

Science for Environment Policy

MSFD implementation: strengths and barriers assessed across European marine regions

There are adequate resources to implement the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) in Europe, a recent study concludes. However, more clarity is needed on the roles of different institutions at EU, regional and national levels in implementing the Directive.

European marine areas and coastal zones require good governance to balance environmental protection with social and [economic](#) needs. Among the policies and instruments the EU and its Member States (MS) can use to [protect marine waters is the MSFD](#)¹, as well as the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, designed to establish a common EU framework for MSP and adopted in July 2014.

The relationship between the MSFD and MSP has implications for marine and coastal areas. The MSP concept directs where and when human activities can take place in marine and coastal waters to ensure that these activities are sustainable. It is identified by the MSFD as a delivery tool and the new MSP Directive will require Member States to address 'land/sea interactions' as part of planning in their waters. Furthermore, the MSFD structure allows MS to take a flexible approach to ecosystem-based management decisions.

The MSFD covers the four marine regions in Europe: the Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and the North-east Atlantic Ocean. These four regions are collaboratively managed by Member States and surrounding neighbouring countries, through the four Regional Sea Conventions (RSCs).

As part of the [EU-funded ODEMM](#)³ project, researchers evaluated the current state and preparedness of regional governance structures to implement the MSFD and achieve good environmental status of the waters. To gather information on this, they carried out 30 face-to-face interviews and an online survey of 264 marine stakeholders across all four marine regions. The results of this analysis reveal the importance of all stakeholders – including EU Member States, non-MS and the private sector with a vested interest in marine natural resources, participating in governance structures to ensure that the MSFD is successfully implemented.

The survey also shows that the strengths of European marine governance to implement the MSFD lie in the availability of governance resources at EU, marine region and national levels as well as the clear distinction of roles of institutions. The respondents suggested one set of resources is the Regional Sea Conventions and, as these governing structures already exist, they can play a leading role in implementing the MSFD. Of the Conventions, the Helsinki Convention ([HELCOM](#)), for the Baltic Sea, and the Oslo-Paris Convention ([OSPAR](#)), for the North-east Atlantic, are more developed than the other two RSCs (the [Barcelona Convention](#), for the Mediterranean Sea, and the [Bucharest Convention](#), for the Black Sea) and are in a better position to lead MSFD implementation. A major issue hampering implementation of the Directive is uncertainty about the roles of different institutions responsible for executing the MSFD, in particular, their levels of authority. This uncertainty is caused by different approaches and interpretations of the rules among bodies at different levels, e.g. by the RSCs at the regional level and individual Member States at the national level.

Opportunities for implementing the Directive, as well as threats to it, are currently dominated by the recent economic crisis. If the crisis results in a more closely integrated EU, the Commission would be in a stronger position to ensure that Member States meet their responsibilities for implementing the MSFD, the researchers say. On the other hand, funding cut-backs have undermined scientific research and stakeholder engagement in decision making and could potentially shift marine strategy policies towards employment and economic growth and away from environmental aims.



October 2014
Thematic Issue 46

Coastal Zones

Subscribe to free weekly News Alert

Source: Lucio Carlos Freire-Gibb, L.C., Koss, R., Margonski, P. and Papadopoulou, N. (2014). Governance strengths and weaknesses to implement the marine strategy framework directive in European waters. *Marine Policy*. 44:172–178. DOI:10.1016/j.marpol.2013.08.025

Contact:
carlos@plan.aau.dk

Read more about:
[Marine ecosystems](#),
[Sustainable development and policy](#)

The contents and views included in *Science for Environment Policy* are based on independent, peer-reviewed research and do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission.

To cite this article/service: "[Science for Environment Policy](#)": European Commission DG Environment News Alert Service, edited by SCU, The University of the West of England, Bristol.

1. Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive). See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:164:0019:0040:EN:PDF>.

2. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2002 concerning the implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Europe. See: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32002H0413>.

3. [Options for Delivering Ecosystem-Based Marine Management \(ODEMM\)](#) was supported by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme.