

MSP Community of Practice in the Mediterranean

Second-year activities: June 2024 – December 2024

1. Background

In 2023 and during the first months of 2024, the technical work of the MED-MSP-CoP was organised along two streams of activities.

Stream 1 - Topic-based analysis, aiming at detailing the identification and definition of specific issues of interest for the MED-MSP-CoP, considering needs and opportunities for the Mediterranean Sea basin. This analysis moved from two wide topics:

- MSP supporting the extension, improved management and improved connection of Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (in short “MSP & MPAs”)
- MSP as a key enabler for the implementation of national Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) strategies and initiatives (shortly “MSP & SBE”)

Two webinars and one face-to-face workshop (in Malta on June 2023) were organised to narrow down the two topics into more specific ones relevant to the Mediterranean, discuss related challenges and share knowledge and practices¹. This process led to the identification of several subtopics of interest and the prioritisation of the following ones:

1. *Engagement of maritime sectors in marine conservation* (part of the MSP & MPAs topic).
2. *MSP as a strategic framework for SBE* (part of the MSP & SBE topic).

Stream 2 - project-based analysis (project screening); with the contribution of the MED-MSP-CoP members, a data-sheet gathering information on MSP projects and initiatives in the Mediterranean was created. This data sheet collates information about the screened projects and their outcomes: data, tools, knowledge, methodological approaches, case studies, valuable practices, etc.

Once the two streams of analysis were concluded (end of 2023), the MED-MSP-CoP evaluated how they can operationally contribute (through their outcomes) to the major challenges and needs of the identified subtopics (in particular prioritised ones). This analysis was informed also by a series of Webinars organised by the MED-MSP-CoP between October 2023 and March 2024 aimed at sharing and discussing examples of valuable practices on the subtopics. Finally, a cross-check with the MSP Assistance Mechanism study on EMFAF MSP projects was performed, to identify commonalities in terms of challenges, available solutions and persisting gaps. Examples of the results of these analyses are presented in the two following sections.

¹ See the workshops report available at: <https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/media/14986>

2. Involvement of maritime sectors in marine conservation

This subtopic recognises the importance of engaging historical and emerging maritime sectors in the progress toward environmental conservation objectives. MSP is a crucial process that can foster this involvement. Beyond MPA designation and management, OECD is acknowledged as an important tool to improve synergies between maritime sector development and nature conservation. Different ways to engage economic stakeholders in conservation exist, including awareness-raising or financial support. Contributions from differently funded projects preliminarily identified by the MED-MSP-CoP include the following examples:

- AMAre (Mediterranean Sea): assessment of multi-pressures and impacts on the sea, based on stakeholders' contribution, and management recommendations defined through a participatory approach.
- MSP4BIODIVERSITY (Italy): methodological approaches (including an evaluation of ecosystem services) for the analysis of socio-economic impacts and benefits of maritime spatial plans further integrating biodiversity conservation goals (according to different scenarios).
- MSP4BIO (EU): definition of a socio-ecological system-based approach to support MPA designation and biodiversity conservation through MSP; screening of MSP plans across the EU to assess how nature conservation has so far been integrated in MSP and to produce recommendations to strengthen it.
- ReMAP (EU): development of a tool to assess ecosystem services related to benthic habitats and compatibility between MPA objectives and maritime uses.

The study of the MSP Assistance Mechanism on EMFAF projects emphasises the importance that these projects give to balancing conservation objectives with socioeconomic ones. In this perspective, future planning efforts should consider the trade-offs between conservation and the impacts of maritime sectors' development. It also highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement in general and in monitoring and planning adaptation in particular. For example, the project MSPMED stressed the need for a comprehensive approach integrating both the scientific and cultural dimensions, given the historical and cultural significance of the Mediterranean region.

3. MSP as a strategic framework for SBE.

Most of the sectoral strategies are developed and implemented independently. Beyond its spatial approach, MSP can establish a framework to align and integrate sectors' perspectives at a strategic level. To do so approaches considering pre-existing strategies should be applied, as well as methods to incorporate new uses' perspectives. Direct integration of SBE objectives into MSP should be a key component of any maritime spatial plan, which can provide different levels of regulations of the SBE sectors (from strategic to prescriptive). The flexibility of maritime spatial plans to adapt and fit with sector-based strategies should also be considered. Finally, the role of maritime spatial plans as surrogates of strategies for sectors without their strategies should be investigated. When MSP plans are adopted and sector-based strategies exist, the practical articulation between the two should be ensured. The challenge is to foster cross-implementation, through the setting of operational complementary objectives and measures. MSP plans shall include clear objectives and measures focused on SBE, while sustainable blue economy strategies are expected to clarify the role of MSP in boosting their objectives.

Contributions from differently-funded projects preliminarily identified by the MED-MSP-CoP include the following examples:

- CROSSGOV (EU): methodological approach for the analysis of coherence in the implementation of different maritime policies (MSP, MSFD and WFD) related to EGD objectives; Methodological approach for the analysis of Science-to-Policy-to-Society Interfaces. Both methodologies are being applied to three case studies based in the Mediterranean
- MSPGREEN (EU): assessment of the role of MSP plans in supporting the implementation of EGD objectives relevant to the SBE (e.g. on zero pollution, blue circular economy, climate change mitigation, sustainable food production).
- REGINA MSP (EU): case studies (4 in the Mediterranean) assessing the role of regional administrations in contributing to MSP and the way they support sustainable blue economy (and nature conservation) at the sub-national level.
- Ariel (Adriatic-Ionian): Co-development of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture management options, including the modelling of potential interactions (e.g. effects on fisheries production of aquaculture development).

The MED-MSP-CoP analysis highlighted that MSP and SBE share common challenges, which must be addressed at different scales, from local to transnational ones. Some of these challenges have a clear pan-Mediterranean nature (e.g. management of shipping). Cross-border cooperation through MSP cannot only support the coherent development of MSP plans in the Mediterranean but also the progressive alignment of national SBE strategies. On the other way around, international agreements and actions promoted by sea-basin cooperation mechanisms drive the way MSP should deal with several cross-border aspects, including those related to the SBE and its impacts on the environment. Indeed, such an alignment among multi-scalar MSP and SBE process is of core interest for the MED-MSP-CoP.

The study on the EMFAF projects highlighted the importance of coordinated maritime spatial planning across borders to promote a sustainable blue economy and address pressing environmental and socio-economic concerns. For example, the MSPglobal initiative promoted by IOC-UNESCO and the EC developed narrative scenarios for the Western Mediterranean region and proposed a methodology to work at the transboundary scale in the discussion of different visions to implement sustainable blue economy objectives in the region, through MSP.

4. Plans of activities June – December 2024

Based on the work performed till now, the MED-MSP-CoP intends to organise **three workshops** discussing the challenges related to the two selected subtopics, further sharing knowledge about what is available from Mediterranean projects and other initiatives on MSP in terms of solutions, and identifying persisting gaps and related recommendations. The workshops' results will be used to inform the elaboration of a MED-MSP-CoP position paper on the two selected subtopics:

- Workshop 1 (tentative date: between 16 and 20 September 2024; modality online): (i) presentation of the results of the project and topic-based analysis, (ii) presentation of the key messages of the MSP Assistance Mechanism study on EMFAF MSP projects, (iii) discussion on what is available and what are the persisting gaps.

- Workshop 2 (tentative date 21 October 2024; modality hybrid, Marseilles): (i) showcase of examples of solutions (pitch presentations from MED-MSP-CoP members), (ii) preliminary identification of additional needed solutions to address persisting gaps.
- Workshop 3 (tentative date: first week of December 2024): (i) further identification of possible solutions, (ii) discussion of draft versions of the two position papers.

In parallel, the MED-MSP-CoP will continue to organize other ad-hoc online events, also focusing on different sub-topics. Among the others, the MED-MSP-CoP hosted the MSP4BIO project in an online workshop held on the 25th of June 2024, while the Blue Azores project will disseminate its results to the MED-MSP-CoP in a second workshop to be held in July 2024. Moreover, MSP-GREEN would like to engage the MED-MSP-CoP in the dissemination of its recommendations to better integrate the objectives of the European Green Deal in the MS plans (late September 2024).

The coordination team will also work to further structure the MED-MSP-CoP and design its future activities. This work includes the following points:

- Design of a process for the identification and activation of MED-MSP-CoP working groups, for example on (i) MSP and aquaculture (as emerged in the Malta workshop held on 22.06.2023), (ii) the use of MSP to support the sustainable blue economy and nature conservation at the sub-national level, as a follow-up of the Regina MSP project (WP4 in particular), (iii) topics linking to the upcoming project MEDIGREEN (see below).
- Discuss the lesson learned in the MED-MSP-CoP implementation so far and brainstorm on the MED-MSP-CoP we need for the future at a planned event part of Ecomondo (5-8 November 2024, Rimini). The outcome of this workshop will inform the definition of 2025 activities of the MED-MSP-CoP, including the way the CoP will bridge with other initiatives on MSP promoted in the Mediterranean, in particular by UfM and UNEP-MAP.
- Setting the ground to properly link with the activities of the new EMFAF project on MSP in the Mediterranean (MEDIGREEN).
- Keep disseminating the MED-MSP-CoP and further engaging experts in particular from non-EU countries. Dissemination activities will capitalise on major events, including among others: (i) the 10-year MSPD conference (22 October 2024, Marseilles), (ii) the final joint conference of REGINA MSP and MSP GREEN (23-24 October 2024, Marseilles) (ii) Ecomondo (5-8 November 2024, Rimini); (iii) the annual WestMed stakeholder meeting (October 2024, Portugal).