NESBp
Northern European Sea Basins project

NESB project meeting & joint workshop with MEDIGREEN

3 June 2026

2025

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Summary

On the 3rd of June 2026, during the MSP week in Brussels, Belgium, the two sister projects NESBp and MEDIGREEN organized workshops on the ecosystem-based approach, ocean governance and data & knowledge sharing.

The workshops where part of the project meeting for NESB and as co-workshops together with the MEDIGREEN project.

This was the second time, the two projects brought their respected sea basins, North Sea, Baltic Sea and Meditereanen Sea together in one room, to facilitate cross-border, cross-sea basin knowledge exchange. Being organized during the Maritime Spatial Planning week, a day prior to the first GNSBI stakeholder conference, also increased the opportunity, especially for the NESB project to exchange with GNSBI members.

The workshops were organized around the three topics; ecosystem-based approach, ocean governance and knowledge sharing. These topics provided an excellent perspective for (early) MSP dialogue between the sea basins.

The workshops were participated by over more than 50 participants and through interactive workshops the participants discussed the challenges and possibilities of both a top-down ecosystem-based approach (guidelines) as to a more bottom-up ecosystem-based approach (EBA ladder for MariParks) and examples of nature protection regarding of a direct example of EBA implementation. Through a format of future scenarios participants continued the discussion and together in groups brainstormed of how future scenarios could play out. Lastly, participants were invited to share their ideas and suggestions on what data, information and knowledge can be and should be included in the knowledge sharing platform under GNSBI.

The knowledge gathered from these workshops will be analysed by the work packages and taken into account for coming work. For NESBp specifically, this means that the EBA is considered as MSP dialogue for the WP 2, for WP 4 the EBA ladder input will be incorporated into the blueprint for a MariPark. The results of the workshop of the scenarios will be taken into account for further developing possible best practices and scenarios of how the GNSBI can be further developed.

For WP 5, the input gathered will serve as additional information on what type of data, information and knowledge can be considered to be added to the platform.

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Workshop 1 – Ecosystem-Based MSP versus Ecosystem-Based Management of Mariparks: Baltic-, North-& Mediterranean Sea Basin Perspectives

Organizers: WP2, WP4 of NESBp + MEDIGREEN

Moderators: Andrea Morf & Marjoleine Nascimento da Silva-Karper

The discussion was informed by three introductory presentations:

1. From vision to implementation: Applying Ecosystem-Based Approach in Maritime Spatial Planning by Jan Schmidtbauer Crona, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM), Sweden (NESBp WP2)

2. The Ecosystem-Based Approach Ladder, A management framework for EBA alignment within Mariparks by Bernd Herremans, Mantis Consulting, Belgium (NESBp WP4)

3. Nature protection in the mediterranean: Ecosystem-based approach by Mónica Campillos-Llanos IEO(CSIC) (MEDIGREEN project)

Following three presentations on ecosystem-based planning and management from the Baltic Sea, North Sea and Mediterranean Sea perspectives, the workshop aimed to discuss challenges in applying and transferring Ecosystem-Based Approaches (EBA) across sea basins. It also aimed to reflect on the institutional and governance conditions needed to strengthen EBA implementation. More broadly, the workshop explored how the evolving blue economy and multi-use concepts, including MariPark, could contribute to long-term sustainability and potentially support positive impacts on marine life.

Participants were divided into smaller discussion groups. The aim was to identify challenges and bottlenecks in implementing the Baltic Sea EBA provisions and the North Sea multi-use concept, while also drawing links to the Mediterranean perspective. During the final part of the group work, each table formulated one question for the "Dragon's Den" panel.

"Dragon's Den" discussion: questions and key points from the answers

Question 1: Are the EBA in MSP guidelines from the Baltic Sea still relevant from the Mediterranean perspective? Is there a need or possibility to develop similar guidelines under the Mediterranean framework?

The answer was that the existing guidelines are relevant for the Mediterranean context. Many of the same principles and topics are already present in the Barcelona Convention framework and in the Mediterranean approach to MSP. The terminology, level of detail, and institutional setting may differ, but the underlying logic is similar.

The speaker emphasised the complementarity between the guidelines and the Mediterranean framework. A useful next step could be a comparison between the existing guidelines and the

Barcelona Convention MSP framework, to identify common principles, differences, and opportunities for mutual learning.

It was also mentioned that a working group under the Barcelona Convention is expected to publish a policy or position paper on MSP, addressing key elements of MSP from the perspective of experts and participating countries. This could create a further basis for comparison and cooperation.

The Mediterranean region may also offer useful experience to other sea basins, especially on social, cultural, economic, landscape, local culture, and coastal management dimensions. At the same time, the Mediterranean can also learn from other regions, especially where EBA has been developed in more operational or technical terms.

A specific strength of the Mediterranean context is the long tradition of integrated coastal zone management. MSP is seen partly as an extension of this work, which makes land-sea interactions, coastal governance, and local territorial dimensions especially important.

Question 2: What are the main challenges in applying EBA in the Mediterranean context?

First, the effectiveness of MPAs remains a major issue. The problem is not only where MPAs are located, but how they are managed. Weak management limits their real contribution to biodiversity protection. Strengthening MPA management was therefore seen as one of the most important solutions.

Second, knowledge at sea-basin level remains incomplete and uneven. The Mediterranean is complex in ecological, physical, geological, cultural, and use-related terms. More detailed maps, better ecosystem knowledge, and more shared data are needed. However, it is not only a question of producing more data, but also of ensuring that data are accepted and used across countries.

Third, local knowledge, citizen knowledge, and local expert knowledge are not sufficiently recognised. The discussion highlighted that competent authorities often rely mainly on formal scientific or administrative data, while local knowledge is difficult to integrate into databases and planning systems. This creates a gap between lived local experience and official planning evidence.

Fourth, the use of scenarios is still limited. Scenarios could help planners understand future pressures, risks, and development pathways, but more scientific advice and practical experience are needed to make scenario work useful for MSP and EBA implementation.

Finally, a broader challenge is that EBA is often mentioned in MSP plans and policy documents, but not always translated into concrete implementation. More human and financial resources are needed to make EBA operational.

Question 3: How can responsibility and accountability be shared among different users in multi-use areas, including in the Maripark concept, without creating a new joint entity?

This question focused on accountability in multi-use maritime areas, particularly in relation to the MariPark concept, where several companies or users may operate in the same marine space. The concern was that, when different activities are combined in one area, environmental damage may occur, and it may be difficult to determine who is responsible. Each actor may try to shift responsibility to another user, especially when impacts are cumulative, indirect or difficult to trace.

The question therefore asked how responsibility and accountability can be shared or distributed among users without creating a new authority, joint company or separate management body. In other words, the issue is not necessarily to establish a new institution where all decisions are centralised, but to create a clear governance framework within the existing institutional setting.

The answer pointed to the need for clear rules and procedures agreed in advance. These should define who is responsible for what, how impacts are monitored, what evidence is needed to identify the source of damage, and how costs for mitigation, restoration or compensation are shared. This could include joint monitoring obligations, transparent reporting systems, baseline data before activities start and agreed mechanisms for dealing with cumulative impacts.

Kinnie De Beule, noted that if a MariPark operates as a joint initiative or shared marine management arrangement, responsibility should also be shared among its members. In this understanding, costs related to environmental damage could be borne collectively through the MariPark structure. The same logic could also apply to positive outcomes: if one activity, such as nature restoration, creates environmental or economic benefits, these benefits could also be shared among participating companies and users.

Bernd Herremans, emphasised the importance of establishing a robust governance structure for a MariPark from the outset. Clear roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms should be defined before problems arise. He also underlined that such governance arrangements are closely linked to the legal framework underpinning the MariPark. The legal framework could serve as the main mechanism for addressing disputes, assigning responsibilities and ensuring compliance.

In the MariPark context, this is especially important because the concept is based on the coexistence or combination of several uses. Multi-use should not lead to a situation where responsibility becomes diluted or unclear. Each user should remain accountable for their own activity, while shared mechanisms may be needed for common infrastructure, cumulative pressures, joint monitoring or wider ecosystem impacts.

The discussion also showed that this is not only a legal or technical issue. It is a strategic governance challenge. Responsibility-sharing needs to connect high-level spatial planning with operational sectoral management. It requires clear roles for competent authorities, clear obligations for users, and sufficient resources to monitor, assess and enforce responsibilities.

The discussion therefore pointed to the need to align operational management with strategic planning and regulatory frameworks. This includes clarifying the role of authorities and stakeholders, defining governance bodies or coordination arrangements where needed, and ensuring that sufficient resources are available for implementation, monitoring and enforcement.

A possible approach could be to combine individual responsibility with shared responsibility for common or cumulative impacts. Companies could also contribute through mitigation measures within their own installations, joint environmental monitoring or financial mechanisms supporting restoration and protection of the wider area.

The key point is that MariPark or other multi-use concepts should not mean unclear responsibility. If several users benefit from the same marine space, the governance framework must also make clear how risks, impacts, duties and costs are distributed among them.

Other questions collected from the breakout groups

In addition to the questions discussed in the panel, several other questions were collected from the breakout groups. These included:

- How can we expose the reality that EBA has sometimes become a legal checkbox, while knowledge does not necessarily lead to real strategic choices on issues such as bottom trawling, good environmental status or large-scale offshore renewable energy targets?

- Under which framework, for example MSFD or MSPD, should EBA and multi-use be operationalised, and how?

- What is the most appropriate scale to implement EBA, how can it be identified, and how can it be acknowledged at sea-basin or transboundary level?

- Ecosystems and species often function at sea-basin scale, while ecosystem service benefits may be realised at community or national level. Does this mismatch of scales make it challenging to integrate EBA, ecosystem services and MariPark concepts?

- How can multi-use in the Mediterranean be shown to be both beneficial for EBA and profitable for sectors?

- Is nature enhancement considered a use within a multi-use platform?

- Since MariParks, for example combinations of offshore wind and aquaculture, depend on consenting processes that are usually designed for single activities, is stronger state-level intervention in spatial zoning needed to enable multi-use MariParks?

3. Final reflections and main takeaways

A strong takeaway from the discussion was that EBA implementation is an ongoing process. Technical information, tools, maps and guidelines are important, but they need to be connected to real decision-making and management systems.

Bernd Herremans highlighted that although political action is needed to advance ecosystem-based approaches, stakeholders should not wait passively for policymakers to act. Practical implementation should continue, including efforts to test and demonstrate what works.

Kinnie De Beule, supported this point, noting that innovation often requires action ahead of policy development. Pilot initiatives and practical examples can help demonstrate feasibility and support better-informed policy decisions.

Jan Schmidtbauer Crona underlined the value of the cross-sea-basin dialogue. He noted that the different approaches to ecosystem-based management discussed during the workshop are complementary and mutually reinforcing. He also suggested that the North Sea context could benefit from an intermediate level of governance and a stronger focus on practical implementation.

Martina Bocci, MEDIGREEN, appreciated the combination of bottom-up and top-down perspectives and emphasised the similarities between challenges faced across the different sea basins. She noted strong convergence with the MEDIGREEN approach and suggested that, in the Mediterranean Sea, concepts such as MariParks could begin through small-scale pilots or governance experiments before being scaled up.

Another key point was the value of cross-sea-basin learning. The Baltic Sea, North Sea and Mediterranean regions have different legal and institutional contexts, but they face many similar challenges: how to make EBA operational, how to manage MPAs effectively, how to use data and

local knowledge, how to work across borders, and how to link strategic MSP with practical implementation.

The discussion also highlighted the need to combine top-down and bottom-up approaches. Regional frameworks and guidelines are important, but they need to be downscaled and adapted to local and operational realities. At the same time, local knowledge and practical experiences need to be recognised and connected back to broader sea-basin governance.

For the Mediterranean, possible next steps include continuing comparison with EBA/MSP guidelines from other regions, using the upcoming Barcelona Convention MSP policy paper as a basis for further exchange, strengthening cooperation with both northern and southern Mediterranean countries, and exploring pilot actions at regional or local scale.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the value of bringing together experiences from three different sea basins. Despite their distinct environmental, governance and socio-economic contexts, the Baltic Sea, North Sea and Mediterranean Sea face many common challenges related to ecosystem-based management, MSP, multi-use planning, MPAs and governance. The exchange demonstrated the importance of cross-sea-basin learning and knowledge sharing, while also providing inspiration for adapting successful approaches and solutions to different regional settings.

The discussion also showed that EBA, MSP, MPAs, multi-use, MariPark and accountability should not be treated as separate issues. They are closely connected through governance, data, management capacity, legal responsibility, operational implementation and cooperation across sectors and countries.

Workshop 2 – Towards sea basin-level collaboration: co-creating scenarios for the governance of the regional seas

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) is typically a matter of national sovereignty. Nevertheless, over the past decade, calls for a greater integration of transboundary concerns in MSP and, more specifically, for Transboundary Marine Spatial Planning (TMSP) have grown.

This session opened by outlining the need for TMSP in an uncertain world, specifically by exploring the challenges facing the Greater North Sea region. This not only concerned the large-scale roll-out of offshore wind energy – from 33 GW in 2025 to 300+ GW by 2050 – but also includes the food and nature transition. Simultaneously, various uncertainties remain surrounding the future of our marine areas, e.g., the understanding of the functioning of marine ecosystems, (geo)political developments, innovation and technological development, and the willingness for and degree of international cooperation. Overall, the question emerges how to respond to the complexities and limitations of physical space, ecological space, and various uncertainties? Here, institutional capacity – i.e., a set of skills, competencies and resources across governance networks to design and pursue policy goals within a network of actors – is crucial.

The session continued with a first overview of research results of the NESB project WP2 on Ocean governance. These results come from the assessment of various bodies for transboundary collaboration from the Baltic and North Sea region. These two sea basins are vastly different. Where collaboration on the Baltic Sea originated with a strict environmental focus and has a long history of project-driven MSP collaboration, urgency for collaboration in the North Sea region emerged due to the large offshore renewable energy ambitions. Further, North Sea countries have a longer tradition of MSP on national levels and collaborate on more informal basis, compared to the top-down structure that provides a robust mandate for collaboration in the Baltic Sea region. In these contexts, various bodies emerged with different governance structures, aims and levels of formality in their collaboration. Various opportunities and barrier shape the functioning and role these bodies play in the respective sea basins, particularly concerning the following topics: resources, overlap and quantity of work, political support, strength of network, accountability and (in)formality, and the influence of national processes.

In order to showcase various perspectives and share experiences of working in these collaborations, three representatives from the Mediterranean, North Sea and Baltic Sea region joined a panel discussion. Two questions or statements were discussed and reflected upon specifically. First, a fully integrated sea-basin-wide MSP framework is neither realistic nor necessary. Second, sea-basin contexts shape the possibilities for transboundary collaboration as much as governance structures do. Are crises (energy security, climate adaptation, biodiversity loss, security concerns) creating more fragmentation or more cooperation? One of the key takeaways here is that trust is key of working together as well as that governance

structures should be fertilizers for collaboration. That is, they enable the formulation of joint understanding and should unite people across borders.

The last element of the session invited participants to join the NESB research and help in (co-)creating governance structures for the future. Participants were placed in groups each within a distinct (*far-away) future (timeline after 2030) and asked to negotiate a governance design for a new transboundary collaboration. The futures they were provided with each involved different political trends – i.e., nationalist or collectivist attitudes to cooperation and bottom-up or to-down governance systems – as well as levels of ambitions for environmental protection, energy and fisheries/aquaculture. Also, the futures also differed between the perceived spatial and environmental pressures. Following a structured form, participants were then asked to answer the following questions: How urgent and willing are you to collaborate? Why do you want to work together, with what aim? How do you work together? How does who pay for what? And, lastly, how can it fail? Creative and lively discussions followed and allowed for critical reflections on the various ways we can work together. These results have to be analyzed and will feed into the research into the scenarios for transboundary collaboration for the Greater North Sea basin. For now, we'd like to highlight the names of the new collaborations the groups came up with: the Sea Basin Sustainable Fisheries group, ME(U)GA Economy, Benefits of the commons, Make my ocean great again, Sustainable blue EU Economy, and Community power.

Workshop 3 – Knowledge Sharing Platform

Within the work package 5, task 5 is attributed to deliver a Demonstrator Knowledge Sharing Platform. A first version of the Demonstrator has been put online at the beginning of the year. The platform builds on earlier work withing GNSBI and contains relevant maps and textual explanation. However, the current content is still demonstration material.

The goal of the session was to make an inventory of content that is planned to make available via the platform or suggestions of other content to be added to it by other means. The first part of the session was a demonstration of the online platform. The second part was an interactive session where suggested or planned content were produced. In total, 38 suggestions were recorded of which 9 are already planned to be produced within NESBp. The other suggestions were either additional content or extended functionality. Within NESBp WP5, it will be decided which of the suggested new knowledge products can be realized.

Content that was suggested at the workshop that is currently planned within NESBp and GNSBI consist of:

product	type	DIK-type	planned/wanted	project/WP/task/track
Data from GNSBI WT LTFP study	maps	I	planned	GNSBI LTFP
mitigation measures OWF	report	I	planned	NESBp T3.2 and T3.3
Glossary	glossary	I	planned	NESBp WP3
timelines + stages of national MSP cycles		D/I	planned	GNSBI product
Report on environmental monitoring plan Maripark	data report	D	planned	NESBp T4.3
Blueprint Maripark	report	I	planned	NESBp T4.2
Governance bodies on Sea Basin level and their focus/mandate	report	I	planned	NESBp WP2
CIA progress report	report	K	planned	NESBp WP3.4
Policy briefs	brief	K	planned	NESBp

The suggestions for new products (that are not currently planned within NESBp and GNSBI) will be evaluated first for their readiness and accessibility.