



Fostering Ecosystem-Based Marine Spatial Planning in the Greek Aegean and Ionian Seas

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Research context

Marine 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 Greek Seas. Through an institutional and policy audit, supported by interviews and a 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

The development of MSP and the completion and institutionalization of a regulatory framework for all Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are two important milestones for achieving Greece's goals in protecting marine ecosystems and regulating human activities at sea. Although the country has translated most international and EU marine management directives into national legislation, the ill effects of inaction are still prevalent in the country's policy landscape. This legacy has led to significant management challenges for the region and left little capacity for the adoption of more flexible, adaptive solutions. This research has identified several governance challenges, including political commitment and insufficient funding, that are obstructing progress. These challenges, as well as proposed solutions, are listed on the page below.

Barriers to achieving targets and recommendations



Barrier #1 – Delays in MSP and MPA policy implementation, rendering conservation obligations unfulfilled.

Recommendation – Develop an actionable plan on how to achieve MSP and MPA targets. This should include a clear timeline, implementation steps for measurable targets, capacity building for strengthened public administration, and enhanced cooperation among competent authorities. Additionally, linking EU funding to the achievement of environmental milestones, setting deadlines for specific actions, and introducing penalties for unjustified delays, should be considered.



Barrier #2 – Lack of a bottom-up approach to stakeholder engagement, whereby participation is limited to perfunctory consultations.

Recommendation – Formal participatory mechanisms should gravitate towards increased engagement of stakeholders. Engagement must be sensitive to socio-cultural contexts, with careful management of stakeholder expectations. Local authorities should gradually re-gain operational decision-making autonomy and co-management should be increasingly considered. Additionally, reporting on stakeholder contributions to policy must be transparent.



Barrier #3 – Weak communication and cooperation between government departments responsible for marine management.

Recommendation – Develop a regulatory framework that defines how cross-departmental cooperation can be operationalised. Departments with overlapping responsibilities can form interdepartmental working groups, coordinated by a central authority to resolve conflicts and supported by clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities. Additionally, establishing a shared geospatial data repository accessible to relevant bodies would support transparency and facilitate coherent action across departments.



Barrier #4 – Lack of key personnel is limiting the operational and adaptive capacity of government and management bodies.

Recommendation – Develop recruitment programs to hire qualified personnel at all levels, including in policy development and enforcement positions, with strict academic and professional qualification criteria. Simplifying bureaucratic procedures for management agencies could free up staff time for operational tasks. Training and experience-sharing initiatives could also be facilitated.



Barrier #5 – Science-policy disconnect, due to inconsistent and ineffective levels of engagement between government and scientific institutions.

Recommendation – Establish scientific advisory committees to support decision-making bodies, with clear procedures for receiving, evaluating, and incorporating scientific advice into policy. These should include an accountability framework for documenting and responding to suggestions in order to ensure transparency.

More information

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

ArcGIS StoryMap [[English](#), [Greek](#)]

'Fostering ecosystem-based MSP in the Greek Seas'



[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/18eTu04>

ArcGIS StoryMap [Greek] – <https://arcg.is/1vD8TD>

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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