



Enabling Maritime Spatial Planning - Enhancing Stakeholder Participation. Lessons from MSP delivery to date

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Contents

1. Introduction	5
1.1. Aim.....	5
1.2. Background.....	5
1.3. Approach	5
1.4. Context	6
1.5. About this report	6
2. An overview of good practice.....	6
3. Methods.....	7
3.1. Participant recruitment and demographics	7
3.2. Survey Designs.....	8
3.3. Data processing and reporting	8
4. Overview of findings.....	9
4.1. Survey 1: Member States	9
4.2. Survey 2 – Stakeholders	21
5. Observations	29
5.1. Survey 1	29
5.2. Survey 2	30
5.3. Correlations between the surveys	32
6. Recommendations.....	34
7. References	37
8. Annexes	38
8.1. Annex 1: Survey 1 – Member States	38
8.2. Annex 2: Survey 2 - Stakeholders.....	47

Glossary of Participation Terms

Participation	Participation is about enabling stakeholders to participate in a decision-making process
Procedural Justice	<p>The principle that fair and transparent processes lead to legitimate and accepted outcomes. It focusses on how decisions are made – not just what decisions are made – emphasising respect, neutrality, voice and trust.</p> <p>When people feel the process is fair, they are more likely to accept the results, even if the outcome is not in their favour.</p>
Professionally facilitated Consensus Building	<p>Consensus Building is a practice with underpinning principles and ethics, steps and stages, that enable a mixed and balanced group of participants move incrementally toward mutually acceptable decisions.</p> <p>Professional design, facilitation and use of Consensus Building techniques enable this with large groups (for example about 50 people) working as equals to share information, generate options, deliberate and make choices.</p>
Unfacilitated consensus building	<p>This is not a practice but an intent to work amicably towards finding agreement.</p> <p>It is possible to do this in groups of about 8 people who have good intent.</p> <p>Issues are:</p> <p>This does not enable representation of different interests in the discussion.</p> <p>As complexity, tension or numbers involved, increase, group dynamics predict the endeavour will break down.</p>
Voting	<p>Is a way of collecting views and making decisions by majority opinion.</p> <p>It is vulnerable to both norming behaviour or tactics to force a particular outcome</p>
Wider engagement	Engagement to collect opinions and views on emerging priorities or options and provide them as feedback to those making the decisions

1. Introduction

1.1. Aim

DG MARE is committed to understanding the differences in approaches to stakeholder consultation undertaken by different EU Member States in the first round of MSP and to identify and support implementation of recommendations for good practices going forwards.

1.2. Background

As Maritime Spatial Planning has been implemented across the EU since the adoption of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (Directive 2014/89/EU) in 2014, Member States adopted different approaches to involving stakeholders and the public in Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP).

The MSP directive requirements for stakeholder participation and engagement determine that Member States shall establish means of public participation by informing all interested parties and by consulting the relevant stakeholders and authorities, and the public concerned, at an early stage in the development of maritime spatial plans. As well as ensuring that the relevant stakeholders and authorities, and the public concerned, have access to the plans once they are finalised.

Therefore, the question arises around the kind of involvement the MSP processes afforded stakeholders across the EU. Is it 'effective public participation'? Have other stakeholders been able to participate in decision making and influence and help shape the outcomes - or have they just engaged to receive information and provide views?

Since maritime spatial planning involves significant environmental considerations and impacts, Member States also need to apply the principles of the European Union Public Participation Directive when engaging stakeholders and the public in the MSP process, notably when carrying out their strategic environmental assessment, under the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (Directive 2001/42/EC).

The European Union Public Participation Directive of 2003¹, even though not explicitly referred to in the MSP Directive, includes provision for access to information, conducting consultations, and facilitating public involvement in the development and implementation of maritime spatial plans.

This short, focused study set out to explore the different approaches taken by Member States in undertaking their stakeholder processes and how stakeholders were involved in the MSP process, in order that lessons can be learned, and recommendations made going forwards.

1.3. Approach

This work collates information about the approach taken by each Member State, and feedback from stakeholders about how they felt able to influence the plan. Two surveys were undertaken:

Survey 1 - Member States

Survey 2 – Participants/stakeholders

The findings were analysed using rapid quantitative and qualitative methods to assess what Member States did in relation to good practice and the experience of stakeholders who responded.

Based on these findings, recommendations have been made.

1.4. Context

During the MSP process, there were two key limitations that impacted the involvement and engagement of stakeholders. The first was the Covid 19 pandemic, and the second was limited resources of the Member States. Both impact the understanding of the review and have been considered when writing this report.

1.5. About this report

This report outlines the methods used to perform the research and summarises key findings. It also includes a summary of good practice, together with findings of wider interest and relevance.

An overview of good practice

The following are examples of what practitioners consider to be effective examples of good practice dialogue and will provide context for comments within this report.

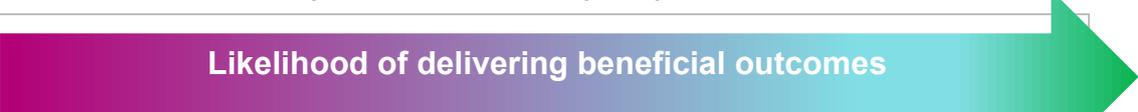
Good practice dialogue has:

- A focus on the importance of dialogue design tailored to the context and following steps and stages in principled negotiation and Consensus Building
- A large core group of multiple interests negotiating together across several workshops. For example, in complex settings with multiple forms of knowledge 50 to 60 people would not be uncommon
- An ethos of levelling power relations so people deliberate together and then ideas are taken on merit not based on the power, status and behaviour of those taking part
- Use of deliberative and Consensus Building techniques including decision techniques to enable people to share decision making without senior or dominant people determining the outcome
- Neutral facilitation throughout

Understanding power is a key component of applying good practice, as it determines whose voices get heard and how knowledge is created or used^{2,3,4&5}. Crucially, power dynamics affect both the nature and quality of decisions, and the acceptance of decisions⁶. Sharing power is also more effective at getting to beneficial outputs and outcomes than other factors such as structured communication alone or communication intensity⁷.

The following table (Table 1) summarises key points of good practice and is adapted from Reed *et al* 2018⁸ theory of participation. This illustrates how the outcomes of participation and engagement in environmental management are explained by context, process design, participants, the management of power dynamics, and scaler and temporal fit:

Table 1: What increases the likely success of stakeholder participation



Challenging: No prior participation culture or ethics, few if any resources, core governance group consider themselves as separate to and being experts.	Context	Conducive: Ethics respectful of others and their knowledge, understanding of good practice, culture of working with others, sharing resources. Core group perceive themselves to be one stakeholder amongst many
Ad hoc procedures and process unclear flows of knowledge and decision-making points	Design	Designed, transparent structured process with clear flows of knowledge and power
Ad hoc representation, hierarchical, closed/limited involvement	Participants	Systematic representation, inclusive of relevant knowledges, interests and diversities, balanced to avoid bias at decision points
Top down, other people involved to input views. Power dynamics unmanaged with some participants unable to contribute knowledge or influence outcomes	Power	Power sharing: principle of equality and shared decision making. Power dynamics effectively managed to give all participants equal opportunities to contribute knowledge and influence outcomes
Poorly matched to spatial scales	Scaler Fit	Well matched to spatial scales
Late involvement and/or poorly matched to what is needed	Temporal fit	Early-stage involvement when options are open and timing well matched to what is needed
Hierarchical, experts decide, governance group, unrepresentative, power over	Underpinning governance	Regenerative governance. Governance group reflects variety of other stakeholder and diversity interests, power with – playing to strengths

2. Methods

2.1. Participant recruitment and demographics

Survey 1

Through the Member States Expert Group on MSP, pre-identified country leads on MSP were directly targeted to elicit opinion and knowledge from those working at the heart of MSP in each country. Designated contact points were provided with a survey link (The survey was hosted using the EU survey tool), which also included consenting and non-attribution unless specific consent was given for specific comments to be attributed. This complies with professional standards the consultants are expected to work to (the UK FSA/NERC Joint Code of Practice for Research (JcoPR)). This practice also complies with and exceeds the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

Table 2: Survey 1 participant organisations

Member State	Participant organisation
Belgium	Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment
Bulgaria	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works
Cyprus	Shipping Deputy Ministry
Denmark	Danish Maritime Authority
Estonia	Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture
Finland	MSP Coordination / Regional Council of Southwest Finland
Germany	Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency
Ireland	Marine Planning Policy and Legislation – Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
Italy	Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport
Latvia	Ministry of Environmental protection and regional development
Malta	Planning Authority
Netherlands	Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management
Poland	Ministry of Infrastructure
Romania	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration of Romania
Spain	Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge

Survey 2

The MSP Assistance Mechanism, on behalf of DG MARE, launched a survey on stakeholder consultation. The survey was hosted using the EU survey tool, ensuring respondents were informed about its objectives, data processing procedures, and consent requirements. The Assistance Mechanism promoted the survey through various communication channels, including posts on X, its own mailing list, newsletters, and the European Blue Forum’s mailing list and newsletter. Additionally, synergies with other key European initiatives were leveraged to enhance outreach. The goal was to engage as many stakeholders involved in MSP across the EU as possible.

It should be noted that whilst use of the MSP Assistance Mechanism’s established and extensive network (and associated networks) was made to disseminate the necessary information and link to the survey, the members of these networks are typically institutions, organisations and academia, and thus under representative of local stakeholders in individual Member States.

2.2. Survey Designs

The online surveys were designed with a mixture of open and closed questions (e.g., multiple-choice responses and Likert scale questions). The aim was for a completion time of approximately 15 minutes. The final survey design can be found in Annex 2.

2.3. Data processing and reporting

Following the surveys, the researchers analysed the qualitative data from the online survey using Dialogue Matters’ ‘emergent processing’ method to avoid prejudgement or bias.

This method takes the essence of what interviewees said and identifies separate points. Researchers then analyse the outputs looking for points at the level of ideas rather than concepts. In this way, key topics and ideas emerge from interviewees responses which are then linked, or clustered, together. Further clustering is done where needed to capture links between similar ideas and topics. The clusters were in turn summarised to form the content of this report.

3. Overview of findings

3.1. Survey 1: Member States

Sixteen Member States responded to survey 1. Most responses came from the central government, however three came from a government agency or public body to which delegated responsibility for the national MSP Process and/or stakeholder consultation process associated with MSP have been appointed.

3.1.1. MSP Objectives

The main MSP objectives for Member States were to balance different marine interests and to promote coexistence and cooperation. These include promoting sustainability of communities, tourism, development, resources, sectors, and use of marine spaces. Increasing marine and port infrastructure and developing a framework for offshore renewables also factored, as well as protecting marine heritage and resources on an international scale. In addition, achieving a good ecological status of the marine environment and developing research areas were key.

3.1.2. Decision Complexity

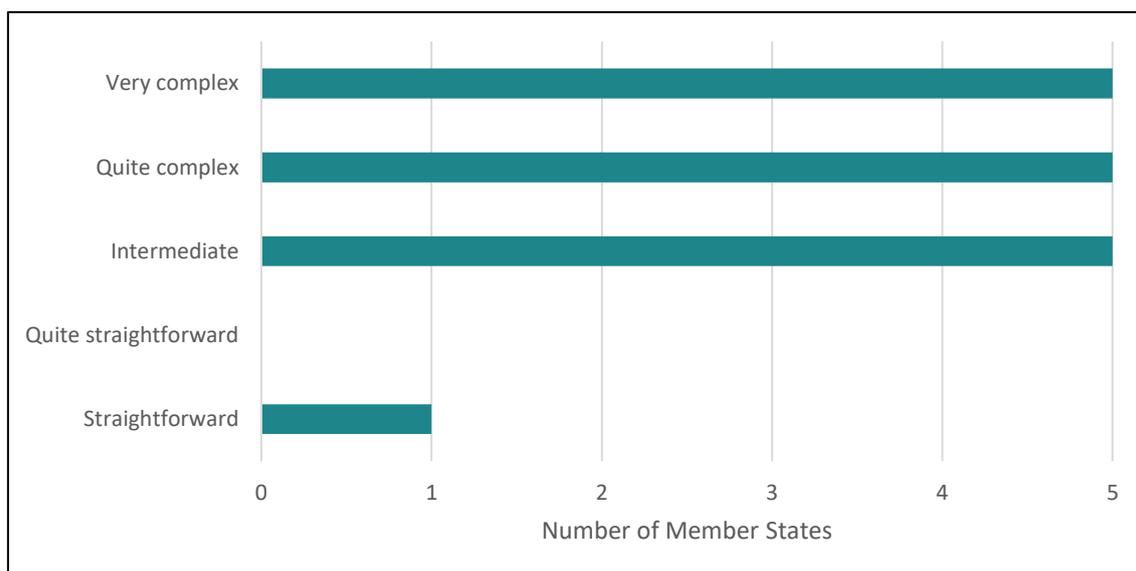


Figure 1: How complex were the MSP decisions

The number and diversity of stakeholders was a predominant factor that increased the complexity of decision making. Other contributing factors were the complexity of government and legislation, a lack of data, and conflicts between sectors.

3.1.3. Included sectors / uses in MSP

Four Member States included the following sectors: fisheries, energy, transport, recreation, communications (cables), aggregates extraction (sand, gravels etc), research, and conservation in their MSP. Every Member State included the conservation sector. An additional four included all sectors except the aggregates extraction sector, however, this may be because not all countries conduct dredging. Eight Member States included additional sectors to those listed above.

3.1.4. Ethics and principles

The surveyed Member States identified several key ethics and principles to guide the involvement of stakeholders. The main principle was the inclusion of diverse interests, perspectives and lived experiences. Also important were principles of thoroughness, democracy, finding balance, following statutory guidance and frameworks, and early, active participation of stakeholders and the public to find a consensus.

3.1.5. Participation and engagement plan

When asked whether a stakeholder participation and engagement plan was created, three quarters of the Member States responded positively.

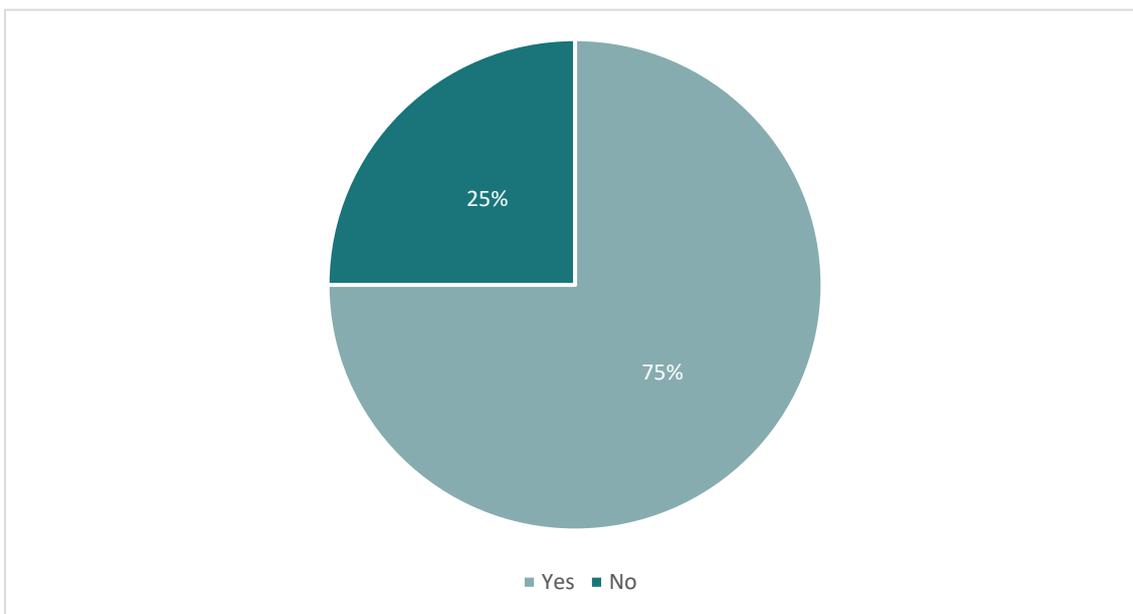


Figure 2: Was a stakeholder participation and engagement plan created?

3.1.6. Leaders of the stakeholder engagement

First round of MSP stakeholder engagement:

Member States identified who designed, facilitated and managed the first round of stakeholder engagement. These metrics are presented in Figures 3, 4 and 5.

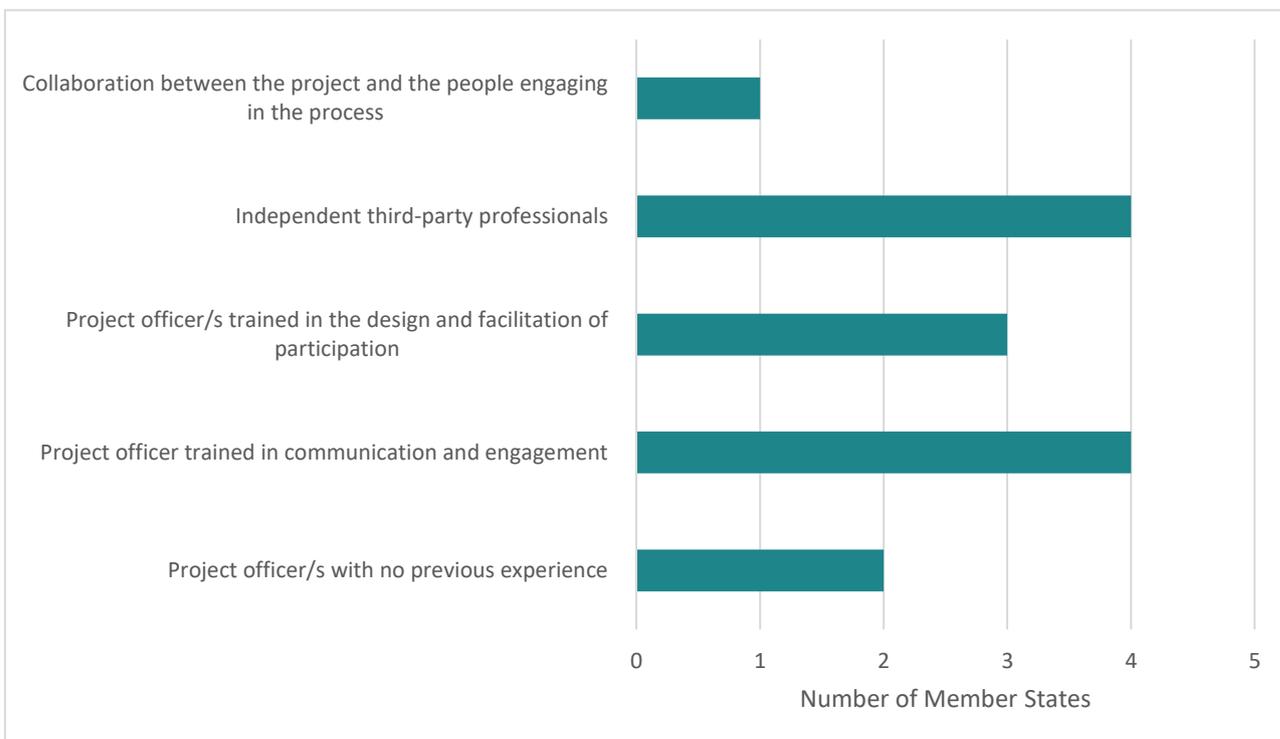


Figure 3: Who designed the first round of stakeholder engagement

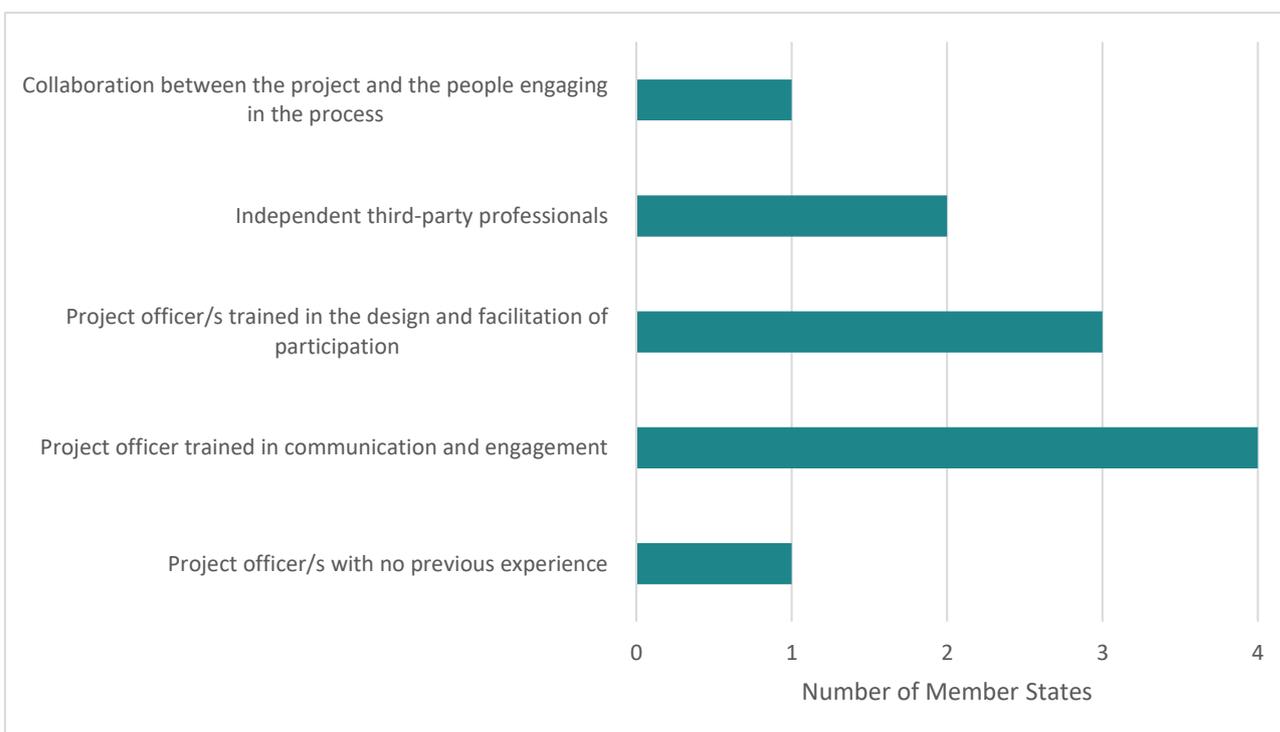


Figure 4: Who facilitated the first round of stakeholder engagement



Figure 5: Who managed the first round of stakeholder engagement

Revision process of MSP stakeholder engagement:

Member States also identified who designed, facilitated and managed the MSP revision process. These metrics are presented in Figures 6, 7, and 8.

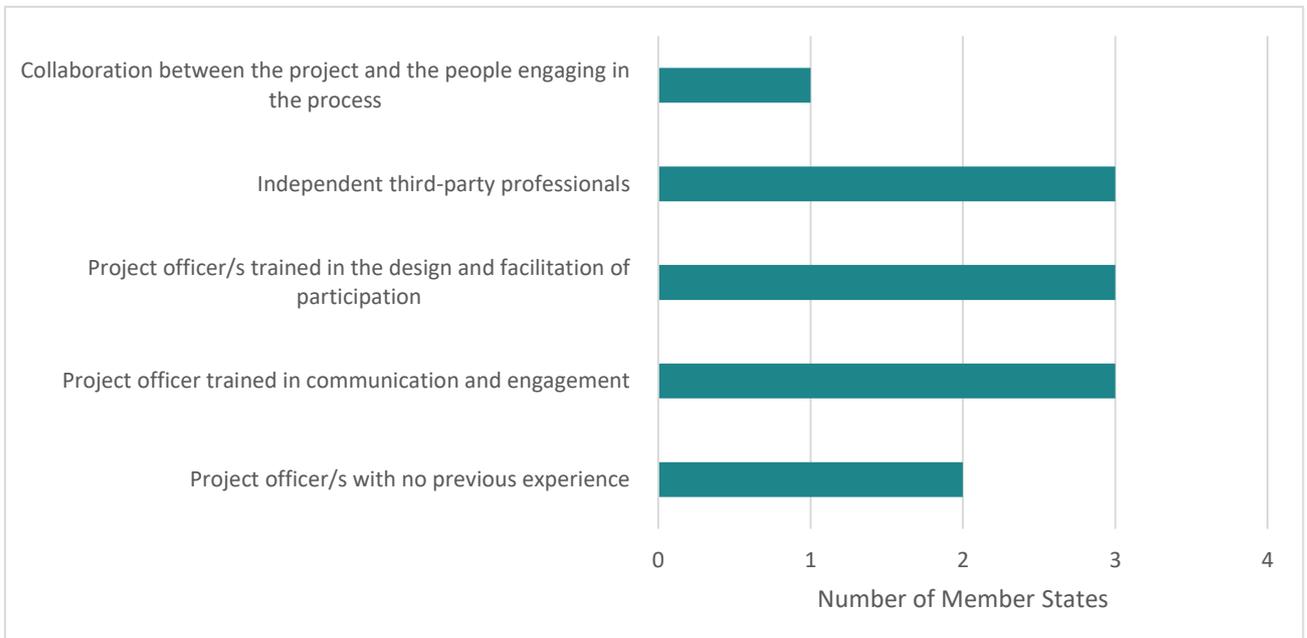


Figure 6: Who designed the revision process of stakeholder engagement

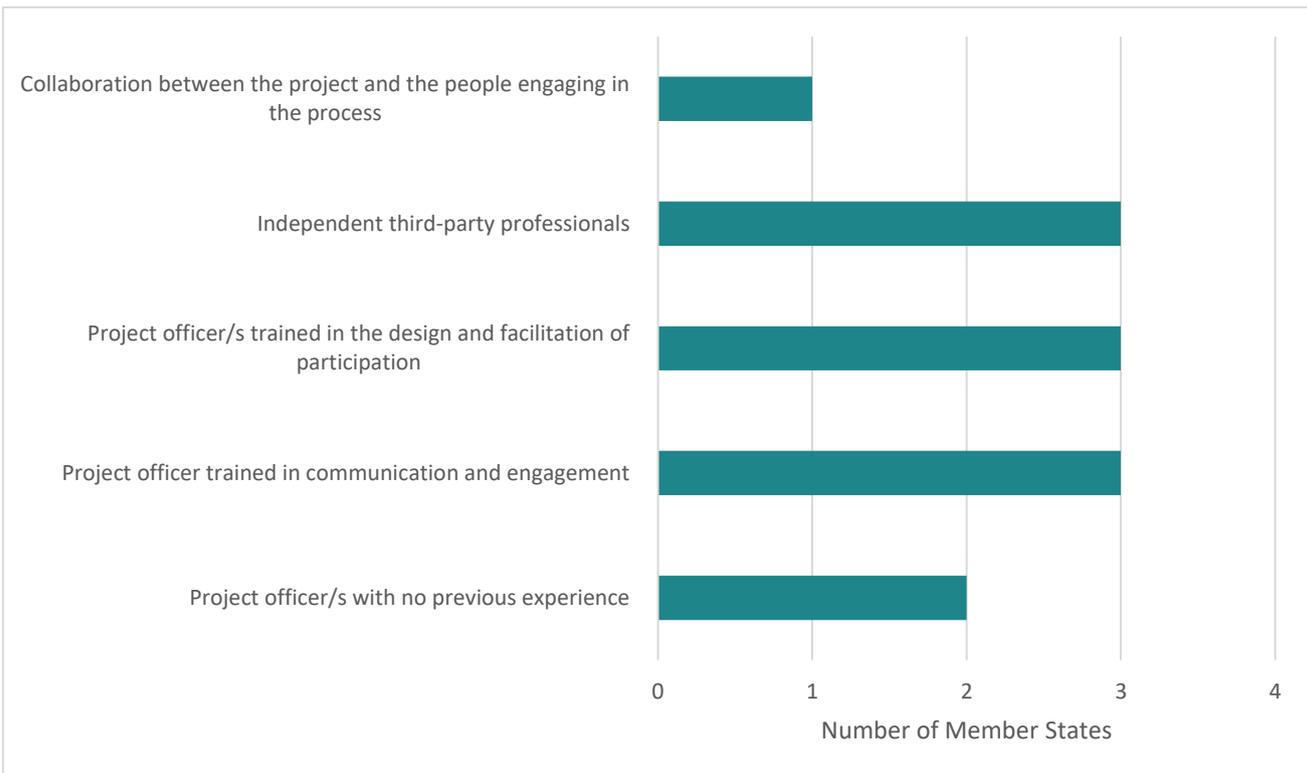


Figure 7: Who facilitated the revision process of stakeholder engagement

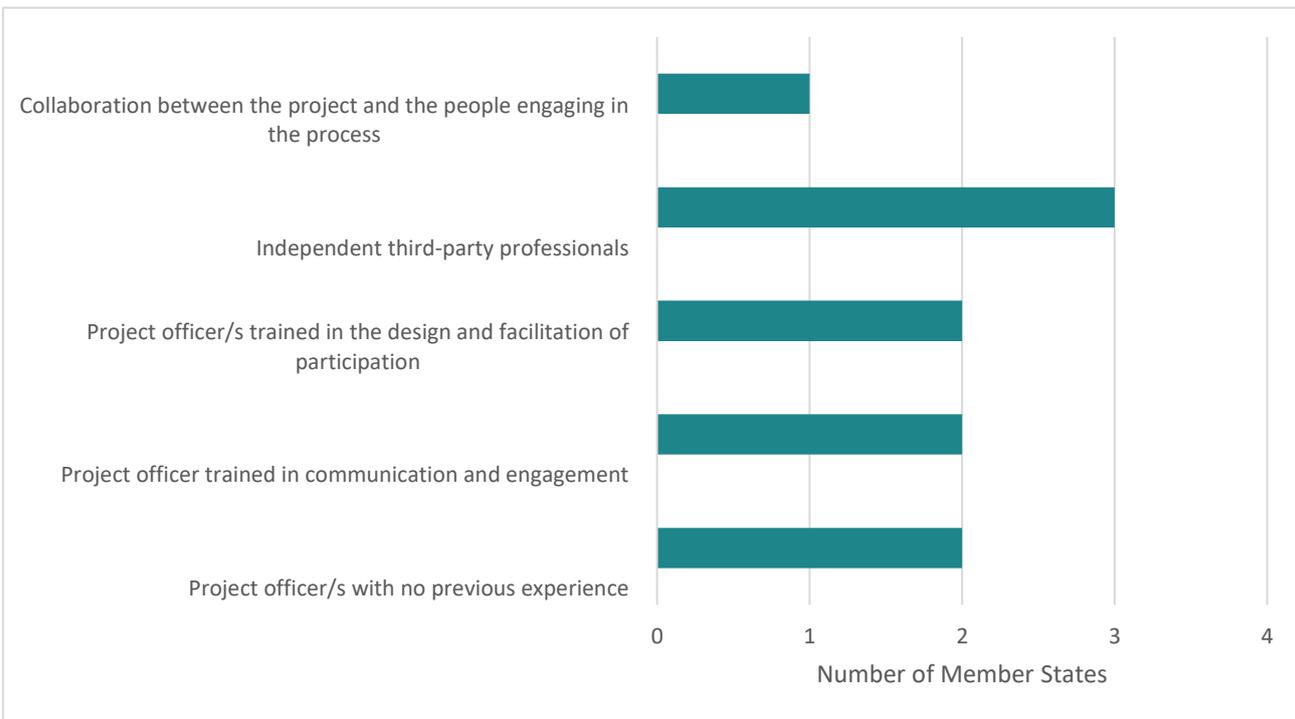


Figure 8: Who managed the revision process of stakeholder engagement

3.1.7. Core decision making group for the MSP

Member States reported that there was no consensus on how many people were included in the core decision making group, with group sizes up to 70 people. However, the public sector was the main group in charge of making the decisions.

Four Member States included NGOs and fisheries in their core group ⁽¹⁾. Three or less included energy, conservation and research interests. Two or less Member States included aggregates, communication (cables) and recreation interests.

In this context, decision making refers to the process of collaboratively creating and deciding upon the course of action that must be undertaken.

3.1.8. How they made decisions

Eight Member States used professionally facilitated Consensus Building processes, four used unfacilitated consensus building, and three used voting to make decisions. In one Member State decisions were made through agreement between the relevant ministries and authorities. In two cases, the survey indicates that whilst professional consensus building was used, but the outcomes were determined by the strongest voices in the group.

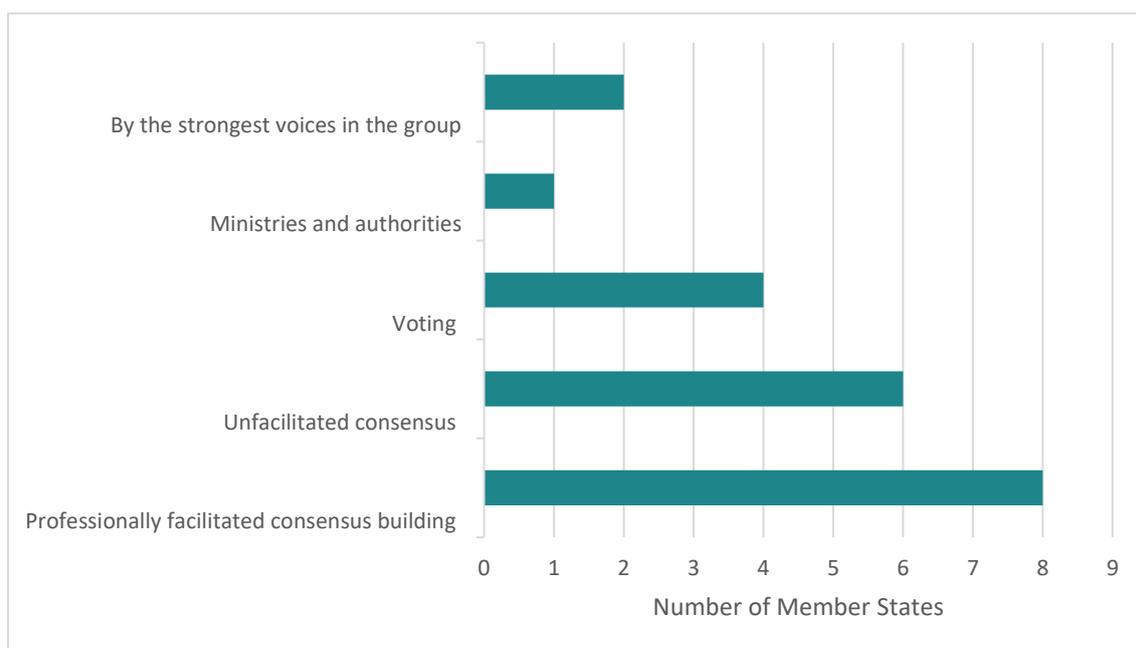


Figure 9: How Member States made decisions

3.1.9. Information and views

Who provided information?

All sixteen Member States had information from the public sector. Fifteen had information from NGOs and transport sectors. At least eight Member States had information from all additional sectors of conservation, communications, research, aggregates, recreation, transport, energy and fisheries. Additionally, three Member States consulted a wider range of stakeholders including neighbouring countries, marine cultural heritage sector, urban planners, and the water quality industry.

⁽¹⁾ one of the respondents was not clear enough to assert this statement

How were they able to share information and views?

Member States were asked to identify how stakeholders could share information and their views, and the different methods used for face to face and/or online engagement.

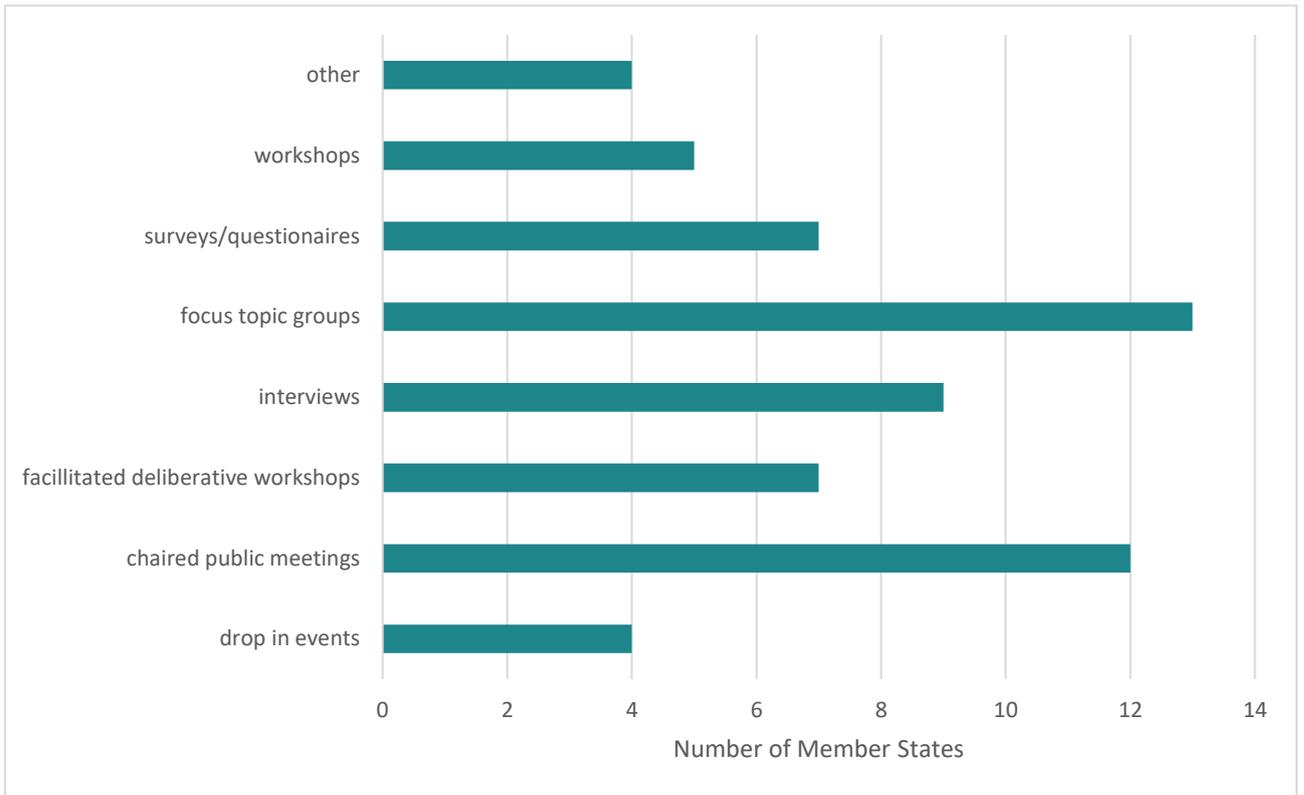


Figure 10: Face to face methods

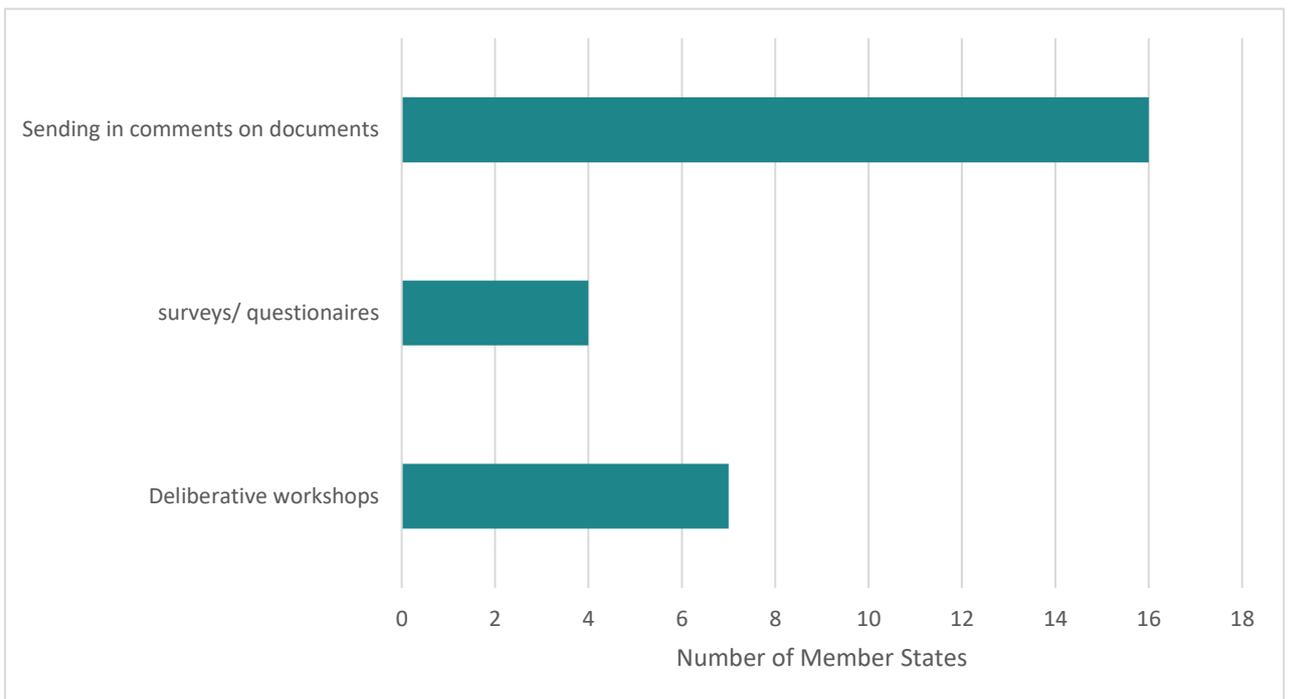


Figure 11: Online or written methods

Who used the information and how?

Five Member States explicitly stated that they used stakeholder input during the drafting phase and six Member States said that stakeholder input was used by the MSP planners/committee during the review and finalisation process. However, it was clear from the responses that stakeholder views were used in a range of ways, such as into an official report, or a register with comments from the planning team. From there, this input could be reviewed and potentially used to shape and revise the plan.

3.1.10. Participant involvement in the MSP

Implementation

There were a variety of ways that stakeholders were involved in the implementation of the MSP. Some were involved in the preparation of plans and decisions concerning development permits. Some in public surveys chaired meetings and focus groups. Some via the shared goal roadmap. Some through a consultation body and its working groups, as well as being responsible for implementing change within their sector. However, two Member States did not know or did not involve stakeholders in this process.

Revision phase

Fifteen out of sixteen Member States said that they used the same participants in the revision phase. There was no consensus over how many people were used. The minimum number of participants used was thirty, whilst the highest number of participants was nine-hundred and sixty.

3.1.11. Challenges involving stakeholders

Difficulties stemming from diversity and balancing the needs and interests of different stakeholders was a significant challenge. Additionally, differences in data, the covid 19 pandemic, time/resource constraints and lack of effective communication were challenges that had a significant impact.

3.1.12. What worked well?

Transparently engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders at an early stage was a key benefit. In addition, there were several strategies that worked well such as creating public meetings, online workshops, and having diverse engagement methods. Other strategies included having a cross sectoral awareness and consulting advisory boards, creating of agreements to facilitate dialogue; as well as listening to stakeholder concerns and taking them into account to make them feel heard.

3.1.13. What would stakeholders say?

When asked what stakeholders would say with regards to the extent they were able to participate effectively, most of the Member States considered that stakeholders would feel they were able to participate effectively.

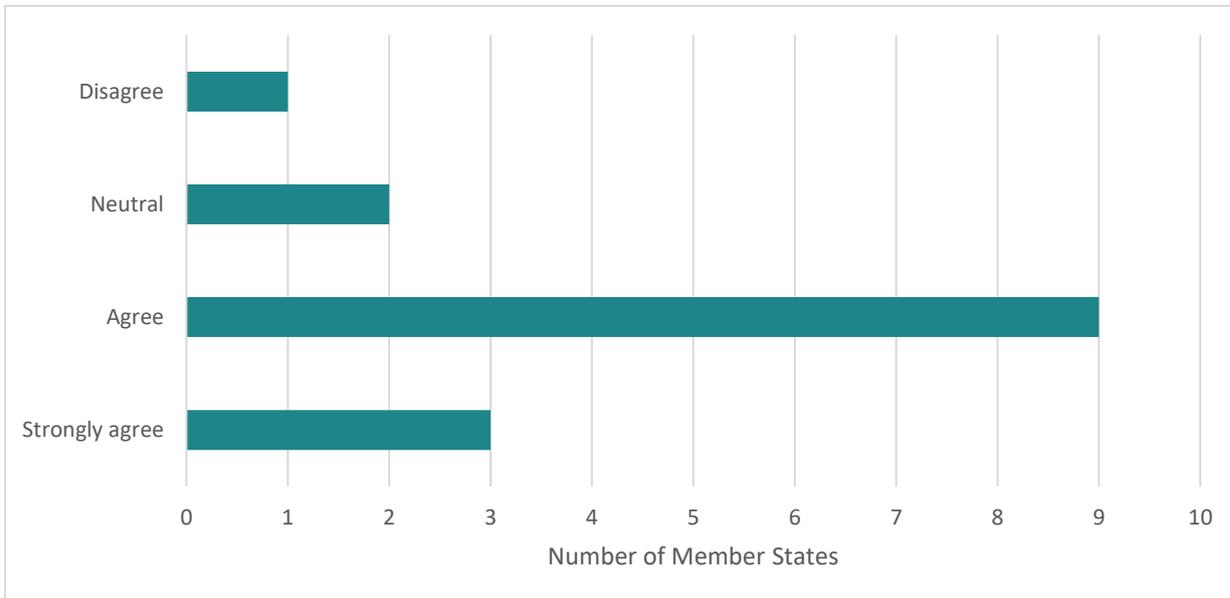


Figure 12: Stakeholders would feel they had been able to participate effectively

Member States largely considered that stakeholders would agree they could share their views easily.

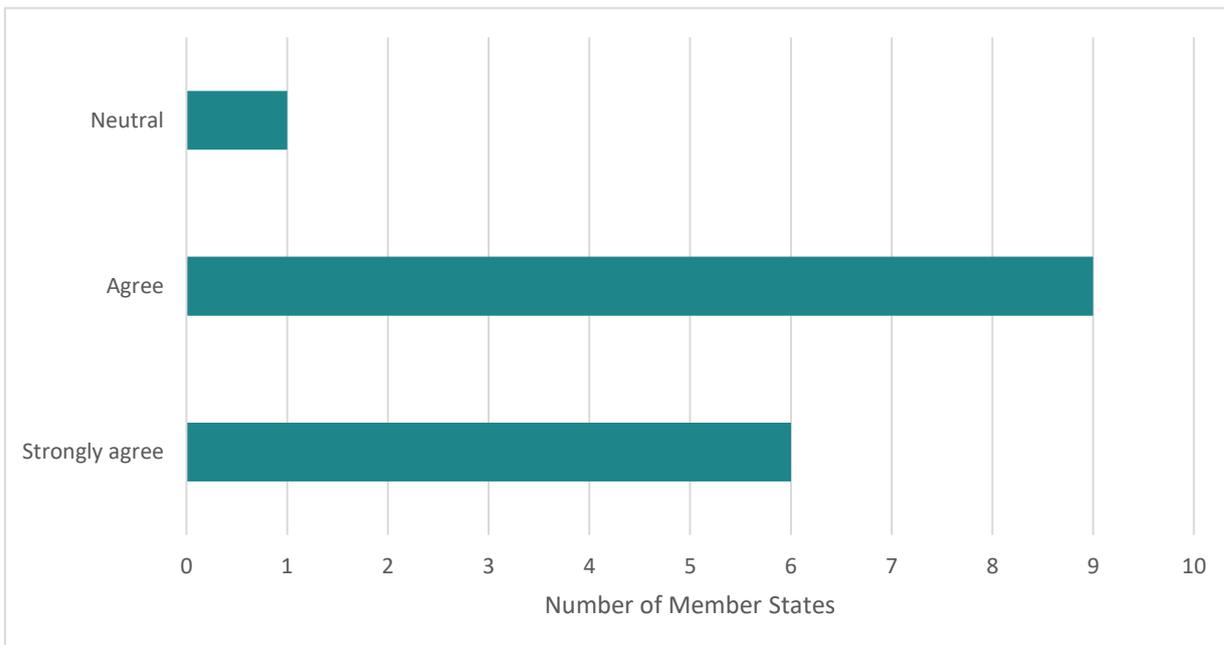


Figure 13: Stakeholders could provide their views easily

Most Member States also considered that stakeholders would agree they were heard and could contribute to the outcome.

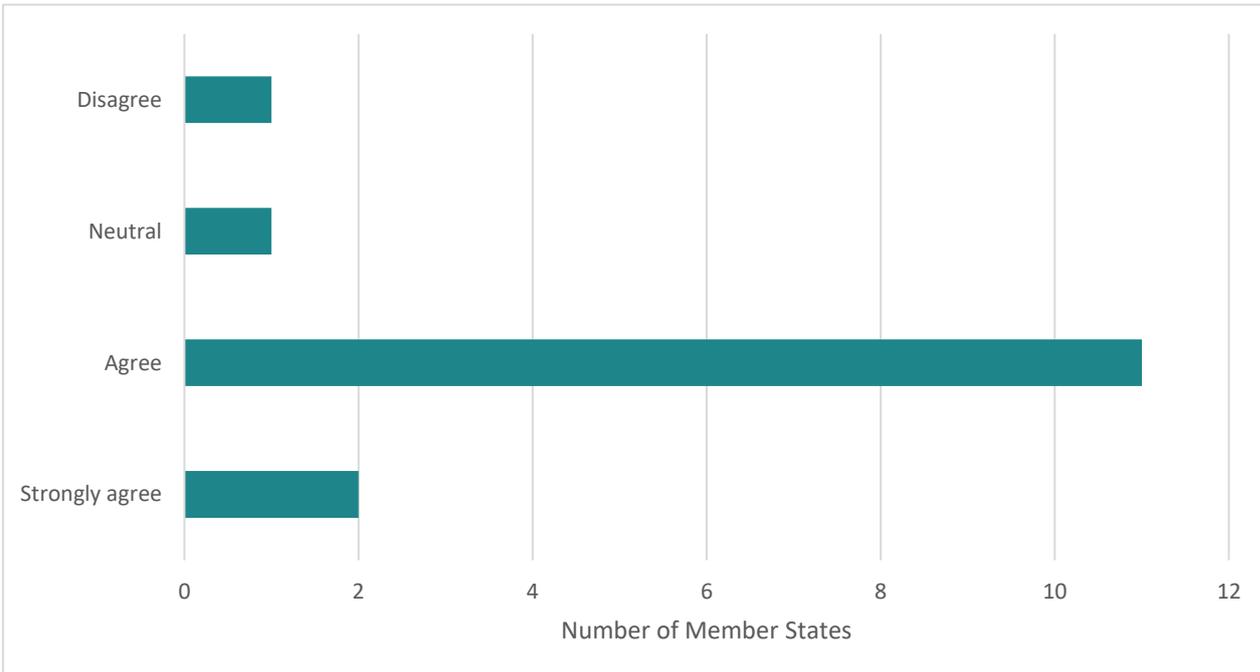


Figure 14: Stakeholders would feel they were heard and could contribute to the outcome

Member States in general believed that stakeholders would agree there was time and space to weigh options, develop common understanding with other stakeholders and appreciate respective roles and responsibilities

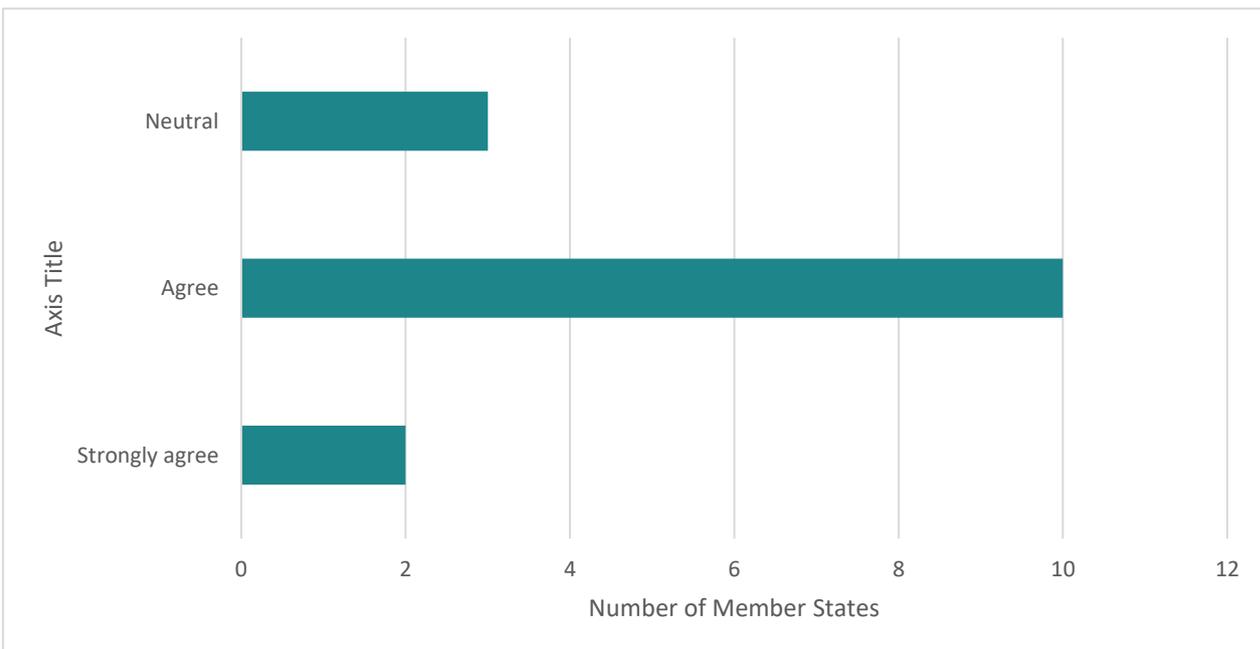


Figure 15: Stakeholders would feel there was time and space to weigh options, develop common understanding with other stakeholders and appreciate respective roles and responsibilities

Member States were also asked to consider whether stakeholders would agree there was sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice, and informed decisions

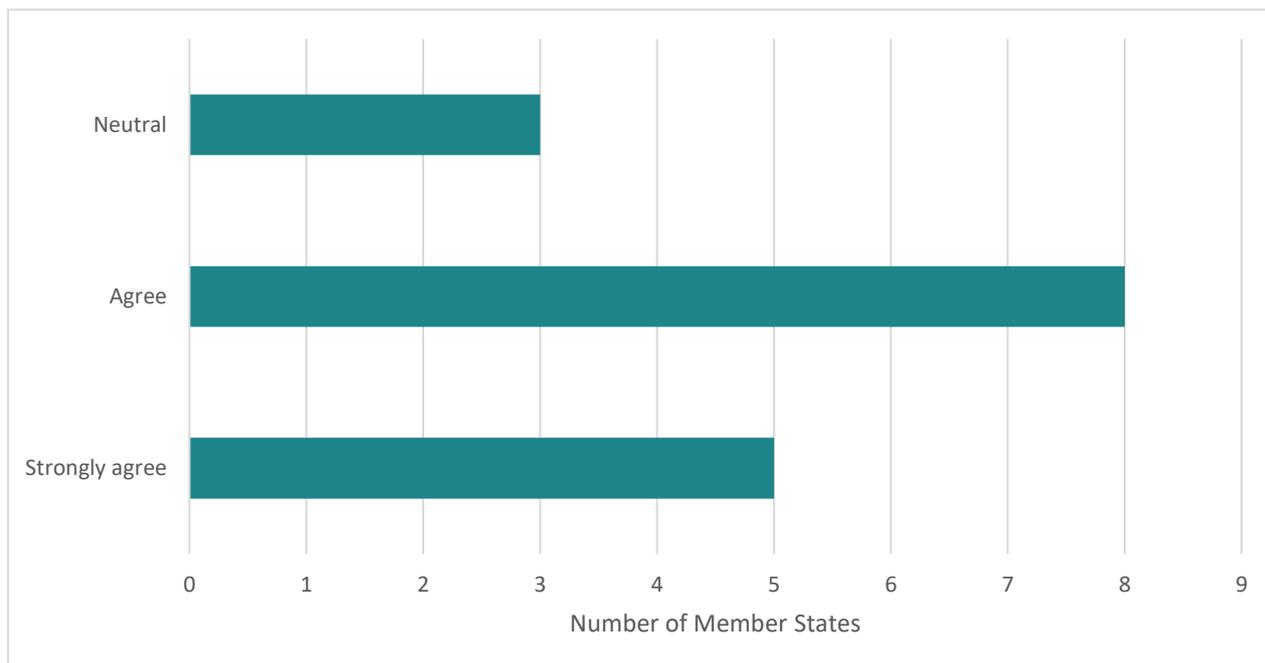


Figure 16: Stakeholders would feel there was sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice, and informed decisions

3.1.14. What would you do differently

The range of responses provided by Member States include performing multiple repetitions, providing a more structured way to collect feedback, and clearly explaining the MSP implications would have been beneficial. In addition, increasing participation to involve stakeholders and participation professionals earlier and enhancing interministerial cooperation would have been of benefit.

3.1.15. Barriers and challenges

Respondents identified several key barriers and challenges for effective participation. Time constraints and covid 19 were two significant factors. Others included limited participation and understanding amongst stakeholders about the scope, implications and complexity of the MSP, and a lack of funds, data and information.

3.1.16. Enablers of effective participation

Government-driven initiatives were seen by survey respondents to be effective enablers of participation. Using different methods, events and platforms were seen as highly effective. These came in the form of strategies including workshops and in person events to think outside the box, and online tools and social media. Other examples include making use of events convened by others and creating different events in the marine sectors and using green schools to engage young people. Independent chair people and mediators are important enablers. Finally, using pre-established networks of maritime stakeholders and authorities, and talking to stakeholders early helped make participation effective.

3.1.17. Key outcomes

There were several key outcomes of the national stakeholder consultation processes, such as creating a national framework for marine users and providing a clear, transparent and consistent policy direction. Promoting sustainable development and resource usage. Balancing the needs and coexistence of marine users and identifying cross-border issues between sectors. Increasing visibility amongst the public and effectively engaging stakeholders.

In addition to these, delivering on EEZ political targets, delimitating responsibilities of different authorities, and creating more innovative (temporary, conditional, overlapping) area designations were highlighted as important. As well as improving the reporting system and providing more space for nature and renewable energy through an adaptive holistic management process.

3.1.18. Stakeholder involvement contributions

Two Member States responded that stakeholders contributed to all the outcomes. However, all Member States noted ways that they had contributed by providing suggestions, verifying information and evidence, highlighting elements not sufficiently addressed within the plan and helping create a shared understanding of socio-ecological systems.

3.1.19. Negative effects of stakeholder involvement

Six Member States didn't see any negative effects around involving stakeholders. However, three identified that the process was time and resource heavy. Two Member States discussed difficulties arising from conflicting stakeholder interests and contributions. Additionally, a lack of interest and understanding from stakeholders and governance complexities presented issues. Finally, some stakeholders withdrew their involvement to defend positions on other policies.

3.2. Survey 2 – Stakeholders

Forty stakeholders responded to survey 2. These came from seventeen different countries. Ten of these came from the private sector and nine came from NGOs. Out of all the respondents, twenty-eight came from a Member States who replied to survey one.

3.2.1. Information and views

How were you able to input your views?

Stakeholders were asked what face-to-face methods were available for them to provide their views.

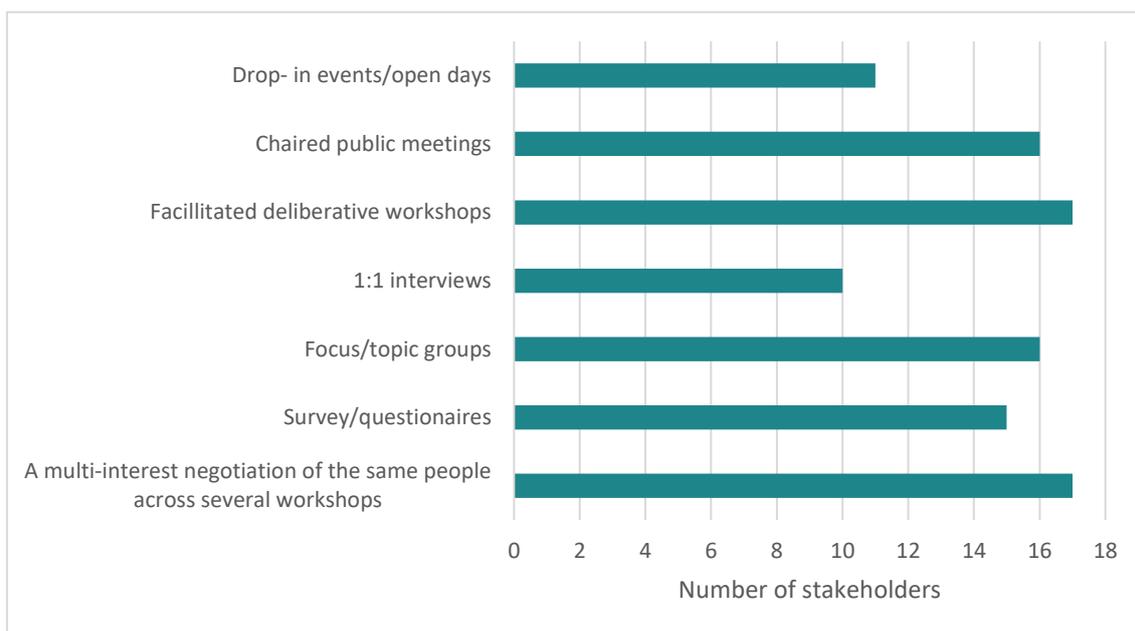


Figure 17: Face-to-face methods

Other methods available to give information and views included:

- private meetings with government bodies, such as a regional government listening to views
- participating as a maritime professional, attending info sessions given by the maritime authority and via the North Sea Council
- participating in the consultation process, writing submissions and a MEDAC members survey.

However, some stakeholders said that there had been little to no engagement, particularly face to face engagement, during the process.

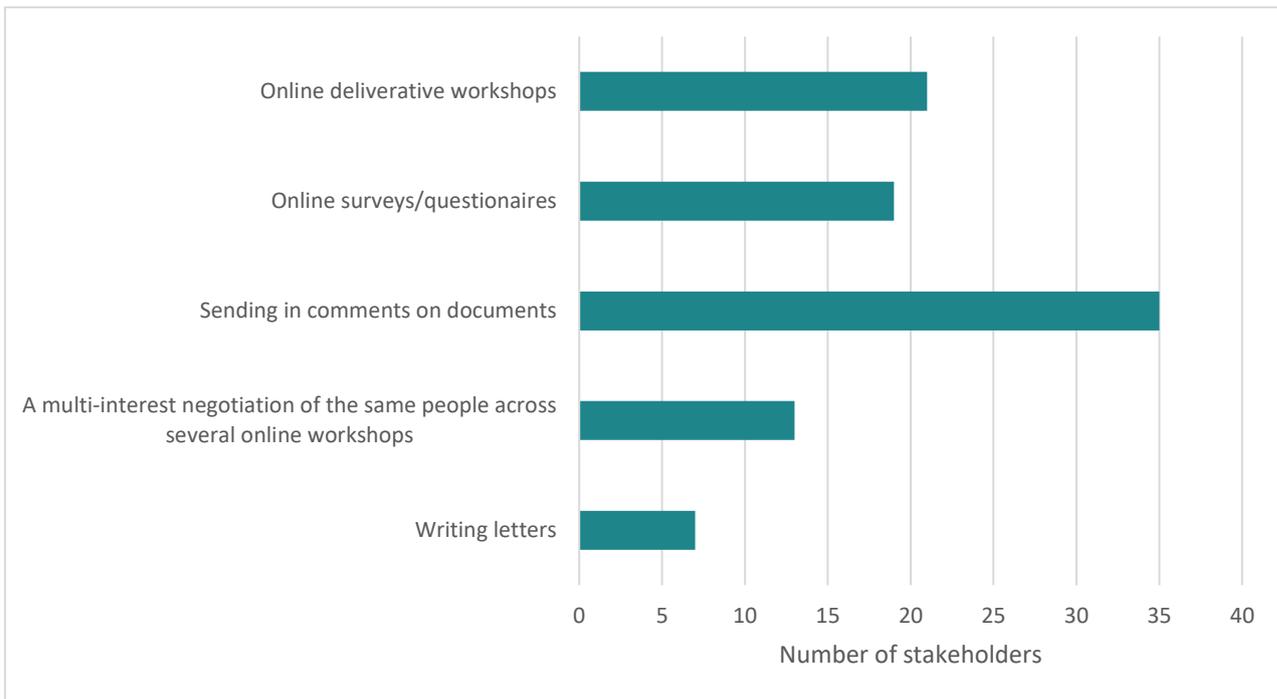


Figure 18: Online methods

How was what you said used and by who

Twenty-three believed that their inputs were used by several authorities, including fisheries representatives, the pleasure craft industry and the EU/EC. The survey responses indicated that stakeholders understood the information was used in reports, to support national level discussions, to revise and simplify documents, and to implement multi-use ambitions. Thirteen stakeholders did not think or did not know if their results were used in a meaningful way.

3.2.2. Participation

Stakeholders were asked to what extent they agree with the survey statements presented in the figures below. To start with, Stakeholders were asked to what extent they agree they could provide their views easily, to which more than half agreed or strongly agreed. However, six disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

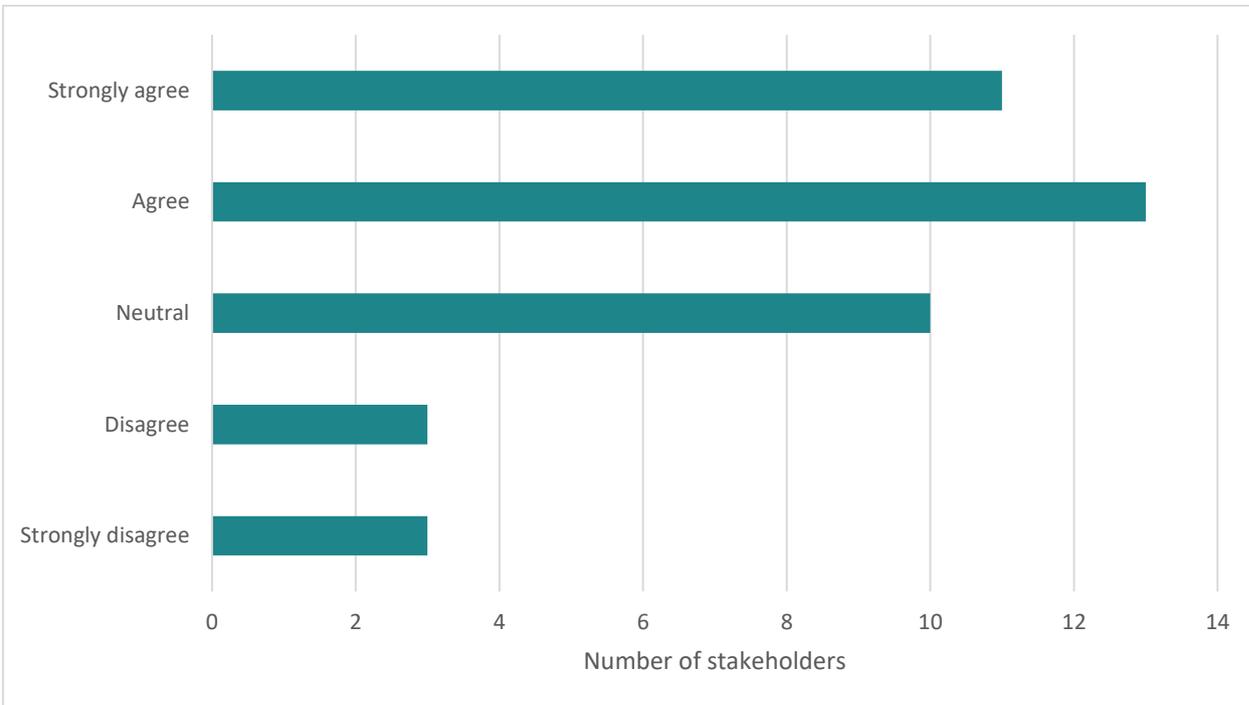


Figure 19: We could provide our views easily

Stakeholders were then asked to what extent they agreed with the statement we were heard and made a difference to the outcome. Half the respondents were either neutral or disagreed with this statement, the other half agreed they were heard and made a difference.

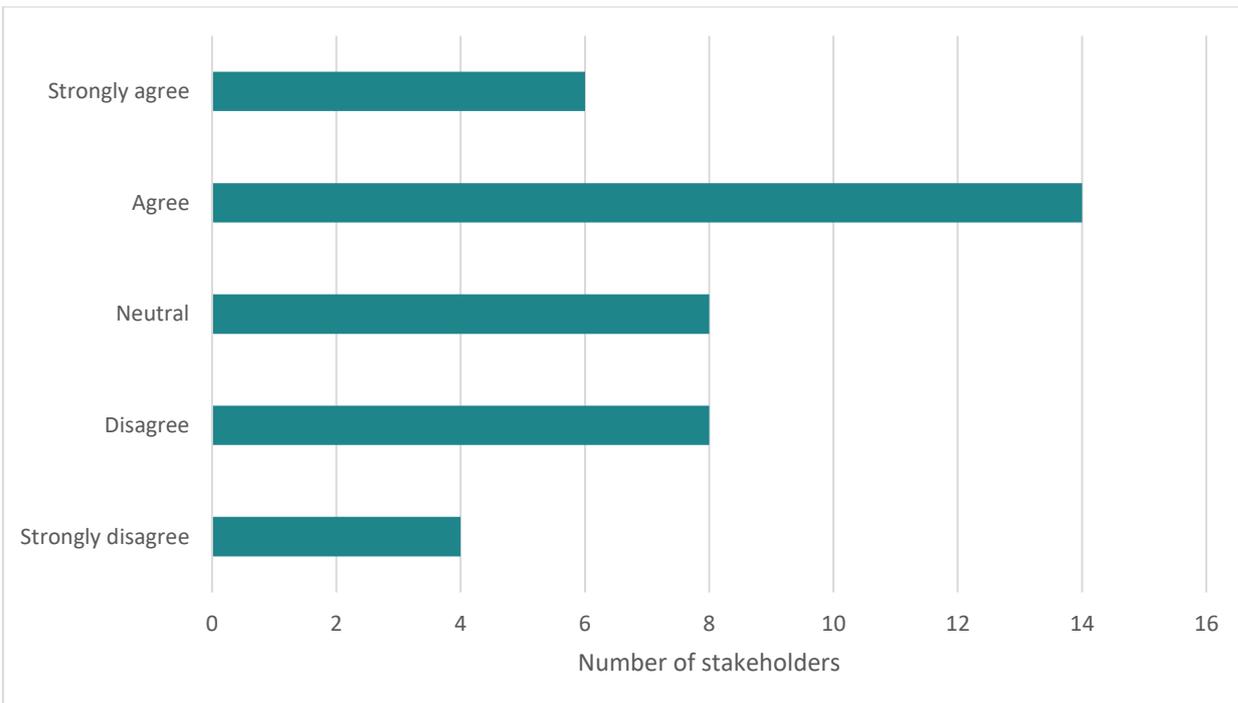


Figure 20: We were heard and made a difference to the outcome

Stakeholders were also asked to what extent they agreed that they were satisfied to have been able to participate effectively. 18 respondents agreed they were satisfied they could participate effectively, the remaining respondents were either neutral or disagreed with this statement.

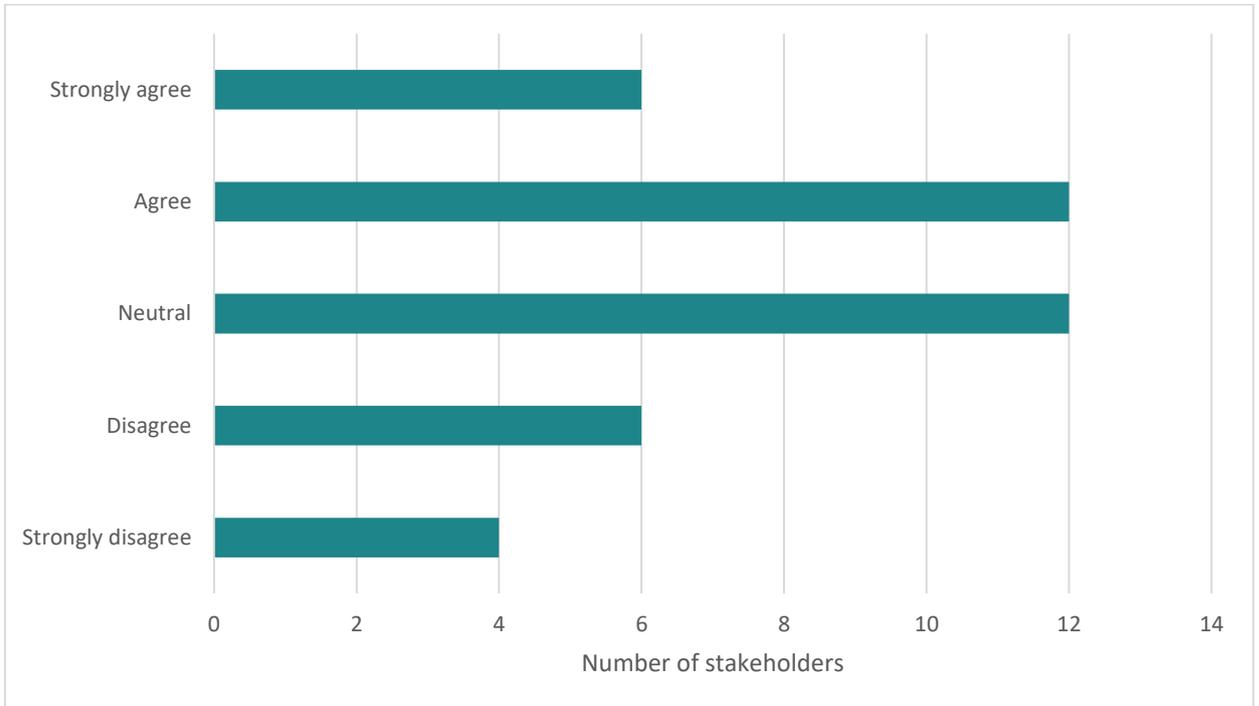


Figure 21: We are satisfied we've been able to participate effectively

Half of the stakeholders that responded also agreed that they believed there was sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and informed decisions. Approximately a quarter were neutral in their response, with the remaining quarter disagreeing.

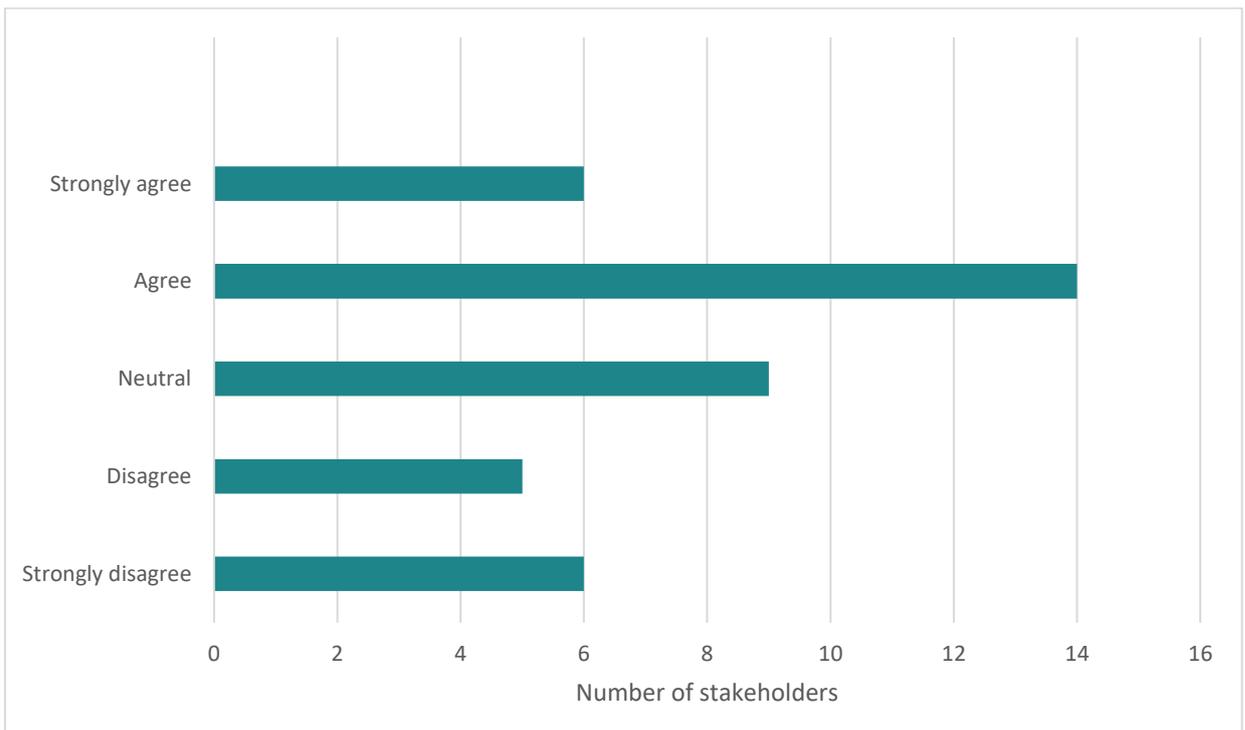


Figure 22: There was sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice, and informed decisions

Finally, stakeholders were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement that there was time and space to weigh options, develop a common understanding with other stakeholders and appreciate the respective roles and responsibilities. Approximately equal numbers agreed and disagreed with the statement, with three remaining neutral in their response.

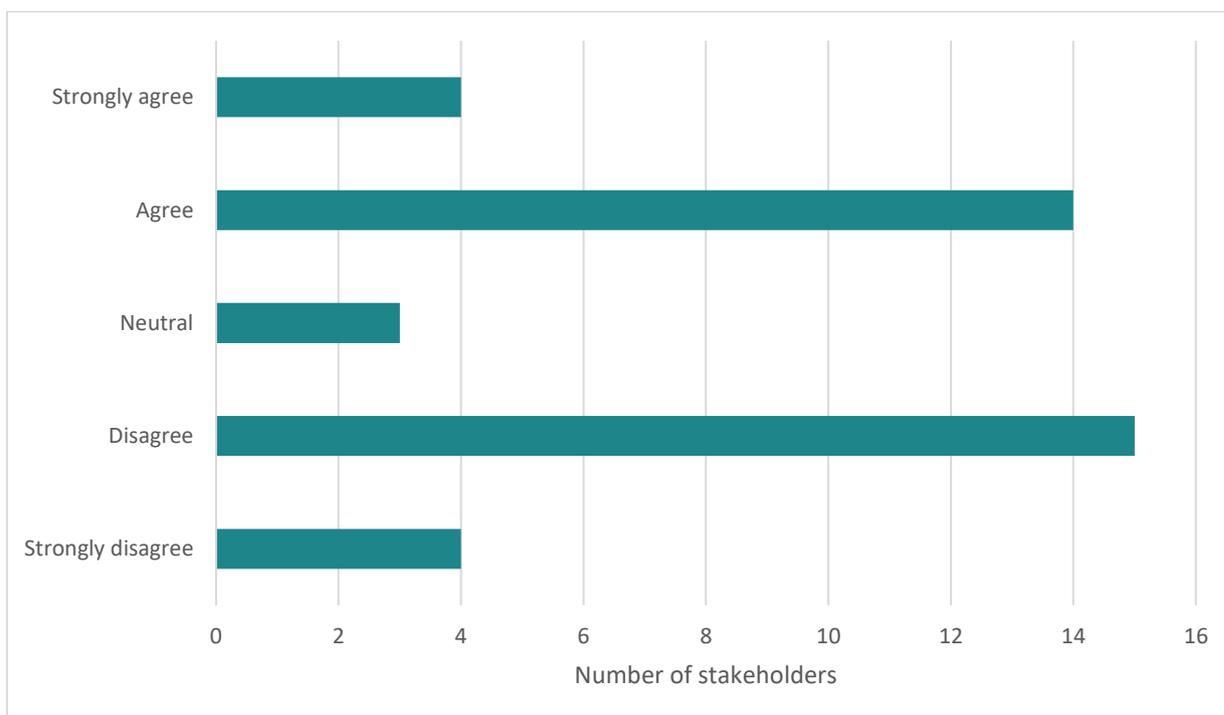


Figure 23: There was time and space to weigh options, develop common understanding with other stakeholders and appreciate respective roles and responsibilities

Other comments suggest that the participatory process was insufficient, and in particular where cultural heritage interests were not adequately included. Legally required information was missing from some, and there was little to no time to study them. In some cases, it was felt that only select stakeholders were consulted and there were significant challenges to improve interactions between land and sea.

3.2.3. What worked well?

Survey respondents shared that providing communication and information in clear, accessible, well-organised and distributed ways was a strategy that worked well. Engaging and listening to a wide range of stakeholders within workshops where they could share their experiences, and the ability to send in documents and feedback were considered positive. That institutional forums met often enough and that there were high quality civil servants was felt to be important. Additionally, national advisory groups and using a community of practice approach was highly beneficial. Respondents identified positives, including policies giving direction, addressing shipping safety, sticking to the timetable.

However, three stakeholders either did not believe there was much that worked well or could not identify what worked well.

3.2.4. What would you do differently?

Stakeholders identified a range of approaches that they believed would be of benefit. Such as including more diverse stakeholders, holding more workshops, using independent, professional facilitation, starting the engagement process earlier and considering all the stakeholders equal would have been useful.

Additionally, designating a leader to make decisions, building a panel of experts, having stricter nature protection and long-term viewpoints on developments that affect spatial planning were also identified.

3.2.5. Barriers and Challenges

A lack of transparency and participation in decision making was a significant barrier for effective participation that stakeholders identified. A lack of equity and inclusivity which meant that not all stakeholders were reached or had barriers to overcome to be able to contribute, such as language barriers. Conflicts between marine users and a lack of cross sector collaboration were also identified. A lack of feedback and engagement from authorities as well as political pressure influencing the decision making. Resource constraints of time and administrative capacity. In addition, insufficient study around marine-land context and interactions, and differing levels of knowledge amongst participants was also challenging. Lastly, the lack of specificity or tailoring the plan to each sector prevented stakeholders seeing how they could contribute.

However, four stakeholders didn't believe there were any barriers to effective participation.

3.2.6. Enablers of effective participation

Open, transparent, well organised workshops were seen as enablers of effective participation. A range of enthusiastic and interested stakeholders, good networks, and individual invitations, and industry and organization cooperation also contributed. Knowledge and necessity about the MSP to be addressed, as well as funding and private company initiatives were also identified as enablers.

However, two stakeholders stated that they did not know of any enablers and five chose not to comment.

3.2.7. Compliance with MSP Directive

Stakeholders were asked to what extent they believed the stakeholder engagement process complied with the MSP Directive for effective participation. More than half of the respondents considered that the stakeholder process either failed to meet the Directive’s requirements or only met the minimum requirement.

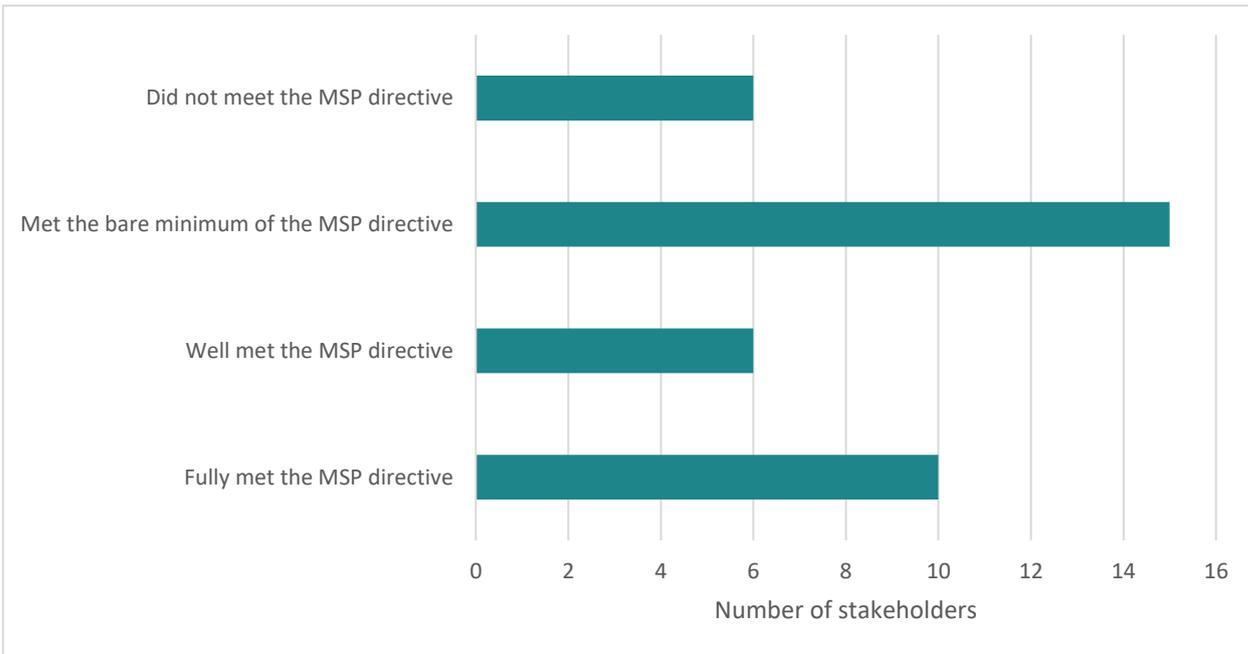


Figure 24: To what extent do you feel the process complied with MSP directives for effective participation

3.2.8. Stakeholder involvement in MSP

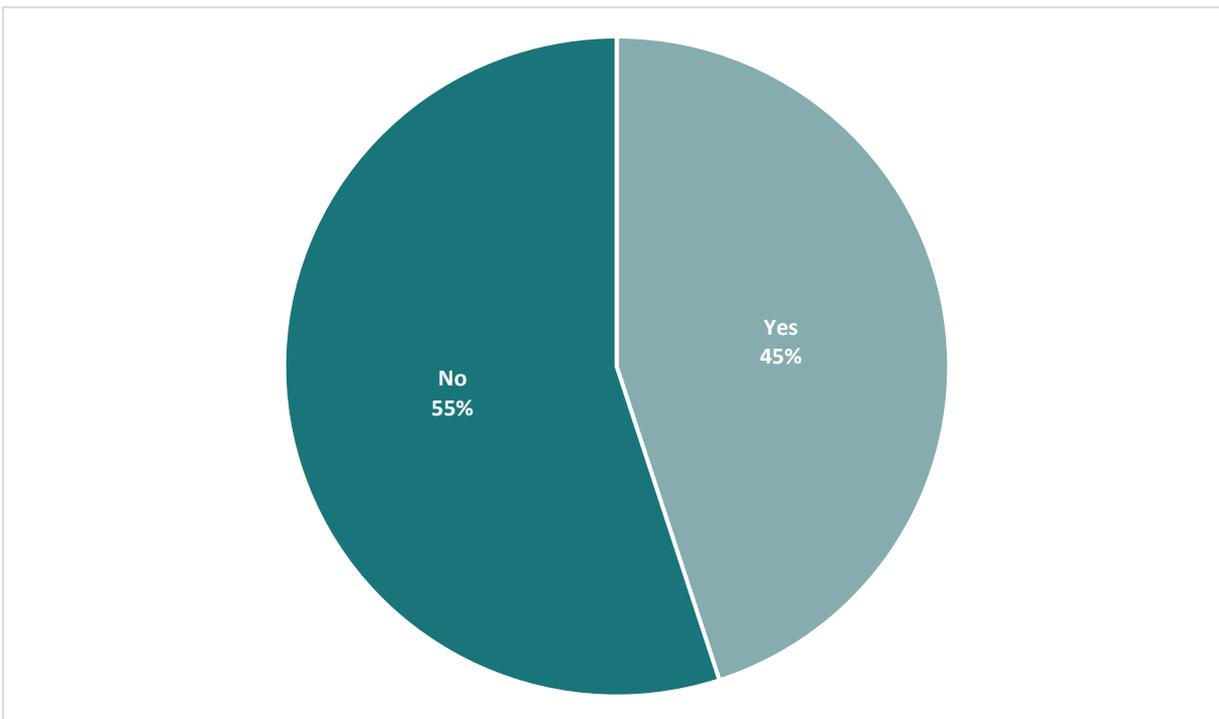


Figure 25: Have you been involved with MSP implementation and how

Those who participated did so in several ways including:

- as an advisor
- an NGO representative
- a supplier of information
- as a civil servant
- supporting the national authority
- creating the approaches
- participating in the pilot projects
- through an existing North Sea consultation mechanism

4. Observations and discussion

We start with the assumption that every country is seeking to do their best within their capacity, resources, and knowledge of good practice.

4.1. Survey 1

4.1.1. Good practice within the context of consultation

The results from survey 1 identified that several Member States used professional specialists within their stakeholder engagement strategies. These came in the form of independent third parties, working as professional, experienced facilitators.

Eight Member States used facilitated deliberative workshops to help build consensus on factors and views concerning the MSP.

All Member States had strong ethics around involving others and thirteen Member States had a wide inclusion of different stakeholders and sectors to comment within the process.

Eight Member States used professional, experienced facilitators within their core decision making groups. In addition, there were three Member States in particular, which included a diverse range of stakeholder voices, such as small-scale fisheries. The sector of small-scale fishing was included and considered within the MSP by thirteen Member States and was identified by one Member State as a key strategy that worked well within the engagement process.

Six Member States had twenty to thirty people in their decision-making groups.

Twelve Member States, out of sixteen, created and implemented a stakeholder participation and engagement plan.

4.1.2. Limitations from the perspective of shared decision making

From a perspective of shared decision making, there was a trend of centralised power during decision-making.

For example, inclusion in decision making was often limited to public bodies. Ten Member States included only governmental bodies in their decision-making process. Whilst this is common practice, there are significant benefits to MSP planning when effectively sharing decision power with other interests and communities, such as better environmental outcomes.

In decision-making groups, two Member States had three to five people, and another two Member States had roughly ten people making decisions for others.

In some Member States, the government authority represented the views of their sector stakeholders in the decision-making and engagement. For example, one Member State assumed the government fishing department could speak on behalf of fishers when there are very divergent views between regulators, different sizes of fishing enterprises, inshore and offshore fleets as well as target species.

Many Member States had strong ethics and principles relating to stakeholder engagement and involvement, however, not all these principles were put into practice, as some countries fell back on top-down strategies. As a result, the power dynamics around MSP decision making were retained in top-down methods, rather than using strategies that would share power. However, eight Member States involved the full breadth of marine sectors in the decision-making process.

4.1.3. Evidence of good practice in the context of shared decision-making

However, there was also evidence of shared decision making within the MSP. Out of sixteen Member States, one used professionally designed and facilitated consensus building which was facilitated by a member of the MSP team.

Within this Member States’ process, the decision-making group of thirty was multi-stakeholder/multi-interest across the breath of interests and types of organisations. Conciliation and conflict management was used to negotiate a way forwards within this process and there was evidence of systems thinking being utilised.

4.1.4. Self-rated score

When assessing the responses to survey 1 provided by the Member States, particularly those in Section 3.1.13 - ‘What would the Stakeholders say’, an overall score of how Member States believed Stakeholders would view the participation and engagement process was calculated.

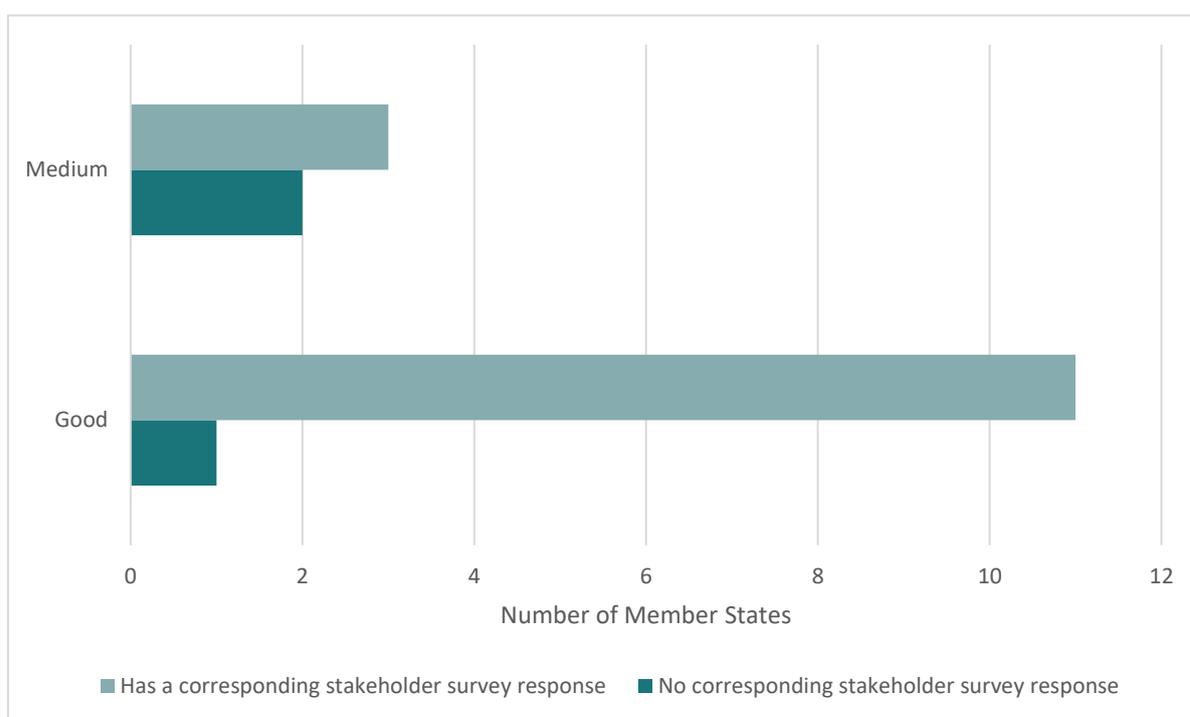


Figure 26: Member States’ rating the quality of their stakeholder engagement

4.2. Survey 2

4.2.1. Good practice

The results from survey two identified that twenty-one stakeholders, from almost all survey 2 Member States, identified that there were online, deliberative workshops that they were able to attend. Additionally, seventeen stakeholders said that in-person, facilitated workshops had been run.

Twenty-three stakeholders knew how their comments and views had been used during the MSP process.

Four stakeholders from three Member States didn't believe that there was anything that could be done to improve the process. Three stakeholders said that there weren't any barriers to their participation.

One stakeholder identified that a highlight and enabler of the engagement process was that the facilitators were trusted by the participants during the online and in person workshops.

4.2.2. Stakeholder concerns

The results from survey 2 identified that three stakeholders believed that involvement in the decision-making process should have started in the early stages of spatial planning with more diverse stakeholders.

Most stakeholders encountered difficulties when trying to participate in the discussions and decision making. Ten stakeholders from nine Member States indicated that more local engagement and including views from a variety of different sectors was needed.

After providing their views, thirteen stakeholders from ten Member States were unsure of how their comments contributed to and guided the formulation and planning of the MSP.

4.2.3. Self-rated score

When assessing the stakeholder responses to Survey 2, particularly those in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.7, an overall score of how Stakeholders rated their inclusion in the participation and engagement process was calculated.

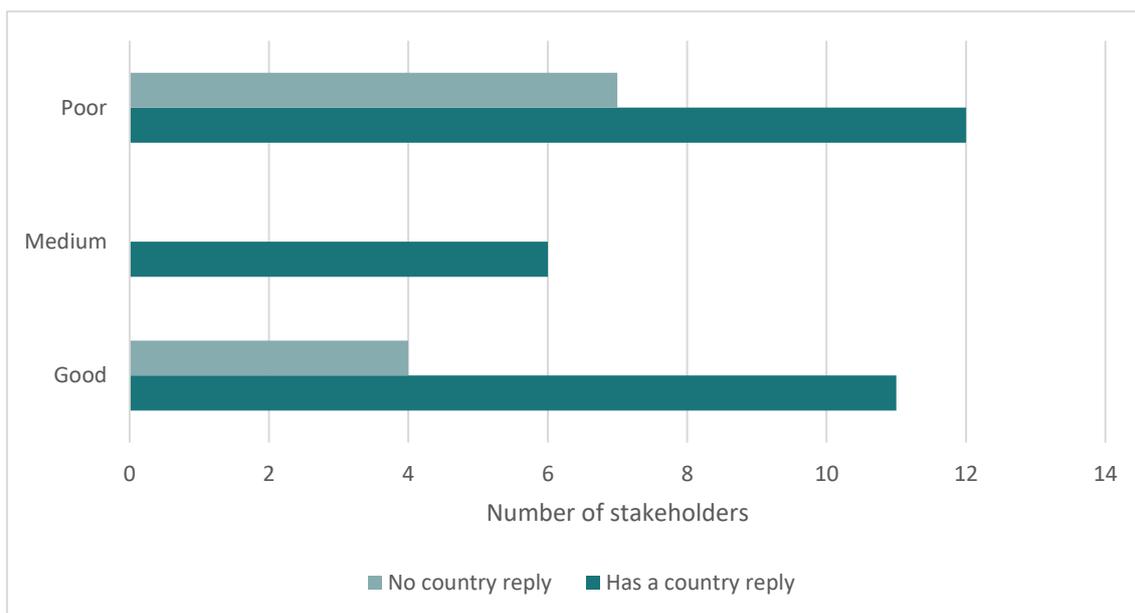


Figure 27: Stakeholder responses rating their inclusion

4.3. Correlations between the surveys

Based on the self-rated scores described above, Table 4 below illustrates the Member States' perceptions of how well the MSP process engaged stakeholders vs the views of those stakeholders they were engaging.

Table 4: Government and stakeholder ratings

Country	Overall Government Rating of MSP Engagement	Number of Stakeholder Responses	Overall Stakeholder Rating of MSP Engagement
Country 1	Good	4	Good/inconsistent
Country 2	Good	1	Medium
Country 3	Good	1	Medium
Country 4	Medium	2	Poor
Country 5	Good	1	Poor
Country 6	Medium	1	Poor
Country 7	Good	3	Poor/inconsistent
Country 8	Good	2	Inconsistent
Country 9	Good	1	Good
Country 10	Good	1	Medium
Country 11	Good	8	Inconsistent
Country 12	Good	1	Good
Country 13	Medium	4	Inconsistent
Country 14	Good	None	None
Country 15	Medium	None	None
Country 16	Medium	None	None
Country 17	Good	3	Poor/inconsistent
Country 18	None	1	Poor
Country 19	None	3	Poor/inconsistent
Country 20	None	3	Poor/inconsistent

For stakeholder replies marked as either 'good/inconsistent' or 'Poor/inconsistent', it identified replies that were predominantly 'poor' or predominantly 'good', but also contained a strong, opposing view from another stakeholder. Stakeholder responses marked only as 'inconsistent' were due to multiple stakeholders replying, with conflicting views on the engagement process.

Three Member States from survey 1 did not have a corresponding stakeholder response to survey 2. Four stakeholders within survey 2 did not have a corresponding Member State response to survey 1.

Comparing the views expressed by the Member States and stakeholders (Figure 28) demonstrated that, overall, there was a significant mismatch between how Member States thought they had done in stakeholder engagement, and how stakeholders themselves perceived the process.

Alignment and partial alignment of the views between Member States and Stakeholders only represented approximately 30%, with no alignment and poor alignment accounting for nearly 70%. However, it is important to note that this larger proportion also includes the inconsistent responses.

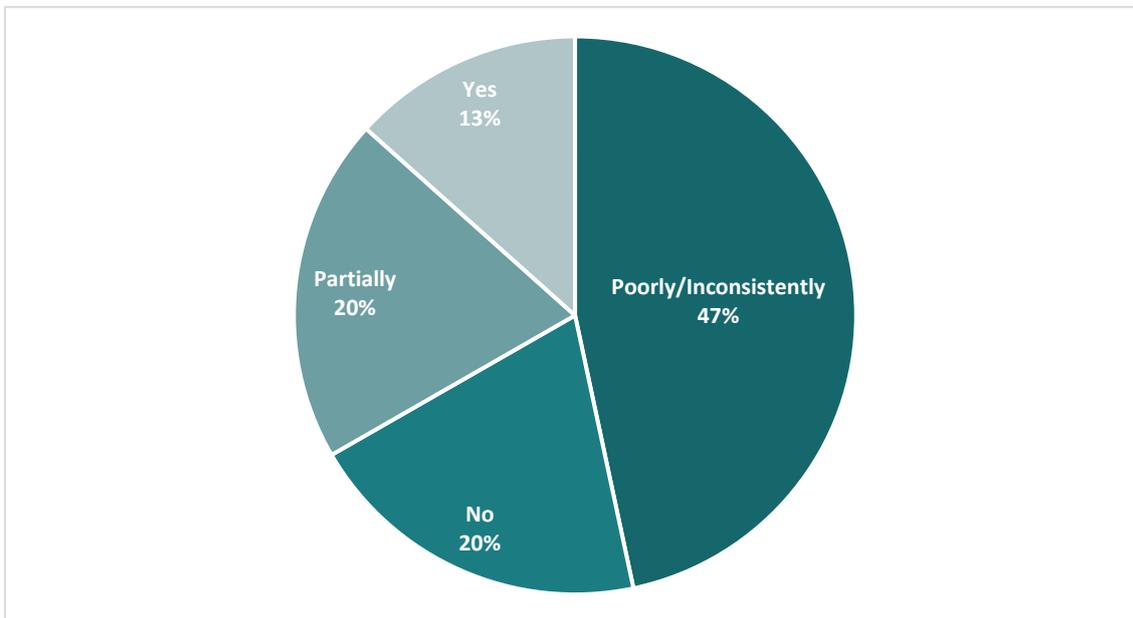


Figure 28: Did stakeholder and Member State views align?

However, the legitimacy paradox may serve to explain this disparity in opinion between stakeholders and countries (Fudge, 2018)⁹. The legitimacy paradox is the phenomena where, as participation efforts increase, stakeholder's perception of the legitimacy of the process decreases.

MSP presents a significant challenge, and extraordinary work has been undertaken by all Member States to engage stakeholders within this process. However, to help overcome the legitimacy paradox, switching from a consultation methodology to 'shared decision' making, characterised by procedural justice can reap dividends. This can be undertaken by sharing decision making power with individuals from different sectors to co-create and decide the best way forward alongside governmental bodies.

5. Recommendations

This section builds on the findings from both surveys. It translates the challenges identified by Member State MSP authorities and the concerns raised by stakeholders into a coherent set of recommendations aimed at improving stakeholder engagement and shared decision-making in future MSP processes.

Synthesis of Feedback from Member States and Stakeholders

Survey 1 responses from Member State MSP authorities highlighted internal challenges such as limited resources, lack of structured engagement plans, and difficulties coordinating across ministries. One authority stated, "We lacked sufficient resources and time to engage stakeholders meaningfully." Another noted, "The complexity of legislation and inter-ministerial coordination made inclusive planning difficult."

Survey 2 responses from stakeholders revealed concerns about the quality and impact of their involvement. Many felt their input was solicited too late, lacked transparency, or was not meaningfully incorporated into decision-making. One stakeholder commented, "We were consulted, but it was too late to influence the plan meaningfully." Another said, "There was no explanation of how our input would be used—it felt like a tick-box exercise."

Stakeholders also noted underrepresentation of key sectors and insufficient facilitation: "Only select stakeholders were consulted, and it wasn't clear why others were left out." and "The process lacked neutrality. A skilled facilitator could have helped balance the discussion."

Drivers and Benefits of Best Practice Participation

Research and practice around participation has advanced considerably and professionalised over the last 20 years. When evidence-based best practices are used, it reaps dividends for the quality of decisions made, legitimacy of process, satisfaction of stakeholders, and quality of outcomes.

In marine spatial planning, the drivers for a stronger understanding and good practices include:

- Increasing recognition in international policy instruments—such as the Aarhus Convention (public rights in environmental decision-making), the EU MSP Directive (Article 9 on stakeholder involvement), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (participatory ecosystem-based management)—that stakeholders and communities have the right to be involved in decisions affecting marine environments.
- The need to integrate different agendas—such as offshore renewable energy, fisheries, biodiversity protection, and shipping—to achieve multi-benefit outcomes. For example, aligning offshore wind development with fisheries zones and marine protected areas can reduce conflict and create co-benefits like artificial reef habitats. Without integration, unforeseen consequences can include displacement of fishing communities, navigational risks, or cumulative environmental impacts
- Deliberative, participatory processes—such as stakeholder workshops, participatory GIS mapping, and scenario planning—lead to better decisions by using local knowledge and building trust. For instance, in the Baltic Sea, co-design sessions helped reconcile shipping routes with conservation priorities, avoiding costly plan revisions later. Benefits include increased legitimacy, reduced conflict, and more resilient spatial plans.

The need for best practice was clearly reflected in the views that survey respondents held and were discussed when participants were asked to reflect on the enablers, barriers and challenges.

As seen in section 4.1.2 and elsewhere, countries identified challenges surrounding MSP including complexity, diversity of views, and conflicts between sectors and stakeholders. However, survey respondents identified key strategies to mitigate these, including:

- engaging with stakeholders early on whilst options are open,
- appointing independent facilitators to design and deliver participation;
- hosting multistakeholder workshops; and
- fostering cooperation.

Identified Support Needs

This research found a gap between what Member States perceived to be effective stakeholder engagement in MSP, and the experience of other stakeholders. Understanding and applying the evidence for best practice participation will help to overcome these challenges.

To address the gaps identified, support is needed in the following areas:

- Structured stakeholder engagement planning
- Professional facilitation and consensus-building techniques
- Early and inclusive stakeholder involvement
- Cross-sectoral coordination, including land-sea interactions
- Transparent communication of MSP implications
- Monitoring and evaluation of participatory processes
- Understanding procedural justice and power dynamics
- Embedding ethics of empowering governance
- Commissioning professional design and facilitation

Expected Outcomes of Enhanced Support

Providing targeted support in these areas is expected to lead to:

- Improved quality and legitimacy of MSP decisions
- Greater stakeholder satisfaction and trust
- More inclusive and representative planning processes
- Enhanced capacity of MSP authorities to manage complex stakeholder dynamics
- Better environmental and social outcomes through co-designed solutions

Best Practice and Procedural Justice Principles

Best practice involves fostering co-design and delivery of change with multiple stakeholders and communities, using a collaborative, power sharing and inclusive ethos.

Procedural justice principles ensure fairness and inclusivity in decision-making. Key principles include:

- Contextual and scalar - Engagement should reflect local, regional and national contexts.
- Conflict resolution – Structured processes to mediate disputes between sectors.
- Neutral facilitation – Independent moderators to balance power dynamics.
- Free, prior, and informed consent – Particularly relevant for coastal communities and Indigenous groups.
- Integrating knowledge systems – Combining scientific, local and traditional knowledge.
- Adaptable and flexible processes – Ability to adjust engagement as new issues emerge.¹⁰

Applying these principles helps shift from “power over” to “power with,” ensuring decisions are co-created rather than imposed.

For robust MSP governance and justice, Member States and the wider MSP Community need support and guidance to:

- understand procedural justice and power dynamics
- shift from an ethos of ‘power over’, to ‘power with’ (sometimes described as ‘deciding with, not for’), and
- embed ethics of empowering governance
- Recognize that collecting large volumes of views is not equivalent to co-creation
- Adopt a reflective learning and continuous improvement
- Commission professional design and facilitation to avoid ad hoc practices

Many MSP practitioners are unaware of the benefits of broadening representation in decision-making. Research shows that power-sharing through good practice results in better outputs (ambition, agreement, stringency) and ultimately better outcomes.

The importance of power sharing and utilising appropriately skilled individuals to design, manage and facilitate the process was especially evident in the outcomes of the surveys and, whilst for many countries this survey reflected on their experience of conducting the MSP process for the first time, others are working on 2nd or even 3rd iterations of their MSP.

Within the scope of this research, we were unable to analyse if countries had changed their practices through these iterations, but it would be interesting to find out if and how they did.

In summary, this research found ambition and strong ethics and some examples of good quality practice. However, there is a way to go before effective and just participatory procedures and governance are common practice and embedded as business as usual.

6. References

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- ⁹Fudge, M. (2018) Participation and representation in governing multiple-use marine ecosystems, *Maritime and ocean affairs* 10(4). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/18366503.2018.1536314>
- ¹⁰ Ruano-Chamorro C., Gurney G. G., Cinner J. E. (2022) Advancing procedural justice in conservation. *Conservation Letters*. 15(3):e12861. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12861>

7. Annexes

7.1. Annex 1: Survey 1 – Member States

Enabling Marine Spatial Planning

This survey is part of research commissioned by DG MARE.

We want to hear from organisations leading Marine Spatial Planning across the EU. The focus is around governance arrangements and how other people were involved in Marine Spatial Planning.

We may want to quote what you say in this or potential follow-on research, but it will not be attributed to you, your organisation or country.

Responding to this survey:

This survey will take approx. 15 minutes to complete

The survey contains a mix of open and closed questions

This survey is available until midnight on the [Date].

You can look through the survey before responding, return to earlier pages without losing your work, and complete it in more than one session.

If you have technical difficulties completing this survey, please alert [name].

Consenting

This research is being conducted by Dialogue Matters (DM) - a neutral third party that designs, facilitates, and evaluates participation and conducts social research in environmental contexts.

Your participation is based on voluntary, informed, and fluid consent. You are free to withdraw the information you have provided at any time, without having to give justification. If you wish to withdraw your responses, please email [name].

Your responses may be quoted in reporting to DG MARE but will not be attributed - unless you specify you are willing to have your information attributed to you. You will be able to consent to this at the end of the survey.

Once passed to DM, the information from this survey will be held in secure file storage with two-factor authentication on password protected devices. Data will be stored for a maximum of six months after the completion of the research and will then be destroyed. Only [name of organisation running the survey] and Dialogue Matters will have access to the raw data. DG MARE will be provided with processed and anonymised data in reporting.

The information you provide may be used by DG MARE to consider how best to support good practices in participation related to Marine Spatial Planning.

You can view DM's privacy notice [here](#).

Do you consent to participate in this survey, given the information above?

_ Yes

_ No

About You:

1. Your name?
2. Your occupation?
3. Organisation?
4. Email address:
5. Organisation type:
Central Government
Government agency or public body/public authority
Other
Other – please specify:
6. Your role in relation to the project

The context for Marine Spatial planning

1. What area does the MSP cover? (for example, all inshore waters, all territorial waters, part of the above)

Country:

Only the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

Including all inshore waters

Including all territorial waters

Part of the above – please specify:

2. If possible, please provide a website link where we can find out more

3. What are the main objectives of the MSP in your country?

4. On the following scale, how complex are the MSP decisions being made?

Straightforward (e.g. low levels of uncertainty, sufficient good evidence to support decisions, few options to choose between, small number of interests with similar views).

Quite straightforward

Intermediate

Quite complex

Very complex (e.g. high levels of uncertainty, limited or conflicting evidence, multiple options, multiple and diverse stakeholders with contrasting perspectives).

5. Can you describe some of these complexities?

6. What are the main marine sectors and uses included in your MSP?

Fisheries
Small scale commercial fishing (inshore and under 10 m fleet)
Large scale commercial fishing
Aquaculture
Energy
Marine Renewables
Oil and gas
Shipping
Transport
Marine transport
Dredging and navigation
Ports and harbours
Recreation
Marine and coastal recreation and tourism
Comms
Cables and telecoms
Aggregates
Aggregate dredging for construction
Research
Research
Conservation
Marine habitat conservation
Marine species conservation
Other

Marine Spatial Planning: Involving Other Stakeholders

1. What ethics and principles guided the involvement of stakeholders/actors in the MSP?

2. Was a stakeholder/actor participation and engagement plan created?

Yes

No

If yes, can you describe it briefly?

3. Who is designing, facilitating, and managing the first round of the MSP participation and engagement process?

	Who is designing the process?	Who is facilitating the process?	Who is project managing the process?
Project officer/s with no previous experience			
Project officer trained in communication and engagement			
Project officer/s trained in the design and facilitation of participation			
Independent third-party professionals			
It is a collaboration between the project and the people who are engaging in the process			

Other (please specify):

4. Who is designing, facilitating, and managing participation and engagement in the ongoing MSP revision process?

	Who is designing the process?	Who is facilitating the process?	Who is project managing the process?
Project officer/s with no previous experience			
Project officer trained in communication and engagement			
Project officer/s trained in the design and facilitation of participation			
Independent third-party professionals			
It is a collaboration between the project and the people who are engaging in the process			

Other (please specify):

5. How many people were in the core decision-making group for the MSP (not including the people that were only consulted)?

6. Who was/is in the group making the MSP decisions?

Please tick the following organisation types:

Public sector
Central Government
Government Environmental Agencies
Other Government Agencies/Other Governmental Bodies
Area governance/authorities
Non-Government Organisations (NGO) (Professional organisations with charitable status and paid staff)
Conservation
Recreation
Resource users
Fisheries
Small scale commercial fishing (inshore and under 10m fleet)
Large scale commercial fishing
Aquaculture
Energy
Marine Renewables
Oil and gas
Shipping
Transport
Marine transport
Dredging and navigation
Ports and harbours
Recreation
Marine and coastal recreation and tourism
Comms
Cables and telecoms
Aggregate
Aggregate dredging for construction
Research
Research
Conservation
Marine habitat conservation
Marine species conservation
Other

7. How does this decision-making group make decisions?

Professionally facilitated consensus building

Un-facilitated consensus

Voting

By the strongest voices in the group

Other (please specify)

8. Who provided information and views:

Public sector
Central Government
Government Environmental Agencies
Other Government Agencies/Other Governmental Bodies
Area governance/authorities
Non-Government Organisations (NGO) (Professional organisations with charitable status and paid staff)
Conservation
Recreation
Resource users
Fisheries
Small scale commercial fishing (inshore and under 10 m fleet
Large scale commercial fishing
Aquaculture
Energy
Marine Renewables
Oil and gas
Shipping
Transport
Marine transport
Dredging and navigation
Ports and harbours
Recreation
Marine and coastal recreation and tourism
Comms
Cables and telecoms
Aggregate
Aggregate dredging for construction
Research

Research
Conservation
Marine habitat conservation
Marine species conservation
Other

9. How were they able to input their views?

Through face-to-face methods

Drop in events/open days

Chaired public meetings

Facilitated deliberative workshops

1:1 interviews

Focus groups/topic groups

Surveys/questionnaires

A multi-interest negotiation of the same people across several workshops

Other (please specify)

Through online or written methods

Online deliberative workshops

Online surveys/questionnaires

Sending in comments on documents

A multi-interest negotiation of the same people across several online workshops

10. How was what they said used and who by?

11. How are participants involved in the implementation of the MSP?

12. Are the same participants involved in the revision?

Yes

No

13. Compared to the first consultation, how many people were involved in the revision process?

14. What challenges have you faced involving other stakeholders?

Participation in MSP – lessons learned

We will be asking some stakeholders/actors from the area how they experienced the opportunity to influence the MSP contents. Here we want to know your views:

1. What do you think stakeholders/actors would say about how they were able to participate:

They would consider:

They could provide their views easily

They were heard and made a difference to the outcome

They are satisfied they had been able to participate effectively

In participatory processes:

There was/is sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice and informed decisions

There was/is time and space to weigh options, develop common understanding and appreciate respective roles and responsibilities

2. What worked well?

3. If you could start again, what would you do differently?

4. What were the barriers and challenges for effective participation?

5. What were the enablers for effective participation?

6. To what extent do you feel the process complied with MSP Directives ask for 'effective participation'?

Outcomes

1. List three key outcomes of the plan:

Outcome 1:

Outcome 2:

Outcome 3:

2. How did stakeholders/actors involvement contribute towards these outcomes?

3. List any negative effect of community and stakeholder/actors involvement

Finish

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this survey.

We may quote what you say in research outputs but will do this in a way that cannot be attributed to you, your country, or your MSP unless you provide consent here:

_ I am happy for you to attribute my information if that is helpful

_ I would want you to check any text with me before publication

_ I want my information to remain anonymous

7.2. Annex 2: Survey 2 - Stakeholders

Enabling Marine Spatial Planning

This survey is part of research commissioned by DG MARE.

We want to hear from stakeholders who took part or wanted to take part in Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in EU countries.

We may want to quote what you say in this or potential follow-on research, but it will not be attributed to you, your organisation or country.

Responding to this survey

This survey will take approx. 10 minutes to complete

The survey contains a mix of open and closed questions

This survey is available until midnight on the [Date].

You can look through the survey before responding, return to earlier pages without losing your work, and complete it in more than one session.

If you have technical difficulties completing this survey, please alert [name].

Consenting

This research is being conducted by Dialogue Matters (DM) - a neutral third party that designs, facilitates, and evaluates participation.

Your participation is based on voluntary, informed, and fluid consent. You are free to withdraw the information you have provided at any time, without having to give justification. If you wish to withdraw your responses, please email [name].

Your responses may be quoted in reporting to DG MARE but will not be attributed - unless you specify you are willing to have your information attributed to you. You will be able to consent to this at the end of the survey.

Once passed to DM, the information from this survey will be held in secure file storage with two-factor authentication on password protected devices. Data will be stored for a maximum of six months after the completion of the research and will then be destroyed. Only {name of organisation running the survey} and Dialogue Matters will have access to the raw data. DG MARE will be provided with processed and anonymised data in reporting.

The information you provide may be used by DG MARE to consider how best to support good practices in participation related to Marine Spatial Planning.

You can view DM's privacy notice [here](#).

Do you consent to participate in this survey, given the information above?

Yes

No

About You

1. Your name?

2. Your occupation?

3. Organisation?

4. Email address:

5. Organisation type:

(Such as government, government agency, third sector, business)

Other – please specify:

6. How were you able to participate in the creation of the MSP?

7. How were you able to input your views (tick all that apply)?

Through face-to-face methods

Drop in events/open days

Chaired public meetings

Facilitated deliberative workshops

1:1 interviews

Focus groups/topic groups

Surveys/questionnaires face to face

A multi-interest negotiation of the same people across several workshops

Other (please specify)

Through online or written methods

Online deliberative workshops

Online surveys/questionnaires

Sending in comments on documents

Writing letters

A multi-interest negotiation of the same people across several online workshops

8. How was what you said used and who by?

9. What would say about how you were able to participate:

-We could provide our views easily

We were heard and made a difference to the outcome

We are satisfied we've been able to participate effectively

In any participatory dialogue process:

There was sufficient and credible information for dialogue, choice, and informed decisions

There was time and space to weigh options, develop common understanding with other stakeholders and appreciate respective roles and responsibilities

10. What worked well?

11. If it was possible to start again, what would you suggest was done differently?

12. What were the barriers and challenges for effective participation?

13. What were the enablers for effective participation?

14. To what extent do you feel the process complied with the MSP Directives ask for 'effective participation'?

15. How are participants involved in the implementation of the MSP?

16. Have you been involved in MSP implementation?

Yes

No

17. If yes, how have you been involved?

Finish

Thank you very much for taking the time to do this survey.

We may quote what you say in research outputs but will do this in a way that cannot be attributed to you, your organisation, or your country unless you provide consent here:

- _ I am happy for you to attribute my information if that is helpful**

- _ I would want you to check any text with me before publication**

- _ I want my information to remain anonymous**

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