Closing Speech Maritime Spatial Planning & Marine Environment Conference 7 December 2015

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First of all, let me start by saying that we started preparing this conference being aware that this is one of the most interesting topics in the context of implementing MSP: the link between maritime spatial planning and the environment. The discussions today have just scratched the surface of how complex and complicated this can actually be. We've heard that's it a potential love story and even had a song to accompany it, so that was even better and we're very much on that line too.

As Charles Ehler said in his opening speech: *we never said it would be easy* and it's very much a work in progress. However, there are some relevant conclusions which we will include in the written output of this conference. The first one is that everything starts with coherence: coherence between the actions that you take in the context of managing your marine environment and managing the marine area that you're responsible for, coherence between activities, coherence between the data that you use (both internally and across borders) and coherence between Marine Protected Areas in the sense of doing MPA networks for example, and coherence between MPAs and the areas within which they are being designated.

In that context, when Charles Ehler mentioned this morning that around 43% of the world's exclusive economic zones will be covered by maritime spatial planning by the year 2025, it came to mind that to the extent that maritime spatial planning is supposed to facilitate the environmental management, and for example the designation of marine protected areas, isn't that also something that then helps reaching the MPA targets we've set ourselves globally and within the European Union? Maybe it does, so that is a concrete thing to work towards.

Another discussion was the potential for duplication, in terms of the work that is being done under the various instruments. If you look at the work that is being done to implement the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the work that is being done to implement the Natura 2000 legislation, the data collection processes for maritime spatial planning, the work that has to be done for

Strategic Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments: there's a genuine concern there that a lot of this work is duplicative and I think one of these things to really look at, particularly in the interface between maritime spatial planning and the environment, is to combine as much as possible the expertise that we have and I will make a more specific point on that later.

Concerning the discussion that was held on the topic of coordination: it is not just coordination of those who are responsible for the various topics inside the various countries inside the European Member States, but also coordination between these bodies and international organisations. One example that we picked up on this morning is how to work with the International Maritime Organisation. So there is a particular concern in that context and the session on Regional Seas Conventions touched upon the same discussions.

Stakeholder involvement has so far been a theme that has run through all of the conferences that we've done on maritime spatial planning. I would say to those who feel disheartened by the subject, and I think they come from all sides of the table: it's painful, but necessary. How else would you deal with issues such as mobile resources, we talked about fisheries for example, without having adequate stakeholder involvement, or how would you deal with the complementarity of activities without stakeholder involvement and then of course the big questions that was kind of the elephant in the room is how do you deal with stakeholder involvement in a cross border context?

Marine protected areas were obviously one of the big topics today and besides coherence between MPAS, I think connectivity between MPAs is a subject to be looked at as well. What I found interesting is this question of who manages what: who manages MPAs versus who manages maritime spatial planning and for me, I cannot imagine how you can achieve coherence if the two are separate somehow.

So, another question in that context is, if you talk about mapping economic hotspots and mapping areas of potential economic activities: isn't that something that can contribute even more effectively to securing that MPAs themselves are more effective in what they are supposed to be doing? And doesn’t that link equally well and equally interestingly with the overall objectives that you may want to develop for an area where you apply MSP across the border? This links in also with reflections that we have, internally in the Commission; trying to find ways to make MPAs more of a concrete output as opposed to something that is akin to paper parks; you designate it and then you forget it. This is something that I think is very much part of this exercise and doing something about mapping areas of potential economic interest is a big part of the work that can help there.

Another big topic that's on everyone's radar screen is the role of MPAs in the context of resilience and in the context of climate change, now that we are in

the times of COP21. There is a lot of discussion about how you can improve the resilience of the oceans and seas with regards to the impacts of climate change and also on what the role of MPAs is in this context, and particularly what the role of well-planned networks of MPAs can be. Concrete experiences in this context have been referred to in this conference; from Scotland, Germany and also from Sweden.

Another thing that is coming back to mind is data and on how to link the various exercises that are being undertaken to collect and use data in order to achieve the objectives that we pursue.

Wouldn't it make sense, if you look at what is being done under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, under Natura 2000, in the context of fisheries, in the context of EMODnet, in the context of maritime spatial planning; to really work towards common maps? This is a very simple concept, from which everyone involved is talking on the basis of the same set of data, rather than disparate sets of data. There are already various exercises that go in that direction, but I'm talking about a concrete effort to put together common maps and this links in perhaps with some of the comments made by our colleagues from the Regional Seas Conventions about them being a resource in terms of common assessments. Perhaps there is something that can be done here that goes beyond what we're doing for the moment and that would help the discussions and the developments move forward. A concrete example is the maps that were developed for the AdriPlan, which are fairly comprehensive in terms of giving everyone a common picture, on the basis of which you can work.

Then there was the famous question about good governance linked to the ecosystem approach. In my opinion, the good governance aspect of what we are doing in terms of maritime spatial planning, is what we are doing today, which is organising conferences on the various issues which are relevant in the context of MSP and making sure that every party that has an interest can participate. As a consequence of these conferences, the Commission produces documents that will hopefully help the whole process along a little bit, without wanting to overstate their value.

Maritime spatial planning in itself is of course already an effort at strengthening the governance of what we do with our sea areas, but there it is very much in the hands of those who implement and apply the MSP: the Member States.

The debate on the ecosystem approach is a very complex one. Ecosystem services are very relevant in this context and make the discussion a very concrete one. Ecosystems in the context of maritime spatial planning are and should be very much area based: when you go beyond this, it becomes a free for all and you get many other subjects added in to it. A third point that I found very useful today in the context of the ecosystem approach, is to maybe start thinking in the context of checklists, to ask ourselves: what do we want to want to cover in our ecosystem approach? Furthermore, when discussing the

ecosystem approach it is pivotal not to lose ourselves in all too lengthy theoretical discussions and to be cautious not to over interpret the concept but to keep focusing on the practical applications.

A great point that was made during the session on the relationship between the Regional Seas Conventions and maritime spatial planning was that they are at the very least a useful resource in the context of applying MSP in the European sea basins. In some cases, they can also function as an instrument that is very helpful in the context of cross border MSP and also as a resource of expertise, data and assessments. To collect the experiences of the various European sea basins in the context of the Regional Seas Conventions and to compare notes is probably a great idea to see where one or the other can learn from other experiences. The Regional Seas Conventions may very well be an ideal forum for developing the aspects of working with Third Countries in the implementation of maritime spatial planning. This is also part of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive of course, although at this stage still very much on a voluntary basis.

Let me conclude by thanking very much our wonderful moderator Dr. Athena Mourmouris for chairing our sessions today, very competently and with good conclusions at the end of each session. I would also like to thank all the colleagues from the DG MARE MSP team, the SCIC and our colleagues from DG ENV for their preparatory work and their contributions to the discussions today.

We are very much looking forward to continuing these discussions and we are at the moment, to give you a little bit of a scoop, working on the idea of having another conference on MSP, this time focused on the international aspects of MSP, to be organised somewhere close to the end of the first half of next year. On that note, I would like to thank you all very much. We will be publishing a document as an output of the discussions that were held today, as we try to do for all of the conferences that have been organised on MSP. We hope these documents will be useful to guide the further work on developing the links between maritime spatial planning and the environment. Thank you all very much and have a good evening.