



AAC Recommendation on the Ocean Act

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Index

Index	2
I. Background.....	3
II. Justification.....	6
III. Recommendations.....	7
IV. Annex.....	9

I. Background

European Ocean Pact - Com (2025) 281 - 05 June 2025

The European Ocean Pact¹ brings together EU ocean policies into a unified framework. In this context, the evaluation and revision of the Maritime Spatial Planning directive is part of the Six strategic objectives.

European Ocean Act (O.P. cornerstone - To be made)

The Ocean Act aims to strengthen ocean governance in the EU, serving as single reference point for all economic, climate, environmental, and social targets to protect and sustainably use ocean resources. The European Ocean Act aims to strengthen and modernise Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) as a strategic tool that serves and implements the European Ocean Pact's priorities. It also aims to improve ocean observation governance.

According to the introductory EU document for the call for evidence² and for the public consultation the Ocean Act³:

- will seeks to improve the coherence and effective implementation of maritime governance in the EU;
- will aim to modernise maritime spatial planning through strengthened national cross-sectoral coordination and a strengthened sea-basin approach;
- will help building an overarching governance framework, including for the Ocean Observation Initiative.
- is supposed to reference existing binding targets, help to meet them effectively and consistently and to streamline reporting obligations;
- will serve as the legal foundation for the basic governance of the Ocean Observation Initiative, whose goals include further developing an integrated, cost-effective, reliable and secure European observation system;
- will create a legal basis for governing and coordinating the European Ocean Observation System through a formal Commission-Member State forum, enabling integrated decisions and stakeholder involvement (including the Regional Sea Conventions);
- will aim to create a coherent and standardised approach to planning and conducting in-situ ocean observation campaigns.

The AAC welcomes and endorses the aforementioned objectives and underline it will require additional efforts from Member States to transpose and implement the new legislation and from the Commission to coordinate all the undertaken activities.

AAC also welcome the creation of a "Commission-Member State forum, enabling integrated decisions and stakeholder involvement".

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025DC0281>

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/16238-European-Ocean-Act_en

³ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-launches-public-consultation-european-ocean-act-2026-04-23_en

This points to a twofold need: namely, the need to operate within a coherent strategic and political framework and the need to adopt a common and shared methodologies.

Regarding the first point, as noted in the AAC 2024 recommendation⁴ and subsequent recommendations, we believe that the “Aquaculture Policy Reform” can become a pillar of the future Ocean Pact policies unified framework.

Regarding the second point, given the fragmentation and lack of uniformity in monitoring and reporting tools, as well as in related R&I initiatives, we believe that establishing common methodologies is essential for the initiative’s success. We believe that, within the context of Ocean Eye, this could serve as the logical continuation of the Copernicus program.

The following basic principles are to be considered as essential for the future development of the Ocean Act and related strategies. They are now widely shared and an integral part of many EU strategy documents for the sector, but they often lack effective implementation.

Basic principles to be recorded

Overall approach to MSP

- **Holistic, flexible, multi-actors, cross-sectoral, cross-border, sea-basin and long-term** approach to support **adaptive MSP** where the Ocean Act appears as a key opportunity to strengthen policy coherence and long-term governance. Where the recent report on the evaluation of the CFP highlighted a low policy attention to aquaculture at national level, the Ocean Act can contribute to mitigate this issue.
- **One-ocean** and **From-Source-to-Sea** approach taking into account the interconnectedness of the global water cycle together with stronger **land-sea integration** considering the **Blue/Green interface** where aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems are inextricably linked.
- In the context of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Water Resilience Strategy (WRS), **maintain healthy and unpolluted waters** and promote measures addressing **biodiversity loss** and **habitat degradation**.
- **Ecosystem-based approach** (EBA) aimed at promoting aquaculture activities able to provide ecosystem services, such as bivalve mollusc farming and seaweed cultivation, and all initiatives or good practices designed to improve existing aquaculture activities, making them increasingly sustainable and reducing their impact on the environment.
- **Striking the right balance between the EU’s food security needs and environmental objectives**, whilst aiming for ever-greater sustainability in high-yield systems and ever-greater profitability in low-yield systems.
- **Animal health and welfare** recognised as an integral component of sustainable aquaculture and ecosystem-based ocean governance where healthy aquatic animals are an important component of resilient aquatic ecosystems and sustainable

⁴ <https://aac-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/4-AAC-Recommendation-for-an-Aquaculture-Policy-Reform-.pdf>

production systems. The Ocean Act should promote policy coherence between environmental sustainability, aquatic animal health and welfare, and food production, ensuring that aquatic animal health and welfare are systematically integrated into evidence-based ocean governance to support a sustainable, resilient and competitive aquaculture sector.

- Address the **Triple Planetary Crisis** - Climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss - protecting aquaculture stakeholders and producers left vulnerable by challenges posed by water pollution or poor quality, climate change impact and increasing predation.

Aquaculture policies

- The **principles of fair and just marine spatial planning** should be applied, and planning should fully integrate the priorities of food production alongside those of other sectors, such as energy, shipping and tourism. The **principles of marine multi-use spatial allocation must be optimised** supporting a “multi-use by design” approach. The role that social, economic and cultural dimensions play in ocean policy should be fostered ensuring a **level playing field**. Co-management models should be promoted.
- **Access to space and water** for aquaculture activities must be increased.
- Complex and time-consuming **licensing procedures**, as well as insufficient **spatial allocation** under maritime spatial planning, should be overcome to allow the sector development and boost investment capacity, particularly for small-scale operators. As part of the process of streamlining the licensing systems, specific procedures and pathways should be put in place that are appropriate for every form of aquaculture, including integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA), co-culture systems and restorative/regenerative aquaculture.
- **Administrative simplification** should be considered a strategic lever.
- Support to **coastal communities** and economies.
- Support initiatives to introduced market based measures including transferable nutrient quotas across economic sectors and **Nature Credits** (NCs), avoiding greenwashing or any action that might undermine environmental current policies.

Technical methodologies

- **Simplify, harmonised and standardised maritime spatial planning tools** in monitoring, reporting and data management. Digitalise reporting and standardise data formats will increase automation and AI potential use.
- Adopt **integrated data management** models at all EU levels.

II. Justification

Dir. 2014/89/EU MSP Framework and following documents⁵

- Com (2022) 185 outlining the progress made in implementing Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (May 22)⁶
- Study from the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) (Dec.25)⁷
- Study on the implementation by EU Member States of Directive 2014/89/EU on Maritime Spatial Planning - Milieu Consulting, Ecorys and SML (Dec.25)⁸
- Com (2026) 174 outlining the progress made in implementing Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning - Second report (Apr.26)⁹

Other key documents

- Com (2021) 236 - Communication on strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 (May 21)¹⁰
- SWD (2024) 107 - Implementing the Strategic Guidelines on EU Aquaculture - Planning of space and access to water for marine aquaculture (Apr.24)¹¹
- SWD (2026) 87 - European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund mid-term evaluation¹²

From an analysis of the aforementioned documents which key points are reported in annex, it appears that the implementation of the MSP directive has been initiated in most member states, but remains incomplete and uneven. Spatial planning for freshwater remains a critical issue. The impact on the simplification of licensing procedures and on the space available for aquaculture is still limited. Integrated data management appears to be fragmented and poorly harmonised and standardised.

To ensure that EU strategies on MSP and data management are translated into action, we emphasize the importance of developing concrete and binding projects designed to become the cornerstone of multi-actor decision-making and cooperation at all levels (platforms, forums, etc.). We believe that provisions limited to strengthening coordination, as well as increasing the sharing of data and best practices, is not sufficient to achieve an efficient and adaptive MSP.

Actively working on concrete, long-term projects requires a more constructive participatory approach and the mobilization of human and economic resources, without which it is difficult to achieve significant progress. We believe this is the fastest and most efficient way to

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2014/89/oj/eng>

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52022DC0185>

⁷ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU\(2025\)765808](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2025)765808)

⁸ https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/publications/digital-publications/study-maritime-spatial-planning-directive-implementation-eu-member-states_en

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52026DC0174&qid=1777789490393>

¹⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52021DC0236>

¹¹ https://aquaculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-04/SWD_2024_Space%20marine%20aquaculture.pdf

¹² [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD\(2026\)87&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2026)87&lang=en)

overcome the current fragmentation and optimize the use of available resources.

In this regard, the recommendations listed below are intended to be specific proposals rather than general guidance.

III. Recommendations

Although the Ocean Pact and MSP focus on seas and oceans, and despite the title "Ocean Pact," it is important to note that the overall framework is intended as a series of measures concerning marine, brackish, and freshwater bodies, following a From-source-to-Sea approach taking into account the interconnectedness of the global water cycle. Any other interpretation would be reductive and misleading.

AAC recommendations:

To the European Commission:

- Define binding objectives, projects and timeline in the context of the AAC proposal for a "Aquaculture Policy Reform" as supported in the APR report¹³.
- Define binding methodologies as a basis for standardization and harmonisation at all levels.
- Request Member States to include in their "Multiannual National Strategic Plans" (MNSPs), as part of their development, Integrated sea-basin management plans. This would ensure that sea-basin specificities, covering ecological conditions, aquaculture production, and the socioeconomic realities of coastal communities, are properly reflected within the broader national strategic framework, rather than being addressed through separate, uncoordinated processes.
- Full development and operational use of the Digital Twin of the Ocean (DTO)
- Monitor MSP implementation in MS strengthening the "European MSP Platform" and the collaboration with EMODnet to further harmonise data and to disseminate the contents of the plans via a common or shared digital platform.
- Set up funding tools for MS to implement binding objectives and projects, included the use of EMFAF and the support through the "Technical Support Instrument".
- Act according to the aforementioned principles.
- Ensure that aquatic animal health and welfare are appropriately integrated into the implementation of the European Ocean Act as a key component of sustainable aquaculture and ecosystem-based ocean governance.

To the EU Member States:

- Develop a "unified national MSP platform" as part of the aforementioned integrated

¹³ <https://aac-europe.org/en/publication/aac-recommendation-for-an-aquaculture-policy-reform/>



sea-basin management plans.

- Develop a “unified national integrate data monitoring platform” in response to the expressed willingness of the Ocean Act to “serve as single reference point for all economic, climate, environmental, and social targets to protect and sustainably use ocean resources.”
- Include a specific chapter on MSP implementation in Member States “Multi-annual National Strategic Plans” (MNSPs) for aquaculture.
- Annual report of MS on MSP implementation.

IV. Annex

Dir. 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning¹⁴

Maritime spatial planning is a process by which the relevant authorities analyse and plan the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve economic, ecological and social objectives. (art. 3)

Each Member State shall establish and implement maritime spatial planning.

The resulting plan or plans shall be developed and produced in accordance with the institutional and governance levels determined by Member States. This Directive shall not interfere with Member States' competence to design and determine the format and content of that plan or those plans. (art. 4)

Member States shall set up maritime spatial plans which identify the spatial and temporal distribution of relevant existing and future activities and uses in their marine waters. Without prejudice to Member States' competences, possible activities and uses and interests may include: aquaculture areas, etc. (art. 8)

Even if the MSP Directive explicitly recognises aquaculture as one of a number of maritime economic activities for inclusion in maritime spatial planning, it is non-prescriptive about how aquaculture (or any other maritime sector) should be included in national plans.

Com (2021) 236 - Communication on strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 (May 21)¹⁵

The Strategic Guidelines note that "coordinated spatial planning, with the early involvement of relevant stakeholders, is essential" as it can 'ensure the allocation of space and water among different activities, while preserving ecosystems".

According to the Strategic Guidelines, spatial planning should be based on the designation of areas suitable for aquaculture (or allocated zones for aquaculture, AZAs).

Com (2022) 185 outlining the progress made in implementing Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning (May 22)¹⁶

As a result of the MSP framework set up by the MSP Directive, for the first time, all coastal EU Member States simultaneously drew up national maritime spatial plans and ensured cross-border cooperation. Coastal EU Member States have made progress in transposing and implementing the MSP Directive. The adoption of the Directive and its implementation have made the EU the grouping of countries that is most advanced in developing MSP, and an international point of reference in this field. However, some Member States are lagging behind.

When drawing up their maritime spatial plans, Member States faced a number of challenges. For most of them, it was the first time they engaged in such far-reaching, multi-sector and

¹⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2014/89/oj/eng>

¹⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52021DC0236>

¹⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52022DC0185>

multi-objective strategic planning of their maritime space. This complex and adaptive process required a broad and intense cooperation and coordination among national ministries, agencies, coastal regions, with stakeholders and with neighbouring countries. Other challenges included data collection and compilation, coherence of plans across neighbouring countries. In several Member States the cross-cutting character of MSP and a lack of clear targets for various maritime sectors made it difficult to prioritise measures and sectors. Transboundary challenges were more significant in cases where there was no established sea basin cooperation on maritime space, or where the maritime zones had not been clearly established or delimited between neighbouring Member States or non-EU countries. In terms of content, the most significant challenges were implementing the ecosystem-based approach, prioritising maritime space uses and providing space at sea to enable various economic activities and achieve various policy objectives, while at the same time protecting the environment or leaving space for future uses.

Two other points are worth noting:

- The fact that Member States can programme MSP action using EMFAF funds under shared management to support the future development of their maritime spatial plans. Additionally, Member states can also request the support through the Technical Support Instrument which provides technical support to design and implement reforms in EU Member States.
- The willingness of the Commission to continue its support of making MSP digital and pan-European, including via the EMFAF in direct management. The European MSP Platform will work with Member States and with EMODnet to further harmonise data and to disseminate the contents of the plans via a common or shared digital platform.

SWD (2024) 107 - Implementing the Strategic Guidelines on EU Aquaculture - Planning of space and access to water for marine aquaculture (Apr.24)¹⁷

This document covers only access to space and water for marine aquaculture. It concerns marine waters under the jurisdiction of coastal EU Member States, i.e. offshore, coastal and estuarine areas of full seawater and transitional (brackish) water.

The Commission has published a separate document on access to space and water for freshwater and land-based aquaculture (SWD (2024) 281 Implementing the Strategic Guidelines on EU Aquaculture - Access to space and water for freshwater and land-based aquaculture)

The document seeks to offer authorities and policymakers in Member States responsible for planning in the marine environment, and in particular for the allocation of marine space to aquaculture activities, potential solutions to facilitate the development of the EU aquaculture sector. This document (i) identifies key challenges and conditions for providing access to space to marine aquaculture; (ii) describes the relevant aspects and steps for providing access to space to marine aquaculture; (iii) consolidates existing good practices and describes relevant tools; and (iv) refers to some concrete examples of the application of those good practices and tools.

¹⁷ https://aquaculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-04/SWD_2024_Space%20marine%20aquaculture.pdf

Study from the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) (Dec.25)¹⁸
Implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive: Impact on fisheries in selected fishing areas and sea basins - European implementation assessment

Study main findings about aquaculture are:

- Implementation of the MSPD has been uneven and incomplete.
- Aquaculture has seen marginal improvements, but continues to struggle with burdensome licensing procedures, lack of dedicated zones, and inconsistent recognition across Member States.
- About stakeholder engagement, Fishers and coastal communities deplore a lack of early and meaningful engagement in MSP processes, compared to stronger sectors such as offshore energy and shipping.
- The effective implementation of MSP is affected by the lack of harmonised data and sufficient resources for data collection and research, making it difficult to apply an ecosystem-based approach and to integrate fisheries and aquaculture adequately into MSP frameworks
- About, cross-border coordination, cooperation between Member States and with third countries remains limited and sea-basin-based planning is still lacking.

Rapporteur recommendations are:

- Strengthen legislative coherence with the MSPD better aligned with related EU legislation, particularly the MSFD, the CFP and the Water Framework Directive.
- MSP should adopt a multi-use approach that reduces conflicts and ensures fisheries and aquaculture are not excluded from maritime space.
- Member States should ensure systematic and early involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Co-management models should be promoted.
- The Commission and Member States should move from national plans to sea-basin strategies.
- Significant resources should be allocated to data collection and scientific research. Improved data will enable evidence-based MSP.
- The forthcoming Ocean Act should achieve the revision of the MSP Directive and establish a coherent framework to improve coordination between existing legislation, introduce more binding and measurable targets and improve land-sea planning.

Study on the implementation by EU Member States of Directive 2014/89/EU on Maritime Spatial Planning - Milieu Consulting, Ecorys and SML - (Dec.25)¹⁹

Concluding statements (6.5)

Implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive has marked a major step forward in establishing a coherent framework for the sustainable use of Europe's seas. All coastal Member States have now adopted or are finalising their maritime spatial plans, and regional cooperation has strengthened considerably. At the same time, experience from the first planning cycle shows that certain elements of the framework could benefit from further

¹⁸ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU\(2025\)765808](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2025)765808)

¹⁹ https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/publications/digital-publications/study-maritime-spatial-planning-directive-implementation-eu-member-states_en

clarification and stronger coordination to reflect new policy priorities under the European Green Deal and the Ocean Pact. The forthcoming evaluation and the preparation of the Ocean Act will provide an opportunity to draw on the lessons learned and to ensure that maritime spatial planning continues to evolve as an effective tool for integrated ocean governance in the European Union.

Several points deserve attention in the context of the revision of the MSP Directive

From the section “Overview of implementation progress” (6.1)

- The first planning cycle has created a solid foundation for MSP across the Union and contributed to the emergence of a shared approach to managing activities at sea. Significant advances have been made in actions for preparing plans, improving coordination, strengthening evidence bases and aligning planning with EU policy objectives.
- Legal and institutional frameworks now provide stable bases for planning and formal coordination structures - both horizontal and vertical - have become more common.
- Most plans apply elements of the ecosystem-based approach (EBA) and support policy coherence with marine and sectoral legislation.
- Use of data has improved markedly, with many Member States investing in data portals or shared geospatial platforms, though differences in data resolution, harmonisation and update cycles persist.

From the section “Key issues” (6.2)

- The Directive’s flexible design enabled adaptation to different governance systems, but this flexibility also produces wide procedural diversity.
- Effective coordination mechanisms depend more on stable processes, continuity of staff and adequate resources than on the specific institutional model chosen.
- Data fragmentation and lack of harmonisation affect coherence of implementation across sea basins.
- The consideration of socio-economic factors and land–sea interactions is often limited or treated as a contextual element rather than fully integrated into planning processes, reducing the capacity of MSP to address holistic maritime and coastal management objectives.

From the section “Opportunities” (6.3)

- The European Ocean Act offers an important lever for greater policy coherence, harmonised governance and simplification in the domain of marine spatial planning (MSP) across the EU.
- The MSP revision can mandate stronger sea-basin coordination, cross-sector integration, data-sharing and ecosystem-based planning.
- Transitioning from project-based learning - outcomes from past EU funded projects - to systematic knowledge integration by ensuring the sustained application and transferability of these valuable outcomes into the routine practice of national planning teams. Moreover, the new planning cycle offers an opportunity to strategically pool and lever funding across sectors, allowing to invest in digital and evidence-based planning tools, while embedding capacity building, monitoring, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms that maximise both impact and sustainability

of MSP projects in the next programming cycle.

From the section “Policy recommendations” (6.4)

- Strengthen guidance for MSP planners
- Consolidate cross-border and regional cooperation
- Support governance and capacity
- Enhance data and monitoring systems
- Foster participation and transparency

SWD (2026) 87 - European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund mid-term evaluation²⁰

The mid-term assessment report flags concerns about the lack of sufficient political attention to aquaculture in policy-making compared to other sectors, such as fisheries, agriculture and novel sectors. The report also concludes that the success of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) depends on the political will of Member States to allocate the necessary resources to develop aquaculture. The interim study (2019) also notes that the success of the OMC depends on political commitment and its capacity to support and have a real impact on national reforms. Policy cooperation should be relevant and concrete, produce visible results, and reach stakeholders and policy-makers, including at higher political levels.

Although three-quarters of MS have included aquaculture areas in their national MSPs and around 40% of MS have developed reference methods or other tools for planning and monitoring relevant for allocation of space for aquaculture, progress in increasing and ensuring access to good quality water is less evident and not reflected in the MS survey results.

Similarly, designation of zones suitable for marine aquaculture in several Member States, though with limited translation into new sites.

Space for freshwater aquaculture is less well defined, with only 38% of MS integrating aquaculture areas into their inland spatial planning.

It is underlined that to meet 2030 objectives it is necessary to accelerate the streamlining of licensing procedures and local-scale spatial planning that dedicates space to aquaculture.

Com (2026) 174 outlining the progress made in implementing Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning - Second report (Apr.26)²¹

The Commission’s analysis shows that MSP directive implementation is reaching maturity across the EU. Currently, 20 of the 22 coastal Member States have adopted at least one MSP, with many already reviewing, revising or making targeted updates to their plans. Experience from implementing maritime spatial planning gathered since the previous reporting cycle has confirmed that maritime spatial planning is now a central and well-established element of EU maritime governance. It increasingly functions as a reference framework for organising different uses of marine space and supporting policy coordination at national and sea-basin

²⁰ [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD\(2026\)87&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2026)87&lang=en)

²¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52026DC0174&qid=1777789490393>

level.

The first challenge relates to cross-sectoral coordination across different levels of government. In many Member States, responsibility for the implementation of maritime spatial planning is distributed across levels of government, adding complexity to coordination processes. While coordination mechanisms are in place in most cases, their effectiveness varies, and implementation experience suggests scope to further strengthen the role of maritime spatial planning as a stable coordinating pillar linking sectoral policies, strategies, targets and implementation instruments across levels of government. In addition, growing demand for space increases the need for sectors to work in overlapping or adjacent areas and thus for planning to take a 'multi-use by design' approach from the outset and in close collaboration with stakeholders.

Another challenge concerns the regional and sea-basin dimension of maritime spatial planning. Cooperation at sea-basin level has become a standard feature of maritime spatial planning processes, supported by regional conventions, EU-funded projects and established cooperation platforms. Nevertheless, geopolitical considerations, differences in planning cycles, national mandates and implementation approaches can potentially limit the extent to which regional objectives are systematically reflected in spatial outcomes. Strengthening regional approaches could help to achieve greater consistency in the way shared pressures, cumulative impacts and transboundary infrastructure needs are addressed, while respecting national competences.

An additional challenge relates to the importance of making instruments more coherent with environmental policies, in particular with the MSFD and related nature conservation and restoration requirements and frameworks, as well as with climate change adaptation objectives.

Another emerging challenge relates to the organisation and use of data and knowledge. Significant progress has been made in developing marine data infrastructure and decision-support tools for maritime spatial planning, often building on EU-level initiatives and regional cooperation. As maritime spatial planning evolves, there is increasing interest in strengthening links with ocean observation and monitoring systems, in order to support adaptive planning, improve understanding of cumulative effects and enhance the evidence base for decision-making across policy domains.

Finally, the growing number of EU initiatives concerning marine space suggests a need for greater coherence and simplification across the policy landscape. Maritime spatial planning is increasingly expected to operate at the interface between multiple sectors, strategies, plans and reporting requirements. While this reflects its potential as an integrating force, it also underscores how important it is for maritime spatial planning to streamline, rather than add to, existing governance complexity.

Since the adoption of the MSP Directive, the policy and legal framework governing EU marine waters have evolved substantially. Maritime spatial planning now operates in a context in which the pace of offshore renewable energy deployment is increasing, environmental protection and restoration objectives are being strengthened, security and



resilience considerations are becoming more central, and there is a growing expectation for integrated ocean governance. These developments emphasise the strategic relevance of maritime spatial planning as a key coordinating instrument, while also exposing its limitations both in terms of its design and implementation.

Maritime spatial planning is widely recognised as one of the few instruments capable of linking sectoral policies, environmental objectives and spatial decision-making across maritime domains. At the same time, experience from implementing maritime spatial planning has highlighted structural challenges. These include inconsistent interpretation of core concepts such as the ecosystem-based approach, variable treatment of land–sea interactions, uneven consideration of marine stakeholders, fragmented approaches to data and monitoring, and limited capacity to coordinate cross-border and third-country planning outcomes.



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