

Recommendation N.º 55

Maritime Spatial Planning of the Outermost Regions

Maritime Spatial Plans (MSP) are essential instruments for the management and sustainable use of maritime areas of the Member States of the European Union (EU). These plans aim to coordinate the various activities that take place in the maritime space, such as, for example: fishing, environmental conservation and energy production, in order to promote a balance between economic development and the protection of marine ecosystems. Responsibility for developing and implementing MSPs lies on Member States, who must ensure that these plans respond to the specific needs of their regions and communities, in compliance with EU guidelines. In our case, the relevant Member States are Portugal, France and Spain.

In the Outermost Regions (ORs): *Saint Martin, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane Française, Açores, Madeira, Canary Islands, Mayotte and La Réunion*, implementing MSPs presents unique challenges. Our regions, due to their geographical location and socio-economic characteristics, depend heavily on fishing as a traditional and vital activity for the livelihood of their communities. However, maritime spatial planning policies and, in particular, the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), can have a significant impact on the viability of fisheries in our territories, raising concerns about the protection of the rights of fishermen and aquaculturists and the sustainability of coastal communities.

Whereas the term “sustainability” is understood as “*the ability to meet our needs in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”¹, it is essential that EU and Member State policies promote a balance between environmental protection and the economic viability of the fishing sector of the ORs, ensuring that artisanal fishers maintain their livelihoods. To this end, it is important that adequate compensation and financial support are made available, allowing fishers to continue their activities in a sustainable manner and ensuring that marine conservation decisions are fair and equitable.

¹ [Business Council for Sustainable Development](#)

Canary Islands

In Spain, MSPs are under the responsibility of the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge (*Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico*) where spaces were reserved for the Navy, Places of Community Interest, Special Protection Zones for Birds and Maritime Transport, but not for Fishing, with the justification that fishing, being a ubiquitous activity, could not have a reserved space. However, the above-mentioned actions resulted in the occupation of areas traditionally used for fishing.

Whereas the main concern relates to the installation of offshore wind farms (*offshore*), which is still an activity under development and whose first project in Spain is planned for the Canary Islands, it is essential to find ways to reconcile fishing activities and offshore wind energy, in the respective MSP. Considering also that European fishing and aquaculture are responsible for 30% of fish consumption in the EU, while the remaining 70% is imported from third countries (which do not follow the strict European environmental, social or economic standards), it is crucial to recognise that fishing in the EU is not just an economic activity: being an artisanal fisherman is also a lifestyle, deeply linked to the traditions and know-how of coastal communities. However, dependence on imports puts this way of life and the communities that depend on it at risk.

Considering also that the installation of the offshore wind farm in Viana do Castelo (Portugal) caused significant losses to local fishermen, this case should serve as an important warning of the need to carefully assess the impacts of implementing offshore wind farms in areas traditionally used for fishing, even during the planning and study phase.

We also note the importance of MSPs to consider not only the surface area occupied by offshore wind structures, but also the surface area occupied by the cables connecting them to land, since this last mentioned area will also be a fishing exclusion zone and where the emission of electromagnetism could be very significant.

Considering also the safety issues related to offshore wind farms, in particular the risks of vessels colliding with the structures, **CCRUP recommends to the Spanish Member State:**

1. that the **planning and installation of these wind farms be carried out with the utmost caution, involving active and consistent listening to local communities, fishermen and experts in the field.**
2. that **takes into account the above considerations** when planning and authorising the implementation of wind farms in the Canary Islands, **ensuring that the needs and rights of fishing communities are duly protected and prioritised.**

French Outermost Regions

Given the challenges faced in planning the maritime spaces of mainland France, it is worrying that the review of the National Strategy for the Sea and Coast addresses very little, if anything, its ORs. We are not aware of any specific studies on the obstacles faced by fishermen in the ORs in this regard, but we are aware of the constraints arising from the application of the MSPs in mainland France, which could potentially be replicated in the ORs.

So, the **CCRUP recommends that the French Member State ensure that its ORs are carefully and judiciously considered in the national strategy.**, using the continental experience as a warning, **to develop specific methodologies and appropriate tools to protect fishing in the ORs** before these same challenges manifest themselves, with catastrophic consequences.

The French ORs face significant problems due to EU policies on fishing and the creation of MPAs, which are poorly adapted to the reality of these territories. In other words, the EU's high dependence on fish imports contrasts with the severe restrictions imposed on fishing activities in the ORs. Furthermore, protected areas, namely the island natural reserve of *Grand-Connétable island* and the Amana natural reserve in French Guyane, where fishing is prohibited to European vessels, are frequently violated by illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices, calling into question the effectiveness of these protection policies.

We should note, that in these ORs, policies are often not adapted to local realities, as can be seen in the imposition of the "strategic document for the maritime basin" (DSBM) by France, which disregards the particularities of our regions.

So, the **CCRUP recommends that the French Member State and the EU review existing policies to ensure that they are adapted to local specificities, particularly those of Europeans living in the ORs, including strengthening surveillance against IUU fishing and implementing a continuous monitoring system for MPAs.**

Açores

In the Açores, the process of creating MPAs and MSPs has faced significant challenges. There was a public consultation for all interested Azoreans to express their opinion on the planning of the region's maritime space, which ended on 28 of April 2024, with the aim of involving the local community in defining its MPAs. This consultation revealed not to be very consensual, leaving several islands with poorly founded restrictions to fishing activity. This process raises concerns among fishermen, who consider their professional future to be not very sustainable in social and economic terms.

The implementation of MPAs, especially the 15% of “fully protected” MPAs, could result in the loss of up to 30% of fishing areas in the Açores. This reduction will lead to the intensification of overfishing in the remaining areas, compromising the sustainability of marine ecosystems. Considering that there are still no adequate financial resources to support fishermen in this process of fleet readjustment, the Azorean fishing sector finds itself in a vulnerable situation, without the necessary support to mitigate the negative impacts of the implementation of MPAs. **CCRUP recommends that the European Commission and the Portuguese Member State allocate adequate financial resources, in proportion to the measures implemented,** to support the fishing sector in its adjustment process, ensuring the sustainability of fisheries in the Açores.

Furthermore, there is a disparity in the implementation of MPAs in the Portuguese ORs and in mainland Portugal, with the Açores being particularly affected by the greater concentration of protected areas, knowing that, despite the large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), only 1% of its waters correspond to fishing areas.

So, **CCRUP recommends to the Portuguese Member State that the creation of MPAs and the implementation of MSPs in the Açores be based on robust scientific studies**, ensuring that decisions made are based on accurate data and take into account the sustainability of the fishing sector. Furthermore, **it is essential that specific funds are allocated in Portugal's national budget to compensate fishermen affected by the reduction in fishing areas.** These compensations are essential to support the fishing sector during the adaptation process.

We also recommend that the process of implementing MPAs in the ORs be gradual and participatory, allowing environmental protection measures to be introduced in a way that does not harm local fishermen, ensuring their financial and social stability.

Madeira

Fishermen of Madeira, face significant challenges due to the creation of the *Ilhas Selvagens* MPA, which prohibits any fishing activity within a twelve-mile radius around these islands. This decision, taken without due consultation with local fishermen, is said to have been based on scientific studies and legal opinions. However, the implementation of this MPA has a direct negative impact on the local fishing sector, significantly reducing the areas available for fishing, particularly for migratory species such as tuna. With limited quotas and the reduction of fishing zones, many shipowners and fishermen find themselves in an unsustainable situation, with vessels at a standstill and no viable work alternatives. The lack of consideration for the particularities of artisanal and seasonal fishing in Madeira, as well as the absence of prior dialogue with stakeholders in the sector, worsened the crisis that fishermen were already facing. Furthermore, the creation of the MPA in the the *Ilhas Selvagens* does not take into account the migratory characteristics of species such as tuna, and the total protection of this area does not bring the expected benefits of increased biomass.

So, **CCRUP recommends that the Portuguese Member State reconsider the total ban on fishing in the *Ilhas Selvagens* MPA**, especially for vessels that practice selective and sustainable fishing methods, such as pole and line fishing. We propose applying a strategy similar to that used in regional nature reserves, such as *Ilhéu das Formigas* (located north of Santa Maria Island, Açores) or *Banco do Condor* (a seamount located 17 km southwest of Faial Island, Açores), where specific licenses are issued for certain vessels. **We recommend to the Portuguese Member State, once again, that the creation of MPAs is based on robust scientific studies that prove their effectiveness**, especially in areas where closing them may not be the best solution, **for the management of marine resources, such as migratory species.**

It is essential to remember that restrictions and quota reductions do not exclusively affect fishermen but also impact the entire value chain associated with the sector, including workers at fish auctions, fish processing industries and other related activities, as well as the end consumer, which makes it even more imperative to consider the needs and challenges faced by all parties involved. So, the **CCRUP recommends that the Portuguese Member State implement a continuous monitoring system for MPAs to assess their effectiveness in protecting species and to allow adjustments to the restrictions imposed, as necessary, without unduly harming traditional and sustainable fishing activities.**

Finally, **CCRUP recommends that Member States take into account the above considerations when planning and authorising the deployment of MPAs and offshore wind farms in their ORs, ensuring that the needs and rights of fishing communities are duly protected and prioritised.**