

Framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy. Marine Strategy Framework Directive

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In accordance with the requirements of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC, the Commission presents a report on the progress in establishing marine protected areas by the end of 2012.

To recall, marine protected areas (MPAs) are a measure used across Europe's seas for protecting vulnerable species and habitats. Based on the work done by the European Environment Agency (EEA) on assessing the network of European MPAs, the report looks at: (i) the progress made on the establishment of marine protected areas by Member States; (ii) the coherence and representativity of MPA networks, as required by Article 13(4) and (iii) assessment of the work which remains to be done.

Assessment of the progress made: the Commission states that **Europe has made significant efforts in designating MPAs and establishing MPA networks** since the entry into force of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1993. At the end of 2012, **5.9% of European seas were designated as MPAs**. However, **large regional differences exist** across Europe in MPA coverage, as well as differences between MPA coverage in coastal and offshore waters. It should be noted that MPA coverage has further increased since 2012, as some Member States have designated a significant number of MPAs.

The EEA report differentiates between three types of MPAs in Europe: marine Natura 2000 sites, MPAs designated under Regional Sea Conventions, and individual national MPAs. These three types of MPAs may overlap (i.e., a given site or part of it may be designated under more than one regime), follow different designation processes and are subject to different legal requirements.

-Marine Natura 2000 sites: the marine **Natura 2000 network is a major success** as it is the largest single contributor to European MPAs in terms of coverage. At the end of 2012 it covered more than 228 000 km² equalling more than 4% of Europe's seas. Natura 2000 coverage, however, varied across marine regions. In the Greater North Sea and the Baltic Sea, marine Natura 2000 sites covered nearly 18% and 12% of the waters respectively. In other regions, such as the Ionian Sea, Adriatic Sea and Macaronesia, Natura 2000 coverage stayed below 2%. The Natura 2000 sites, underpinned by the [Habitats Directive](#), provide a strong legal framework for the protection of the sites and the sustainable management of human activities there, and coastal Member States have stepped up efforts to fill existing gaps.

-MPA networks established under Regional Sea Conventions: these networks significantly overlap with Natura 2000 and national MPA sites. Regional Sea Conventions, however, represent an important platform for Member States' cooperation to develop an ecosystem based approach to MPA designation and management. This makes RSCs one of the driving forces behind the expansion of the European MPA network.

The Baltic Sea region was the first regional sea in Europe where coverage exceeded 10%. Significant progress can also be observed in certain areas of the North-east Atlantic Ocean, particularly the Greater North Sea area whose MPA coverage is the highest in Europe (nearly 18%).

-National MPAs: Member States have designated marine protected areas to protect features of national interest. These sites can feed into the Natura 2000 network, MPA networks under RSCs, or they can stand alone. The extent of convergence between MPA networks designated under different regimes varies from

Member State to Member State, and averaged at 68.2% across Europe in case of national and RSC sites (i. e. more than two thirds of the total area covered by national and regional MPAs is designated under both regimes), and at 54.5% in case of national sites and Natura 2000 MPAs.

Coherent and representative networks of marine protected areas: currently **no EU-wide method exists** to assess the coherence and representativity of European MPA networks. As a first attempt to develop a common set of criteria and a methodology, external consultants prepared in 2014 a study, which found that the MPA network in a test area in the Baltic Sea was not coherent.

EU action: the Commission will continue supporting national and international efforts in relation to the designation and effective management of marine protected areas. In particular, it will:

- support Member States in the **effective and integrated implementation** of the legislation in place through increased communication or guidance;
- foster common understanding of Article 13(4) of the Directive and **develop an EU methodology** for the assessment of MPA network coherence and representativity;
- support Member States, particularly through the [European Maritime and Fisheries Fund](#) and the [LIFE Programme](#) or through ongoing processes such as the Natura 2000 bio-geographical process, to increase MPA designations, especially offshore and to effectively manage MPAs;
- promote inclusive governance structures for MPAs which enable **wide stakeholder participation** (e.g. local authorities, local communities, economic actors etc.) in MPA management;
- **promote research** at a European level and support Member States' efforts to close existing data gaps hindering the effective management and assessment of MPAs;
- contribute to **determining the economic benefits from MPAs** by preparing studies and collaborating with international organisations such as the OECD;
- **ensure EU representation** at negotiations on an implementing agreement to UNCLOS or the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The Commission considers that with a dedicated effort at all levels, it should be possible to meet the objectives set out in EU and international law and policies, and increase MPA coverage above 10% by 2020 in Europe.