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The MED EU MSP plans and nature conservation: insights on available elements and gaps

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Sustainable Maritime Planning in the Mediterranean

European Green Deal (EGD)



Zero net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050

Economic growth decoupled from resource use

No person and no place left behind



Unfold the MSP – EGD nexus

Key topics

- A. Climate change mitigation
- B. Climate change adaptation
- C. Sustainable sea-food production
- D. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration
- E. Blue circular economy
- F. Zero pollution

+

Fair and just transition:

Leave no one and no place behind

A snapshot of results

Biodiversity conservation: Strongly embedded in MSP through established EU frameworks and spatial tools (e.g. MPAs, ecological corridors), although ecosystem restoration remains only partially operationalised.

Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE): Well integrated as the main entry point for climate mitigation in MSP, but implementation is constrained by cumulative impact uncertainties and coordination challenges with environmental objectives.

Fisheries: Integration is visible through measures on selectivity, bycatch reduction and habitat protection, yet integration with MSP remains partial due to the EU-level nature of fisheries governance and limited planning mandates.

Aquaculture: Increasingly considered within MSP, particularly in relation to spatial allocation and sustainability, but still lacks strong integration with broader policy frameworks and ecosystem-based planning approaches.

D2.1 – State of play of sector-related EGD components in MSP plans of EU Med countries



Four key sectors

Offshore Renewable Energy, fisheries, aquaculture, and nature protection.

Seven EU Mediterranean countries

Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovenia and Spain.

MSP plans and processes

Vision, objectives, measures, zoning provisions, stakeholder participation, and cross-cutting elements.





Nature conservation elements in MSP

- Nature conservation is the strongest and most consistently integrated EGD topic across all countries.
- The plans embed biodiversity as either a central pillar or a cross-cutting principle.
- There is a strong alignment with EU frameworks (Habitats, Birds, MSFD).
- This component is widely implemented through spatial tools (MPAs, Natura 2000, FRAs, ecological corridors).
- Beyond spatial designation, a wide range of additional measures is foreseen: e.g. control of invasive species.
- Marine restoration is very limitedly addressed.



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Zoning provisions

Zoning is the primary tool through which MSP operationalises biodiversity objectives

- **Cyprus:** Integrated zoning including Natura 2000, MPAs, FRAs, artificial reefs and geosites
- **France:** Extensive vocation maps covering ~30% of waters with protected areas and key habitats
- **Greece:** Broad Natura 2000 network integrated into zoning; management plans under development
- **Italy:** Large-scale zoning (~50% of waters) with priority, limited and reserved areas for protection
- **Malta:** Zoning aligned with biodiversity strategy; focus on MPAs, SACs, SPAs and ecological corridors
- **Slovenia:** Strong emphasis on connectivity (blue/green corridors) and activity restrictions
- **Spain:** Dual zoning system (protected areas + high-potential conservation zones) covering ~16%



Example from Italy:
priority areas for
nature protection

Common features:

- Integration of existing and future protected areas
- Identification of high ecological value zones
- Support for connectivity and ecosystem-based management



Insights from other sectors' perspective

Fisheries

- Sustainability addressed through spatial and regulatory measures (MPAs, FRAs, restrictions, bycatch reduction)
- Focus on habitat protection and fish stock sustainability
- Support for artisanal and sustainable practices

Aquaculture

- Site selection avoids sensitive habitats (e.g. Posidonia, Natura 2000)
- Growing use of studies, pilot projects and risk assessments
- Focus on carrying capacity and ecological sustainability

Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE)

- Managed through precautionary measures and spatial restrictions
- Requires impact assessments and environmental monitoring
- Still limited integration, mainly focused on mitigation rather than planning



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Measures to address environmental sustainability

Fisheries



- i. **Selectivity:** bycatch reduction; innovation in gear selectivity
- ii. **Habitat protection:** trawling bans and limits to fishing
- iii. **Awareness and innovation:** best practice sharing, training on sustainable techniques
- iv. **Circular economy:** port reception facilities, end-of-life vessel recycling, and biodegradable gears.

ORE



- i. **Environmental measures:** prohibit installations in MPAs; environmental assessments, monitoring of seabird collisions, underwater noise, and cumulative impacts
- ii. **Innovation and multi-use:** wave, tidal, and solar pilots; ORE + aquaculture synergies
- iii. **Zero pollution and Circular economy:** some plans mention the cleaner energy role of ORE, but few integrate principles of the circular economy.

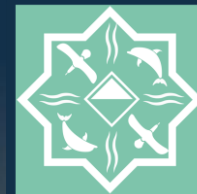
- i. **Environmental measures:** site screening to avoid sensitive habitats, assessing carrying capacity, multi-trophic aquaculture to reduce impacts
- ii. **Diversification:** Marine biotech (seaweed for fuel, pharmaceuticals) and algae farming
- iii. **Circular economy:** eco-design of gear, recyclable materials and by-product reuse, port waste separation.

- i. **Spatial measures:** designation of conservation zones
- ii. **Regulatory measures:** anchoring limits, visitor management, etc.
- iii. **Knowledge and governance:** cross-policy working groups, biodiversity inventory and monitoring
- iv. **Targeted actions:** species conservation, invasive species control, ecosystem restoration, artificial reefs, and integration of marine green infrastructure.

Aquaculture



Nature protection



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Climate-related elements

Climate mitigation linked to nature protection is partially addressed in MSP plans, mainly through blue carbon ecosystems. Overall, integration remains limited, indirect, and often strategic rather than operational.

- Italy: focuses on the protection and restoration of blue carbon habitats (e.g. seagrass, wetlands) and related studies on carbon neutrality
- Greece: promotes ORE development within MPAs, where compatible with environmental management plans
- France: highlights nature-based solutions (e.g. Posidonia seagrass) in strategic vision, but not in concrete measures
- Slovenia: protects Posidonia through a 100m coastal buffer zone, indirectly supporting carbon sequestration.

Climate-related elements

Climate adaptation is explicitly addressed in some MSP plans, especially through strategic goals and priorities. Adaptation is considered but remains uneven and only partially operationalised.

- Cyprus: integrates climate risks (e.g. sea level rise, land-sea interactions) into planning objectives
- France & Italy: promote nature-based solutions (e.g. Posidonia restoration) for coastal protection and resilience
- Italy and Spain support resilience via coastal protection and sand management.
- Spain: includes adaptation through land-sea interaction analysis and climate impact assessments (e.g. port infrastructure).

Elements supporting implementation

- **MPA designation** is a central pillar of MSP plans, aligned with EU 30x30 and 10% targets (e.g. Cyprus designation of new MPAs).
- **Precautionary approaches** are emerging, with forward-looking tools (e.g. Spain's designation of High Potential Areas for Biodiversity before formal protection).
- Biodiversity is supported **beyond zoning** through management, restoration, and innovation measures (e.g. France includes objectives for species, habitats, and ecosystem restoration).
- **Coherence across EU frameworks**, with integrated governance and data systems, as demonstrated (e.g. Italy's Technical Table linking MSP, MSFD, and Biodiversity Strategy objectives).

Challenges and gaps

- Persistent knowledge gaps limit effective implementation, as marine biodiversity data remain insufficient.
- Operational tools are still underdeveloped, with limited approaches to MPA connectivity and scarce use of OECMs across plans.
- Restoration is largely missing from MSP plans, with only a few examples emerging (e.g. Italy and France).
- Implementation capacity remains weak, due to limited enforcement, resources, and surveillance.
- Governance challenges persist, with insufficient engagement of NGOs and local communities in many contexts.
- Climate adaptation is poorly integrated, with only partial initiatives and weak consideration in most countries.

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Thank you!

¡Gracias!

Grazie!

Merci !

Ευχαριστώ!

إشكراً

Hvala!

Grazzi!



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