

## Project aims to guide EU monitoring and implementation of spatially managed areas

The EU-funded project "Monitoring and Evaluation of Spatially Managed Areas" (MESMA) is analyzing marine spatial planning in practice in Europe. The ultimate goal of the four-year project, which started in 2009, is to inform wider implementation of MSP in the region, namely by drawing lessons and good practices from 13 case studies of spatially managed marine areas. Scheduled for completion by the end of 2013, MESMA is applying a framework to monitor and evaluate each of the 13 cases.

Luc van Hoof of the IMARES research institute at Wageningen University in the Netherlands is leading the MESMA project. MEAM asked him for insights he has gained so far from the project. He responds below.

### On lessons learned so far in MESMA

"MSP and spatially managed areas (SMAs) in the EU are currently a mixed basket, with only a few actual plans in place and several more plans either in progress or anticipated. As for good practices and lessons learned in our case study analysis, we observe so far that:

- In those cases where an ecosystem-based approach toward sustainability has not been considered a prime objective of marine management, there is usually also no incentive to embark on a process of marine spatial planning.
- Implementation of the European Habitats and Bird Directives (Natura 2000) as well as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive have often been a trigger to move toward MSP.
- Despite the absence of an overall MSP framework in the EU, ecological conservation considerations have resulted in the designation of marine protected areas in some cases. At the same time, in other cases, MPAs have not been designated because of a perceived lack of scientific evidence.
- Early-stage public participation, as well as involvement of all governmental bodies relevant to the MSP, results in a faster MSP process, from what we have seen.
- Legal constraints to full MSP implementation are particularly clear in transboundary areas between EU member states, and even more so between EU and non-EU countries. In such cases, national interests often get higher priority than the promotion of sustainability in the entire spatially managed area. Regional Seas Conventions could have an important role to play here."

### On national or regional differences observed in approaches to MSP in Europe

"In cases where spatial management is already in place, it is striking that two of the existing marine spatial plans were instituted at the international level (the Wadden Sea Plan and the Baltic Sea Action Plan). In contrast, where planning initiatives are ongoing or anticipated (the majority of the case studies), marine spatial plans are much more focused on the national level. Very often the plans are made for parts of the national waters - like the different plans for the Celtic Sea and Pentland Firth (in Scotland), which are each part of the UK marine area."

### On the MESMA framework, which provides a series of steps for monitoring and evaluating spatially managed areas

"The MESMA framework ([www.mesma.org/default.asp?ZNT=S0T1O750](http://www.mesma.org/default.asp?ZNT=S0T1O750)) was built on the basis of good practice and lessons learned from existing approaches. It builds, for example, on components of ecosystem-based management: scoping, performance measures, assessment, and adjustment. It is equally footed in policy analysis.

"The MESMA framework is more than a set of logical steps. It is complemented by a detailed user manual that gives guidance on its practical implementation for the assessment of spatially managed areas. For example, it contains suggestions on how to structure the analysis for each of the steps of monitoring and evaluation, depending on user preferences and the quality and availability of information.

"It is also worth mentioning that the framework can be used for different depths of analysis. It can be helpful on the one hand as a structured step-by-step, go-through-the-boxes systematic approach to setting up monitoring and evaluation of a spatially managed area. On the other hand, it is a flexible framework allowing the user to enter the framework at any point."

#### For more information:

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The MESMA Final Conference is 8-10 October 2013 in Lisbon, Portugal: [www.mesma.org](http://www.mesma.org)