



# ACCESS TO SPACE AND WATER FOR MARINE AQUACULTURE

*STUDY RECAP*

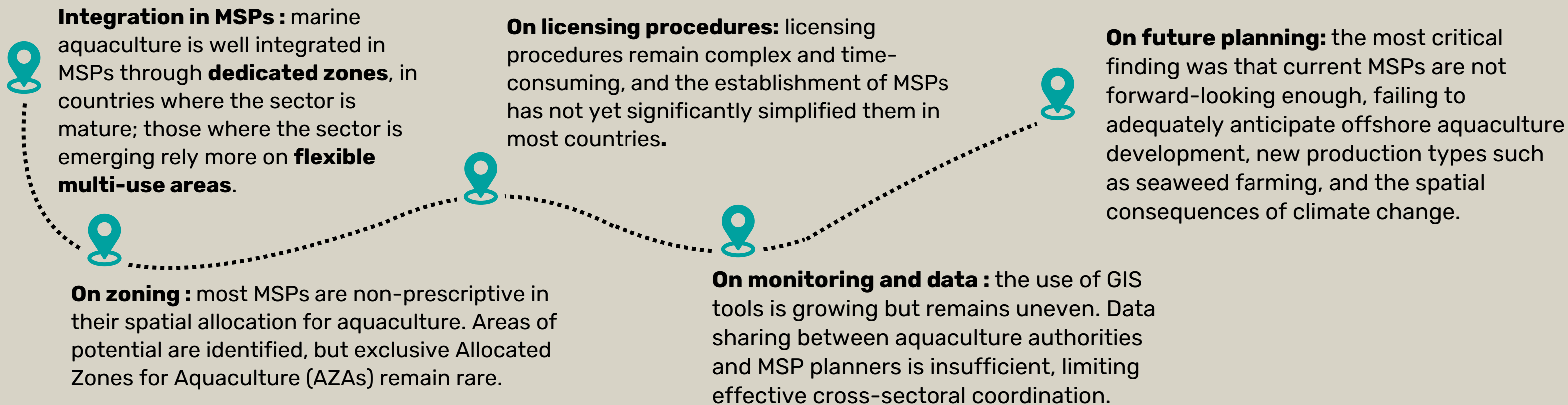


As global population grows and food security becomes increasingly important, marine aquaculture has emerged as a critical component of the EU's sustainable blue economy. Yet the sector faces a fundamental tension: while EU strategic frameworks set ambitious targets for the sector, access to marine space and water is increasingly challenging, due to competing maritime activities and conservation objectives. In this context, Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) has become a decisive tool for reconciling these competing demands, and secure allocation of marine space to aquaculture.



## AS COMPETITION FOR MARINE SPACE INTENSIFIES, HOW TO SECURE SPACE FOR AQUACULTURE?

**This study examined how access to space and water for marine aquaculture is addressed through licensing procedures, zoning provisions, stakeholder governance, and spatial monitoring. It aimed to identify the main trends, practices, enablers, and blockers for the allocation of marine space to aquaculture across EU Member States, within the framework of their Maritime Spatial Plans.**



**Overall, marine aquaculture lacks coordinated, strategic and forward-looking planning. MSPs have not yet fulfilled their potential as tools to actively secure and facilitate the sector's development. However, the study highlights a number of inspiring practices across Member States, from GIS-based site selection tools in Finland and Italy, to the integration of existing aquaculture plans into national MSPs in Portugal and France, or Estonia's innovative "turnkey" approach to facilitating investor access to marine space.**



## WHY READ THIS STUDY NOW ?

**The European Ocean Pact places aquaculture at the heart of the EU's food sovereignty** and blue economy ambitions, committing to a long-term Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture. Yet delivering on this ambition will remain out of reach if the sector cannot secure access to the marine space and water it needs.

The **upcoming Ocean Act** will build on a revision of the MSP Directive and aim at strengthening maritime spatial planning as a strategic tool to serve the priorities of the Ocean Pact and its implementation.

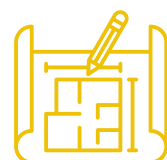
By mapping what works and what doesn't across the EU, the study offered concrete insights to inform the development of the Ocean Act and strengthen the revision of the MSP Directive.

**The study showed that securing space for aquaculture is not merely a sectoral issue, it is a prerequisite for delivering on the Pact's ambition to develop a competitive, sustainable, and food-secure blue economy.**

## The way forward



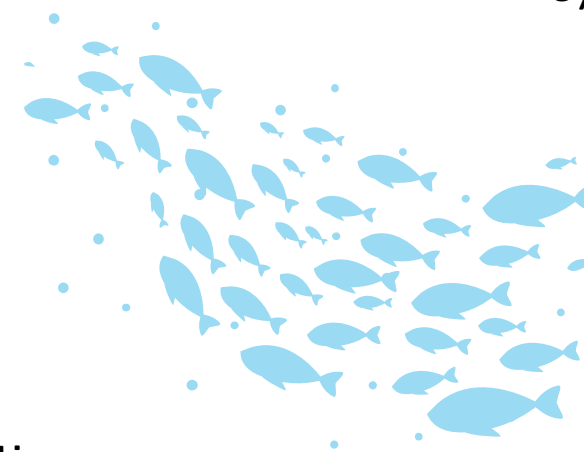
**Strengthen governance**  
Better coordinate aquaculture and planning authorities, and streamline licensing processes.



**Plan aquaculture more proactively**  
Make MSPs more forward-looking, integrating new production systems, climate change adaptation, and multi-use approaches.



**Strengthen strategic zoning**  
Designate suitable aquaculture zones on an evidence-based, systematic basis, including carrying capacity assessments.



**Share data**  
Develop common GIS systems and real-time data exchange between aquaculture and planning authorities.



**Read the full study**  
or access on <https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/media/document/12836>