



The MSP Community of Practice in the Mediterranean: Progress and Next Steps

Final Report

European Maritime, Aquaculture and Fisheries Fund (EMFAF)

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The Mediterranean Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning (MED-MSP-CoP): Progress and Next Steps

Final Report

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Executive summary

The [Mediterranean Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning](#) (MED-MSP-CoP) is a voluntary group of experts from EU and non-EU countries working on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) in the Mediterranean sea/region. The MED-MSP-CoP aims to operate as a permanent network between experts on MSP, to exchange knowledge and relevant experiences, to reach a shared perspective on topics of common interest on MSP and enhance the cooperation between the north and south Mediterranean. To date approximately 100 experts have registered as members of the CoP.

The aim of this report is to summarize the results of the MED-MSP-CoP activities since its launch, in January 2023 and to report on some key results of the CoP regarding currently available knowledge, as well as knowledge gaps, with a focus on some priority topics. Thematically, the report focuses on two elements (so called sub-topics), co-identified by the CoP's members: A) Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management and B) MSP as a strategic framework for Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE).

During these two years of activity, the results from recent and ongoing projects and initiatives were mapped to answer some key questions and issues identified by the CoP. The report showcases some examples of answers provided based on the available knowledge, focusing on the two sub-topics of interest.

Despite the experience and the knowledge acquired in the last decade through projects and various initiatives, some challenges still prevent the smooth implementation of MSP in European Seas in general and also in the Mediterranean. The MED-MSP-CoP has identified some of these challenges, specific for the Mediterranean context. From the overview of the available projects and experiences, some solutions were identified to address these challenges. More solutions were showcased by experts and relevant organizations, during the series of webinars organized by the CoP. Additional solutions were co-identified by the CoP itself through the active participation of the CoP members, engaged in online and physical workshops.

However, some of the challenges still persist and need additional effort to be addressed by projects or initiatives and, more importantly, in real-world application. From the discussions and exchanges, the CoP has identified some priority actions to be included in its next Action Plan.

Abbreviation list

AZA	Allocated Zones for Aquaculture
CBD	Conference of Biological diversity
CINEA	European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CoP	Community of Practice
DG	Directorate General
EB-MSP	Ecosystem-Based Maritime Spatial Planning
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EGD	European Green Deal
EMFAF	European Maritime, Aquaculture and Fisheries Fund
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
FRAs	Fisheries Restricted Areas
GES	Good Environmental Status
GFCM	General Fishery Commission for the Mediterranean
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOC-UNESCO	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan
MED	Mediterranean
MED-MSP-CoP	Mediterranean Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
MSs	Member States
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
MSP	Maritime Spatial Planning
MSPD	Maritime Spatial Planning Directive
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECM	Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures
OWE	Offshore Wind Energy
PSSA	Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas
RAC	Regional Activity Centre
SBE	Sustainable Blue Economy
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SSF	Small-Scale Fisheries
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Program
UNESCO-IOC	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WG	Working Group

1. Introduction

The Mediterranean Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning (MED-MSP-CoP) is a voluntary group of experts from European and non-European countries working on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) in the Mediterranean. The MED-MSP-CoP was launched in January 2023 by CINEA and DG MARE, under the West Mediterranean Sea Basin Initiative (WestMED) framework and it is supported by the EU MSP Assistance Mechanism.

The CoP aims to operate as a permanent network between experts on MSP, to exchange knowledge and relevant experiences, in order to reach a shared perspective on topics of common interest on MSP and enhance the cooperation between the north and south Mediterranean. At the same time, it is becoming a “knowledge-tool” supporting relevant regional initiatives at the policy and project level.

The MED-MSP-CoP was initially focused on the WestMED, being open to experts and observers from across the whole Mediterranean region. However, during these two years of activity, the CoP has progressively moved towards a fully pan-Mediterranean dimension. To date, approximately 100 experts from 22 countries have registered as members.

2. Objective of the report

This report aims:

- To summarize the results of CoP activities so far (first two years of work)
- To report on some key results from the CoP regarding currently available knowledge, as well as knowledge gaps, with a focus on some priority topics.
- To reflect on what an exchange of expertise can offer to advance a regional perspective on MSP in the Mediterranean.
- To identify feasible activities for implementation in continuation of the CoP's work.

Thematically, the report focuses on the following elements (defined as “sub-topics” in the following chapters), co-identified by the CoP's members in different workshops:

- Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management
- MSP as a strategic framework for Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE).

As detailed in the following chapters, these two “sub-topics” were identified from two broader topics, respectively: (1) MSP supporting the extension, improved management and improved connection of MPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean, towards the targets set at the international and EU level on marine biodiversity protection; and (2) MSP as key enabler for the implementation of national SBE strategies and initiatives, through the adoption of an integrated approach and towards the balanced distribution of benefits.

3. State of play

3.1. Objectives of the MED-MSP-CoP

According to its Terms of Reference¹, “the main objective of the MED-MSP-CoP is to establish a permanent communication and dialogue across borders between experts on MSP (i.e., planners, technical experts, researchers), and to exchange knowledge and relevant experiences in the region, so as to reach a shared perspective on topics of common interest on MSP and enhance the cooperation between the north and the south of the Mediterranean”.

The CoP also aims to formulate recommendations to support regional cooperation for MSP, as well as the national process of implementation of MSP plans in the Mediterranean countries.

The Terms of Reference indicate the following specific objectives of the MED-MSP-CoP:

Short term objectives:

- Creation of the Coordination Team of the MED-MSP-CoP formed by a core group of experts (voluntary basis) and design of the annual action plan;
- Formalization of the MED-MSP-CoP within the WestMED framework;
- Identification of experts to be involved in the MED-MSP-CoP;
- Stocktake of ongoing and upcoming projects and initiatives regarding the priority topics identified by the MED-MSP-CoP;
- Stocktake of future events to capitalize on for the organization of back-to-back meetings;
- Identification of major gaps and needs;
- Establishment of informal connections with the national MSP processes and the MSP competent authorities.

Mid-term objectives:

- Design of capacity building activities according to the identified gaps and needs and available funding and resources in the sea basin;
- Assessment of R&I as a key driver to provide recommendations for MSP in the WestMED - and for the wider Mediterranean Sea as applicable - and the way to address them;
- Assess how to include the private sector and the NGOs in the MED-MSP-CoP, i.e., pool of experts or within specific working groups.

(¹) [MSP Community of Practice in the Mediterranean - Terms of reference](#)

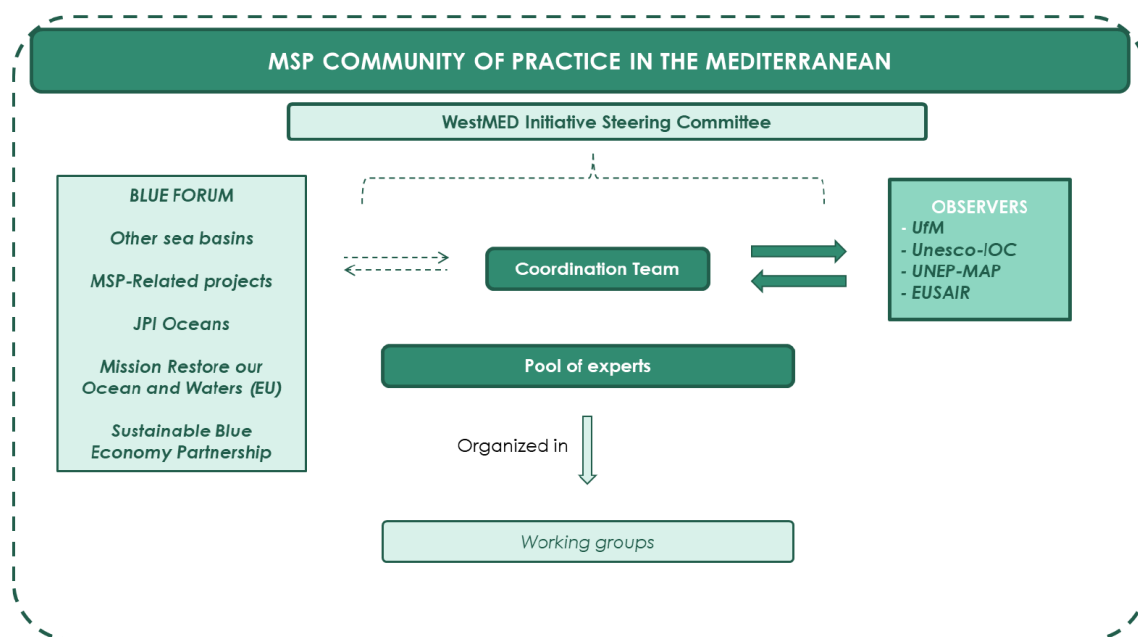
Long-term objectives:

- Collaboration on specific actions capitalizing on results of previous projects and project development on transboundary issues;
- Extension of the MED-MSP-CoP to the entire Mediterranean.

3.2. Structure, governance and members

The main components of the MED-MSP-CoP are shown in Figure 1. The **WestMED Initiative Steering Committee** ensures strategic coordination and support to ensure the achievement of expected results. The **coordination team** (volunteers) ensure the overall management and design of actions of the MED-MSP-CoP. The **Pool of experts** represents the core of the MED-MSP-CoP and consists of a volunteer expert group from different disciplines and institutions of the Mediterranean with expertise and interest in MSP and the Blue Economy. The **Working groups** – not yet activated - are technical discussion groups on the topics of primary relevance for the MED-MSP-CoP, that can be proposed by any member. **Observers** are institutions with commitments related to MSP and the blue economy that could contribute to and benefit from the MED-MSP-CoP outcomes through the establishment of reciprocal channels of communication (e.g., UfM, IOC-UNESCO, UNEP-MAP, EUSAIR, GFCM, etc.). **Synergies with other ongoing initiatives/projects** are also relevant for the MED-MSP-CoP activities, for example in the case of GFCM, fisheries being one main topic of interest for MSP in the Mediterranean (indeed, the recently launched EMFAF project MEDIGREEN focuses on this topic, among others).

Figure 1 – Structure of the MED MSP CoP



3.3. Dialogue and exchanges

During the first two years of activity, the CoP has organized a number of events to promote exchange and discussion among its experts. Some of these events were focused on the identification of key topics of interest for the CoP and the related sub-topics. Discussion and prioritization of sub-topics were also undertaken, as described in the following chapters.

In particular, seven (7) workshops were organized through which the core activity of the CoP has been carried out. Seven (7) webinars were also offered, to share diverse experiences from MSP projects and initiatives among the CoP members and beyond. The details of these events are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Events organized by the MED-MSP-CoP

Date	Type of event	Description
23.01.2023	Meeting	Kick-off meeting – in person (Brussels)
27.04.2023	Meeting	1 st meeting - online
30.05.2023	Workshop	1 st Workshop: Presentation topic-based analysis "MSP supporting MPA/OECM" - online
05.06.2023	Workshop	2 nd Workshop: Presentation topic-based analysis "MSP as key enabler for the implementation of national sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) strategies and initiatives" - online
22.06.2023	Workshop	3 rd Workshop: Topic-based analysis and Preliminary results of topic screening – in person (Malta), as part of the WestMED stakeholder conference
13.10.2023	Webinar	I Webinar - MSP supporting local communities' economic activities in the Southern Mediterranean
13.11.2023	Webinar	II Webinar - MSP and offshore wind energy
29.11.2023	Webinar	III Webinar - A sea of knowledge: capitalize within MSP processes (presentation of preliminary results from the MSP-related European EMFAF projects MSP-GREEN and REGINA-MSP).
13.02.2024	Webinar	IV Webinar: Sharing knowledge as key for advancing MSP practice: examples from other communities of practice and knowledge platforms (presentation of the MSP-OR Platform and of the MPS4BIO Community of Practice
24.06.2024	Webinar	V Webinar: MSP4BIO science-policy dialogue THINK TANK. Co-development of policy solutions for better integration of biodiversity conservation in MSP and sectoral policies
19.07.2024	Webinar	VI Webinar: Blue Azores - Strengthening the network of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in Azores islands
05.09.2024	Webinar	VII Webinar: Science-based conservation planning of the Israeli EEZ
17.09.24	Workshop	Series of workshops for the preparation of position paper - 1 st Workshop: Results from projects identification of persisting challenges and gaps – online
21.10.24	Workshop	Series of workshops for the preparation of position paper - 2 nd Workshop: examples of solutions to the persisting challenges and gaps identified in workshop 1 and co-identification of additional needed solutions – in person (Marseille)

4. Key topics

4.1. Identification of key topics

Through a survey launched at the beginning of the process², the MED-MSP-CoP has identified two main topics of interest. The two topics are:

1. *MSP supporting the extension, improved management and improved connection of Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean, towards the targets set at the international and European level on marine biodiversity protection.*

Examples of issues/ challenges to be considered under this topic:

- MSP can provide the framework for and support the establishment, extension, improved management and connection of MPAs. The way MSP supports MPAs may differ from country to country. A common approach is needed, making consideration of the specificities of the Mediterranean Sea and integrating regional strategies and initiatives (i.e., UNEP/MAP ones).
- MSP shall also support the establishment and management of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), defined as: “A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values (CBD Decision 14/8)”. Examples of OECMs may include Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs) or Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSA).
- MPAs and OECMs should form a network, that must be designed and managed as such. In a transboundary perspective, MSP should support this function, for the benefit of conservation objectives within MPAs and also beyond their boundaries.
- MPA and OECM establishment and/or extension is not the only priority of MSP. One of the major challenges MSP has to face is balancing environmental protection and blue economy development needs. At the same time, MSP must properly address the cumulative impacts of maritime activities.

Main objective for the CoP under this topic

The MED-MSP-CoP will identify the challenges MSP could tackle to improve biodiversity protection and share good practices and transboundary collaboration on improved coordination of nature protection and economic development objectives, specifically by using spatial conservation tools such as MPAs and OECMs.

(²) MSP Community of Practice in the Mediterranean - First year activities: January 2023 – January 2024

2. *MSP as key enabler for the implementation of national Sustainable Blue Economy strategies and initiatives, through the adoption of an integrated approach and towards the balanced distribution of benefits*

Examples of issues/ challenges to be considered under this topic:

- Each Mediterranean country has specific priorities, but countries also share common needs and common opportunities for the development of maritime and coastal activities. Lack of coordination at the planning and implementation stages results in a waste of resources that could be capitalized upon for more than one Mediterranean country. A lack of coordination can also increase cumulative impacts on the environment. On top of all, some SBE challenges have an important transboundary dimension (e.g., maritime transport management or energy grid connection).
- Recently, several Mediterranean countries defined their National Blue Economy Strategies. Although, these strategies have different priorities, they all stress the role of MSP for the integrated and sustainable development of a blue economy, as also stressed in the 2nd [Union for the Mediterranean \(UfM\) Ministerial Declaration \(2021\)](#).
- MSP is also an important tool/process to support transnational dialogue on SBE (i.e., in the frame of the Roadmap for the implementation of the UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean) and approach some of the major challenges, for example data and knowledge gaps differently affecting European and non-European countries.

Main objective for the CoP under this topic

The MED-MSP-CoP will address the topic of coordination among sectorial strategies at different scales and point at perspectives provided by the framework of MSP implementation in this sense.

4.2. Identification of sub-topics

Elaborating on the two main topics, the CoP members identified several relevant sub-topics and prioritized them. During the workshop in Malta (22.06.2023)³, a collaborative approach for this task was defined and tested. Identification and prioritization of sub-topics was undertaken by engaging the CoP members in two online workshops organized in the second year of activities (30.05.2024 and 05.06.2024). Sub-topics are presented in Table 2. Along with the sub-topic identification, these interactions offered an opportunity to experiment the working approach: good practices and experiences were shared among participants, priority needs were addressed and persistent gaps emphasized, together with potential recommendations for future actions.

(³) [Sharing ideas and knowledge on MSP topics of common interest: results of the online workshops and the MED-MSP-CoP thematic session in the WestMED Stakeholder Conference in Malta](#)

Table 2 – Topics and sub-topics of interest for the MED-MSP-CoP

Sub-topics are presented in order of priority

Topic 1	Topic 2
<i>MSP supporting the extension, improved management and improved connection of Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean, towards the targets set at the international and European level on marine biodiversity protection.</i>	<i>MSP as key enabler for the implementation of national Sustainable Blue Economy strategies and initiatives, through the adoption of an integrated approach and towards the balanced distribution of benefits.</i>
SUB-TOPICS	SUB-TOPICS
1. Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management	1. MSP as a strategic framework for SBE
2. Planning and conservation coherence across scales (from the cross-border basin scale to the local scale)	2. Practical implementation of SBE through MSP (and vice versa)
3. Climate change and environmental conservation	3. MSP supporting multi-use
4. Monitoring and adaptive management	4. Stakeholder engagement
5. MPA designation and integration in MSP	5. Reducing environmental effects
6. Environmental Restoration	6. Transboundary coherence between SBE
7. Data	7. Land-Sea interactions
8. Ocean Literacy for MSP	8. Climate change consideration when planning for SBE
9. Decision support tools	9. Performance assessment and monitoring of Maritime Spatial Plans
	10. Capacity building

Specific aspects to be investigated (key questions) were identified for all sub-topics. For the first-ranked sub-topic on “Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management” key questions included the methods and approaches to achieve involvement of economic stakeholders, both at national and regional scale but also at the smaller local scale. OECMs (identification, recognition and implementation) were also identified as relevant, as well as the involvement of aquaculture operators, to achieve a more sustainable food production system. For the first-ranked sub-topic on “MSP as a strategic framework for SBE” the main points of attention identified were the reciprocal influence between MSP and SBE, the capacity of MSP to integrate non-spatial provisions, the need for future scenarios to evaluate alternatives both in MSP and in SBE developments.

After this preliminary stage, the CoP decided to focus its activities during the first two years on the two first-ranked sub-topics.

5. Available knowledge on the key MSP topics for the region

5.1. Analysis of topics

The two key topics were analysed through a three-step approach, to understand what is at stake in terms of knowledge and what are the main knowledge gaps. Namely the following tasks (steps of analysis) were undertaken:

Task A - What we have: it consisted of mapping the MSP projects and initiatives relevant to the MED-MSP-CoP objectives

Task B - Where we are: the mapped projects and initiatives were analysed through an *ad hoc* conceptual framework, to identify how they can provide added value to the MED-MSP-CoP objectives, to respond to identified, topic-based needs and challenges.

Task C – What we need: the extent to which the available project and initiative provides solutions to topic-based needs and challenges was assessed and the remaining major gaps and needs were identified.

The results from Task A and Task B are summarized in the chapter below. Results from Task C are presented in Chapter 6.

Under Task A, past, on-going and upcoming projects and initiatives related to the two MSP-related topics identified by the CoP were mapped (32 projects in total). They included regional, sub-regional, national and sub-national projects and initiatives. A **Catalogue of projects** was prepared (Task B) providing synthetic guidance to available solutions. **The Catalogue will be made available on the European MSP Platform web site.**

5.2. Sources of information

The present report capitalizes on the screening of projects undertaken by the MED-MSP-CoP. The screening showed that several solutions, in terms of approaches, methods and tools are provided by some recent and ongoing projects. Such solutions bring some degree of an answer to the key questions associated to the sub-topics. From the recent study on EMFF - EMFAF projects (2024) [“Maritime Spatial Planning Through the Years: Insights of a Decade of EMFF and EMFAF Funded Projects”](#) other solutions were identified. In fact, the study emphasises the attention provided by several projects to balancing conservation with socioeconomic objectives and to the fact that future planning efforts should consider the trade-offs between conservation and industry impacts. The importance of stakeholder engagement in general, and of monitoring and planning adaptation in particular, was also underlined. In addition, valuable experiences from the Webinars organized by the MED-MSP-CoP can be also considered.

Notably, most of the projects considered are funded by the European Union and are focused on the European Mediterranean countries, with few exceptions for non-

European countries' participation. Therefore, the knowledge gathered, and the tools developed so far only partially represent the conditions and fit the needs of the entire region.

In the following two paragraphs, some insights are provided on the available knowledge, with reference to the two sub-topics of interest for this report.

5.3. Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management

To make significant progress in marine biodiversity conservation, engagement of traditional and emerging maritime sectors is key. MSP is a crucial process that can foster this involvement. Identification of efficient ways to engage economic stakeholders in conservation objectives is a fundamental point: a range of opportunities can be considered, from awareness raising to financial measures. Hence, MSP could facilitate fund raising for marine conservation from economic sectors, e.g., through voluntary engagement or taxes. In terms of instruments, beyond MPA designation and management, OECM appears as an important tool to engage maritime sectors in conservation matters. The fact that many countries in the region do not apply MSP nowadays justifies continued work on the sectoral approach, from the perspective of moving towards integrated management, to which, the second subtopic is dedicated.

Results from recent and ongoing projects and initiatives can contribute to answering some of the key questions related with this sub-topic (as listed in the previous chapter), **as well as other crucial problems implied in involving maritime sectors in environmental management**. Some **examples of answers** provided by the available knowledge are summarized in Table 3. Other answers can be found in the Catalogue of projects.

Table 3 – Examples of answers: Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management

The table presents some examples of answers to key questions and other issues under the sub-topic “Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management”, provided by recent and ongoing projects (EMFAF study + CoP analysis) and from the MED-MSP-CoP Webinars.

Problem/Questions	Examples of answers	Source
Engaging with maritime sectors – <i>What are the ways to involve stakeholders of private sectors in environmental conservation?</i> – <i>What are the ways to involve stakeholders of local communities in environmental conservation?</i>	A network for fishermen communities was established among Tunisia, France, and Italy, with the aim to develop Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) strategies. Starting from CLLD initiatives in Italy and France, the project aimed to empower local communities in North Africa for sustainable coastal development, through a participatory process. Training activities were designed to engage fishermen, youth, and women. The project also promoted sustainable tourism starting from local territorial, environmental, and cultural resources, including sea-related traditions, through community involvement.	ENSABLE project (2019-2021)
	The Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (OCEaN) provides an open forum for discussion between wind energy developers, transmission system operators, and non-governmental organizations active in the field of nature conservation, aimed at improving and speeding up the planning deployment of offshore wind development and grid infrastructure, while preserving and restoring our European seas. The Renewable Grid Initiative (RGI) is a founding member of OCEaN, acting as moderator of the group.	MED-MSP-CoP Webinar 13.11.2023
Integration of ecological and socio-economic needs	An integrated and modular Ecological-Socio-Economic (ESE) management framework has been developed for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems. The ESE looks at the compatibility between maritime/coastal uses and protection measures. Methods and tools to assess the impact of maritime uses as well as identification of trade-offs between Blue Economy sectors and marine conservation are provided. Several good practices related to the environmental compatibility of maritime sectors are showcased.	MSP4BIO project (2022-2025)
	An approach to pressures/impacts assessment of maritime sectors is provided, as well as the formulation of alternative scenarios for improved spatial management in the Northern Mediterranean. In the Greek case study, cumulative impact assessment results were coupled with scientific diving/ground-truthing in identified hot-spots of conflict: anchoring on sea grass meadows and derelict fishing gears on coralligenous were identified as major threats of priority conservation habitats. Ecosystem services valuation related to <i>Posidonia oceanica</i> and coralligenous formations was applied to explore options supporting more effective decision-making: environmental impact was combined with cumulative monetized impact assessment. Recommendations stemming from a participatory approach achieved through the engagement of key stakeholders were linked with spatial and non-spatial management scenarios, as conservation objectives seem to be better supported in cases when sustainable development (socio-economic) ones are also accomplished.	AMAre project (2016-2019)

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Problem/Questions	Examples of answers	Source
Assessing conflicts and compatibility between marine conservation and maritime uses <i>– How to plan for sustainable food production (e.g., small-scale fisheries, low trophic aquaculture) and MPAs?</i>	An approach to address the conflicts between the environment and human uses, such as maritime traffic and priority areas for the conservation of cetaceans, offshore oil and gas exploitation, MPAs, and aquaculture, and identified multi-use opportunities in the West Mediterranean was provided. The initiative developed a methodology that could be used at regional workshops with stakeholders in exploring the compatibility of different sea uses while aligning with the objectives of the sustainable blue economy. The analysis highlighted the fact that as maritime sectors surge, competition over marine space intensifies, and for that reason, it focused on supporting transboundary MSP and elaborated on projecting future scenarios. The initiative developed 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. The report Current Conditions and Compatibility of Maritime Uses in the Western Mediterranean (UNESCO-IOC, 2021) provides insights on this aspect. 11 tools are being developed to systematically review and assess the performance of the MSP plans. The approach leverages data interoperability and the adoption of a set of standardised data models to represent the input and output data of the MSP process. Among them, a tool to assess ecosystem services related to benthic habitats and compatibility between MPA objectives and maritime uses has been developed.	MSPglobal Initiative (2018-2021) ReMAP project (2022-2025)
Transboundary MSP	The project highlighted the need for moving towards transboundary EB-MSP, necessitating coordinated measures across borders. Centralised oversight by national ministries was underscored as essential. The project demonstrated how European research projects played a vital role in fostering cooperation and building an international community of experts for EB-MSP implementation at the regional sea level.	MSPMED project (2020-2022)
Reconciling diverging policy objectives (conservation, sector developments)	The engagement of maritime sectors in environmental management is most often hindered by diverging objectives. Co-development of policy solutions for better integration of biodiversity conservation in MSP and sectoral policies has been discussed in the MED-MSP-CoP Webinar of the 24.06.2024 where the activities of the Science-Policy Think tank organized under the MSP4BIO project were discussed. A number of policy solutions are being developed by the project and will be soon available. Insights on coherence and cross-compliance (C&CC) of marine related policies and legislation including MSP are provided, with regards to the European Green Deal objectives related to marine biodiversity protection, zero pollution and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Among the solutions proposed, roadmaps towards enhanced C&CC for the European Seas are provided, as well as recommendations and guidance towards enhancing and reinforcing coherence and synergies within the policy and legal landscapes, including Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Challenges of implementing simultaneously WFD, MSFD and MSPD in case studies are discussed.	MSP4BIO project (2022-2025) CROSSGOV project (2023-2025)
Contributing to the European Green Deal objectives	Recommendations on how to better integrate the objectives of the European Green Deal – including biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration – within MS plans are provided. Actions are foreseen primarily by institutions at European, national and regional-sea level but interaction and collaboration with sectors is of utmost importance and specific measures are suggested considering ports, maritime traffic, fishing, aquaculture.	MSP-GREEN project (2022-2024)

Problem/Questions:

- How to take benefit of OECM to recognise the involvement of economic sectors in environment conservation?
- How can OECM's effectiveness be monitored?
- Is there a need for a shared categorization of OECMs?
- How to raise awareness about the evolving scope of OECMs?
- How to include OECMs in Mediterranean strategies (related to UfM, Barcelona Convention, ACCOBAMS, GFCM, etc.)?

The involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management becomes key when considering the identification of **Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)**. Despite the fact that the Mediterranean Sea does not currently have any formally recognized OECMs, the [Post-2020 Regional Strategy for marine and coastal protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures in the Mediterranean](#) prepared by UNEP/MAP recognizes OECMs as an essential tool to help Contracting Parties under the Barcelona Convention to achieve the regional targets for biodiversity conservation. In fact, the tool is able to coordinate the efforts of economic sectors in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into

sustainable development. Given the lack of experience across the region, the Strategy recognizes the need for the Barcelona Convention system to provide clear guidance and support for potential and candidate OECM recognition and reporting to relevant regional and global databases.

A non-exhaustive list of the types of areas that could be potential OECMs in the Mediterranean can include:

- Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs), in particular those that host critical species, and those that are permanently restricted so as to enhance the long-term conservation outcomes.
- Marine or coastal military closure areas, as some are often no go-areas and can have good conservation outcomes.
- Archaeological and cultural heritage (sunken ships, archaeological shipwrecks, underwater ancient remains, cities, etc.).
- Areas managed for navigation purposes such as IMO Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSA).

5.4. MSP as a strategic framework for SBE

Given that most of the sectoral strategies are developed and implemented independently, MSP can establish a framework to align sectors' perspectives at a strategic level. To do so, approaches integrating pre-existing strategies should be developed, as well as methods to incorporate new uses' perspectives.

Direct integration of SBE objectives into MSP should be a key component of any MSP plan, which can have different levels of regulations of SBE sectors (from strategic to prescriptive). The flexibility of the MS plans to adapt and fit with sector-based strategies should also be considered. Finally, the role of MSP plans as surrogates of strategies for sectors without their own strategies should be investigated.

When MSP plans are adopted and sector-based strategies exist, the practical articulation between both 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 SBE strategies are expected to clarify the role of MSP. When SBE does not exist, MSP plans can trigger the process of preparation of SBE national strategies.

Also, MSP and SBE share challenges that need to be addressed at different scales, from local to transnational basin scale. Some of these challenges have a clear pan-Mediterranean nature (e.g., management of shipping). Cross-border cooperation on MSP implementation can support the alignment of national SBE strategies. On the other hand, economic international agreements or organisation actions should be considered when dealing with cross-border aspects of MSP (including the expected impacts of sectors' development on the marine environment).

Moreover, this topic has a strong and important transboundary dimension: it would be important to move towards Mediterranean SBE strategies and Mediterranean MSP frameworks, beyond national processes (and interests). This is not easy, considering current disputes and conflicting interests in some areas of the Mediterranean.

Presently, availability of SBE strategies is quite scattered in the region: some countries have SBE Strategies but not maritime spatial plans, some countries have maritime spatial plans but not SBE strategies, some countries have ongoing processes, more or less coordinated, on both instruments. The case of France is presented as an example where the two instruments are both available and reinforce each other.

**Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy and Maritime Spatial Plan: how do they work together.
An example from France**

France developed a National Strategy for the Sea and the Coast in 2017 and revised it in [2024](#). The Strategy 2024-2030 (SNLM 2) considers four main areas of priority: 1. Carbon neutrality; 2. Biodiversity; 3. Equity; 4. Economy. The SNML 2 establishes the national framework of maritime and coastal objectives and priorities that are reflected in the strategic documents for sea basins and the sea-front. The SNML 2 is intended to enable the planning of activities and uses that will be determined by the DSFs, through general objectives and spatial objectives.

As regard the maritime spatial plans, France has developed four sea basin strategy documents (document stratégique de façade - DSF) for mainland France (Eastern Channel-North Sea, North Atlantic, South Atlantic, Mediterranean) that indicate the provision for implementation of the national strategy, considering the local contexts. These MSP documents address both the requirements under the MSFD and the MSP directives. The sea-basin documents identify various groups of actions addressing different strategic objectives: such objectives are linked to the key areas of action identified by the National Strategy for the sea and the coast. For example, the sea basin document for the Mediterranean, addresses sustainability and resilience to climate change of coastal activities, by identifying many specific actions (e.g. on pollution prevention, habitat protection, knowledge gaining, etc.), marine renewable energy development, fisheries and aquaculture sustainable development, the development of ports and of the naval and boating industry under the sustainability paradigm, addressing decarbonization and circularisation.

As for the previous sub-topic, the screening of projects undertaken by the MED-MSP-CoP identified a number of answers to key questions related to this sub-topic, as well as to other crucial issues. Such answers are derived from recent and ongoing projects, screened by the MED-MSP-CoP and from the study on EMFF - EMFAF projects (2024), as well as from the MED-MSP-CoP webinars. Some **examples of answers** are summarized in Table 4. Other answers can be found in the Catalogue of projects.

Table 4 – Examples of answers: MSP as a strategic framework for SBE

The table presents some examples of answers to key questions and other issues under the sub-topic “MSP as a strategic framework for SBE”, provided by recent and ongoing projects (EMFAF study +CoP analysis) and from the MED-MSP-CoP Webinars.

Problem/Questions	Examples of answers	Source
MSP as enable of SBE: improving coexistence and promoting synergies	The effect of human activities impacting the marine environment in the Eastern Mediterranean was assessed, including their cumulative environmental effects and projected future trends, especially for the Adriatic, Ionian, and Aegean-Myrtoon Seas. The analysis considered fish and shellfish harvesting, oil and gas extraction, aquaculture, shipping, shipbuilding, renewable energy generation, and maritime tourism. In addition, the project identified the spatial demands for maritime sectors at both basin and marine waters scales, with a focus on reducing conflicts and promoting synergies, particularly through multi-use approaches within an ecosystem-based framework.	SUPREME project (2017-2018)
– How to develop scenarios for the future and quantify trade-offs between them?		
– How to consider new or future uses in MSP?	Opportunities for co-development of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture were explored following different options. The project dealt with innovation acceleration and uptake in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture sectors aiming to contribute to the sustainable development of the two sectors and the minimization of existing conflicts. The project capitalized on the outcomes of the ECOAST (COFASP ERA-NET) project in which spatial conflicts between the two sectors were explored and were further tackled in ARIEL to promote Blue Economy objectives in the Ionian Sea. The project provides approaches to modelling of potential interactions (effect on fisheries production of settling aquaculture) and examples of compensatory measures for fishing sector (e.g., Developing fishing tourism) through planning.	Ariel project (2022)
- Are maritime spatial plans enough specific to drive SBE strategies' elaboration?		
- Can MSP be a surrogate of an SBE strategy? In which cases?		

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Problem/Questions	Examples of answers	Source
	MSP can become a key enabler for the implementation of national Sustainable Blue Economy strategies and initiatives. Through the adoption of an integrated approach and towards the balanced distribution of benefits, MSP can support the extension, improved management and improved connection of MPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean, towards the targets set at the international and European level on marine biodiversity protection. The outcomes of the project include methodology and tools for improving and adapting MSP plans for a sustainable blue economy, through scenario building and analysis, methodologies and socio-economic analyses for the definition of a 'just and safe maritime space', socio-ecological framework of methods to assess socio-economic costs and benefits of marine activities and ecosystem services in support of the MSP process. Methods and tools are applied in 3 Pilot Areas (Northern Adriatic, Strait of Sicily, and Northern Tyrrhenian Sea).	MSP4BIODIVERSITY project (2023-2026)
Data and knowledge for SBE development	A common platform (Geoportal) for data, information and decision support tools focused on coastal and marine areas of the Adriatic-Ionian Region was developed. The Geoportal integrates and further develops existing databases, portals and tools developed within previous European projects by local and national administrations and by other initiatives. Through this approach, most of the available knowledge and resources are well organized and made accessible through a single virtual space. The project also provided several tools useful from a Blue Economy perspective, including one to develop multicriteria analysis for optimal aquaculture planning	PORTODIMARE project (2018-2021)
Improve sustainability of maritime sectors, through MSP <i>- Can maritime spatial plans integrate non-spatial provisions (e.g., strategic objectives)? And how?</i>	Good practices and recommendations are made available to align maritime spatial plans to the ambition of the EGD by creating a framework for maritime spatial plans as marine enablers of the EGD. The project considered a number of EGD key topics with strong implications for SBE: climate change (mitigation and adaptation), circular blue economy, marine biodiversity protection, marine renewable energies, sustainable seafood provision, zero pollution. Some of these topics are directly linked to SBE sectors, while others (e.g., climate change adaptation or circular economy) are cross-cutting. Finally, recommendations on how to strengthen the EGD ambition of European MSP plans were prepared.	MSP-GREEN project (2022-2024)
Provide space for sector development	The General Fishery Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) aims for the sustainable expansion of aquaculture in the Mediterranean and Black Sea by providing guidelines on Allocated Zones for Aquaculture (AZA). An AZA is a coastal area resulting from a zoning process within the framework of marine spatial planning (MSP) which identifies sites that are suitable for aquaculture which also minimize conflicts with other users and uses (e.g., tourism, marine protected areas [MPA], small-scale fisheries [SSF], maritime routes, military zones). MSP can also provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating the success of aquaculture projects. Zoning regulations should be based on scientific data and involve stakeholder participation. They can include criteria such as water quality, depth, and distance from shore etc. by they can also consider other factors such as biodiversity conservation and social impacts.	MED-MSP-CoP Webinar 13.10.2023

6. Challenges

Despite the experience and knowledge acquired in the last decade through projects and various initiatives, some challenges still prevent the smooth implementation of MSP in European Seas. The study “[Maritime Spatial Planning Through the Years: Insights of a Decade of EMFF and EMFAF Funded Projects](#)” (2024) has identified a number of them, by analysing the goals and activities of 32 projects and initiatives. Constraints and limitations linked to national governance and institutional frameworks and their functioning, difficulties in reconciling different policy objectives, different stages in the MSP process, gaps in methodologies and approaches, as well as their full operationalization, and lack of data are some examples of the challenges identified and targeted by the EMFF and EMFAF projects.

Elaborating on the topics and the sub-topics, the **MED-MSP-CoP has also identified some challenges, specific to the Mediterranean context**. This has been done through a participative process, undertaken during the workshops mentioned in chapter 3. The challenges related to the first-scored sub-topics considered in this report are listed in

Table 5. They are presented in order of priority, as resulted from the MED-MSP-CoP workshop held in Marseille and online on 21.10.2024.

For the first topic, the Challenge related to **Improved nature conservation and protection through MSP implementation** was prioritized first, together with **Sectors' engagement**, to which it is directly related. The issue of restricting or limiting human activities in specific areas and establishing technical regulations for their improved management emerged as crucial for strengthening conservation efforts via MSP across the Mediterranean.

For the second topic, the Challenge related to **Cross-border collaboration in MSP** was prioritized first.

Table 5 – Challenges related to the two first-ranked sub-topics

Challenges are presented in order of priority

Sub-topic 1 <i>Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management</i>	Sub-topic 2 <i>MSP as a strategic framework for SBE</i>
CHALLENGES	CHALLENGES
1. Improved nature conservation and protection through MSP implementation (activity banning/limitation from specific areas, technical regulations, promotion of sustainable practices...).	1. MSP cross-border collaboration to enhance the coherence of sectorial strategies at the basin scale
2. Sectors engagement in marine conservation: effectiveness assessment, monitoring and integration in MSP	2. Alignment of existing “stand-alone” sectors’ strategies through MSP implementation
3. Valuation of economic impacts and benefits of environmental management measures (ecosystem services, trade-offs, etc.)	3. Improved coherence between policies (environmental and sectorial ones) in formulation and implementation stages
4. MSP alignment across borders to meet regional conservation objectives	4. Integration of existing sector’s strategies into MSP: how to align their content (strategic objective, concrete actions...) with MSP plan ones (zoning, prioritizations, spatial measures...)
5. Valuation and spatialization of economic and social values for maritime sectors	5. Using MSP to elaborate strategies for less structured sectors
6. Funding environmental measures/action from maritime sectors (voluntary initiatives, taxes...).	6. MSP influence on sectors regulated at regional/international scale (e.g. fishing, shipping...).
	7. MSP role in stakeholders’ engagement to align sectorial strategies.

6.1. Available knowledge and challenges

From the Catalogue of projects prepared by the CoP (par.5.1 Analysis of topics; Task A and B), some project outcomes – named as *solutions* - were identified and associated to the challenges related to the two selected sub-topics. Additional solutions were identified through the two workshops held on 17.09.2024 online and on 21.10.2024 in hybrid mode.

Challenges and available solutions related with the selected sub-topics are presented in the two following paragraphs, with some descriptive text and a summary table.

It should be noted that, **despite the fact that most of the Mediterranean non-European countries don’t have ‘formal’ MSP plans, challenges and solutions identified when looking at MSP issues could also be addressed throughout a less formalized maritime management process** (such as a sector-based or a local management initiative) that are more often implemented in the non-European countries.

6.1.1. Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management

With regard to the ***Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management***, it can be concluded that **MSP should be increasingly used as a framework to support the co-design of conservation measures** in the Mediterranean, addressing conflicts between human activities and nature protection. In this regard, MSP can contribute to creating an environment for discussion where the different sectors can be engaged. This would facilitate discussion and identification of trade-offs and solutions.

Allocation of areas for maritime sectors based on environmental and compatibility criteria is one way in which MSP can contribute to strengthening marine conservation, by application of ecological criteria for the identification of the most suitable areas. Another important way is the identification of areas for marine protection in MS plans. These two activities should be done by engaging the maritime sectors in a continuous dialogue from the early stages of the plan's preparation, across the whole process of implementation. Case studies could be developed on specific topics - like ecosystem conservation, aquaculture and sustainable fishing practices, etc. - to advance how to achieve better management of protected areas.

Engagement of maritime sectors is particularly crucial in the **design and implementation of OECMs** (Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures). The CoP recognizes the importance of this tool for improved environmental protection in the Mediterranean; however, there is still the need for a clear definition of what areas can be considered as an OECMs, while the identification of related management measures still presents some unclear aspects.

Maritime sectors should be engaged in and could benefit from a mutual exchange of spatial and non-spatial information with the MSP process – as well as of data and information relevant to the implementation of the MSFD. Provision and sharing of relevant information on the environmental receptors and their status is still quite complicated due to the lack of understanding of ecosystem functioning and the reduced accessibility of some marine ecosystems (e.g. deep sea), but the collaboration with maritime sectors would help a lot, providing data to build maps and visual information, which would be beneficial for the sectors too.

Finally, when considering environmental management at large, **collaboration with maritime sectors is crucial to achieve the objectives of decarbonization and circularisation identified by the European Green Deal (EGD)**. MSP can play a role in contributing to boosting the marine dimension of EGD. The EGD should be seen and exploited as an asset for SBE developments in the Mediterranean region, and to do so, the role of the maritime sectors is essential.

With specific reference to the challenges related to this sub-topic, the following elements were identified by the MED-MSP-CoP.

1. Regarding Conservation through MSP implementation, approaches to design **scenarios of human uses** including spatial and non-spatial measures to improve marine protection are becoming available (e.g.,

through the results of the MSP Global initiative⁴, the Horizon MPA Europe project, the Italian MSP4BIODIVERSITY project). Moreover, different approaches are developed to assess coherence in the implementation of MSP in parallel or in synergy with European environmental policies such as MSFD, WFD, N2000 (e.g., MSPOR, Remap and CrossGov projects, e.g. the French MSP). This challenge is also related to the effectiveness of **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)** for which the availability of common guidance at the Mediterranean level, related to plans for maritime sectors and MS plans would definitively help.

2. When considering Sectors' engagement in marine conservation, experience from projects (e.g., AMAR project, Greece) has proved the involvement of key maritime stakeholders in a **participatory process to design management measures** can successfully work. However, processes of joint planning between maritime sectors and marine protection should be further promoted (e.g., Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature).
3. Regarding the Valuation of economic impacts and benefits of environmental management measures, **tools to assess Ecosystem Services** are becoming available (e.g. ReMap project) but should be made more operational, while the capacity of planners and managers to apply them should also be increased. **Systematic approaches to trade-off analysis** and their discussion with stakeholders are also key and should be more extensively applied (e.g. MSP4BIO project results).
4. MSP alignment across borders to meet regional conservation objectives remains a major challenge. Cooperation opportunities exist at a technical level (e.g. through European projects) and a political level (e.g. through UNEP/MAP Working Group on MSP, the WestMed initiative). The MED-MSP-CoP could support by highlighting issues shared by different countries and by disseminating and supporting elaboration of shared solutions. A key asset in this regard is to **bring the projects to work closer and closer with the national MSP and implementation processes**. In this regard, ensuring a permanent format to the MED-MSP-CoP would provide continuous support to the interaction between projects and national processes. Involvement of countries at the political level (e.g. through the Working Group on MSP of the Barcelona Convention – UNEP MSP WG) would be needed to put recommendations into practice through concrete actions.
5. Valuation and spatialization of economic and social values for maritime sectors have been poorly considered by projects so far and therefore need to be further studied, particularly the social aspects, including how to spatialise social and economic data. Yet, it's a crucial aspect to properly implement trade-off approaches.

⁴ UNESCO/IIOC, 2021. [Technical Report on Future Conditions and Scenarios for MSP and Sustainable Blue Economy Opportunities in the Western Mediterranean](#).

6. Funding environmental measures/action from maritime sectors should be promoted at the regional level, also through **Public-Private-Partnerships**; the new Restoration Law can be an opportunity in this regard. However, this practice would profit from the availability of approaches and methods to quantitatively assess economic benefits of conservation measures.

Table 6 links the challenges identified under this sub-topic with some **solutions provided by recent and ongoing projects, as described in the Catalogue of projects prepared by the CoP and in the CoP workshops.**

Table 6 – Available solutions to challenges: Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management

The table presents some solutions to the challenges identified for the sub-topic “Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management”, provided by recent and ongoing projects (analysis undertaken by the CoP) and from the MED-MSP-CoP Workshops.

Challenge	Solution	Source and details	
1. Improved nature conservation and protection through MSP implementation	Benchmark of MSP instruments for marine conservation	MSP-GREEN	Recommendations on how to include marine conservation and restoration in MSP
	Building scenarios of marine uses' evolution with regard to potential conservation measures	MSP4BIODIVERSITY (IT)	Scenario building, marine sectors evolution with regard to ecosystem and biodiversity conservation
		MPA EUROPE	
		FutureMARES	Ecosystem models to develop future scenarios examining how to reach targets on biodiversity conservation
		WestMed Initiative	Tool to conduct cumulative impact assessments
	Coherence between MSP and MSFD measures	ReMAP	Spatial overlapping between MSP plans and GES assessment under MSFD
		CrossGov	Methodologies developed to assess the coherence between different policies and to assess the transfer from science-to-policy-to-society to improve policy coherence
	Ecosystem approach in MSP	Mediterranean MSP Workspace (PAP/RAC)	Self-assessment method
		Marine Plan	3D planning, to prioritise conservation areas. 3D is very important to be able to consider the depth dimension in the conservation of marine ecosystems
	Assess uses compatibility with ecosystem sensitivity	ReMAP	Tool to assess compatibility between MPA objectives and maritime uses
	Taking advantage of the SEA process	GES4SEAS	SCAIRM method for cumulative impact assessment; toolbox for Harlpern and NEAT methods application

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Challenge	Solution	Source and details	
2. Sectors engagement in marine conservation:	Guidance for sectors to operate in MPAs/Areas at stake for conservation	MSP4BIO	Sector based factsheets
	Co-design management recommendations and/or actions with key stakeholders	AMARE (GR)	Recommendations or actions with key stakeholders
		Marine PLAN	Policy and NGOs engagement to build recommendations when dealing with transboundary cooperation
	Assess sectors' impact through planning measures to foster their acceptability	Workshop	
	Sectors contribution to restoration (e.g. vi the European restoration law)	Workshop	
3. Valuation of economic impacts and benefits of environmental management measures	Ecosystem Services valuation	ReMAP	ES mapping
		GES4SEAS	Linking human activities with pressures, ecosystem components and ecosystem services
		AMARE (GR)	Ecosystem Services valuation – monetary impact assessment
	Use of Ecosystem Services by sectors	MSP4BIODIVERSITY (IT)	
	Consideration of Climate Change when assessing conservation measures	Mediterranean MSP Workspace (PAP/RAC)	Tool to identify Climate Change impacts on sectors, mitigation or adaptation measures
		MEDIX	Modelling Climate Change refugia
4. MSP alignment across borders to meet regional conservation objectives	Build common objectives at transboundary or basin scale	Mediterranean MSP Workspace (PAP/RAC)	
	Cross border studies on environmental conservation priorities	MSPMED	Sharing environmental knowledge

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Challenge	Solution	Source and details	
	Cross border studies on uses management strategies to lower environmental impacts	MSPMED	Common understanding between France and Spain on windfarm environmental effects
		Marine PLAN	Cross-border studies on transboundary governance and prioritizing conservation areas
5.Valuation and spatialization of economic and social values for maritime sectors			
6. Funding environmental measures/action from maritime sectors (voluntary initiatives, taxes...).	Proofing benefits of conservation measures (as an advocacy to push for sectors contributions)		

6.1.2. MSP as a strategic framework for SBE

Regarding the use of **MSP as a strategic framework for SBE**, MSP can definitively contribute through the **design of scenarios to support SBE** (including visions, status of the sectors(s) and drivers of development). Assessment of value of economic activities, the definition of strategic objectives, indicators and vocation maps can be also provided by MSP. Sustainable innovation in blue sectors can be fostered by MSP through the allocation of areas for experimental facilities with a low environmental footprint. Finally, MSP can help to develop and to support the application of Decision Support Tools for SBE scenario design, analysis, discussion and selection.

Another key area of action is for **MSP to assess trade-offs associated with the implementation of Sustainable Blue Economy Strategies**: assessment of socio-economic costs and benefits of marine activities and ecosystem services can provide an understanding of the functions and interactions of the marine environment, assessing opportunities and measuring risks, while targeting Good Environmental Status (GES). The availability of tools to analyse the socio-economic impact of adopting a plan in a given area can support transparent decision-making. This can include, for example, the assessment of how MSP plans integrate EGD ambitions, and associated gaps, challenges and trade-offs.

With specific reference to the challenges related to this sub-topic, the following elements were identified by the MED MSP CoP.

Regarding the Integration of existing sector's strategies into MSP, **improved coherence between environmental and sector development policies** is definitively needed and several projects are working on this topic (e.g., CROSSGOV, MSP4BIO, PERMAGOV), providing methodologies, analysis and roadmaps. However, MSP plans should always apply a methodology able to consider **key strategic objectives/trends/scenarios** from sector strategies, select and prioritize them in relation to development needs in the planning area, and integrate them into MSP objectives (e.g. MSP4BIODIVERSITY, Italy).

In general, more clarity in the governance structure at the national level is needed with reference to conservation and sector policies, as well as MSP: for example, REGINA-MSP project has analysed sector plans' integration in MSP at a regional (sub-national) level.

The implementation of the **European Green Deal objectives can help to align several sectors' strategies in the marine/maritime domain**: this can be coordinated through MSP implementation (e.g., MSP-GREEN project results).

1. Cross-border collaboration in MSP to align sectors' strategies across scales can be supported by the results of the recently concluded project REGINA-MSP, providing recommendations on how to **better integrate and implement national MS plans at the regional (sub-national) level**. The study on EMFF-EMFAF projects also highlighted the importance of **coordinated maritime spatial planning efforts across borders to promote sustainable development** and address pressing environmental and socio-economic concerns. However, the experience of cross-border projects in the regions also showed that different countries had difficulty in

sharing a common view on the demands of each sector: stakeholders and experts should take stock of such gaps and co-develop guidelines on how to achieve this common vision and shared objectives.

2. The role of MSP in stakeholder engagement to align sectorial strategies remains unsupported by the available solutions so far. To overcome this gap, case studies could be developed, on a cross-border bilateral level, considering one or two sectors, on how alignment could be achieved through MSP.
3. To be able to enhance the coherence of sectorial strategies at the basin scale, cross-border collaboration on MSP needs additional effort: e.g., the MEDIGREEN project – recently launched - will undertake technical studies considering fisheries, aquaculture and offshore renewable energy developments and the MED-MSP-CoP could play an important role in this. The same case study approach identified for the previous challenge could also be useful in this case: by identifying some best practices on cross-sectoral coherence, it could lay a good foundation as case studies can share different experiences in different countries through their blue economy strategies.
4. The Integration of existing sector's strategies into MSP solutions and experience from existing projects still seems to be lacking. More effort is needed to understand how non-European countries implement MSP and other related policies (the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the UNEP MAP would be useful channels in this regard). Looking at international goals and objectives would clarify the scope of implementation by other countries, as the 30% biodiversity protection target.
5. Taking the opportunity of MSP to elaborate sectorial strategies for less structured sectors seems a promising approach, as piloted by some projects (e.g., co-development of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture - ARIEL project, Greece).
6. The MSP influence on sectors regulated at a regional/international scale (e.g., fishing, shipping) seems more challenging and would need to rely on monitoring the implementation of existing MS plans, as a starting point to define further improvements.
7. Regarding the role of MSP in stakeholder engagement to align sectorial strategies, practices from available projects seem to be lacking.

Table 7 links the challenges identified under this sub-topic with some **solutions provided by recent and ongoing projects, as described in the Catalogue of projects prepared by the CoP and in the CoP workshops.**

Table 7 – Available solutions to challenges: MSP as a strategic framework for SBE

The table presents some solutions to the challenges identified for the sub-topic “MSP as a strategic framework for SBE”, provided by recent and ongoing projects (analysis undertaken by the CoP) and from the MED-MSP-CoP Workshops.

Challenge	Solution	Source and details	
1. MSP cross-border collaboration to enhance the coherence of sectorial strategies at the basin scale	Scenarios for maritime uses in the Western Mediterranean, based on different visions.	MSP Global	Three scenarios: trend scenario, conservationist scenario and integrated scenario. Methodology to discuss them in a regional workshop.
	Improved governance	REGINA MSP	Articulation of region's maritime policies with national MSP
		Marine PLAN	Study on transboundary governance and recommendations
		MEDIGREEN	Technical study on the role of EGD-MSP for key sectors: fisheries, aquaculture, OWE
	Fora to agree on common objectives and with political will	MED-MSP-CoP	The political level will more accessible with an operative connection with the UNEP/MAP MSP WG.
2. Alignment of existing sectorial strategies through MSP implementation	Alignment of sector strategies with EGD objectives	MSP-GREEN	Recommendations to integrate the EGD objectives into MSP, per “EGD element” but also crosscutting.
	Calls that make mandatory the collaboration between sectors to advance on certain topics.		
	Methodology/approach to identify key developments/trajectories/scenarios and select the related key elements from existing sector strategies	MSP4BIODIVERSITY (IT)	Proposals for improving and adapting MSP plans for SBE in three pilot areas
	Options to improve governance structure for national maritime policy		
	Identification of synergies amongst sectors that can improve ocean governance		

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Challenge	Solution	Source and details	
	Communicate clearly with sectors		
	Analysis of sector plans integration in MSP at the regional level, identification of gaps and solutions	REGINA MSP	
	Analysis of EGD components integration on MSP plans, design of new actions and provision of recommendations to improve it.	REGINA MSP	Actions designed and/or developed in MSP that concern one or more sectors and contribute to the EGD
3. Improved coherence between policies (environmental and sectoral) in formulation and implementation stages	Identification of challenges of implementing simultaneously WFD, MSFD and MSPD	CROSSGOV	Guidance to reinforcing coherence and synergies within the policy and legal landscapes, including MSPD
	Development of methodologies, analysis and roadmaps	CROSSGOV	Guidance to reinforcing coherence and synergies within the policy and legal landscapes, including MSPD
		MSP4BIO	
		PREMAGOV	
4. Integration of existing sector strategies into MSP	Methodology/approach to identify key developments/trajectories/ scenarios and select the related key elements from existing sector strategies	MSP4BIODIVERSITY (IT)	Proposals for improving and adapting MSP plans for SBE in three pilot areas
		GES4SEAS	Ecosystem modelling using future scenarios with different climate change projections; MPA management measures + wind farms + shipping
	Options to improve governance structure for national maritime policy	Workshop	
	Identification of synergies amongst sectors that can improve ocean governance	Workshop	
	Communicate clearly with sectors	Workshop	

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Challenge	Solution	Source and details	
	Analysis of sector plans integration in MSP at the regional level, identification of gaps and solutions	REGINA MSP	
	Analysis of EGD components integration on MSP plans, design of new actions and provision of recommendations to improve it.	REGINA MSP	Actions designed and/ or developed in MSP that concern one or more sectors and contribute to the EGD
5. Using MSP to elaborate sectorial strategies for less structured sectors	Scenarios for maritime uses and activities aiming at improved nature conservation	MSP4BIODIVERSITY	3 Pilot areas. Proposals for improving and adapting MSP plans for SBE.
	Modelling scenarios for co-development between several activities (mutual benefits, cross-impacts, compensatory measures...)	ARIEL (GR)	Co-development of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture
5. MSP influence on sectors regulated at regional/international scale			
7. MSP role in stakeholders' engagement to align sectorial strategies			

6.2. Persistent gaps and needs

With regard to the Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management, it can be concluded that several solutions have already been identified in the Mediterranean region through several projects: stakeholder engagement, dialogue and co-construction of practices to increase the sustainability of sectors have been implemented, particularly in relation to small-scale fisheries and marine protection. Engagement of industrial sectors, like offshore wind energy, can rely on the existence and further development of platforms for dialogue such as the Offshore Coalition for Energy and Nature (MedOCEAN). Nevertheless, **dialogue and exchanges for co-planning and co-implementation of marine protection provisions with maritime sectors should definitively be given more attention.**

However, some of the challenges identified under this sub-topic persist and need additional effort to be addressed by projects and, more importantly, in **real-world cases**. **Valuation and spatialization are still challenging aspects when considering maritime sectors and their economic impacts.** Questions like “How much value is created and where?”, “What categories do benefit from MSP plans and what categories are negatively impacted?” are still largely without answer in the Mediterranean. Some knowledge about metrics (i.e. the economic impacts towards the possible returns on investments) would benefit the analysis or alternative planning scenarios. In addition, as an emerging gap, **social value and societal impacts of MSP** and their provision with regards to maritime sectors should be approached and integrated into MS plan assessment. This aspect has not been addressed by projects so far. Given that MSP plans remain relatively new for the Mediterranean region, and are available only for the European countries, there is still a lack of knowledge with regards to the **effectiveness of sustainability measures for maritime sectors in MS plans**: monitoring and assessment of progress in this direction are still needed (in fact, this is linked to the fact the MS plans are relatively new in the Mediterranean and the MSP process has not yet had time to cover a full MSP cycle,). Particularly, common frameworks and approaches should be developed at the regional level with regard to **progress towards the European Green Deal objectives.**

As an additional emerging need, guidelines for the **identification, designation, monitoring and assessment of OECMs** are expected to be developed at the regional level in the context of UNEP/MAP. Testing of their application across the region and integration with MS plans should be brought forward with the support of projects and initiatives.

Regarding the role of MSP as a strategic framework for SBE this still represents a key working topic for the region. Considering the heterogeneity of situations occurring in the different countries (cases with MSP and no SBE strategy, cases with no MSP but with SBE strategy, and intermediate cases with different degrees of development of the two components) the topic should be addressed at the national level, considering national specificities and capitalizing on other national cases of the same type. The **full integration of sector plans into MSP has not yet been reached.** This represents an important gap, particularly for those countries that do not have a framing SBE strategy. As for the **regional dimension of SBE** (harmonized and integrated SBE strategy for the Mediterranean), given the high complexity and ambition of the topics, **integration and harmonization of MS plans and SBE strategies should start with cross-border and**

sub-regional cases, possibly focused on one or a few key sectors: e.g. common strategies and harmonization of spatial plans for development linked to offshore renewables in a specific area – for example, related with grid connection; coherent cross-border management of fishing in view of sustainable exploitation of resources; establishment of cross-border area-based management to increase sustainability of maritime traffic (OECM) as a solution to influence sectors regulated at international level, etc.

7. Benefits of MSP at regional level and priorities for implementation

The activities undertaken so far by the MED-MSP-CoP have allowed the identification of commonalities in terms of needs and interests in MSP among European and non-European experts. In fact, despite the different obligations in terms of MSP, the difference in availability of MSP plans and the related process, as well the heterogeneity in terms of SBE developments and sectorial plans for maritime activities, some elements of common relevance have been identified around two key topics:

(1) MSP supporting the extension, improved management and improved connection of Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean, towards the targets set at the international and European level on marine biodiversity protection;

(2) MSP as a key enabler for the implementation of national Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) strategies and initiatives, through the adoption of an integrated approach and towards the balanced distribution of benefits.

As described in this report, **the analysis and the discussions undertaken by the CoP in the first two years were focussed around two sub-topics identified under the two main topics** indicated above. This was done in order to provide **as many specific results as possible**, both in terms identification of challenges, as well as of already available solutions. The narrowing of the scope ensured **more focused discussion** and the identification of **more concrete action points**. However, **it should be considered that the results presented in this report are not exhaustive of all the issues and challenges for MSP in the Mediterranean.**

Below, in relation to the sub-topics, the following elements are provided: (i) some cross-cutting common needs at regional level on MSP and benefits from the CoP; (ii) some specific action points; (iii) some concluding considerations and perspective on the role of the CoP.

7.1. Common needs and benefits

The following common needs have been identified and discussed by the CoP⁵: (i) decision support and decision-making tools; (ii) science-to-policy-to-society interfaces; (iii) data harmonisation and sharing; (iv) cost/effective solutions to address both the key topics; (v) definition of a governance framework at the regional scale; (vi) multi-level governance for MSP; (vii) climate-smart MSP.

On these topics, the MED-MSP-CoP has recognized the benefit of **continued exchanges of knowledge and experience**. Such exchanges between experts are fundamental to building a common background and language, sharing concepts and approaches, and commonly recognizing tools and methods for MSP (e.g. scenario identification and analysis, use conflict analysis, cumulative effect assessment analysis, trade-off analyses, stakeholder engagement and co-construction, etc.), as well as the use of available solutions (e.g. multi-scalar approach to MSP, multi-use, recommendations on how to incorporate elements to support ecological transition into MSP, etc.).

Beyond exchange, the CoP has also recognized the opportunity to build on the shared knowledge and create **capacity building opportunities** for the CoP's members and, in general, for all interested actors. Operational capacity on MSP has to be reinforced and enlarged in the Mediterranean.

In addition to that, **continuous progress towards a shared and commonly recognized base of data** at the regional level on the state of marine biodiversity and habitats, key species and marine environmental key components in general, as well as the distribution of economic sectors should be pursued by common projects and initiatives. Ultimately, **sharing of commonly recognized data and tools represents the essential technical prerequisite for progressing towards a regional perspective for MSP in the Mediterranean. This process would at the same time reinforce national capacity to develop MSP plans.**

7.2. Action points

From the discussions and the exchanges undertaken by the MED-MSP-CoP, some specific **actions** have been identified and are recommended as priorities.

Firstly, the **publication on the European MSP Platform of the full Catalogue of projects developed by the MED-MSP-CoP**, including elements of solutions to address issues and challenges in relation the two key topics of interest.

Regarding the two sub-topics this report focuses on, the following actions can be proposed.

⁵ [Sharing ideas and knowledge on MSP topics of common interest: results of the online workshops and the MED-MSP-CoP thematic session in the WestMED Stakeholder Conference in Malta](#)

Involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management:

- Organize exchanges on the way MSP could support the **sustainable management of small-scale fisheries (SSF)**, including increasing knowledge on spatial distribution of the sector (in connection with GFCM initiatives) and fostering collaboration with marine protection initiatives.
- Organize exchanges on the way MSP could support the **extension and sustainability of aquaculture** (linking to the work of the WestMED thematic group on sustainable aquaculture, as well as with GFCM initiatives) and fostering collaboration with marine protection initiatives.
- Organize exchanges on **identification, designation and implementation of OECMs**.
- Organize **online training to build capacity on the use of available tools from recent projects** to support the involvement of maritime sectors in environmental management and conservation (e.g., ReMAP assessment of ecosystem Services, MSP4BIO trade-off analysis, MSP4BIODIVERSITY scenario identification and analysis, etc.).

MSP as a strategic framework for Sustainable Blue Economy:

- Prepare a **study** to map the availability and **analyse the relationship between SBE strategies development and MS plans in the Mediterranean countries**. Such a study could combine desk analysis and participatory tools, by engaging experts and authorities in a dialogue on the relationships between the two tools.
- Identify specific topics (e.g., offshore wind energy developments) and cross-border or sub-regional cases to **develop tests/exercises of coordination between SBE developments and MSP**.
- Regularly exchange and possibly establish active cooperation and mutual support with the UNEP Working Group on MSP. For example, sharing the results of the recently launched MEDIGREEN project can be an opportunity to initiate this process.

In addition, some other elements (mainly cross-cutting) have been identified in relation to persisting and emerging gaps. These elements would deserve **more work through projects and initiatives**. The main elements are:

- Assessing the economic impacts of MS plans
- Assessing the societal impact of MS plans
- Assessing effectiveness of conservation measures
- Assessing the contribution of MS plans towards EGD objectives (with the MEDIGREEN project this will be considered also through the involvement of the MED MSP CoP: communication and cultural exchange on EGD topics will also be pursued).

7.3. Perspectives for the MED-MSP-CoP

The experience of these two years of activities showed that the MED-MSP-CoP can play an important role in **extending and strengthening the implementation of MSP in the region**, representing a fundamental **tool for dialogue, exchange and capacity building**.

The CoP should not be seen in isolation but it would **benefit and contribute from synergies with other initiatives**, in particular with the UNEP-MAP WG on MSP, as well as with other CoPs being developed at national or sub-national level (see e.g. the results from the REGINA-MSP project). Beyond the Mediterranean, the CoP will be able to enter into a direct dialogue with the MSPGlobal initiative: in fact, the CoP already capitalised on some of its work in the MED (see tables with answers and solutions) and in the future the two entities could work towards common goals/interests in the region.

Among its priorities, the CoP has identified the need to work towards bridging the gap between science and policy and transfer the results from scientific research to policy and decision makers. In this area of exchange, there is the opportunity for the CoP to **become the voice of the MSP practitioners from the region**, being able to convene shared message to the Mediterranean stakeholders and policy makers. In this direction, the CoP could take the same role of 'spoke-entity' in exchanges with similar CoPs from other sea basins.

Finally, the analysis and the discussion undertaken by the CoP have highlighted that the results from projects are generally poorly taken up by national MSP processes. Therefore, the CoP recommends additional work towards implementation oriented-projects, by **increasing the active involvement of MSP responsible authorities in projects**. In addition, the CoP's findings (e.g. gaps, challenges and solutions) could be regularly proposed to national authorities through the organization of dedicated workshops (e.g. back-to-back with relevant political events). In such a way, it would be possible to demonstrate that **projects can bring operational results, encouraging MSP authorities to actively participate**. Finally, authorities could be encouraged to address the identified gaps and challenges when in their competence.

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