



Fostering Ecosystem-Based Maritime Spatial Planning in the Bay of Biscay

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Research context

Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is the main governance process that ideally balances economic, ecological and socio-cultural goals through the regulation of human uses at sea. With the global and regional conservation and green energy targets ahead, there is an urgent need to better align MSP and strategic conservation planning, hence the operationalisation of an ecosystem approach to MSP. The EU-funded project MarinePlan supports the implementation of ecosystem-based MSP through the development of a Decision Support System (DSS). To inform the DSS, research has been conducted on the effectiveness of current governance regimes across eight European study sites, including the Bay of Biscay. Through an institutional and policy audit, supported by interviews and a questionnaire survey with key marine actors, detailed information has been developed on

the barriers and enablers of adaptive marine governance in each region.

Governance targets and objectives

Spain's primary objective in MSP is to promote sustainable growth while ensuring the protection and sustainable use of marine resources. This is achieved through the development and implementation of POEMs for specific marine demarcations. In France, interest in MSP has grown due to a political move to define dedicated areas for offshore wind. MSP will also enable the protection of marine biodiversity by establishing highly protected areas. However, such ambitions are subject to a range of governance challenges that must be considered and addressed. These barriers to achieving progress, as well as proposed solutions to overcome them, are listed on the page below.

Barriers to achieving targets and recommendations



Barrier #1 – There is limited cooperation across borders in identifying priorities and setting specific objectives for the Bay of Biscay

Recommendation – A structured transboundary MSP cooperation framework in the context of the already existing initiatives should be designed and implemented. The framework should support the development of a multi-stakeholder working group representing public and private entities, as well as associate eNGOs and coastal communities. Such efforts should result in the co-development of policy recommendations, as well as supporting policy alignment and the simplification of maritime planning procedures across borders.



Barrier #2 – Ineffective and inconsistent management measures for fisheries, pollution and biodiversity across the Bay of Biscay

Recommendation – To address inconsistent governance measures, a formalised, coordinated and multi-pronged strategy is required. This should involve launching a comprehensive review of French and Spanish maritime governance – identifying overlapping or conflicting policies – to inform the development of a harmonization roadmap. Such a review should be achieved through an intergovernmental agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding. The review should involve both quantitative and qualitative evaluation criteria, supported by the setting of joint sustainability objectives addressing issues such as fish stock recovery, pollution reduction, and biodiversity protection.



Barrier #3 – Impaired interaction, cooperation and knowledge sharing between the fisheries sector, eNGOs and policy-makers

Recommendation – Develop joint projects between the fisheries sector, eNGOs and policy-makers to build trust and support active engagement. Efforts should involve launching low-risk projects to maintain and develop local fisheries practices. For example, projects could involve establishing fisheries management zones wherein fishers and environmental groups jointly manage resources. Initiatives could be complemented by the development of marine litter collection programs to identify problem areas and call for government support. Setting up shared monitoring programs – for instance, focused on water quality and fish stock levels – with input from all stakeholders, should also be facilitated.



Barrier #4 – Lack of a coordinated or integrated approach to managing the emergence of the offshore sector in the Bay of Biscay

Recommendation – Both countries should collaborate in the common, strategic development of the offshore energy sector. This should involve the creation of formal processes for analysing the cumulative impacts of designating areas for renewable energy facilities, and assessing their potential impacts on fishing activity and conservation. This is particularly crucial in the Bay of Biscay as both countries' fishing fleets operate at a transboundary level. Additionally, formalised assessment processes should consider the potential environmental risks on mobile species at regional level.

More information

To read more on MarinePlan's recommendations for the Bay of Biscay, click on the below links to an ArcGIS StoryMap, Deliverable reports, and a publication presenting an EB-MSP assessment tool:

ArcGIS StoryMap [[English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#)]

'Fostering ecosystem-based MSP in the Bay of Biscay'



Deliverable 4.1

'Report on existing policies and institutions'



Deliverable 4.2

'Report on adaptive capacity of governance'



EB-MSP Assessment Tool

'Assessment tool to address implementation challenges of EBM principles in MSP processes'



References

ArcGIS StoryMap [English] – <https://arcg.is/1mnf8f5>

ArcGIS StoryMap [French] – <https://arcg.is/WXa9K>

ArcGIS StoryMap [Spanish] – <https://arcg.is/1TTCzX0>

Deliverable 4.1 – doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10829632

Deliverable 4.2 – doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13862281

EB-MSP Assessment Tool – doi.org/10.1038/s43247-024-01975-7

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