



## Maritime Spatial Planning Country Profile

Croatia

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# Background Information

## Basic Facts on Marine Waters



Croatian national waters extend for 31,479 km<sup>2</sup> (35,7% of the entire territory), while the coastline is 6,278 km long: of which, 1,880 km are part of mainland Croatia, while 4,398 km are on islands. There are 1244 islands, islets, rocks and reefs (islands and islets 602, rocks and reefs 642). Only 47 islands are permanently inhabited.

In February 2021, the Croatian Parliament declared the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Croatia in the Adriatic Sea (EEZ)<sup>1</sup> following the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Maritime Code.

The sea borders with member states and non-EU countries anticipate the following:

- the sea border between Croatia and Italy was defined in the 1968 Agreement on the Delimitation of the Continental Shelf, and the 1975 Osimo Agreement determining the boundary of the territorial sea, both applied between Croatia and Italy by virtue of succession to the predecessor state. In addition, the existing traffic separation schemes established by IMO, based on the joint proposal of Italy, Croatia and Slovenia, ensure safe and unimpeded navigation under the regime of innocent passage through Croatia's and Italy's territorial sea.
- regarding the delimitation with Bosnia and Herzegovina, the line of delimitation at sea has been determined by the 1999 Treaty on State Border which has been in provisional application as of the date of its signature pending ratification by both Parties.
- between Croatia and Montenegro, delimitation applies as regulated by the 2002 Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (predecessor state to Montenegro) on interim regime along the southern border.
- final delimitation of the territorial sea between Croatia and Slovenia is still pending. Following a procedural incident arising from the implementation of the Arbitration Agreement of November 2009 (between Croatia and Slovenia), Croatia has decided to terminate the Arbitration Agreement and to withdraw from the arbitration. After Slovenia appealed to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) against the dispute, the ECJ gave a judgment<sup>2</sup> according to which it was not competent to arbitrate the dispute between the two countries. It urged Croatia and Slovenia to reach an agreement following international law.

<sup>1</sup> Decision on Declaration of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Croatia in the Adriatic Sea (OG 10/2021)

<sup>2</sup> JUDGMENT OF THE COURT (Grand Chamber) in Case C 457/18, 31 January 2020 (<https://curia.europa.eu/juris/documents.jsf?num=C-457/18>)

## Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) authorities and legislation

### General

Croatian physical planning system (**PPS**) in continuity covers both terrestrial and marine areas so that maritime spatial planning is traditionally an integral part of spatial planning. Today's maritime spatial planning in Croatia incorporates most of the themes and requirements of MSP arising from the EU and international regulations, primarily Directive 2014/89/EU – **MSP Directive**, Directive 2008/56/EC - **MSFD** and the Protocol to the Barcelona Convention on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean (**ICZM Protocol**)<sup>3</sup>. The regulations relating to spatial planning of marine and coastal areas, in particular - the ICZM Protocol, have been gradually incorporated over the years into the PPS, starting with declaration on protected coastal and marine zone in 2004<sup>4</sup>.

#### Planning at the national level

The backbone of the legislation on physical planning in Croatia is the Physical Planning Act - PPA<sup>5</sup>. Spatial plans in Croatia are binding, with the status of the subordinate regulations.

Spatial plans (which include MSP) under state competence:

1. State Plan for Spatial Development, covering the entire Croatian territory, up to the external limit of the territorial sea
2. Spatial Plan of the Exclusive Economic Zone
3. spatial plans of national parks and nature parks which include marine areas
4. urban plans under state competence which include marine areas.

#### National MSP authority

National MSP authority is the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets (MPPCSA) - Institute for Spatial Development.

#### Planning at the regional and local level

Spatial plans (which include MSP) under regional and local competence:

1. county spatial plans which include marine areas
2. municipality spatial plans which include marine areas
3. general urban plans or urban plans which include marine areas.

Each county spatial plans includes provisions for the use of marine areas (up to the external limit of the territorial sea). According to PPA and the regulations enacted under it, these plans include locations for different categories of use, such as ports and marinas, waterways, underwater cables and pipelines, mineral, oil, gas and other energy exploitation and extraction areas, tourism, protected areas, underwater archaeological sites and aquaculture areas.

Each coastal municipality has developed its own spatial plan, including general urban plan or urban plans. All plans contain provisions for the use of marine area if it is within their scope.

#### Regional MSP authority

Physical planning institutes of coastal counties are competent for MSP.

### Details

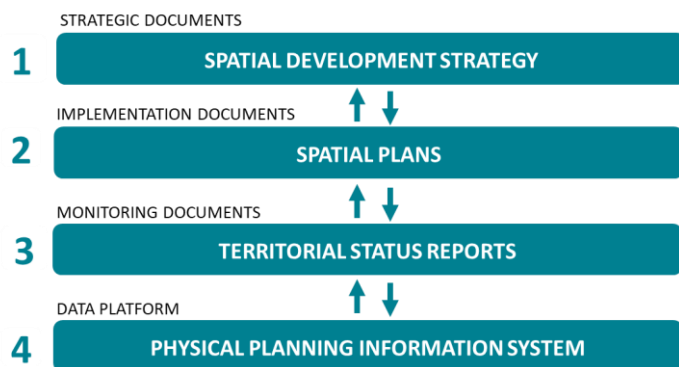
PPS provides the legal frame for implementing spatial planning. As defined by PPA, it provides conditions for the use, protection and management of the territory of the Republic of Croatia as a particularly valuable national asset, enabling the preconditions for social and economic development, environmental and nature protection, quality of construction and rational use of natural and cultural assets.

#### **PPS Basic Structure**

<sup>3</sup> more detailed examination was carried out for Dubrovnik-Neretva County during the SUPREME project - explained later in text

<sup>4</sup> Regulation on Development and Protection of the Protected Coastal Area of the Sea (OG 128/2004)

<sup>5</sup> in force: Physical Planning Act (OG 153/2013, 65/2017, 114/2018, 39/2019, 98/2019, 67/2023)



**Spatial Development Strategy** is the basic document directing spatial development, setting strategic goals and priorities based on established core values and analysis of the territorial status.

**Spatial plans** are the main instruments for the implementation of national spatial planning policy at all levels - state, regional/county and local. In the formal-legal sense, spatial plans have *the force and legal nature of bylaws* (Article 58, paragraph 1 of the PPA) which means that the buildings, infrastructure and other interventions can be realized only on their basis. Depending on the level of spatial plans, they are adopted by the Croatian Parliament, the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the representative bodies of counties and municipalities.

The **territorial status reports**, i.e., the report on the spatial situation in the Republic of Croatia, are prepared to obtain a comprehensive overview of spatial development and future spatial development trends, as well as an overview of the implementation of spatial planning instruments and measures taken by competent authorities in the period under review. They are being prepared for a four-years period on state, regional/county and local levels.

**Physical Planning Information System (ISPU)** is established to develop and monitor the implementation of spatial plans, as well as the preparation of territorial status reports based on continuous monitoring. The ISPU geoportal is a central place for displaying and reviewing publicly available spatial plans, spatial data and layers. Public access to the ISPU geoportal is provided, whereby an overview (WMS) of selected maps of spatial plans of all levels is available. Further development of ISPU will enable direct connection and data exchange with European portals (EMODnet).

By adopting the amendment to PPA (OG 65/2017), came into force in July 2017, and the amendment to PPA (OG 67/2023), came into force in June 2023, the MSP Directive was fully transposed into the legislation of the Republic of Croatia. The amendments include the provisions related to:

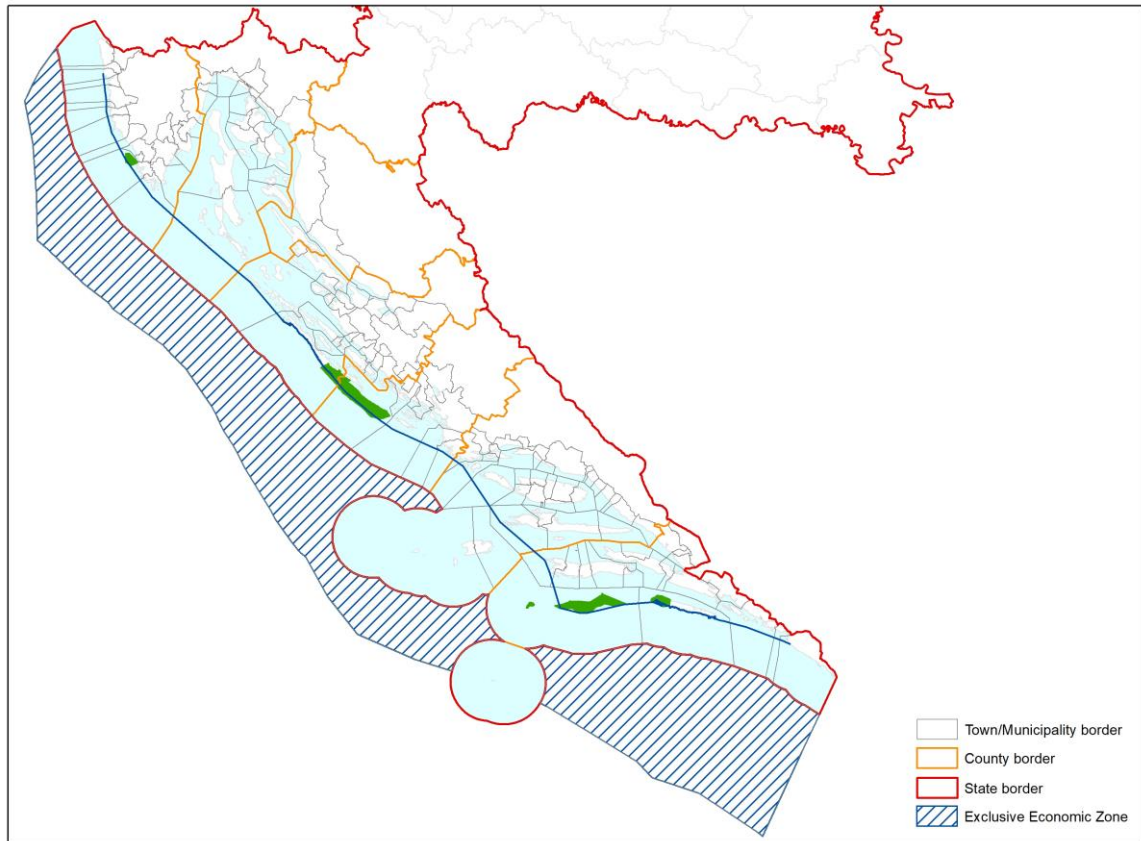
1. Definition, objectives, and principles of MSP
2. Cooperation of Croatia with other EU member states in the field of MSP in the Adriatic Sea
3. Cooperation with the non-EU member states
4. Competent authorities on MSP
5. Legal basis for creating the Spatial Plan of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Croatia.

According to PPA the plans which include maritime spatial planning are:

1. State Plan for Spatial Development
2. Spatial Plan of the Exclusive Economic Zone
3. Spatial plans of national parks and nature parks which include marine areas
4. Spatial plans of counties and municipalities which include marine areas
5. General urban plans and urban development plans which include marine areas.

Status of spatial plans which include the maritime spatial planning:

- Spatial plans on the regional and local levels that cover the territorial sea are in force. They can be found on Geoportal ISPU.
- State-level spatial plans of all national parks which comprise sea areas are in force. Additionally, Spatial plan of Nature Park Telašćica is in force. All these plans can be found on Geoportal ISPU. Spatial plans of nature parks that cover the territorial sea, Velebit and Lastovo Isles, are to be developed, but the area is already covered by the existing regional and local level spatial plans, respecting the special rules on nature protection for these territories.
- State Plan for Spatial Development is under development. Currently, its draft proposal is being prepared.
- Spatial Plan of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Croatia is to be developed. By the amendment to PPA (OG 67/2023), came into force in June 2023, the legal basis for creating that spatial plan has been set.



At the national level, the attempt is to develop consistency in various strategic documents through the Act on the System of Strategic Planning and Development Management of the Republic of Croatia (OG 123/2017 and 151/22).

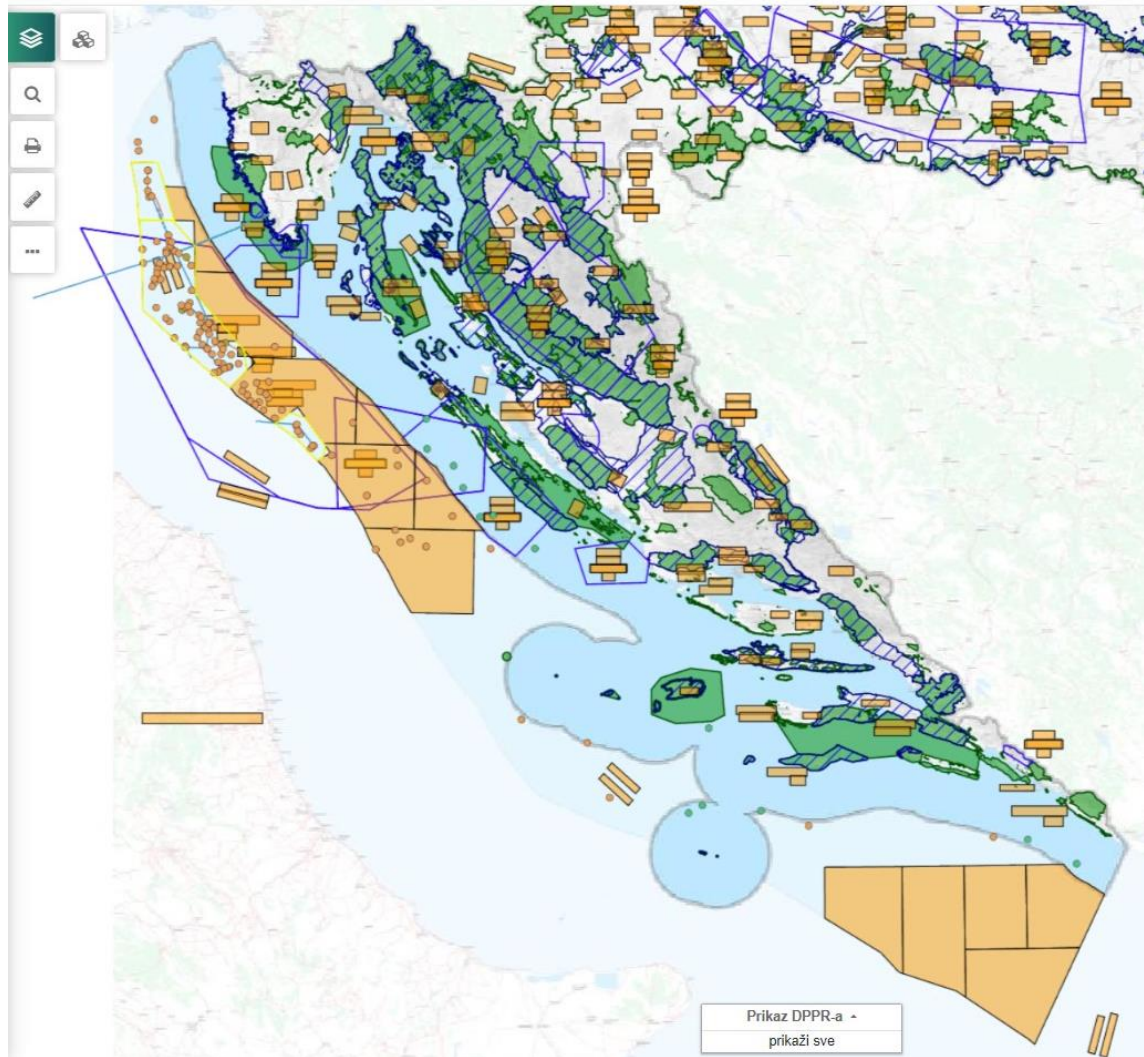
**Overview of other ministries with competencies closely related to the use and protection of marine resources:**

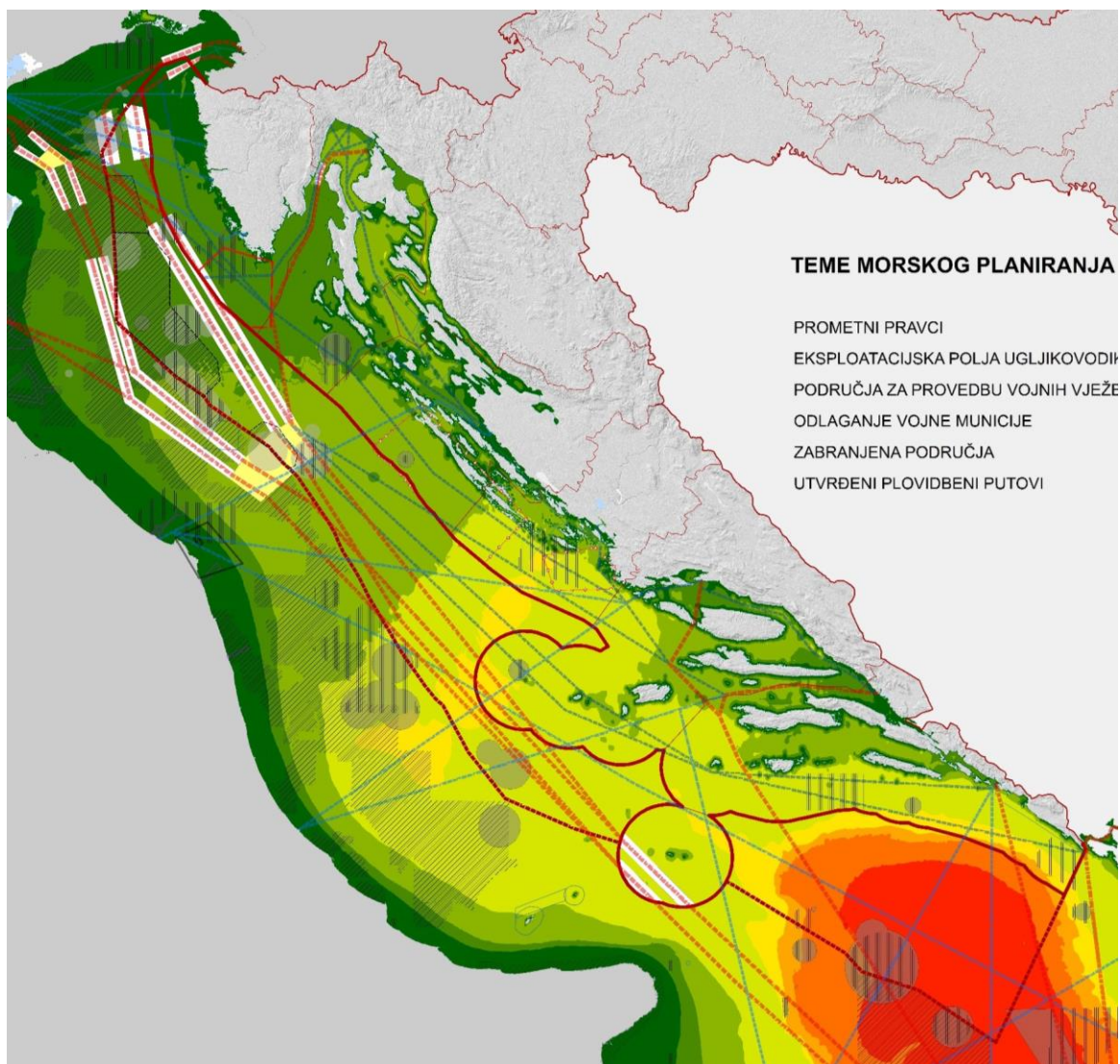
- the ministry in charge of maritime affairs: Ministry of Sea, Transport and Infrastructure - **MSTI**
- the ministry in charge of fisheries and aquaculture: Ministry of Agriculture – **MA**
- the ministry in charge of nature and environmental protection: Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development – **MESD**
- the ministry in charge of exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons and other mineral resources in the marine area: **MESD**

**Progress**

On June 7, 2023, the Croatian Parliament passed the amendments to the PPA, published in the Official Gazette no. 67/2023, entered into force on June 29, 2023, entered the THEMIS database in June 2023. This fulfills the legal requirement for formally starting the development of the spatial plan of the exclusive economic zone. Further to the adoption of the amendments, the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and State Property (MPPCSA) drafted the Ordinance on Spatial Plans, which is in the process of public consultation. The Ordinance, among other things, determines the purpose and use, the spatial and temporal distribution of activities, etc.

MPPCSA prepares the Decision on the creation of the Spatial Plan of the Exclusive Economic Zone, issued by the Minister of Spatial Planning, Construction and State Property. The planned adoption of the relevant Decision is expected in the 4th quarter of 2023.





At the same time, the initiation of the process of SEA for the Spatial Plan of the Exclusive Economic Zone is being prepared, with the main assessment of feasibility for the ecological network in accordance with special laws in the field of environmental and nature protection.

As part of the preparatory work for the creation of the Spatial Plan of the Exclusive Economic Zone, the MPPCSA, in cooperation with the Institute for Spatial Planning of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County, created the “Expert Analytical Basis: Data Collection, Analysis and Processing for the MSP” (June 2023).

The Republic of Croatia is obliged by law to adopt the Spatial Plan of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Croatia, at the latest by December 31, 2026.

When setting the specified deadline, the account was made of the time necessary to carry out the complex procedure of data obtaining and processing, drafting the plan proposal, in addition to which the process of the plan’s strategic environmental assessment is carried out in parallel, with the main assessment of the impact on nature. Based on experience, the expected duration of all previously mentioned steps is at least 18 months. This is followed by the holding of one or more public consultation, as well as meetings of expert working groups, preparation of reports on the public consultation, along with the drafting of the final plan proposal. Afterwards, the final proposal of the plan must be determined by the Government of the Republic of Croatia and sent to the Croatian Parliament, which is to ultimately adopt it.

Given the expiration of the deadline to enter the MSP into force (March 31, 2021), Croatia have initiated a formal communication procedure with the European Commission through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the current state of the MSP.

## Overview of MSP-related uses and issues

A strategic document *Maritime Development and Integrated Maritime Policy Strategy of the Republic of Croatia from 2014 to 2020* was adopted by the Croatian Government in 2014 (the new document is in progress). MSTI is responsible for the implementation of measures and goals determined by this strategy, in coordination with other state and public authorities in the field of maritime affairs. The strategy sets out two basic strategic goals:

- sustainable growth and competitiveness of the maritime economy and
- safe and environmentally sustainable development of maritime transport, infrastructure, and a maritime area of the Republic of Croatia.

EUNETMAR (2014) identifies the following 7 largest marine/maritime sectors for Croatia at present, listed here in order of importance:

### **Coastal tourism**

It is the most relevant maritime activity in Croatia and a major blue sector in terms of employment. This activity still has high growth potential, and it is identified as a strategic sector by the national authorities. [Strategy for the Development of Sustainable Tourism until 2030](#) was adopted by the Parliament in 2022. A new law on tourism with a focus on sustainable destination management is on the process of adoption.

### **Cruise tourism**

This sector represents an important maritime activity in Croatia<sup>6</sup>. Compared to 2010, the total number of cruise ships has reduced but has kept almost the same number of passengers and has increased the average number of stops. The most important cruising destination in Croatia is the city of Dubrovnik, accounting for more than 70% of all cruise tourism in Croatia. However, the daily number of people is often beyond the city's carrying capacity and, in line with UNESCO recommendations, local authorities are limiting the daily number of passengers to the Port of Dubrovnik.

### **Passenger ferry services**

Due to its direct link with the growth of tourism, particularly on the islands, passenger ferry services are among the fastest-growing maritime activities in Croatia, with a continuous increase in the number of passengers.

### **Short sea shipping**

The economic potential of Croatian seaports is based on its favourable geographical position and the deep penetration of the Adriatic Sea into the continent. Integration into the network of European transport corridors represents a development potential for inclusion in trade flows within the European and world markets. Almost 90% of freight transport in Croatian ports takes place in the ports of Rijeka, Ploče and Split. Passenger traffic mainly takes place in the ports of Split and Zadar, while most of the traffic in the port of Dubrovnik is traffic on cruise ships.

### **Yachting and marinas**

This activity has large growth potential in Croatia. The objective of the [National Strategy for Nautical Tourism Development](#) for the period 2009 – 2019, was the creation of many new moorings and the construction of new high-quality marinas.

### **Fishing and marine aquaculture**

The direct production value of fisheries, fish farming and processing, with accompanying activities, exceeds 1% of GDP. It is estimated that it employs (directly and indirectly) around 25,000 people. The share of aquaculture in the total fishery production in Croatia is only 20% but it has strong potential for growth<sup>7</sup>.

Besides the *Agriculture and Fisheries Strategy of the Republic of Croatia* (OG 89/2002), as the umbrella strategic document in the field of fisheries and aquaculture, another two key strategic documents were developed: [National Strategic Plan for the Development of Fisheries](#) (prepared under the provisions of Council regulations on the European Fisheries Fund) and *National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture Development 2014- 2020*. These documents are in the process of revision. The objectives are to promote sustainable development of the sector, increase productivity and strengthen competitiveness.

### **Oil and Gas**

Gas exploitation occurs in the Northern Adriatic Sea, with 20 operative gas platforms and about 228 km of gas pipeline laying on the sea bottom. In addition, there is a plan to build a large LNG terminal in the Northern Adriatic Sea basin.

According to the *Framework Plan and Program for Hydrocarbon Exploration and Exploitation in the Adriatic* (2015), 28 hydrocarbon exploration areas have been defined in the Adriatic Sea, comprising both territorial sea and continental shelf of the Republic of Croatia: 8 exploration areas in the northern Adriatic, 15 in the central Adriatic and 5 in the

<sup>6</sup> Institute for tourism, 2016

<sup>7</sup> National strategic plan for the development of fisheries in the Republic of Croatia; OG 123/13

southern Adriatic. A strategic environmental assessment was carried out for the Program but there is no national consensus on realization.

#### **Protected areas**

As far as natural protection is concerned, it is worth noting that 266 Natura 2000 marine sites have been established in Croatia (257 SCI and 9 SPA) for a total sea area of 5,279 km<sup>2</sup> (European Environmental Agency, 2013 - Natura 2000 Barometer), i.e., 16,4% of the country's marine area.

There is no MPA site defined by Nature Protection Act, but there are many protected areas which include marine areas:

#### **National Parks**

- National Park Brijuni
- National Park Kornati
- National Park Mljet

#### **Nature Parks**

- Nature Park Lastovo Isles
- Nature Park Telašćica

In consideration of its high ecological value, in 2014 the Jabuka/Pomo pit was declared<sup>8</sup> an "Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area" (EBSA)<sup>9</sup>, according to the criteria adopted by the 9<sup>th</sup> COP of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)<sup>10</sup>. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2017, at its 41<sup>st</sup> session, through the *Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/3 on the establishment of an FRA in the Jabuka/Pomo pit in the Adriatic Sea*, the GFCM adopted the EU proposal for the establishment of a Fisheries Restricted Area (FRA) in the Jabuka/Pomo pit banning demersal fisheries.

The Republic of Croatia determines the areas for additional protection in accordance with the provisions of the EU Biodiversity Strategy until 2030, with the given goals: 10% strictly protected and 30% of other types of protection (land and marine areas) - project in progress.

Furthermore, the "OPKK project" is ongoing: Mapping of coastal and bottom marine habitats in the Adriatic Sea under national jurisdiction. In accordance with the Habitats Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the systematic mapping of coastal and bottom marine habitats will enable an increase in knowledge about the distribution and state of marine resources.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-12/cop-12-dec-22-en.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/ebsa/>

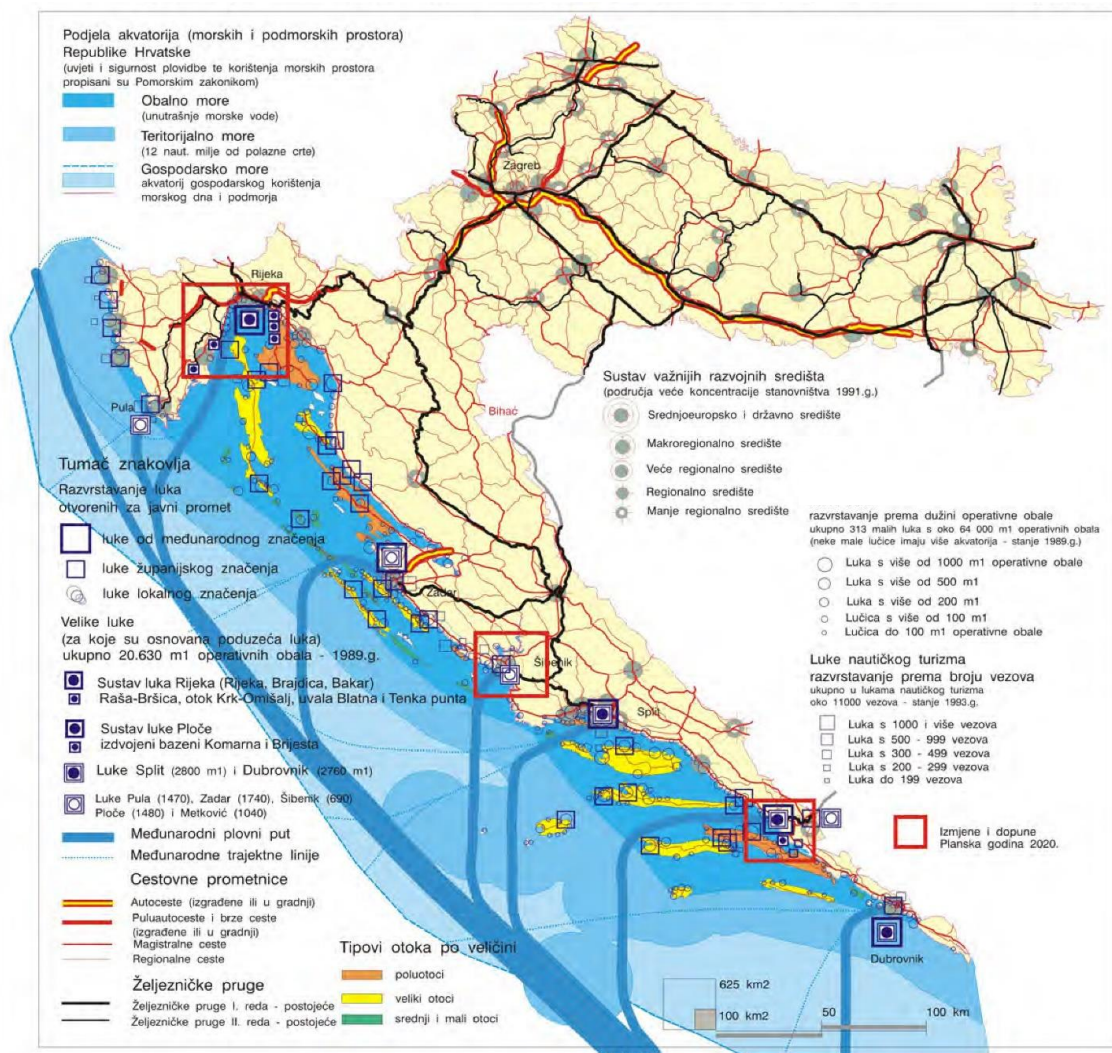
<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-09/cop-09-dec-20-en.pdf>

# Maritime Spatial Plans

## Existing Maritime Spatial Plans

As mentioned above, there is no single MSP plan for the Croatian marine area, but existing spatial plans cover the entire area of inner waters and territorial sea.

The area of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Croatia is covered by the Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia, adopted by the Croatian Parliament and published in the Official Gazette no. 106/2017.



The EEZ is covered by [Physical Planning Programme of the Republic of Croatia](#) (adopted by the Parliament in 1999 and revised in 2013), a document with strategic and implementation components at the state level.

The coastal area is administratively part of seven counties with a total of 133 local units (cities and municipalities) to which the MSP Directive and the ICZM Protocol should be applied. So far, all counties and cities/municipalities, encompassing sea areas, have developed, and adopted spatial plans for their administrative territories, including the corresponding sea area.

At the state level, spatial plans encompassing the marine area have been developed and adopted for all national parks (Brijuni, Kornati and Mljet) and the Nature Park Telašćica.

Existing spatial plans on the state (NUTS1), regional (county; NUTS3) and local (city or municipality; LAU2) level cover the entire sea area up to the outer border of territorial waters.



All Spatial plans are available via the central platform ISPU/Physical Planning Information System: <https://ispu.mgipu.hr/>

ISPU is a geoportal that enables public access to spatial plans. Geoportal ISPU contains all valid spatial plans with associated data and graphic representations. Further development of the ISPU will enable direct connection and exchange with European portals (EMODnet).

The analysis carried out in the EU-funded Project [SUPREME](#), shows that the majority of the MSP Directive provisions regarding the activities in the sea area are covered in the existing county spatial plans<sup>11</sup>. However, all existing spatial plans will be revised and restructured in the process of transition to the “new generation” of plans according to the PPA. The Zadar County Spatial Plan is described below as an example of an existing plan at the county level that comprises both land and maritime areas.

An example of a county spatial plan with a maritime dimension is detailed below:

- [The Zadar County Spatial Plan](#) was developed in 2001. It addresses the demand for different uses of its marine area, including protected areas, maritime transport, ports and others. The Plan also obliges municipalities and towns to define sea use within their coastal belts, through their spatial plans. It identifies four different marine zones for mariculture, which is one of the most important maritime activities for Zadar County, amounting to approximately 60% of total mariculture production in Croatia. Mariculture zonation is based on the “Study on the use and protection of the sea and seabed in Zadar County”, of which the main objective was to initiate the ICZM process in the County and simultaneously propose zones for different types of mariculture, based on suitability assessments.

Legal basis: the plan was initially developed following the provisions of the Physical Planning and Construction Act (1994, and amendments). The Plan has been revised and adjusted several times (amended in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2015 and 2023). Its alignment with the Regulation on Protected Coastal Area Development

<sup>11</sup> available on link: <https://www.msp-platform.eu/practices/addressing-msp-implementation-case-study-areas-dubrovnik-neretva-county>, Addressing MSP Implementation in Case Study Areas: Dubrovnik – Neretva County, chapter: E.1.1. Existing spatial plans encompassing areas of internal and territorial sea in the physical planning system

and Conservation (2004) was particularly important for the spatial planning of the coastal area. The Plan was adopted by the County Assembly.

Legal impact: the plan has the legal force of subordinate regulations. According to the Physical Planning Act, all city and municipal spatial plans (local level plans) in Zadar County must be aligned with this plan.

Area covered: the total area covered by the plan is 7,275 km<sup>2</sup>, which includes 3,643 km<sup>2</sup> of land and 3,632 km<sup>2</sup> of marine area.

Objectives of the plan: the main objectives of the plan include economic development, coastal development, rational use of natural resources, protection, landscape protection, and protection of historical heritage.

Designated uses: referring to MSP and LSI themes, the plan has designated: marine ports for different purposes, marine traffic routes, island heliports, sea salt harvesting area(s), underwater cables, freshwater supply, areas for mariculture with detailed zoning and capacities, and the following areas with special restrictions for users:

- particularly sensitive and especially endangered habitat areas, sources of marine pollution, areas defined according to building density along the coastline (natural coast, planned building areas, illegal construction of different types)
- protected areas (coastal and underwater archaeological zones, protected landscape, natural park)
- restricted area (1,000 m of land and 300 m of sea surface measured from the coastline)
- areas for aquaculture with detailed zoning and capacities (based on detailed study).

Planning regulations: provisions for the implementation of the plan have been developed with the last version dating back to 2023.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA): a Strategic Environmental Assessment was not carried out, but the plan contains provisions related to the protection of the environment and the natural landscape.

Public Participation: public hearings were carried out during the preparation of the plan and its amendments. Major stakeholders were involved according to the regulations and their views on specific subjects were sought after. The County Institute for Spatial Planning was responsible for the preparation of the plan.

Harmonisation with other plans: the Zadar County plan was harmonised with the national spatial development strategic documents and relevant spatial plans according to the regulations.

Monitoring and Review: the territorial status report is the basic instrument for monitoring the plan's implementation. It envisages the use of standard indicators to monitor spatial development, such as the occupation of land, parameters of land use, construction of infrastructure, etc. No use of specific MSP indicators was envisaged.

Electronic resources: <https://www.zpu-zaduzp.hr/prostorno-uredjenje#1>

## Pilot plans or projects

Croatia has elaborated one MSP-related pilot project and has been involved in several ICZM and MSP European projects, most of them involving transboundary cooperation between the Eastern Mediterranean countries.

- [Coastal Plan for the Šibenik-Knin County](#) is not sector-specific. It was developed as a pilot project, thus as an indicative plan addressing the coastal areas and land-sea interactions. However, the County Assembly adopted the plan. The preparation of the Coastal Plan started in January 2013. The plan was finalised in December 2015 and was approved by the County Assembly in April 2016.

Legal basis: it is a pilot plan which is not legally binding. However, the Coastal Plan is an indicative plan, adopted by the Šibenik-Knin County Assembly, that became an official guidance document.

Area covered:

*Area covered by the Šibenik-Knin County Plan (red boundaries define the Plan area; the yellow square is the influence zone). Source: PAP/RAC, 2016. Coastal Plan for the Šibenik-Knin County*

Objectives of the plan<sup>12</sup>: the objectives of the Coastal Plan for Šibenik-Knin County are to:

- promote sustainability and resilience as coastal zone development criteria

<sup>1212</sup> For more information about the plan: [http://pap-thecoastcentre.org/projects/coastal\\_plans.html#skc](http://pap-thecoastcentre.org/projects/coastal_plans.html#skc).



- The [ADRIPLAN project](#) (2013-2015) funded by EC DG MARE developed recommendations and proposed MSP exercises for transboundary maritime spatial planning in the Adriatic and Ionian seas. In particular, the project identified two Focus Areas for which MSP exercises were developed:
  - MSP exercise in ADRIPLAN Focus area 1 – Northern Adriatic
  - MSP exercise in ADRIPLAN Focus area 2 – Southern Adriatic and Northern Ionian.

Main ADRIPLAN deliverables include downscaling and application of the developed methodology in the two project Focus Areas, ADRIPLAN Data Portal, and MSP tools (conflict score and cumulative impacts tools).

A vision and related objectives were also set by the [ADRIPLAN project](#) and described in the publication “ADRIPLAN: Developing a maritime spatial plan for the Adriatic-Ionian Region”. Moreover, the ADRIPLAN project identified seven activities of socio-economic importance and two additional uses forecasted to take place in designated locations of the Adriatic-Ionian region.

- The [SUPREME Project](#)<sup>13</sup> (2017-2018), is an EU-funded project involving public authorities in charge of MSP in four EU Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia). Concerning Croatia, the Institute for Spatial Development participated in the project. The project aimed at helping Member States to implement the European directive by developing MSP projects in several case pilot areas. The development of those case studies has provided a review of the approach to MSP and cross-border cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean while exploring issues highlighted previously by the Member States.

One of the case studies carried out in the scope of the SUPREME Project concerned the [Croatian Dubrovnik-Neretva County](#), coordinated by the Institute for Spatial Development. This county is in the southernmost part of the Croatian Adriatic Sea. It has a total area of 9,272 km<sup>2</sup> and a high portion of maritime zones (corresponding to the 81% of its total extension). The maritime zone of the County represents almost 25% of the total Croatian maritime area. The neighbouring continental shelf included in the case study area, with an area of about 9,350 km<sup>2</sup>, represents almost 40% of the total Croatian continental shelf area. The land area consists of two main functional zones: a relatively narrow longitudinal coastal zone and the area of the Neretva Valley with its gravitating coastal zone. The narrow and heterogeneous coastal zone is separated from the hinterlands by the steep mountain-massive, while the whole area suffers from traffic connectivity issues and isolation from the rest of the country. The region is characterised by a high proportion and biodiversity of natural protected areas, rich cultural heritage (e.g., Old Town of Dubrovnik is under UNESCO protection) and a specific coastal landscape.

One of the main outputs of the case was a comprehensive analysis of the spatial planning framework and socio-economic characteristics of the maritime sectors present in Dubrovnik – Neretva County, including:

- 1) vision and scenario building
- 2) establishing objectives and indicators for MSP in the study area
- 3) spatial plans for internal waters and territorial seas and the EEZ and continental shelf of the study area
- 4) recommendations for the improvement of maritime spatial planning in Croatia
- 5) implementing a transboundary approach between Croatia and Italy.

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<sup>13</sup> The Ministry of the Environment and Energy is one of SUPREME Project partners (<http://www.msp-supreme.eu>)

# Aspects of the MSP process

## Sustainable development and growth in the maritime sector

Croatia is part of the Union for the Mediterranean ([UfM](#)), which has been supporting and leading numerous regional and national initiatives for the development of the Blue Economy for over a decade, including the ongoing MedCoast4BG project. This project aims to find common approaches and planning tools (ICZM and MSP) to co-evaluate the human activities and the natural systems situated in coastal areas.

- Croatia is also a partner of the [BlueMed Initiative](#), set up in 2014 as a means to foster the integration of knowledge and efforts to develop the Blue Growth in the Mediterranean. BlueMed aims to promote joint actions at the Mediterranean level on relevant research and innovation priorities.

Blue Economy is also a pillar of the [European Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region \(EUSAIR\)](#), of which Croatia is a part, as it promotes research, innovation and business opportunities in blue economy sectors, the adaptation to sustainable seafood production and consumption, and the improvement of the sea basins' governance.



### Ecosystem-based approach (EBA)

The ecosystem-based approach is referenced in the Strategy for the Management of the Marine Environment and Coastal Zone and the principles of spatial planning determined by PPA.

Additionally, 266 Natura 2000 marine sites have been established in Croatia (257 SCI and 9 SPA) for a total sea area of 5,279 km<sup>2</sup> (European Environmental Agency, 2013 - Natura 2000 Barometer), i.e. 16,4% of the marine area. Spatial plans for protected areas managed by national authorities, covering both terrestrial and marine areas, have been developed. These include the National Parks of Brijuni, Kornati and Mljet, and the Nature Park of Telašćica, while a spatial plan for the Nature Park Lastovo Isles is expected to be developed. Depending on the type of plan, they include zonations for different levels of protection.

Croatia is also participating in the [MedPan project](#), a network of Marine Protected Area Managers in the Mediterranean. Today, it brings together close to 100 institutions and NGOs that either has direct responsibility for managing Marine Protected Areas (MPA) or are involved in the management, monitoring or development of MPAs in the Mediterranean. The MedPAN network's mission is to promote, through a partnership approach, the sustainability and operation of a network of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean that are ecologically representative, connected and effectively managed to help reduce the current rate of marine biodiversity loss. Concerning Croatia, six MPAs have been established along the country's coasts. Despite these MPAs being mainly terrestrial, they also include surrounding marine areas.

Croatia is also a partner of the [PHAROS4MPAs](#) project (2017-2020), which aims to enhance management effectiveness and networking for Mediterranean MPAs, to contribute to the conservation of marine biodiversity and natural ecosystems, taking into account the complex ensemble of human activities developed within the Blue Growth perspective and their interaction with protected areas and marine ecosystems.



### Resilience to climate change impacts

In 2017, Croatia published its [National Adaptation Strategy](#), a document "*developed in synergy with [...] all relevant sectoral strategies that have been adopted or are in the process of adoption*<sup>14</sup>", which includes the Strategy for Maritime Development and Integrated Maritime Policy of the Republic of Croatia, the Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia, and the Draft Management Strategy for the Marine Environment and Coastal Region of the Republic of Croatia. These documents address climate change issues and propose appropriate measures.



### Land-sea interactions

The [PPA](#) explicitly addresses land-sea interactions (Art. 8, 49.b.1, 49.c) as part of the key principles of spatial planning. In addition, the Act defines the Protected Coastal Area (PCA) (Art. 45-49.f) as a zone of special State interest, encompassing the area of coastal cities and municipalities. Within that zone, and to ensure protection and sustainability of development and planning, a restricted area comprised of a 1,000 m wide terrestrial belt and a 300 m wide sea belt, measured from the coastline, is established. Furthermore, additional limitations are in place for building and construction within 100 m from the coastal line.

<sup>14</sup> Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy in the Republic of Croatia for the period to 2040 with a view to 2070, page 19.

The protected coastal area represents an area of special interest for the Republic of Croatia and was declared for the first time by the Regulation on Protected Coastal Area Development and Conservation in 2004. Special conditions exist for the planning, development and utilisation of the PCA and the restricted area and its conservation. All spatial plans within the protected coastal area need to be approved by the ministry in charge of physical planning (MPPCSA).

A monitoring and observation programme<sup>15</sup> was adopted in 2014 and a Programme of measures for protection and management of the marine environment and the coastal area of the Republic of Croatia, the most comprehensive document addressing land-sea interactions, was adopted by the Government in 2017 (OG 97/2017).

The SUPREME project (2017-2018) also had a specific focus on land-sea interactions.



## Stakeholder Involvement

Public consultation in spatial planning is prescribed by the [PPA](#) (Art. 94). It refers to both land and marine spatial planning because spatial plans cover both terrestrial and maritime areas. The Act also defines the *subjects of physical planning* (public bodies, institutes and persons registered to carry out physical planning activities) as stakeholders with special duties and responsibilities in the spatial planning process. They are invited to submit their requests and data immediately after making decisions on the development of spatial plans.

Preparation of all strategic documents requires consultations with the public. The preparation of the Strategy for Spatial Development and the Strategy for the Protection and Management of the Marine Environment and Coastal Zone was undertaken through extensive consultation with responsible institutions, as well as with the public, through public hearings.

Through the implementation of MSP related projects, there have also been conferences and workshops bringing together regional stakeholders, as in the case of the ADRIPLAN project<sup>16</sup> and the SUPREME project, which included several consultation events, both at the scales of the whole Adriatic-Ionian region and the Focus Areas for the MSP exercises. The [SUPREME project](#) also aimed to promote mechanisms for transboundary cooperation on MSP implementation, involving all relevant stakeholders in the planning and, in perspective, in the management phase.



## Co-existence of uses

The ADRIPLAN project analysed interactions between human activities in the Adriatic-Ionian region through a spatial analysis based on a methodology developed with the COEXIST project (Gramolini et al., 2013). The analysis described the potential relation between all types of combinations of activities and assigned different conflict scores to each set of combinations.



## Transboundary cooperation

Transboundary cooperation between Croatia and other Adriatic countries (Italy, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) on marine issues has been formalised through a series of treaties and legal acts. A recent important effort on transboundary cooperation, supported by significant contributions from Croatian and Italian scientists, brought the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the [General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean](#) (GFCM) in October 2017 to the adoption of the EU proposal for the establishment of a Fisheries Restricted Area in the Jabuka/Pomo Pit, effectively banning demersal fishing (i.e. bottom-set nets, bottom trawls, and some long lines and traps). The marine area of at least 2,700 km<sup>2</sup>, recognised as an essential nursery and spawning ground for several marine species, is placed outside the territorial waters of Italy and Croatia.

The relevance of transboundary issues has been demonstrated as part of the different projects and programmes, such as ADRIPLAN, Shape, PlanCoast, COASTANCE, ECASA, IPA Adriatic Cross-Border Programme, MedPAN, PEGASO, SECURESEA, and SUPREME. For example, at the level of pure MSP exercise, the ADRIPLAN project identified transboundary planning issues in the Adriatic Sea, including unresolved transboundary matters between Italy and Croatia in the North Adriatic Sea.

<sup>15</sup> <https://galijula.izor.hr/projekti/jadmon/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://adriplan.eu/index.php/stakeholders/stakeholder-workshops>



## Use of best available data

[TOOLS4MSP](#), a geo-platform created within the ADRIPLAN project, holds a compilation of MSP-relevant data from the Adriatic and Ionian Sea (including Croatia) as well as at regional level. It is intended for partners, stakeholders and the general public to search and share knowledge, data, and information related to MSP. It offers tools to analyse data (e.g., conflicts, cumulative impacts) and is continuously updated with new data.

In Croatia, spatial databases within individual sectors are in the process of developing. Some sectoral information systems have already been established and well maintained, while some of them are only partially established or the spatial component is not covered at all.

One of the tasks and challenges is the inclusion of data from a wide range of stakeholders/sectors in the ISPU, including building a unique module for MSP.

Besides previously described **Geoportal of Physical Planning Information System (ISPU)**, other geoportals contain valuable data for MSP:

- **Geoportal MORE** (<http://baltazar.izor.hr/portal/slojevi>), providing access to data and databases related to the marine environment, legislation related to the marine environment and national monitoring of the marine environment (Review of the annual assessment of the quality of the sea for swimming on Croatian beaches, Overview of area monitoring according to MSFD descriptors, Display of data on sea currents and wave height, and Databases and indicators of the state of the marine environment, aquaculture and fisheries)
- **Geoportal of cultural properties of the Republic of Croatia** (<https://geoportal.kulturnadobra.hr/geoportal.html#/>), providing access to spatial data on cultural property under legal protection (including sea area)
- **Bioportal** (<http://www.bioportal.hr/gis/>), providing access to spatial and other data on biodiversity and nature protection in Croatia
- **GeoAdriatic (GeoAdriatic - HHI)**, Croatian Marine Spatial Data Portal, provides search and view services for marine spatial data, and e-services from the scope of the hydrographic Institute of the Republic of Croatia (HHI)

## Coherence with other processes

Besides the MSP Directive 2014/89/EU, the MSFD 2008/56/EC and ICZM Protocol have also been transposed into the Croatian legal and strategic framework, adopting international obligations for protecting nature and the marine environment, protecting cultural heritage and supporting a policy of sustainable development of the coastal economy.

### Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)

Due to the variety of existing policies related to the management of marine and coastal environments that are mutually connected, in 2012 Government of Croatia decided to link the obligations arising from the MSFD and the ICZM Protocol, including links with Integrated Water Resources Management (**IWRM**) and climate changes in the coastal area, into one strategic document that would reflect and harmonize the management solutions for the sustainability of the coastal and marine environment, economy and society. According to Environmental Protection Act, the Croatian Government adopted *Regulation on development and implementation of the documents of the Marine Environment and Coastal Zone Management Strategy* (OG 112/2014). The development of the *Marine Environment and Coastal Zone Management Strategy (Marine Strategy)* is coordinated by MESD. For the development and implementation of the Marine Strategy, the National Committee, representing inter-ministerial coordinative body, was established in 2012 and its members were appointed by the Croatian Government<sup>17</sup>.

Within the process of Marine Strategy development, preparatory documents and action programs were developed as follows:

- *The Initial Assessment of the Status of Marine Environment and the pressures thereon in the Croatian part of the Adriatic Sea* (adopted in 2012)
- *Set of Characteristics for Good Environmental Status for the Marine Waters under the Sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia* (adopted in January 2015)
- *Economic and social analysis of the use and the cost of degradation of marine and coastal environment* (adopted in June 2015)
- *Monitoring system for the ongoing assessment of the status of the Adriatic Sea* (OG 153/2014)
- *Programme of Measures for the Protection and Management of the Marine Environment and Coastal Zone of the Republic of Croatia* (OG 97/2017), as the most comprehensive document addressing land-sea interactions

<sup>17</sup> the expert team for developing the documents includes: the Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries, the Faculty of Economics of the University of Split, and the Priority Actions Programme - Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) of the UNEP-MAP

- *Action Program for the Marine Environment and Coastal Zone Management Strategy: Monitoring system for the ongoing assessment of the status of the Adriatic Sea 2021-2026 (OG 28/2021)*

The first three documents have been revised in 2019.

### Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)

Many relevant ministries are indirectly involved in the MSP process. In particular, the ministry in charge of nature and environmental protection (MESD) is closely linked to the MSP process, as it is responsible for the implementation of the MSFD and for coordinating the implementation of the ICZM Protocol for the Mediterranean in Croatia. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Croatia began preparing the Strategy for the Management of the Marine Environment and Coastal Zone, integrating the requirements of the MSFD and the ICZM Protocol. Also, the Program of measures for the protection and management of the marine environment and the coastal area of the Republic of Croatia for the period 2022-2027 is being developed, along with the implementation of the strategic environmental impact assessment procedure - the development of the Strategic Environmental Impact Study is underway.

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

The national regulation on Strategic Environmental Assessment<sup>18</sup> stipulates that SEA is mandatory prior to the development of national strategies, plans and programmes, including their amendments at national, regional and local levels in certain sectors (including spatial planning), if the implementation of these documents could have environmental impacts. Before the adoption of these documents, the ministry competent for nature and environment protection (MESD) issues a final opinion on the validity of the SEA procedure.

Furthermore, expert background documents for nature protection are mandatory for the development of the spatial plans of national parks and nature parks.

## Cooperation with third countries

Croatia is a party to the Barcelona Convention.

Additionally, Croatia is involved in the European Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR), involving both EU and non-EU countries of the Adriatic and Ionian region. In both cases, MSP is considered a relevant tool/process for the sustainable management of marine space.

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<sup>18</sup> Environmental Protection Act (OG 80/2013, 153/2013, 78/15, 12/2018, 118/18), Regulation on Strategic Environmental Assessment of Strategies, Plans and Programs (OG 3/2017)

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## Relevant legislative acts

There are many sector legislative acts and strategic documents that are relevant for the effective implementation of MSP, including those dealing with: physical and spatial planning, coastal zones, nature protection, environmental aspects, maritime affairs, fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism. Due to the integrative and interdisciplinary character of spatial planning, all of them are to be taken into consideration in the process of spatial planning.

The most important are listed below:

- Act on Maritime Property and Seaports  
<https://www.zakon.hr/z/505/Zakon-o-pomorskom-dobru-i-morskim-lukama>
- Decision on the Preparation of the State Plan for Spatial Development  
[https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018\\_04\\_39\\_746.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2018_04_39_746.html)
- Decision on Declaration of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the Republic of Croatia in the Adriatic Sea  
[https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021\\_02\\_10\\_192.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_02_10_192.html)

- Environmental Protection Act  
<http://www.zakon.hr/z/194/Zakon-o-zaštiti-okoliša>
- Nature protection act  
<https://www.zakon.hr/z/403/Zakon-o-za%C5%A1titi-prirode>
- Marine Environment and Coastal Area Management Strategy of the Republic of Croatia  
<https://mingor.gov.hr/o-ministarstvu-1065/djelokrug/uprava-vodnoga-gospodarstva-i-zastite-mora-2033/strategija-upravljanja-morskim-okolisem-i-obalnim-podrucjem-1441/1441>
- Maritime Code of the Republic of Croatia  
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