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New guide and website walk readers through the how-to of evaluating marine spatial plans

Marine spatial plans are being developed in more than 40 countries worldwide. Such processes can be complex and time-intensive, and sometimes the focus becomes simply to finish the plan. However, a new guide released by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission emphasizes that it is just as important to think beyond the adoption point. Namely, planners should establish how the outcomes of their plan will be measured over time, and how future versions of the plan can be improved as a result.

This is performance monitoring and evaluation. The new *A Guide to Evaluating Marine Spatial Plans* - authored by Charles Ehler, MSP consultant to UNESCO - suggests monitoring and evaluation need to be integrated in MSP processes from the beginning. Ultimately, monitoring and evaluation allow practitioners to gauge the success of their plans: whether they're achieving their goals and objectives and delivering desired outcomes. The guide is available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002277/227779e.pdf>.

"While the idea of MSP is still in its early life stage - it's only 10-12 years old - and many tangible results could take 5-15 years to be realized, it's not too early to think about evaluating the results of MSP," says Ehler. His new guide walks readers through an eight-step process, based on good practices in performance monitoring and evaluation from early results of MSP. The publication is a follow-up to a guide Ehler co-authored with Fanny Douvère, *Marine Spatial Planning: A Step-by-Step Approach toward Ecosystem-Based Management*, published by UNESCO in 2009.

Companion website features video interviews with MSP practitioners

A companion website to the guide features more than two-dozen video interviews with ten MSP professionals in North America and Europe, summarizing their practical experiences with monitoring and evaluation. The website (www.openchannels.org/msp-eval-guide) was produced by UNESCO in partnership with OpenChannels.org and Green Fire Productions (www.ocean-frontiers.org). Financial support for development of both the guide and the website was provided by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

Here, MEAM talks with Ehler about the guide, the website, and the future of MSP in general.

MEAM: In what ways do the guide and the accompanying website complement one another?

Charles Ehler: The website captures the main points of each of the eight steps of monitoring and evaluation described in more detail in the *Guide to Evaluating Marine Spatial Plans*. So it's a good summary and introduction to the guide and performance evaluation in general. But the website does something that the printed word cannot do. Through its interviews with international MSP experts, all of whom have practical experience in developing and implementing marine plans, it brings the story and issues alive.

MEAM: You note in the guide that American MSP initiatives often define "success" as the adoption of a marine spatial plan, whereas several European initiatives define success as meeting the objectives and targets of the management plan. Why do you think it has evolved this way in the US vs. Europe?

Ehler: Marine planning in the US has very limited experience with actual implementation and evaluation of marine plans. And where plans have been implemented at the state level (no marine plans have been completed or implemented at the regional level), little thought has been given to defining and measuring the success of those plans over time - even though these plans often claim to be "adaptive".

The EEZs of European countries are smaller and the human uses more intense: the need for MSP to sort out spatial conflicts among uses, and between human uses and nature, is not a question but a necessity. The United Kingdom, for example, has constructed over 1000 wind turbines offshore; the US, none. Five countries (Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and England) already have government-approved marine plans covering their EEZs, and the first three have already gone through one round of revising their plans. They have had to think about which management actions in their plans have worked and which need to be modified in their revised plans. That's adaptive management.

The US has the same technical capacity, and more information, for MSP than European countries. What it lacks, at the moment, is high-level political leadership and political will at the national level to develop and implement marine plans. I'm sure it will catch up over the next decade.

MEAM: What do you think the next decade holds for MSP worldwide?

Ehler: When we first started to think about MSP as a practical approach to marine management in the early years of the 21st century, no one thought that it would grow so quickly internationally. But it has and will continue over the next decade. Nine countries have already approved about 30 plans, including 11 provincial-level plans in China covering its territorial sea, six bioregional plans in Australia (including the Great Barrier Reef), three in Norway, two in Germany, and two in England, with another seven anticipated by 2022.

Last July, the European Union passed a Directive on maritime spatial planning that will require all of its Member States with marine waters to bring into force by September 2016 any laws, regulations, and administrative procedures needed to enable MSP processes, and to implement the resulting maritime spatial plans by 2022. The combined surface area of the EEZ of the EU is twice as large as the EEZ of the US and covers about 17% of the EEZs of the world. Elsewhere, the president of South Africa has just announced an Ocean Initiative that will include MSP, and other initiatives are springing up in Africa, South America, and the Middle East.

By 2025, it's reasonable to expect that at least a third of the surface area of EEZs of the world will be covered by approved marine spatial plans. That will be incredible progress after only two decades, and a huge step forward in managing the human use of the world ocean. This rapid rate of progress creates a huge demand for evaluating how effective, efficient, and equitable these marine plans have been and will be. As experience grows and we learn by doing, MSP will get even better the next time around.

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