capable of – and whether the stakeholders know how to use it.
- Stay transparent throughout the evaluation process to retain the trust of stakeholders.



Sectoral development – what is happening in the maritime sectors?

- Regularly and systematically observe sectoral developments to build an up-to-date information base.
- Ensure a solid first baseline of information against which to interpret subsequent change.
- Only observe sectoral developments that are relevant to the plan.
- Prepare reports on sectoral development as a basis for engaging in discussions with stakeholders and for considering trends and impacts.
- Strengthen international co-operation to broaden knowledge on sectoral development.

Environmental monitoring – how is the plan affecting the environment and what are the relevant changes in state and knowledge?

- Use offshore wind farm data to monitor the environmental effects of implementing the plans. Enrich it with further monitoring data from other sectors or projects.
- Consider using suitable artificial intelligence (AI) systems to support environmental data analysis.
- Do not collect data for the sake of it. Some aspects may need closer monitoring than others.

Frameworks and policies – how is the context for maritime spatial planning changing?

- Keep up with the dynamics! Don't be driven by developments – as far as possible, observe political developments to be ahead of the curve. European Directives set ambitious targets; this requires readiness for adaptation and change.
- Change can be unexpected and fast. Being connected to the political arena and to sectoral policy processes is essential, both at the national and international level.
- Be mindful of the public: Be ready to explain how MSP benefits a changing society.

Coherence – how do we align our developments?

- Coherence will be even more important in the future as sectoral developments and national planning cycles gather speed.
- Exchange is crucial! Be in touch across countries to exchange data, share policy and planned sectoral developments.
- Consider using a Community of Practice-based approach to build coherence.

Further reading

IOC-UNESCO (2021): International MSP guidance. www.mspglobal2030.org/msp-global/international-msp-guidance/

Steinmann J., Arora G., Roebeling P. (2023): Monitoring and evaluation of maritime spatial planning – A review of accumulated practices and guidance for future action, *Marine Policy*, 150, 105529, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2023.105529>.

Varjopuro, R.; Konik, M.; Cehak, M.; Matczak, M.; Zaucha, J.; Rybka, K.; Urtāne, I., Kedo, K., Vološina, M. (2019): Monitoring and Evaluation of Maritime Spatial Planning. Cases of Latvia and Poland as examples. *Pan Baltic Scope*. www.panbalticscope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/PBS-ME-Report-final.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/>

Authors:

Philipp Arndt (BSH), Kira Gee (BSH), Magdalena Matczak (Maritime Institute Gdynia) and Jacek Zaucha (Maritime Institute Gdynia)

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Community of
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Sustainable
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Climate-smart MSP

Monitoring
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Data Sharing,
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Communication
Technologies



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.

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