| **Data for MSP Workshop** |
| 3rd October 2019 |
| Place: COV2/ Place Charles Rogier, 16, B - 1210 Brussels, BELGIUM |
| ROOM: COV2 19-SDR2 |

Presence or represented:

Projects SIMATLANTIC, MAREI, MARSPLAN II, SEANSE, HELCOM-VASAAB, SIMNORAT/SHOM, MarSP, PLASMAR, MSP AM

EMODnet Human Activities, EMODnet Secretariat

DG MARE, DG ENV, EASME

Meeting Summary

To develop their Marine Spatial Plans, Member States are requested to use 'the best available data and information' and to make use of 'existing instruments and tools for data collection'. Some Member States have expressed difficulty to use data and information from other Member States when establishing their maritime plans, sometimes because marine data & information are limited or not available, sometimes because data is not homogeneous (not ready to use).

As Member States progress with the development of their Maritime Spatial Plans, it is becoming apparent that the challenges linked to marine data and information availability and interoperability will become even more important during the implementation of the MSPlans (after 21 March 2021), as it is expected a stronger convergence to other European policies such as MSFD.

This fact is also supported by the growing demand for clean and renewable energy production due to Energy Roadmap 2050 and European Green Deal, including the current goal of 40% emission reduction by 2030. The space in the sea will be increasingly in demand and the use of data will be necessary to ensure sustainability grow of human activities on it.

In order to address these concerns, DG MARE/EASME organised a workshop on 'Data for MSP' back-to-back with the kick-off meetings for two new MSP Projects (SIMAtlantic and MARSPLAN II), drawing together MSP project leaders, and representatives from EMODnet Human Activities Portal as well as other relevant parties.

The purpose of the meeting was to gather input from MSP experts concerning the data issues relating to MSP preparation and implementation and to identify ways forward to address the concerns highlighted.

The workshop was organised around two sessions, each session posing specific questions to be answered. A summary of the sessions is presented below, as well as conclusions and recommended future actions.

Session 1 - MSP Data: Taking stock of Projects

What can the existing MSP projects teach us regarding data needs for MSP?

- Data is fundamental for MSP but often comes in different formats and varies in scale and quality among Member States (MS). There is frequently a lack of data at national level and sometimes a reluctance by owners to share data given the cost of collection;
- There is a need for freely available, accessible and harmonized data. However, data are very fragmented in quality and are not harmonized, depending on the sources. These are mostly local and national when it comes to country level data; while EMODnet, Copernicus, the EEA and EUROSTAT cover all MS and offer data at sea basin level. These data is essential for the continuous development and implementation of MSP in the EU.

- The MSP Data Study[1] provided a data classification framework and an inventory of all data sources in each MS as well as spatial tools such as geoportals. The data framework for MSP allows data to be classed into categories facilitating their use, but this is complex and for it to be effective, data must include all the relevant marine users, but also land-sea interaction, coastal data, MSFD data and environmental data.
- The EC INSPIRE Directive was created to help harmonise and share data between MS but relates mainly to land-use data and not the marine space. It should also be noted that there remains inconsistency between national implementation of the INSPIRE directive. The data model developed within projects MarSP and PLASMAR could serve as a basis for discussion to develop a common language for MSP. In this context, it could be useful if an INSPIRE representative could attend future MSP data meetings.
- The Transboundary MSP Study[2] discusses MSP Data as two types, input data and output data. It was found that it is extremely challenging to harmonise both these data types. It was concluded that whilst it would be near impossible to harmonise input data, it would be relatively simple to ensure harmonisation of output data, i.e. the data resulting from the plans. This approach could offer a way forward on the path to data harmonization for MSP on a sea-basin level.

Why do we need (more) sharing and harmonization of data for MSP?

- Harmonisation is necessary to provide a global or ocean scale picture, without which it is impossible to develop and implement plans in line with the ecosystem-based approach and generate 'common' maps. It is also needed to estimate properly cumulative and in-combination effects of human activities at sea, necessary for sustainable grow. However, in order to progress there is the need to define/agree on which data and which data layers should be prioritized. i.e. local/national/regional.

- There is a need to get better at sharing data between project(s). In the past, different project partners maintained their own data servers, but this required ongoing maintenance. However, a single project server with web-service links to each partner ensures that the data is shared and instantly uploaded and available to all other project partners. (much like EMODnet but at a project scale).

- In addition, there is a need to stimulate and promote sharing between MS in line with provisions of the MSP Directive, especially those in the same sea basins, but also within the administrations of Member States. It would be useful to inform and ensure that relevant authorities know and use the MSP tools that already exist.

- The issue of sharing and harmonising data has been one that is relevant for 10 years now and that was tackled via a number of MSP projects. Several MSPs under development use different categories and symbols for the same data attributes which makes it very difficult to read across them, highlighting the need for a common vocabulary on the different uses of the marine space.
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- EMODnet works in partnership with member states to harmonise and publish new data layers. Whilst EMODnet could harmonise the data, this harmonization also leads to loss of national nuances and important nationally specific issues. E.g. The French plan will contain a large number of sites suitable for particular forms of aquaculture, but other plans will not contain these details since there is no such aquaculture in the country.

- It is important to note that the harmonisation results in a certain amount of compromise. Harmonisation at the European level can thus be problematic, and needs to be implemented at the national level to start with. This is a way to allow national classification needs to be preserved within the data. Previous projects have demonstrated that it is possible for high level data to be harmonised whilst retaining detail at lower levels. What guidance can be given, and models be applied to reach harmonization at EU level.?

- Several of the past and ongoing projects have developed data models. These could be shared as best practice guidance and provide valuable guidelines to support harmonisation of MSP data. E.g. Basemaps Platform developed by Helcom VASAB[3]. This model builds on the INSPIRE Directive. It relates to output data only. Whilst to try and do this for input data would require multiple data models, one for almost every sea use – this might not be essential to advance.

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[1] MSP Data Study Executive Summary. Technical Study under the Assistance Mechanism for the Implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning, 2016.
[2] Guidelines on transboundary MSP output data structure in the Baltic Sea. VASAB CSPD/BSR 2019.
[3] https://basemaps.helcom.fi/

Session 2: Looking forward - MSP Data gaps & needs for MSP implementation

How do we address data gaps in the future?

- The MSP community needs to vocalise what and where are the data gaps: do a gap-analysis; priority setting. It is well known within the community that there are gaps with socioeconomic and biological data.

- Planners don't necessarily know that the data that they need exists. There is good communication within communities (e.g. fisheries or environment), but very poor communication between communities.

- The problems encountered not only relate to whether data exist, but how easy it is to access those? Also, the issue of data-gaps is specific to individual sea-basins, which have their particularities.

- One of the conclusions of previous 'checkpoints' under EMODnet was that fisheries data is hard to access, and as a consequence there is very little data on changes in habitat as a result of fisheries.

- Undertaking a stress test is very different to simply assessing data and identifying the gaps, since it determines what one can do with the data one has.

- EMODNET offered to host another 'stress test' exercise for MSP that incorporates the results of the MSP projects which have collected data. The proposal is to build a tool for accessing data and evaluate its operability, based on the data management work packages of the MSP projects, including linking up with the Blue Growth studies done by the former MSP Assistance Mechanism. All projects represented confirmed their interest to participate to such an exercise.

- In some cases, countries are developing their own tools for cumulative impacts to feed into decision making on planification. It is important that these tools generate the same results and conclusions as those of other countries, especially regarding cross-border situations and to allow cross-border cooperation on MSP. Once again participants confirm that this requires a common approach and guidance. Proposal is to set-up a dialogue between GIS experts and planners to increase knowledge for doing MSP.

What are the main obstacles at this point and how do we overcome them?

- A fundamental obstacle is that Article 10 of the MSP Directive gives no information regarding the form in which MSP plans have to be submitted to the EC. In March 2021, the EC will potentially receive 23 very different plans from each Member State. What then?

- It is increasingly important for the EU MSEG and the EC themselves to consider this issue. It would be valuable for the European Commission and the respective sea basin initiatives to try to ensure some consistency and harmonisation in the national plans.

- The plans must be fit for the future. e.g. in line with the EU Green Deal and Decarbonisation Strategy. All of this requires guidance be provided to the Member States. E.g. In the future, an increase in renewable energy will result in increased demands on space and thus there is a need for more data now.

- If member states undertake the harmonisation in the correct way and use the correct tools (important to demonstrate the added value in this) it will make it easier for comparison with neighbouring MSPs as well as the EC.

- The Assistance Mechanism can offer member states tools and training via the MS Expert Group.

- Can the existing projects do something to support the harmonisation and consistency of plans? It was proposed that within the existing European projects it may be possible. Even though they do not currently have the official final plans, in some cases the projects have access to the draft plans.

- The question was posed - would it be of interest to have a dedicated working group on MSP data? Would it be useful for it to be back to back with the MSEG meeting (Cork 2020?).

- Helcom Vasab has an MSP data sub-group that refers back to the main group, it provides an effective mechanism.

- A difficulty identified is that in some MSP meetings planners, GIS experts, inspire representatives etc. all speak a different 'language' and often little progress is made during the meeting. Planners need to have some technical knowledge of the data, otherwise they miss things. The knowledge gap between practitioners needs to be addressed.

- In order to set-up a dedicated working group on MSP data, there would need to be a very clear mandate for any such group and it would need to be the representatives of the MSEG that nominate the relevant national contact. A training session for the data working group could come from the participants in the existing projects. The proposal could have many positive multiplying effects going forwards.

- In addition, the European Atlas of the Seas is an excellent communication and educational mechanism which could be used to publicise the work being done. European Atlas of the Seas makes use of the EU automatic translation tool, which may be useful in ensuring consistency in MSP process and the terminology used.

- Another proposal regarding a data repository for national MSP is that the Human Activities Portal of EMODnet could be the future repository of the MSPs. It could be mirrored and rebranded as the EU MSP Portal, but it would use the same technology as the Human Activities portal. This would also make the information available across all the other EMODnet sites. However, it would need to be clear that the countries retain the ownership of their plans etc. thus, harmonisation of the plans needs to be done by the member state themselves, since EMODNET is not permitted to harmonise the actual plans.

Conclusions

In the future, MSP is going to be vital since multi-use of sea space is key and increasingly Europe's energy requirements will be delivered from the offshore region. In particular, the commitments to offshore wind energy made within the EU Energy Policy will place increasing competition on the Mediterranean's sea space and thus the need for MSP and to address the issues relating to data for MSP discussed in the meeting are critical.

Amongst those representatives of the MSP community attending (the MSP projects), there is a real willingness and openness to share ideas and expertise and find a solution to the problems of data availability and harmonisation for MSP.

There are a number of different tools and data models which have been developed as part of projects represented in this workshop which provide great possibilities. If these could be replicated in other sea basins, it could be a start in addressing the need for common regional models and data harmonisation.

It is apparent that across the MSP Community, different 'languages' are being used, both between different technical communities, but importantly between different Member States. Thus, not only is there is a lack of data, but also a lack of interoperability between the available data highlighting the need for a common MSP language - a 'glossary of the seas'.

There is a need to get MSP better understood, to encourage a connected community that can share and exchange knowledge, experience and tools amongst each other, for the benefit of our seas and all their users.

Future Actions

- Propose the establishment of an in(formal) working group on MSP data at the upcoming MSEG in Riga (17 – 18th November 2019);

- Explore ways to make use of the newly launched Assistance Mechanism to connect MSP practitioners and facilitate the exchange of tools and methods, as well as to provide guidance and training;

- There is a need for increased stakeholder engagement, since there remains some opposition to 'industrialisation' of the sea;

- There is a need for data production standards and best practice guidance on harmonisation of 'input data' at the national level to ensure that MSP Plans can be compared, and common outputs produced;

- Further discussion on whether the Inspire Directive could be used to 'encourage' the harmonisation of data, guiding common data models. As a starting point, Inspire representatives could be invited to future events.

- Collation of data and results from participating projects to be shard with EMODNET at a future meeting / workshop. Recommendations for a new round of 'stress-testing' to be carried out to determine the information contained within the currently held data. Projects to be invited to participate in the exercise.

- EMODNET has offered support with regards to the future hosting of MSP plans, an offer that will need to be presented as part of a future MSEG Meeting.

- The need for a common MSP language – a 'glossary of the seas' is becoming more apparent. Consideration urgently needs to be given to how this can be progressed.