



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE/A2/LS

Subject: Recommendations of the Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP) about Maritime Spatial Planning of the Outermost Regions.

Dear Mr. Farias,

I would like to thank you for sharing the recommendations of the Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP) about Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) of the Outermost Regions (ORs). Your insights highlight the complexities of balancing environmental conservation, economic activity, and the traditional practices of fishing communities.

The European Commission acknowledges the importance of MSP as a strategic tool to ensure the sustainable use of maritime resources while protecting marine ecosystems. We also recognize the unique challenges faced by ORs due to their geographical, ecological, and socio-economic characteristics.

At the outset let me recall, that at the moment all of the Outermost Regions, where the Maritime Spatial Planning directive is applicable – Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands - already adopted their Maritime Spatial Plans (with Azores being the last one adopted in October 2024). However, the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive is not applicable to the French OR's in line with Article 2 and 3(4) of the directive.

Although, as you correctly identify, most of your recommendations are addressed to Member States as the ones responsible for Maritime Spatial Planning and the designation of MPAs, let me address key aspects of your recommendations:

1. Fisheries and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):

The concerns about the socio-economic impacts of MPAs on artisanal fishers and coastal communities are valid. The Commission emphasizes the need for balanced policies that align conservation goals with community livelihoods. For regions like the Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands and French ORs, it is important to ensure that MPA designation is backed by scientific studies, as recommended. This approach ensures that decisions are

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data-driven, meaningful, equitable, and minimize adverse effects on traditional fishing activities.

Fisheries activities depend on a healthy marine environment with healthy fish stocks and rich biodiversity. Measures that will be taken to improve conservation and protection of marine species and habitats, in particular in MPAs and spawning and nursery areas for commercial species, will directly benefit fisheries through rebuilding fish stocks. In that regard DG MARE recently conducted a study “*Assessing spillover from marine protected areas to adjacent fisheries*”⁽¹⁾, which assessed 15 selected case studies including three in Macaronesia (Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands). The case studies have shown that MPAs can lead to increased spillover of species, although such effects would take a relatively long time to be relevant for fisheries. Like noted in the recommendation of the CCRUP, the study highlights that while stakeholders acknowledge MPA’s role in biodiversity protection, fishermen express concerns about the impacts of fishing restrictions on their livelihoods. In this regard, we note that certain period is needed to begin seeing results with the implementation of MPAs, but they are likely to pay off in the mid to long run.

Furthermore, regular assessments and adaptive management of MPAs are critical. Adjustments should be based on ecological and socio-economic data to meet conservation objectives without causing undue hardships. Enhanced enforcement in MPAs is also vital to combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, which undermines protection efforts.

2. Offshore Wind Energy and Coexistence with Fisheries:

The deployment of offshore wind farms represents a significant opportunity for clean energy but requires careful planning to minimise disruptions to traditional fisheries.

In October 2023, the European Commission delivered a “Wind Package”² amongst which a Communication on delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions³, as a follow-up to the EU Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy published in 2020⁴. In this Communication, the Commission notably committed to launch a research and innovation action to reduce the environmental impact and optimise the socio-economic impacts of offshore wind farms in 2024. A specific call for proposal under Horizon Europe was opened on 17 September to this effect (HORIZON-CL5-2024-D3-02-08)⁵.

3. Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement:

Indeed, early and continuous dialogue with local communities and stakeholders is crucial. This process ensures transparency and builds trust while addressing potential spatial conflicts. This is true not only with regard to offshore developments but also to all planned activities in the sea, like also MPAs. In that regard during the development (or revision) of national maritime plans, as provided for in Directive 2014/89 on maritime spatial planning (MSPD) Members States must consult the “stakeholders and authorities,

¹ https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/publications/assessing-spillover-marine-protected-areas-adjacent-fisheries_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_5185.

³ Delivering on the EU offshore renewable energy ambitions (COM/2023/668 final).

⁴ An EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future. COM(2020) 741 final.

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-cl5-2024-d3-02-08>

and the public concerned, at an early stage in the development of maritime spatial plans”. And then secondly, as far as offshore energy development is concerned, at the project level there must be also a public consultation during the environmental impact assessment, as established in Directive 2014/52/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment.

Over the years since the adoption of the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive (2014/89/EU), the Commission has put in place several tools for coordination on MSP and stakeholders’ participation in planning at EU and regional level:

- A dedicated [Member States expert group on MSP](#) that meets at least twice a year (E01682/2) and welcomes observers from different stakeholders’ groups⁶. MSFD, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the new EU Restoration Law are discussed with Member States and DG ENV during these meetings.
- An [Assistance Mechanism](#) (team of experts on MSP) and a [European MSP Platform](#): funded by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), it acts as the central exchange forum for the rich knowledge generated in past, current and upcoming MSP processes and projects. The European MSP Platform allows officials, planners and other stakeholders interested in MSP to build on what is already available, avoid duplication of efforts, assist in capacity building and foster development of new practices.
- The [European Blue Forum](#): a pan-European stakeholder group and a moderated space for all users of the sea, able to come together to discuss shared challenges and priorities with the aim of finding consensus, synergies and solutions towards a common vision. I had the pleasure to launch it officially in May 2023, and I encourage you to register to the forum, be informed and involved in future events, like for example the fisheries and ocean dialogue that will be held during the European Ocean Days in March 2025.

4. Multi-Use of Marine Space

In a situation where marine space is limited and various activities compete for space, such as also fisheries, multi-use is a true solution. For that reason we launched a [multi-use compendium](#) in March 2024. It compiles good practices and information on projects involving two or more sectors working together at sea. Fisheries is one of the sectors for which we want to expand multi-use in the EU and wider, beyond the identification of fishing zones, through the inclusion of multi-use areas in national maritime spatial plans. Expanding such models to ORs can provide innovative solutions. Many EU Member States now allow certain types of fisheries to happen within the perimeter of offshore wind farms and many others are now considering adapting their rules in that sense. With increased experience and technological innovation such as increasing wind turbine sizes and associated spacing requirements, co-existence between offshore and fisheries are likely to evolve positively. The EC encourages the exchange of good practices in that regard and whenever possible, planning for multi-use of the marine space between offshore wind farms and fisheries should take place at an early stage, before construction. There are already several examples of multi-use between offshore wind and aquaculture in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands where seaweed and molluscs are being grown

⁽⁶⁾ The European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) and Européche are both observers of this expert group since 2020. New observers can submit their applications via MARE-MSP-MSEG@ec.europa.eu

successfully. Other projects are being developed with the support of Horizon Europe, Interreg and the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund across the EU (e.g. [UNITED](#) and [ULTFARMS](#)).

As far as Fisheries and MPAs are concerned, certain types of fishing activities and methods are compatible with nature protection, while aquaculture can even play a role in restoration.

5. Impact mitigation

However, we understand that nature protection and offshore developments can touch the daily lives of fishers and communities that depend on fishing practices. It is therefore important to ensure that the transition is gradual and that Member States take due account of the specific needs of local communities and support them in a targeted way.

In terms of financial incentives and compensation mechanisms for fishers and aquaculture operators, who may be impacted by the establishment of offshore wind farms or MPAs, it falls under Member States competence and in case of offshore sometimes these are settled directly between the wind farm developer and the local community. For an overview of compensation practices in the EU concerning offshore energy, with some concrete examples, we recommend you to read the above-mentioned [report](#) ⁽⁷⁾ published by the Commission in 2021.

6. Regional Specificity and Support:

The Commission agrees that policies must account for the unique realities of each OR. Tailored methodologies and tools, as well as adequate financial resources, are necessary for addressing local challenges. We encourage Member States to allocate specific funds to support the adaptation of fisheries in ORs. EU has funded projects to enhance MSPD implementation and cross-border cooperation in MSP: All EU projects on MSP have been selected through public calls, open to all stakeholders to apply and advertised on Commission's websites, e.g. on CINEA funding opportunities' page ⁸. Let me specifically note an MSP project for the Outermost Regions – MSP OR ⁽⁹⁾, which supports the European outermost regions (ORs) of the Azores (Portugal), Madeira (Portugal), Canary Islands (Spain) in the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSP Directive 2014/89/EU) in their marine territories. MSP-OR's main objective is to support MSP competent authorities in Portugal (Azores and Madeira) and Spain (Canary Islands) in advancing the implementation of their MSP processes, launched with the previous MarSP project; and in France (French Guiana) in advancing knowledge gathering, providing a basis to launch and adopt the MSP principles.

In conclusion, I believe that all the above-mentioned groups, forums and activities represent a strong basis for coherence between the different policies that influence maritime spatial planning. Further strengthening of the MSP approach will be also addressed in the “European Oceans Pact” announced by Commission President Ursula

⁽⁷⁾ Van Hoey, G., Bastardie, F., Birchenough, S., De Backer, A., Gill, A., de Koning, S., Hodgson, S., Mangi Chai, S., Steenbergen, J., Termeer, E., van den Burg, S., Hintzen, N., Overview of the effects of offshore wind farms on fisheries and aquaculture, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, p. 99.

⁽⁸⁾ https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/european-maritime-fisheries-and-aquaculture-fund/emfaf-calls-tenders_en

⁽⁹⁾ <https://msp-or.eu/en/>

von der Leyen in her political guidelines¹⁰. It will be developed in parallel to the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation, which includes spatial elements.

Let me thank you again for your commitment and valuable input. I am looking forward to our continued cooperation.

The European Commission remains committed to fostering cooperation and dialogue among stakeholders to achieve sustainable maritime development. We appreciate the valuable contributions of CCRUP in advancing inclusive and informed maritime policies.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms. Amanda Perez Perera or Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours faithfully,

Charlina VITCHEVA

¹⁰ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

