



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúil:
National Parks and Wild
Service

Third Seminar for the Atlantic and Macaronesian Marine Biogeographical Regions Dublin, Ireland 11 – 13 October 2023



SEMINAR REPORT

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Event: For more information on this seminar and associated documentation, see the Natura 2000 wiki: <https://biogeoprocess.net/atlanticandmacaronesia/>

Cover photographs by NatureBureau and the National Parks and Wildlife Service Ireland: Seminar working group; Malcom Noonan, Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Andrea Vettori, Head of Unit for Natura Conservation at DG Environment, and Ciara Carberry, Director of Nature Conservation at National Parks and Wildlife Service Ireland; Howth Cliff, Dublin Bay; group photograph of the seminar participants; the presenting stage at the venue.

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1 Introduction

The Natura 2000 biogeographical process was launched by the European Commission in 2011 to assist Member States in implementing their legal obligations under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and to manage Natura 2000 as a coherent ecological network. The Process serves as a practical means to exchange the information, experience and knowledge required to identify and define common solutions and develop cooperative actions which can be delivered to ensure progress towards reaching favourable conservation status at biogeographical level.

Since the first marine Natura 2000 biogeographical seminar held in St Malo, France in 2015¹, the strategic orientations of the Natura 2000 biogeographical process have been further developed. The most recent addition is the support for the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (**hereinafter “the Strategy”**) aim of “bringing nature back into our lives”² which was adopted by the European Commission in 2020 and supported by Member States³. The Strategy sets out a comprehensive, ambitious, long-term plan for protecting nature and reversing the degradation of ecosystems and ecosystem services. Specific targets are to be achieved by 2030, among them two that are particularly relevant for the Natura 2000 biogeographical process:

- **Protected areas:** legally protect at least 30% of the land, including inland waters, and 30% of the sea in the EU, of which at least one third (10% of land and 10% of sea) to be under strict protection. Effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitor them appropriately.
- **Conservation status:** ensure that at least 30% of species and habitats covered by the Birds⁴ and Habitats⁵ Directives not currently in favourable status are in that category or show a strong positive trend, as well as ensure no deterioration in conservation trends and status of all protected habitats and species.

These targets are not legally binding and do not replace the legal obligations that Member States have under the Birds and Habitats Directives. Rather, they represent a political agreement for action to drive their delivery and help stop and reverse biodiversity loss. Guidance documents produced by the Commission provide further clarifications for each of the targets^{6,7}. These targets have given a new and over-arching context for the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process.

As part of the initiative to meet the objectives set out within the Strategy, the European Commission requested that Member States make pledges to show how they will meet the

¹http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/documents/marine_biogeographical_kick_off_seminar_report_en.pdf

² EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing nature back into our lives <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1590574123338&uri=CELEX:52020DC0380>

³ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11829-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32009L0147>

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A01992L0043-20130701>

⁶ Commission guidance on the protected areas targets: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/publications/criteria-and-guidance-protected-areas-designations-staff-working-document_en

⁷ Commission guidance on the status improvement targets: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/6f30d1d2-d6f2-4c6e-a4dc-1feb66201929/library/bd8a2cd4-f774-4574-bd88-0b1fa012b725/details>

protected area and conservation status targets. These should follow the format⁸ and contents agreed between the Member States, the Commission, and the European Environment Agency (EEA), using an Excel file template developed by the EEA and the European Topic Centre for Biodiversity (ETC-BD) for pledge submission to the EEA's Reportnet platform. Pledges will be peer reviewed by the Commission, the EEA, and Member States. The expanded Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process seminars are central to this review process.

Furthermore, to provide additional support to Member States and the pledge and review process, the scope of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process has been expanded. In addition to helping Member States to implement their legal obligations under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, the process will also help them to contribute to the full implementation of targets under the Strategy.

Sharing information, experience, and knowledge on best practices, and ensuring cooperation and common understanding at transnational level are key to making progress towards achieving a coherent EU-wide network of protected areas, improving the effectiveness of its management, and ultimately ensuring progress towards reaching favourable conservation status at biogeographical level by 2030. Natura 2000 seminars will therefore support key players in:

- achieving a common understanding of the objectives and processes in relation to relevant targets under the Strategy;
- presenting national pledges related to the targets for a peer review in the seminars;
- achieving a common understanding on relevant topics, especially in relation to Natura 2000, to address challenges in implementation and management, financing, and monitoring and reporting, to ensure coherence and effectiveness of implementation at regional/biogeographical level;
- sharing good practices in regulation, supervision, conservation, and restoration with a view to promoting and upscaling them; and
- facilitating the setup of joint projects to support delivery of these objectives, including on management/restoration.

As the responsibility for the implementation of Natura 2000 and ensuring progress towards the EU's Strategy targets lies with Member States, they are key actors in the Natura 2000 biogeographical process. The process also provides an opportunity to mobilise expert networks and inputs from other key stakeholders, including NGOs. This is important to tap into the direct experience of Natura 2000 practitioners, expert stakeholders and Member States' representatives with specific responsibilities for implementation of Natura 2000. It underlines the strategic and operational importance of the process, the integrated inputs required from diverse actors and the opportunities available to develop concrete collaborative actions for future implementation.

⁸ Format for the protected areas target: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/6f30d1d2-d6f2-4c6e-a4dc-1feb66201929/library/55e353-e369-49ab-92b1-4ddab67424b0/details>

Format for the status improvement target: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/6f30d1d2-d6f2-4c6e-a4dc-1feb66201929/library/395c7cde-e2c4-40b0-9afc-638a214d6b39/details>

1.1 Context of the seminar

The third marine Natura 2000 seminar for the Atlantic and Macaronesian biogeographical regions took place in Dublin, Ireland from 11 - 13 October 2023 (Annex 1) and was attended by 94 participants from the Member States and other relevant organisations (Annex 2).

Preparations for the seminar started after the annual meeting of the Marine Expert Group in March 2023. Its primary aim was to take stock of the pledges that Member States in this marine biogeographical region have submitted in the context of the commitments taken under the EU the Strategy and the Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework. It also sought to stimulate transnational exchanges and promote a coherent management of the Natura 2000 network at biogeographical level.

The seminar was hosted in Dublin by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The participants engaged in discussing the progress of pledges and the challenges faced in this process, as well as three specific themes linked to marine conservation and management of the Natura 2000 network. Evaluation of the seminar by the participants is given in Annex 3.

1.2 Seminar work plan

The seminar was organised in five main sessions, as well as introductory and closing remarks. Following each session, the participants were split into break-out groups for in-depth discussion on questions which were posed by the Biogeographical Process team. Discussion groups were chaired by the hosts and the organisation team, and a note taker and rapporteur were selected from the participants. Rapporteurs then reported the thoughts of each discussion group back to the plenary. The feedback from each of the group discussions is summarised in tables using notes from each discussion table alongside recordings of the session.

Introductory remarks:

- Niall Ó Donnchú, Director General of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- Video message from Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries
- Andrea Vettori, Head of Unit, Nature Conservation Unit, DG Environment, European Commission

In addition, Vedran Nikolić from the European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit gave a presentation on the Strategy: policy context for the biogeographical process.

Session 1: Protected Area Targets

An overview of the progress made towards the protected area targets of the Strategy was provided by the European Commission. This was followed by the presentation of pledges by

those Member States who have already submitted, a presentation by the MPA EUROPE Horizon project on the scientific basis for the identification of MPAs, and a presentation from the Biogeographical Process team on the methodology for the analysis of the pledges for protected area targets. Presentations were followed by a discussion in six break-out groups on the challenges faced when working towards protected area targets and how these can be overcome. Findings were then reported back to the wider group in plenary.

Session 2: Conservation Status Targets

An overview of the progress made towards the conservation status targets within the Strategy was provided by the European Commission. This was followed by a presentation from the only member state to have submitted a pledge towards conservation status targets (Spain), a presentation by the LIFE CIBBRiNA project implementing activities to address bycatch of protected species, and a presentation from the Biogeographical Process team on the methodology for the analysis of the pledges for conservation status targets. Presentations were followed by a discussion in six break-out groups on the challenges faced when working towards conservation status targets and how these can be overcome. Findings were then reported back to the wider group in plenary.

Session 3: Theme 1 – Role of Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs in marine restoration

Presentations were delivered by the European Commission and Better BirdLIFE project on the EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs and the improvement of natural habitats for coastal birds respectively. Following presentations, discussions were held in six break-out groups which covered examples of successful restoration activities in MPAs, the main challenges in marine restoration in MPAs, and whether the designation of MPAs ensures non-deterioration. Findings were then reported back to the wider group in plenary.

Session 4: Theme 2 – Strict protection in the Atlantic and Macaronesian marine region

Presentations were delivered by the European Commission on strict protection in the context of the Strategy, the MarHA project on their nature integrated approach for effective management of marine habitats in France, and the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Germany) on the management of existing uses in areas suitable for strict protection. Following presentations, discussions were held in six break-out groups which covered the habitats likely to benefit most from strict protection, examples of best practice in the implementation of strict protection, and how trans boundary collaboration of strict protection management can be supported. Findings were then reported back to the wider group in plenary.

Session 5: Theme 3 – Renewable energy and marine conservation

Presentations were delivered by the European Commission and SeaLIFE project on achieving renewable energy targets whilst protecting and restoring biodiversity. Following presentations, discussions were held in six break-out groups which covered synergies between renewable energy and marine conservation, the planning of offshore renewables to be compatible with protected area targets, and how to use marine spatial planning to minimise any negative effects. Findings were then reported back to the wider group in plenary.

Closing remarks:

Concluding talk was delivered by the European Commission and the Biogeographical Process team, summarising the next steps for the pledge process, the discussions had at the seminar, and how these discussions will aid future progress. The closing plenary and farewell message was delivered by Malcom Noonan, Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

All presentations from the seminar can be found on the biogeographical process website: <https://biogeoprocess.net/atlanticandmacaronesia/>

1.3 Field trip to Dublin Bay

On the second day of the seminar (12 October), participants embarked on a boat excursion around the Natura 2000 sites in Dublin Bay Biosphere Reserve. During the excursion, participants were informed about the special areas of conservation (SAC) and special protection areas (SPA) which are found within the bay. Speakers included protected area rangers and the Nature Conservation Directorate from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, who play a role in the management of these sites, and the Port Heritage Director. The Natura 2000 sites visited by the participants onboard the vessel were:

- Baldoyle Bay SAC & SPA
- Irelands Eye SAC & SPA
- Rockabill to Dalkey Island SAC
- North West Irish Sea cSPA
- Howth Head SAC & Howth head Coast SPA
- North Dublin Bay SAC
- Bull Island SPA
- Dublin Port & Dublin Bay UNESCO Biosphere
- South Dublin Bay SAC & SPA
- Dalkey Island SAC & SPA

Once disembarking the vessel, the participants attended a lunch at the Irish Lights HQ, before Yvonne Shields O'Connor, the CEO of Irish Lights, informed the group about their work in maritime safety and marine conservation.



Ireland's Eye island SAC/SPA (NatureBureau)



Participants onboard the vessel (NatureBureau)

2 Welcome and introductory session

The overall objective of the introductory session was to provide an overview of the Strategy for 2030 targets and present them in the EU policy context. The session was held in plenary and consisted of welcome talks from the hosts – the Head of Unit for Natura Conservation at DG Environment and a video message from the European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries.

It was followed by a presentation from the Nature Conservation Unit in DG Environment on the Strategy: Policy context for the Biogeographical Process. The presentation introduced the participants to the Biogeographical Process and its role in the current context of EU environmental policy and legislation:

- The Birds, Habitats, and Marine Strategy Directives
- EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030
- Global Biodiversity Framework
- Nature Restoration Law (proposal)
- EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries
- Climate Policy and Climate Law

The scope of the Biogeographic Process was enlarged beyond the support for the management of the Natura 2000 network, and it now also supports the pledge and review process of the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Under this process, Member States submit pledges for reaching the relevant targets. The targets to be met are:

- Protected areas targets:
 - Legal protection for at least 30% of EU land area and 30% of EU sea area
 - Strict protection for at least 10% of EU land area and 10% of EU sea area
 - Integrate ecological corridors.
 - All protected areas have clearly defined conservation objectives and measures and are effectively managed and appropriately monitored.

- Conservation status targets (for all species/habitats reported under Article 17 of the status are in that category or show a strong positive trend. Habitats Directive and bird species reported under Article 12 of the Birds Directive):
 - To ensure no deterioration in conservation trends and status of all protected habitats and species by 2030
 - To ensure that at least 30% of species and habitats not currently in favourable
 - To know the conservation status of all species and habitats.

The pledges are being assessed by the EEA for the protected area target and for the status improvement target by using a methodology developed by the Biogeographical Process team.

Currently, only 12% of EU seas are covered by the MPA network, less than 1% are strictly protected and most MPAs are also not effectively managed⁹. The current challenges to reach the Strategy protected areas targets include improving the scientific underpinning for locating new protected areas, discussing the role of other effective areas-based conservation measures, and improving the management of marine protected areas. The conservation status targets aim to prioritise species and habitats with the highest risk of disappearance, species for which Member States have particular national responsibility or those that can have an umbrella effect. Both the Nature Restoration Law and the EU Action Plan can support progress towards conservation status targets. The Nature Restoration Law is a key initiative of the European Green Deal and the Strategy and aims to bring about a large-scale restoration effort. Under the Law there is a requirement for specific restoration targets for marine habitats (beyond the Habitats Directive) to reach the overarching objectives of the restoration measures covering 20% of the EU's land and sea by 2030, and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. These restoration efforts will increase the conservation status of local species. The EU Action Plan aims to protect and resort marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries by protecting the seabed, improving gear selectivity, and addressing bycatch. This will also help to improve the conservation status of both target species and those impacted indirectly by fishing activities.

EU-level coordination or transnational coordinated approaches would be necessary to include in the pledges for transboundary populations, to ensure that efforts taken in one Member State are not imperilled by the lack of measures in another Member State or in cases where the conservation status or trend of a species or habitat is influenced by pressures or threats acting at transboundary levels.

Through regional marine biogeographical seminars and networking events, the Biogeographical Process aims to support Member States in the production of pledges to meet the relevant targets before the European Commission evaluate progress in 2024.

⁹ <https://www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-icm/products/etc-icm-report-3-2020-spatial-analysis-of-marine-protected-area-networks-in-europe2019s-seas-iii/@@download/file/Spatial%20Analysis%20of%20Marine%20Protected%20Area%20Networks%20in%20Europe%E2%80%99s%20Seas%20III.pdf>

3 Session 1: Protected Area Targets

The aims of Session 1 were to provide an overview of the current situation regarding protected areas and distance to targets, to hear the experiences of Member States whilst producing pledges for these targets, and to discuss possible solutions to challenges faced in the pledge process. The session was held in plenary, and the following presentations were made:

- Where are we – overview and distance to target – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit.
- Scientific basis for identification of MPAs – Anna Maria Addamo, Horizon Europe Project, MPA EUROPE.
- Pledges and approaches:
 - Denmark - Caroline Vestergaard Mikkelsen, Ministry of Environment
 - Sweden - Lena Tingström, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management
 - Spain - Jorge Alonso Rodríguez and Helena Moreno Colera, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge
- Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Paul Goriup, Biogeographical Process consortium.

3.1 Overview and distance to protected area targets

The Nature Conservation Unit in DG Environment, on behalf of the European Environment Agency (EEA), gave an account of the current status of protected areas in EU waters (and thus before pledges have been implemented). Data from the European Environment Agency showed that at the end of 2020 only 9.1% of the North-East Atlantic Ocean and Macaronesia was covered by MPAs. This is the lowest coverage of MPAs throughout the marine biogeographic regions. Within this 9.1%, just four Member States have an MPA coverage of over 30%: Belgium, France, Germany, and Sweden.

In addition, the structure and expected content in the Member State protected area pledges was explained. Information to be provided in the pledges includes general information on existing nationally designated areas, Natura 2000 sites and OECMs, as well as pledges for future protected areas and OECMs. The European Environment Agency has designed a dashboard tool for the presentation of both existing and future protected areas which will be published soon, and updated when new pledges are submitted. Currently, four Member States (Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Spain) have submitted for protected areas in the Atlantic and Macaronesian region.

3.2 Scientific basis for the identification of MPAs

Nord University presented the MPA Europe project¹⁰, which aims to provide the scientific basis for the identification of MPAs in European seas. Species richness, potential geographic distribution of important biogenic habitats and data-driven classifications of ecosystems are being mapped (the sources of the datasets for species distribution and blue carbon were provided). This has allowed the project to produce an online European marine biodiversity atlas, which can be used to design MPA networks covering 10% and 30% of European seas that maximise biodiversity protection and blue carbon benefits. A demonstration was given on how the tool can be used to map environmental data which may impact the placement of new MPAs, such as spatial differences in temperature between today and 2090. Ongoing work under the project includes standardising species ranges, biomes, and functional ecosystem units, mapping oceanographic connectivity, and running models to select the best 10% and 30% for protection at European, sea basin, EEZ and territorial scales.

3.3 Denmark's preliminary protected areas pledge

The Danish Ministry of Environment presented the preliminary protected area pledge submitted by Denmark. She began with an overview of the current situation of protected areas in Denmark, as well as the new areas proposed in the pledge. The latter include six new bird protection sites (Natura 2000) and 19 new marine protection sites, 18 of which will have strictly protected areas (for Marine Strategy Framework Directive purposes). One of the bird protection sites was designated in September 2023. A political decision was taken in June 2023: "At the latest in 2030, more than 30% marine area will be protected and hereof 10% strictly protected", with more political decisions to come. Denmark's pledge that protected areas in its Atlantic marine region will increase from 18.7% coverage currently to 29.7%, with 4.8% strictly protected. 6% of Denmark's marine area to be strictly protected is in public hearings currently, and by 2030 a further 4% of marine areas will be strictly protected.

3.4 Swedish experience in preparing the pledge for marine protected areas

The Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management presented the marine protected area pledge submitted by Sweden, as well as the experience of pledge preparation. On a national scale, marine pledges make up 15% of pledges seen in Sweden, with the highest percentage of pledges seen for mountain regions (46%) and lakes and rivers (28%). This proportion will increase to 20% with the addition of the pledges by 2030. The overall contribution from Sweden toward the protected area targets will be an increase in marine protected areas from 32% coverage to 36.5% coverage in the Atlantic marine region by 2030, and the introduction of 8% coverage of strictly protected areas, for which coverage is currently zero. However, Sweden does not yet have a fully developed concept for strictly protected areas. The government plans to work with stakeholders to increase their involvement in the provision of the data needed to understand where and how best to implement protected areas to meet the targets.

¹⁰ <https://mpa-europe.eu/>

3.5 Spanish target on protected areas

The Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge presented the approach taken by Spain for the development of a protected area pledge. It began with a review of the current protected areas in Spanish waters, and the progress made over time. In 2009 only 1% of Spanish waters were protected, which had increased to 12% by 2018. Furthermore, only one third of current MPAs have an approved management plan in place. He explained the steps taken by Spain to determine which areas should be designated as protected, and how to make sure the protection is effective. Regarding effective protection these steps include the approval of management plans for Natura 2000 sites through participatory process and the ecological monitoring and surveillance in place, whereas towards the 30% protection by 2030 they consist of oceanographic campaigns and surveys to identify new marine areas for protection, and a gap analysis for the identification of proposals for potential new designations. Oceanographic campaigns have identified 6 new areas that represent round 3% of Spanish marine area, and these are pending designation by 2024. As a result of the gap analysis, Spain proposes 7 more areas which have been selected as high priority for protection by the end of 2023, making up a further 9% of Spanish waters. The presentation concluded with a brief description of the proposed new protected areas.

3.6 Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges

Paul Goriup from the Biogeographical Process consortium presented the methodology designed for the analysis of protected area pledges, and the initial analysis produced of pledges received. So far from the Atlantic region pledges have been received only from Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Spain and therefore analysis at a regional level is not yet possible. However, analysis at a Member State level was carried out in relation to total current and expected by 2030 area covered by protected areas, OECMs and strict protection. This showed that expected protected areas after pledge implementation meet the 30% target in three out of the four submitted pledges, with Spain reaching around 12%. With regard to strict protection, only partial information has been submitted so far while Sweden and Germany have not submitted expected areas covered for strict protection. This analysis is only preliminary as the results will be updated as Member States continue to develop and submit pledges.

3.7 Session 1 break out group discussion and feedback

The feedback from each of the group discussions is summarised in the following table.

3.7.1 What are the major challenges for Member States in pledging protected areas in the marine environment and how can these challenges be overcome?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective stakeholder engagement. • Political will to reach targets – time allocated to progress and pressure from the public to see changes. • Competing interests in the same areas of the sea, for example fisheries and renewable energy. • There are lots of administrative targets to be met. • Some of the issues on protected area pledges need to be dealt with at an EU level as opposed to a Member State level (e.g. fisheries management). This takes longer. • Non-EU countries may need to get involved to effectively pledge protected areas (UK and Norway). • Money/budget is often an issue, and it is important to have financial support from the government. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation • Early engagement • Good co-operation ○ Examples of this co-operation were given from Denmark, where discussions are in progress with fisheries and NGOs about where to place the last networks of protected areas (NPAs), and the Netherlands, where working with fisheries is conducted as much as possible. • Public pressure and political will.
Table 2	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The guidance for how to recognise OECMs is unclear at the moment. • The integration of the common fisheries policy and the consideration of various fishing rights in play, for example in the Irish Seas. • The lack of clear definition for “strict protected areas”. Does this mean restriction of all activities? • Data availability across Europe.
Table 3	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to pledge using the format requested by the European Commission. • Lack of knowledge/data in Member States to make this commitment. Knowledge is project based and so cannot be applied to a comprehensive approach across Europe. Acquiring this level of knowledge would be expensive and time-consuming. • Strictly protected areas are proving to be a complex problem. • Member States who share a boundary with non-EU countries such as the UK, Norway and Iceland find cross-border management and protection challenging. • A high level of stakeholder engagement is required before the pledge is even made.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are major differences between the targets of different management authorities such as the Department of Fisheries and the Department of Conservation. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive engagement with stakeholder groups e.g., fishermen. • Change Natura 2000 process from being purely scientific to including stakeholders. • Common criteria on identifying “strictly protected” areas. • Marine spatial planning must be taken into consideration in the pledges. Identify areas which are suitable for designation rather than those not suitable.
Table 4	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative responsibilities – targets are numerous and spread across various agencies, regional governments etc. This can cause confusion about the individual roles of various agencies. • Differences between various sectors such as fisheries, tourism, and renewables. • The definition of “conservation” can vary across different agencies and “strict protection” can be interpreted differently by different Member States. • Management of areas once designated is a topic for discussion. Who is responsible at a regional, national, and international level? • Access to relevant and current data. Lack of sharing data between Member States. • Obtaining support of neighbouring Member States can be challenging. • Lack of transboundary coordination between Member States. • Marine designation can be challenging due to the movement/migratory behaviour of species. Large protected areas can be challenging to monitor due to their size, scale, species and habitat mobility.
Table 5	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no space in the sea which is not currently being used in several Member States. Many economic sectors are sharing the same areas. • Once areas are designated, implementation will be a challenge to ensure that protected areas are good quality. • Strict protection is complicated in a sea which is used by so many sectors. Sectors often disagree, for example conservation and fisheries. Member States are finding it difficult to identify suitable areas for designation.
Table 6	<p>Challenges and solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to make nature and biodiversity count against fisheries and commercial interests. • Difficulties between competing governmental departments. • The strategic spatial utilisation of the sea is of increasing importance currently, so the military is given priority to conduct activities. • If areas are designated strictly protected as they have limited current commercial activities, are they being considered for their scientific interest? • The Nature restoration law may provide a solution; however, Member States may be opposed to Nature Restoration activities that impact the CFP and data required may be sensitive so stakeholders may be slow to share. • Once designated, protected areas are challenging to operate. How will the areas be effectively managed? What is defined as strictly protected?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder consultation is a key step in the process which needs to be given appropriate time early in the process. Local interests should be considered alongside science. • Climate and energy security issues must be brought into the designation process. The protected area process must acknowledge competing requirements. • Data is lacking in key areas to support the control of activities within the protected areas. • Management of water waste materials is key in terms of delivering high water quality and therefore a healthy marine environment. Incentivise better behaviour from identified problem sources such as agriculture and water treatment facilities. • EU laws can lead to restrictions on environmental action by Member States.
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3.7.2 How can we ensure that the protected area pledges made under Biodiversity Strategy 2030 are deliverable?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear guidelines on strictly protected areas as different states have different interpretations of what they are. • Capacity on all levels e.g., agriculture vs biodiversity • Contradictory policies will make the process harder. Policies should support each other. • Public awareness is important for areas in which access is allowed. In Denmark tourists can check on their mobile phones where they can and cannot go. • Some believe the European Commission have gone beyond what is practical and that there will not be public support for the targets/pledges. • Politicians need to be on board and work with colleagues in other ministries and departments and stakeholders is important. • Financial capacity needs to be secured. Spending is biased towards other sectors. • Regulation – support the measures stated and deliver on biodiversity.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient resources such as funding and projects such as the Horizon project presented today. • Ongoing seminars and networking opportunities are very useful as well as progress reports and roadmaps which Member States can complete to track progress and share best practices with others. • Early stakeholder engagement is critical. • Defining the difference between strict and non-strict protection and ensuring that these definitions are based on the best available scientific knowledge across multiple disciplines. • The Nature Restoration Law could also be very helpful in delivering these pledges.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions about marine spatial planning and the use of the seas. This can lead to the identification of go to areas and be used as a tool for the management of human activities. • Offshore wind and fisheries sectors should also be involved in designations, not just the Ministry of Nature. • Highlight and showcase success stories e.g. Oyster fisheries in Lough Swilly which have has voluntary “no go zones” for hundreds of years.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with NGOs which have done work on these areas already. • The stakeholders need to clearly see the benefit of the designation. • Target large scale activities such as bottom tow, however this may require legislation change. • Ensure that the natural capital benefit of the protected area is illustrated. • Use of flagship and charismatic species • Annual monitoring of pledge action
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder led negotiations e.g. with the fishing industry, renewable energy sector, and NGOs to get an early “buy in” to the designation process. • Using mechanisms in the Common Fisheries Policy Articles 11 and 20 • Real world decision making rather than being guided by idealism. Practical approaches to find workable and deliverable outcomes. • Focus the conversation on overcoming fears and building trust with stakeholders. • Stronger transboundary mechanisms for countries to cooperate and work together and an emphasis on the overall EU wide 2030 targets. • Agreement on what constitutes “strict protection”. • Public and political pressure for change.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national control (e.g. permitting) is relatively straightforward in some places but conflicts with common fisheries policies and international level regulations. This need to be made more cohesive. • There is a problem of semantics. Strictly/high/strongly protected areas. Although the definitions are clear, interpretation is still an issue which needs to be discussed. For example, in France small scale fishing is accepted in strictly protected areas, but other Member States do not agree. • Effective management is essential to mitigate pressures such as shipping, fisheries, tourism, and explosives.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are two stakes to this question: it is important to be able to deliver what you promise, but targets are ambitious to motivate political action. • Political ambition may be required to motivate the process as there is often a lack of viable alternative to such a tool. • There is a need to fully define the designations to ensure clarity for stakeholders, and those involved in their implementation. • Assess what the legally required protections are compared to the aspirations that would be desirable but are not legally binding. • Long- term planning to help reduce potentially painful actions on stakeholders e.g. reduced payments.

3.7.3 Beyond the EU/Member States, who are the key players in delivering the ambition of Biodiversity Strategy 2030?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sectoral groups – fishing, IMO, ICCAAT, IUCN • Regional groups – HELCOM, OSPAR • Species groups – ASCOBANS, BirdLife • These groups will all be supported in different ways.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing industry • International authorities such as the IMO • NGOs • Scientists

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional sea conventions • Local communities
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional bodies e.g. NE Atlantic Fisheries Commission, UNEP, OSPAR • Sectoral groups • Stakeholders • Government bodies e.g. Marine Institute • Research institutes/academia
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Seas Convention – OSPAR • Regional advisory councils • NGOs and stakeholders • Financial sector
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbouring Member States • Stakeholders – International Maritime Organisation, DG Mare, OSPAR, HELCOM, NATO • Industries – wind/renewables • Finance actors and investors • Maritime industry – blue economy • There are also some players who could prevent the delivery of the ambition of the Strategy: mineral exploitation, dumping sites, and illegal activities at sea such as illegal fishing and trafficking.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders – commercial interests, users, landowners, lobby groups, local fishing, and corporate companies. • Political bodies – including departments with land-based components that influence the marine environment (run-off, pollution etc.) • The governments – with on the ground support by state agencies e.g. NPWS and the Marine Institute. But it is important to note that competing interests between departmental bodies within governments may be challenging.

4 Session 2: Conservation status targets

The aims of Session 2 were to provide an overview of the current conservation status of habitats and species and the distance to achieving targets, to hear the experiences of Member States in producing pledges for these targets, and to discuss possible solutions to challenges faced in the pledge process. The session was held in plenary, and the following presentations were made:

- Where are we – overview and distance to target – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit.
- CIBBRiNA LIFE: International bycatch project – Lejo van der Heiden, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food quality, the Netherlands.
- Pledges and approaches:
 - Spain - Jorge Alonso Rodríguez and Helena Moreno Colera, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge
- Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Paul Goriup, Biogeographical Process consortium

4.1 Overview and distance to conservation status improvement targets

The Nature Conservation Unit in DG Environment introduced the conservation status improvement targets of the Strategy and outlined the current state of species conservation in EU waters i.e. before pledges have been implemented.

Every six years, EU Member States are required to report on the trends in populations of birds, and the conservation status of and trends for habitats and species covered by the Birds and Habitats Directives. The results from the compilation of these reports (EU State of Nature) show that in the Atlantic and Macaronesian marine regions, no habitats are in favourable conservation status and there has been no improvement of habitats in unfavourable/inadequate status. Furthermore, marine birds are in favourable status in just 39% of assessments, and for many species, the assessment of their status is unknown. Although deterioration of status for habitats or species is more frequent in areas outside Natura 2000, there are still cases of deterioration even for habitats well covered by the Natura 2000 network, which would indicate poor effectiveness of conservation measures or the lack of the most important measures.

The measures to improve the conservation status expected to be reported in the Member State pledges should aim to mitigate pressures on these species and habitats, such as fishing, shipping, and the modification of the coastline for development. Pledges should ensure the effective management of Natura 2000 sites to increase effectiveness of conservation measures and should introduce new or improved measures inside and outside Natura 2000 sites capable of reversing negative trends. Synergies with other legislation, contribution to other targets such as bycatch reduction, and an increase in knowledge are also expected in pledges for conservation status improvement.

4.2 CIBBRiNA LIFE: Coordinated Development and Implementation of Best Practice in Bycatch Reduction in the North Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean regions

The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food quality in the Netherlands introduced the LIFE CIBBRiNA project. The project aims to work with fishers, authorities, and other relevant stakeholders to minimise and/or eliminate incidental bycatch of priority endangered, threatened, and protected (ETP) marine species due to a better mitigation framework adopted across the EU. It works on a multi-species level and focuses on high-risk fisheries in the North-East Atlantic, Baltic, and Mediterranean Sea. Several case studies are underway to identify key issues to develop a “safe working environment” and provide training courses for scientists and policy makers.

4.3 Spanish conservation status targets

The Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge described the approach taken by Spain for the development of a conservation status pledge. A review of the conservation status assessments of marine habitats and species in Spain revealed that 82% of species had unknown status and all habitats were also assessed as unknown. For marine birds, 50% of the species had unknown status and a large number of birds are in unfavourable status. Accordingly, conservation efforts will focus on the habitats and species which are most likely to see an improvement in their conservation status with intervention. These include *Posidonia* beds and submerged or partially submerged sea caves, *Phocoena Phocoena*, *Patella ferruginea* and *Lithophaga lithophaga*, and *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* and *Puffinus mauretanicus*. In addition, 15 habitats and species have been selected for Spain’s non-deterioration target. However, challenges remain concerning the lack of information on those habitats and species with unknown status, and the coordination of conservation measures across autonomous regions.

4.4 Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges

The Biogeographical Process consortium presented the methodology designed for the analysis of conservation status pledges, and the initial analysis produced of pledges received. Currently, conservation status pledges have only been received for the Atlantic region from Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Spain. Therefore, analysis at a regional level is not yet possible and birds are not assessed at a biogeographical region level. Preliminary analysis at a Member State level was carried out to compare the current conservation status of each feature (favourable, unknown, unfavourable-inadequate, and unfavourable-bad) and the targets stated in the pledges. For example, if the status of a feature is assessed as unknown, there should be a target to gather the required information. Finally, it should be noted that aspects of conservation status targets (e.g. 30% improvement) need to also include terrestrial pledges, and analysis methods will develop as Member States continue to develop and submit pledges.

4.5 Session 2 break out group discussion and feedback

The feedback from each of the group discussions is summarised in the following table.

4.5.1 What are the major challenges for Member States in pledging improvements in conservation status in the marine environment and how can they be overcome?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of data available for some Member States. • How much of the pressures should we remove to be able to co-exist? • Fear of losing credibility if Member States cannot deliver. There is a lack of confidence in being able to achieve targets. • Lack of funding- some of the large pressures are expensive to mitigate. • Need to know the economic consequences of any bans before they are put in place. • Climate change, rising sea levels and global warming- we must look at the big global picture not just our own coast. • Pressures such as shipping can be out of the control of each Member State. • Collaboration between organisations. • Governance structure- governments may have a different view to the EU.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is so much unknown information about the status of species and habitats in most Member States. • The approach for assessing status in habitats sometimes differs from that used for species. • It is complex to challenge the existing uses within the habitats that are to be improved. • However, we cannot just avoid taking action because it is difficult. • We must find a balance between doing what is achievable and what is difficult and unlikely to be achieved. • Competing agendas between fisheries and environment. • Lack of, or poor communication. • There is a need to create a common culture across administrative groups. • How can we highlight the natural capital benefit in advance? Can we put a monetary value on it?
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the legal status of a pledge? Member States may be reluctant to pledge improvements if they will be held over them. • Marine Strategy Framework Directive is looking for “Good Status” not “Favourable Conservation Status”, so two policies are disjointed. • Too many policy commitments, Member States want to take one set of actions. • Solution: incorporate pledges into National plans e.g. MSFD to ensure they are relevant and achievable.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting/unknown ecological baselines – the need to know where you are starting from. • Data deficiencies • Many marine areas offer limited biological data so there is less knowledge about the status of species and habitats. • Convincing politicians, stakeholders, and the public about the benefits of marine protection. This can be difficult due to marine habitats being less visible than terrestrial habitats.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in monitoring species and habitats due to their transboundary, migratory nature. • Member States may be reluctant to protect an area that is only used by a species on a seasonal basis e.g. rest areas for migratory bird species. • Long term financial commitments and the continuity of political support/will to ensure that pledges are not amended/dropped when there are changes in governmental/regional/local administrations. • Identification of the correct/contributing source pressures.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data deficiency is a challenge, but this group does not view it as a major one. • The major challenge is settling on a list of targets that are achievable. • There is a reluctance to put species on a list for pledges when there is no chance of actually delivering on that pledge. For example, oyster reef restoration is fairly achievable and therefore can be pledged, but restoring kittiwake populations is much more difficult (although necessary) and so is harder to pledge. • Coherence between national and regional policies in terms of conflict. Maerl beds, for example, are commonly bottom-trawl fished because, in priority setting the conservation status of the maerl comes below the economic value of fishing. We need a common culture where conservation benefits do not fall below the benefits perceived by other activities.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do policies such as European level pledges, Nature Restoration Law targets, and National Plan overlap and interact in the view of the Commission? The timing of all these policies is a challenge. • Time and care are required to make sure commitments are only made where they can actually be achieved. • Stakeholders: engagement, support and groundwork required before a restoration action plan or conservation measures can be implemented. • Lack of data is a challenge, and data for these pledges is even more important to the process and its success. • These challenges may be overcome through guidance from the Commission.

4.5.2 How can we ensure that the conservation status pledges made under the Biodiversity Strategy 2030 are deliverable?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder investment • Financial support • Political ambition • EU-cooperation to deliver on biodiversity. • EU support for marine sites – financial. • Government collaboration between sectors – fisheries, agriculture, environment- agree on a main goal. • People, knowledge, data, communication
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of a species list which includes those that have the highest potential for restoration. • There need to be good financial and human resources in place – the resource of public opinion can create a groundswell behind any project. • Political courage • Educating the users of the sea.

Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underpinned by legislation e.g. MPA law followed by enforcement. • Where is legislation making it a requirement? Where is the law regarding biodiversity? • Liaise with stakeholders. • Utilise flagship species. • Participation of private sectors/removal of subsidies. • Use of SMART targets- this can identify resource constraints.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent and reliable financial support and political will. • Early engagement with relevant stakeholders – support and “buy-in” from an early stage in the process. • Innovation must accept a certain level of failure. Trial and errors must be recognised as a valid part of the scientific process and failure should not be penalised.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitable financing • Resourcing – both human and finance • Support from the public – explain to them that these measures are of benefit to them. This is difficult because marine habitats are not as visible. • Political will and courage – especially important when a species or habitat is on the pledge list, to ensure that measures are implemented. • Education • Removing the harmful subsidies, e.g. fuel subsidies, which can then be replaced by financial incentives for environmentally friendly fishing or other activities.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require targeted actions that are measurable for areas and habitats. • Improve habitats but more closely monitoring impacts and pressures such as pollution, damage by fishing and mining etc. • Holistic approach to manage the threats and pressures across the land-sea interface. • Minimum level of data should be required to support any decisions. • Identify areas where passive actions versus active measures are more appropriate. • Habitats and species outside of the 30% and 10% protected areas mainly drive the health of those inside protected sites and so should also be considered. • Identify corridors for movement of species where possible to create coherent networks of protected areas. • Delivery of efficient monitoring and enforcement within protected sites. • Buffer of limited actions around protected sites. • Align the Natura 2000 infrastructure with the biodiversity targets/framework. • Alignment of reporting periods for MSFD and Birds and Habitats Directives.

4.5.3 Do you have examples of improvements in conservation status of marine habitats/species that could be applicable across Member States?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<p>The group found is very difficult to find examples.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denmark have implemented fisheries closures of 4 reef habitats and have also implemented the Water Framework Directive which has improved water quality. An improvement has been seen subsequently in the reefs, but it is not clear which measure is having this effect.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many seabird species feed on seagrass and their status can be improved by changing the agriculture and implementing the Water Framework Directive. Local agriculture can reduce the quality of the water and therefore the quality of the seagrass feeding habitats for these birds. The implementation of the WFD prevents this chain of events. Farmers have changed their practice of winter seeding of barley, and this is feeding geese and swans as well.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives for more sustainable fishing are often successful. For example, removing the subsidy for fuel, or even incentivising other activities. • Denmark has implemented the water framework directive and small-scale fishing bans in biogenic reefs such as oyster reefs which are showing signs of restoration as a result.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of another policy e.g. Water Framework Directive • Reducing pressures e.g. fishing and pollution • Localised reduction in nutrients appears to have led to the recovery of seagrasses in some examples. • The change to organic farming from glyphosate has also led to the recovery of seagrass.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grey seals are protected under the Habitats Directive and have increased in number in Ireland due to the designation of areas used by them for breeding and haul out.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Denmark the national status of coastal lagoons has improved from U2 to U1 over the last reporting period through the removal of pressures and restoration of lagoons brought about by two different LIFE projects. • The Roseate Tern Irish population has seen a 30% status increase since 2015 due to the efforts of LIFE projects.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • France - Posidonia seagrass- local regulations in place to ban anchoring vessels more than 24m. This has resulted in positive progress to date. • France - Fishing industry mapped king scallop areas inside and outside a SAC for maerl, fishing was then excluded from parts of the maerl beds and scallop numbers have increased with benefits for the local fishers. • Common theme along with other examples mentioned in the UK was that the engagement and inclusion of the sector/group posing the biggest threat is essential.

5 Session 3: Role of Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs in marine restoration.

An important part of the Strategy is the EU Nature Restoration Plan. The Strategy emphasises that marine restoration will, along with effective protected areas, bring substantial health, social and economic benefits to coastal communities. The Strategy aims to reconcile the use of bottom-contact fishing gear with biodiversity goals, reduce the by-catch of protected species, and establish fisheries management measures in all marine protected areas. By implementing these measures, and if the restored marine areas comply with the criteria for protected areas, then these restored areas should also contribute towards the EU targets on protected areas. Protected areas can also provide an important contribution to the restoration targets in the Strategy, by creating the conditions for restoration efforts to be successful. It is important for there to be

exchange of relevant experiences in view of increased efforts and investments in marine restoration and protection in the future.

The overall aims of Session 3 were to explore the importance of nature restoration as well as habitat protection, and the role of protected areas in successfully restoring marine habitats and species. The session was held in plenary, and the following presentations were made:

- EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs - Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit.
- Better BirdLIFE: Improvement of natural habitats for coastal birds – Jakob Pederson, Middelfart Municipality, Denmark.

5.1 EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs

The Commission proposal for the Nature Restoration Law (NRL) was adopted in June 2022 and the ambition is to have an agreement on the law by co-legislators by the end of 2023. Preparations for the implementation of the law are ongoing with Member States and the European Environment Agency. The Nature Conservation Unit from DG Environment explained the relationship between the NRL and the role of MPAs. The Strategy targets cover both the protection of nature through a coherent trans-European nature network, and the restoration of nature. Therefore, MPAs alone are unlikely to enable Member States to reach targets. Restoration targets therefore require additional legislation, which is where the NRL can play a vital role.

The NRL is pioneering legislation proposed as a key initiative of the European Green Deal and the Strategy. It aims for a large-scale restoration effort which complements and builds on the existing policy framework and focuses on synergies between climate and nature policy. Within the restoration targets, there is a specific target for marine ecosystems, broken down into three components:

- Put in place the restoration measures necessary to improve to good condition areas of habitats in not good condition (for groups or habitat types: 30% by 2030, 60% by 2040, 90% by 2050).
- Put in place the restoration measures necessary to re-establish the habitat to reach the favourable reference area (for groups of habitat types: 30% by 2030, 60% by 2040, 100% by 2050).
- Put in place the restoration measures necessary to improve the quality and quantity of European protected habitats and species (including re-establishing them) and enhance connectivity until sufficient quality and quantity is achieved.

Areas under restoration do not have to be protected areas, but if they comply with the relevant criteria, these areas should also contribute towards protected area targets. Furthermore, conservation objectives and measures in many Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs already requires restoration of habitats, and protected areas provide the conditions for successful restoration and no deterioration. Strictly protected areas also have a key role in marine

restoration by providing close to pristine conditions without pressures, allowing passive restoration, demonstrating the benefits nature can provide to society and economic sectors, and providing a control environment of good condition in which the best restoration methods can be determined.

Examples of protected areas allowing the restoration of species and habitats are already being seen. An example was presented from Bradda Inshore Fishing Ground in the Isle of Man. The area was closed to dredging and scallop fishing in 2003, and the biomass of scallops within the MPA is now 4.9 times higher than in surrounding fished areas. The scallops are also much larger specimens, meaning they can produce more juveniles.

As part of the Horizon Mission to restore our ocean, seas, and waters by 2030 the European Blue Parks call has been made for the protection and restoration of marine habitats. The call aims for:

- Effectively managed MPAs with clear science-based conservation objectives and conservation measures that contribute to restoration and protection.
- Protection and restoration of marine habitats and species through strictly protected areas, in particular of seabed habitats, including to preserve their carbon sequestration capacity, ensure spill-over of fish, provide ecosystem functionality and maintain connectivity.
- Enhanced resilience and adaptation potential of coastal and marine ecosystems.
- A blueprint for the designation and management of MPAs and/or for shifting their status from “protected” to “strictly protected”.

5.2 Better BirdLIFE: Improvement of natural habitats for coastal birds.

The Middelfart Municipality, Denmark presented the Better BirdLIFE project which aims to improve the natural habitats for coastal birds in the Danish Baltic Sea. The Blue Reef LIFE project was a very successful restoration project which took place from 2006 to 2013, restoring the favourable conservation status of the offshore reefs. 5 hectares of degraded reef were restored, and 6.5 hectares of disturbed reef stabilised, resulting in a 6 tonne increase in algae, a 3 tonne increase in bottom fauna, and 3-6-fold increase in cod numbers.

With such a successful example set by the Blue Reef LIFE project, the Better BirdLIFE project aims to improve the stone reefs in the same location to provide feeding areas for coastal birds by increasing the area of habitats suitable for blue mussel populations and seagrass meadows for juvenile fish.

The stone reef will comprise 2,800 m³ of stones situated at 6-8m depth. Currently, there is voluntary protection on around 8 km² of the reef and there has been protection from fishing for 7 years to protect local cod and harbour porpoise populations. The project follows the best practice for restoration of stone reefs in Denmark from the Danish Centre for Environment and Energy. One of the main activities is the restoration of the seagrass meadows. The project team are using three methods to re-introduce seagrass plants into degraded areas: seeds in hessian

bags, cultivation, and injection. It remains to be seen how successful each of these methods will be and how it will impact the quality of the natural habitat for local seabirds.

Marine restoration is way behind terrestrial restoration and therefore requires a lot of work. Furthermore, there is an argument for just removing pressures and allowing nature to repair itself. However, there are some good reasons to carry out and refine restoration methods in marine habitats. Restoration needs to be more than just for the benefit of one habitat or species, it needs to be for multiple benefits. For example, the restoration of oyster reefs benefits biodiversity, coastal protection, and water quality, and the reintroduction of seagrass meadows benefits biodiversity, nursery areas, sediment stability, carbon sequestration and the removal of pollutants.

5.3 Session 3 break out group discussion and feedback

The feedback from each of the group discussions is summarised in the following table.

5.3.1 Which marine restoration activities in MPAs have been successful so far and could they be upscaled to the EU MPA network?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence base is quite low with projects as success is limited. • Still in the testing/trial stages with most restoration projects so don't want to upscale until we know it will be successful. • The Netherlands have stopped bottom trawling recently within 5% of the Dutch part of the North Sea. It is a resting area for seabirds and with the removal of fishing there is reduced disturbance and a removal of pressure. • Ireland provided some examples; however, they were not classed as successful: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Salmon drift net bans implemented in certain areas; however, it was not a success for the salmon and the population is still declining. ○ Missed opportunity with a ban on pair trawling and a 6km trawl limit – this is now a huge pressure. ○ Rockabill Island – the work of the NPWS/Birdwatch protects the island and limits visitors. This protects the terrestrial aspect of a marine bird, but nothing was done to protect their marine habitat. • However, in Ireland Skelligs and marine plans control the number of fishing boats. Activities are regulated and controlled but restoration efforts are all passive.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive restoration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anchoring ban ○ Interceptors on land to reduce storm water discharge. ○ Removal of pollutant pressures. • Removal of pressures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fisheries such as bottom trawling ban (Holland example) ○ Gravel/soil extraction ○ Aquaculture ○ Nesting & resting sites • Active restoration

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stone reefs – restoration is expensive – non-upscaleable – Denmark example from the BirdLIFE presentation. ○ Full removal of substrate from an illegal infilling activity gave rise to full recovery of a SPA and SAC in Ireland ○ Eel grass (Denmark and France examples) ● Posidonia species in the Mediterranean – expensive with slow results (France example).
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coral restoration – 7-year project in Catalonia, Spain. Gorgonians taken by fishermen, cultivated in laboratories and then returned to MPAs. ● In the Netherlands there are not many restoration area examples but there is an example in Fore Delta where they have reinstated some areas where activities are banned which is beneficial for protected seabirds by reducing disturbance. This can be scaled up. ● There are areas in MPAs in the Netherlands where there is no bottom trawling. 5% of the seabed is protected in this way. There is a target for 15% of the Dutch seabed to be closed for bottom trawling by 2030. There are no results yet as it was only implemented in March 2023. They will be monitoring changes in the habitat every 3 years. ● Seagrass restoration projects in Portugal. ● Oyster restoration in Ireland- cross boarded project with Northern Ireland.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reef creation in Denmark ● Elimination of bottom trawling in MPAs in the Swedish Atlantic area. Partial banning in Denmark. Huge upscale potential. ● The UK removed bottom tow gear in four offshore MPAs and brought in restrictions in several inshore areas. Three key sites included Lundy, Lamlash Bay, and Lyme Bay and a significant increase in scallop populations has been seen. It is planned to apply these measures to 56 MPAs in the UK.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most important aspect of restoration is to remove pressures. ● Small projects are seen in a lot of places but are rarely interconnected. ● Removing pressures may be the only option beyond the intertidal in the marine environment. ● Danger that created habitats may not deliver the same biodiversity as natural habitats but may still be perceived as “restoration”. ● Restoration is seen as positive as it helps to raise awareness and introduce positive public relations ● Restoration vs augmentation – putting things in inappropriate locations will not work. ● Intervention is sometimes necessary – for example in the case of native oysters (but it is very expensive). ● Marine ecosystems are complex with multiple habitats and coastal zone planning is essential to manage such a large and complex network. ● Does ecosystem management count as restoration? ● Marine ecosystems are complex, but so is restoration and non-deterioration.
Table 6	<p>Spain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regulate activities, including removal of activities where required ● Targeted active restoration such as removal of anchoring activities and active planting of <i>Posidonia</i> ● Reef systems: capture and release of species into appropriate, controlled areas (LIFE– Med)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mooring systems, reduced pressure on seabed via buoyant chains. Fines may also be applied should users anchor boats rather than using the mooring systems • Moorings may be removed in the winter • May interfere with fishing activities • Mooring/anchoring regulations can be easily upscaled <p>Ireland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seagrass restoration through passive means but may be expanded into developing nurseries but still quite nascent in their development • fishery closures exist in primarily deep sea sites but time scales for change detection will be decadal- passive action • limited restoration actions currently exist in Ireland but good scope for projects to expand. <p>France:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to Spain – some passive restoration • Active restoration will not be authorised where passive restoration can achieve the same aims – 10 years of passive restoration must be attempted. • Active actions include oyster reef restoration (Bretagne) and <i>Zostera</i> (Basin d’Arcachon) in collaboration with the Netherlands • Active restoration must only assist natural environment, not alter the original ecosystems. <p>Belgium:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nascent oyster restoration. Strict protection required before actions can be taken. Identify areas where they previously occurred. Near shore, not coastal (30km) <p>Germany:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active restoration needs a permit, and active restoration must prove that it will not damage/alter the original ecosystem
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5.3.2 What are the main challenges in marine restoration in MPAs and how can we overcome them?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not currently have any proven evidence of a successful restoration method and so are uncertain about the outcomes. (made clear by the lack of examples in question 1). • Marine MPAs are a new concept and need to be imbedded. People are nervous about how they may affect their way of life so we must overcome the uncertainty and their fears. • Separation of functions of conservation and fishing policy and Article 11- Article 20 of the Common Fisheries Policy. • There is a gap between what conservation/restoration ministers want and the common fisheries policy. This is something that the Commission could make clearer by joint recommendations and Fisheries Management. • The legislation that underpins fishing is not aligned with the legislation that underpins nature conservation. • Marine Action Plan is voluntary, not law. • Commission could be more vocal with support for the Member States. • Nature Restoration Law – a clause needs rephrasing in Article 14A- discussion ongoing. • There is also a challenge in being brave enough to make decisions and take risks in case of failure.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We must start with small scale trials which can then be upscaled to large projects. We can use funding bodies such as the LIFE projects. • Lack of data is a challenge – we do not know which habitats and where to restore and what the associated challenges are. • Increase in pressures is a challenge – how do we overcome them. Must be firm in the designation of MPAs and management. • A lot of Irish marine sites do not have management plans – you are not going to see restoration in an MPA with no coordinated single management plan. • Lack of awareness is a challenge – we need to be more proactive in communication and work better together.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scientific assessment as to the suitability of sites and allocation of appropriate funds to such. ○ Education as to the sustainability of sites and the ecological impacts of appropriate and non-appropriate sites. • Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establishing best practices • Length of Article 11 procedure of Common Fisheries Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Effective measures could be achieved in a timelier manner if Article 11 process was not so lengthy • Control and enforcement – once restored this can ensure it is not lost again. ○ Stakeholder engagement • Climate change to be considered, particularly in the near shore, fast actions could be beneficial in a timely manner. • Active restoration techniques may divert attention away from removing pressures (should not destroy habitats in the first place). • Greenwashing • Adequacy of assessment, particularly for offshore renewable energies.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties in upscaling restoration for reasons such as the cost of restoration projects to date. • In the Netherlands, the main costs associated with protected areas is the enforcement and patrol costs. This makes using them to ensure restoration costly. • Consultation with stakeholders is often difficult but achievable. • The Article 11 procedure takes a long time to consult with other countries who have interest. • Need to designate an area as strictly protected if you want to restore it in full.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 11 of the CRP is lengthy and difficult to implement with limited actions under the article to date. It needs to be made more streamline and “fit for purpose”. • Resourcing – money, scientific knowledge/competency, robust monitoring and data, enforcement. • Gaining the agreement of the various stakeholders. • Trans-national cooperation – coordination and harmonisation of programmes and policies. • Public/political “buy in” – the need to involve communities with effective communication and demonstrate projects/publicise results. • The lack of a requirement for an Appropriate Assessment for the fishing industry.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Fisheries Policy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Agricultural Policy • Food security • Different ministries responsible for different but interconnected policies. • Competing priority e.g. areas for strict protection may be the areas that are not required for other policies and not the most “suitable” for strict protection. • Getting a consensus is vital – grown-up conversations required. • Financing – there is money available but it may not be channelled for biodiversity. • Marine is different to terrestrial – the EU is the custodian of the marine waters.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costly • Active restoration is not allowed without regulation/licence in some countries, e.g. in Germany. Justification must first be provided. Existing nature protection regulations may be in conflict with some restoration projects. These may be EU or national legislation. • Habitats Directive: restoration projects must align with conservation objectives of a Natura site. • Need budget to support follow-up actions. • Germany: funding may be provided by compensation from commercial activities. Funds gathered from these activities are ring fenced for these actions. • Fishing licence may be bought to remove fishing pressure but only applies to territorial waters. EEZ is problematic with this method. • Limited space can lead to high competition for areas where restoration projects can occur. • Pressures must be removed first, for both passive and active projects. • Previous projects have resulted in negative impacts from active restoration actions.

5.3.3 Would designation of MPAs in areas subject to restoration be one way to ensure non-deterioration and long-term ecological and socio-economic benefits of restored habitats?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, absolutely, but it is not realistic. • MPAs come first in the sequence before habitat restoration. • Socio-economic benefits depend on where you are. • Long term ecological benefit is assumed but depends on the habitat. • The MPA will only ensure non-deterioration if it is protected – no paper parks. • Conservation targets is that 30% should be protected, and restoration is that 30% should be restored. • Restoration activities must only be what can be delivered through the management of sites. • There is an overlap as opposed to protection and restoration being parallel. Doing one hits the targets of the other.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, with exceptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Local acceptability may take time. ○ Extension of sites instead of designating new MPAs. • OECM designation with fishing bans is also an option to ensure long-term ecological benefits.

Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective management is needed if you designate an area otherwise the area will not be protected. • If the area is well managed, it will have good socio-economic benefits. • Where you have restoration in place, adding the MPA protection will further protect and enhance it on a socio-economic basis. • Adding the protection of the area will ensure governments also target funding for the future in these areas. • Putting the effort into restoring a habitat and not adding a long-term protection is not good practice and could waste funding in the long term.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Restoration Law will help with habitat/species protection and a combination of passive and active actions. • A combination of the Restoration Bill and MPA designation. • Effective management after MPA designation – monitoring and long-term legal protection.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The marine environment is a dynamic system. • MPAs can be valuable for static elements (seabed/sea floor and spawning grounds) but can be challenging for mobile elements e.g. species. • MPAs are a single tool in the protection of the marine environment. • OECMs may be more valuable. • Look at examples from terrestrial systems that may be applicable in the marine ecosystem – e.g. corridors. • Need long-term measures and management – pressures could be removed and then another pressure develops.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, a combination of both passive and active measures is required and MPAs can combine both.

6 Session 4: Strict protection in the Atlantic and Macaronesian marine region

The Strategy sets a target of at least one third of all protected areas in the EU, representing 10% of EU land and 10% of EU sea, to be under strict protection by 2030. As they are to be left undisturbed by human pressures and threats, strictly protected areas will be non-intervention areas where only limited, well-controlled activities can take place. Activities must not interfere with natural processes, must enhance natural processes, or must involve the restoration of the natural values of the area in question. To make progress with the implementation of this target, it is important to identify habitats and areas which are suitable for such a protection regime, exchange experience between Member States, and ensure proper control and enforcement of measures.

The overall aims of Session 4 were to discuss the importance, implications, and successful implementation of strictly protected areas in the Atlantic and Macaronesian marine region. The session was held in plenary, and the following presentations were made:

- Strict protection in the context of Biodiversity Strategy targets – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit
- MarHA: Nature Integrated Project for effective and equitable management of marine habitats in France – Alain Pibot, Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB)
- Management of existing uses in areas that are ecologically suitable as strictly protected areas – Jochen Krause, Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Germany

6.1 Strict protection in the context of Biodiversity Strategy targets

The Nature Conservation Unit from DG Environment explained what is meant by strict protection in the context of the EU Strategy targets. Member States committed to legally protect at least 30% of EU land area and EU sea area. On top of this, strict protection must be implemented for at least 10% of EU land area and EU sea area. However, today less than 1% of marine areas are strictly protected in the EU.

In the context of the 10% target in the Strategy, the definition of strict protection as outlined in the Commission's guidance document and agreed with Member States is as follows:

“Strictly protected areas are fully, and legally protected areas designated to conserve and/or restore the integrity of biodiversity-rich natural areas with their underlying ecological structure and supporting natural environmental processes. Natural processes are therefore left essentially undisturbed from human pressures and threats to the area's overall ecological structure and functioning, independently of whether those pressures and threats are located inside or outside the strictly protected area”.

In the marine environment, these protected areas are often called marine reserves, no-take zones or similar. Natural processes are left essentially undisturbed in these areas, with only activities compatible with the conservation objectives of the area permitted (e.g. research,

invasive alien species control, restoration) on a case-by-case basis. Strictly protected areas should also be comprised of functionally meaningful areas which are of a sufficient size on their own or together with the relevant buffer zones. Areas covered by strict protection should include:

- Areas of very high biodiversity.
- Significant areas of carbon-rich ecosystems, such as wetlands, mangroves, and seagrass meadows.
- Important fish spawning and nursery areas.

For a site to be formally designated as strictly protected it must be legally protected. The protected area may be strictly protected in its entirety or the areas under strict protection can be a smaller part of the wider protected area. The designation of strict protection can occur through specific national legal instruments, specific long-term contractual agreements, or through zoning in the management of planning wider areas. The strictly protected areas must always be clearly identified in the management plans of any wider protected areas, and those plans must have a legal standing.

This definition of strict protection aligns with the definitions of IUCN “Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories”, namely: (Ia) strict nature reserve, (Ib) wilderness area, and (II) national park as part of a zoning approach. Extractive activities are not compatible with this level of protection, but non-extractive activities can exceptionally be allowed when compatible with the ecological requirements of the areas.

Strictly protected areas can also provide an important contribution to restoration targets in the Strategy by creating conditions for restoration efforts to be successful. The implementation of strict protection can in some cases in the marine environment be enough to lead to the restoration of natural habitats.

Currently, all Member States except Spain report that there are no areas that could currently be considered as being under strict protection. Furthermore, only Denmark provides an estimate of marine areas that would be under strict protection in the Atlantic marine region in the pledges for 2030 (covering 4.8% of the marine waters of Denmark).

6.2 LIFE IP MarHA: Nature integrated project for effective and equitable management of marine habitats in France

The Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB) gave a summary of the MarHA LIFE integrated project which will run until 2025. The project covers 600 operations under 6 different topics, studies 164 Natura 2000 marine and lagoon sites and 9 habitats of community interest and has 140 staff. The work of the project includes the assessment of the ecological status of benthic habitats and the reduction of pressures, the implementation of restoration measures, training of those involved, raising awareness of the benefits of management, and reinforcing protection.

In 2022, MarHA organised a platform meeting on the implementation of strict protection in European marine waters. The goals of the meeting were to bring together relevant LIFE projects with policy makers and stakeholders to:

- Exchange experience to enhance the results of projects
- Get updated information about the EU policy context
- Provide insights to policy makers about (strictly) protected marine areas

Following the publication of the Strategy in 2020 and the subsequent publishing of criteria and guidance for protected area designations, the platform meeting examined the issue of “How will the Member States achieve 10% strictly protected marine areas in Europeans Seas by 2030?” from three points of view: ecological, sociological, and economic. The meeting discussions focused on four main propositions:

- Marine ecosystems are in a poor state of conservation and a large proportion of the world’s population and economy depend on them
- Only highly/fully protected and actively managed areas can guarantee effective conservation of ecosystems and ecosystem services
- We now have enough data to take action, if we wait until we have all the information required, we will have nothing left to protect
- It is essential to make a clear distinction between managing fish stocks and protecting the ecosystem.

Case studies of strict protection across the world were also discussed at the meeting, including:

- **The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park** – this marine park works under a zoning method with differing levels of protection within each zone. 33% of the zoning is no-take zone.
- **The Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary** – this sanctuary moved from community-based protection during 1998-2001, to state-based protection from 2001-2003 and finally to a federal phase in 2007.
- **The Capo Carbonara Marine Protected Area** – utilises the zoning method with zones determined using seabed mapping and environmental and anthropogenic data.
- **The Iroise Natural Marine Park** – strictly protected with high levels of control of activities and frequency assessments of biodiversity.
- **Columbretes Islands Marine Reserves** – smaller marine reserves but with a focus on the management of activities within the area, the assessment of habitat diversity and continuity, and support of the local fishermen who understand the importance of protection for their economy.
- **Agde Natura 2000 site** – 45% of the coralligenous habitat of the MPA is strictly protected in a no-take zone with no diving, anchoring, or dredging.

The MarHA project has identified success factors for the implementation of strict protection that include a clear and transparent process and objectives to establish a climate of dialogue and trust, more inclusive governance, sufficient scientific and technical knowledge communication/training, and political cooperation at a local/national/international level.

6.3 Management of existing use areas that are ecologically suitable as strictly protected areas

The feedback from each of the group discussions is summarised in the following table.

The Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Germany gave a brief talk on the methods used by Germany to identify existing use areas that are ecologically suitable as strictly protected areas. Whilst the designation of areas which are not currently used for human activities is simpler than the management of current activities, these areas do not make up enough area to reach the target of 10% of EU seas strictly protected. Therefore, effective management of existing use areas is essential.

6.4 Session 4 break out group discussion and feedback

6.4.1 What Atlantic and Macaronesian habitats are likely to benefit most from strict protection?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group agreed that this is a very challenging question. • It is less about designating specific habitats, and more about designating those with the greatest amount of pressure or those that are fully degraded. • Areas with high biodiversity should also be prioritised for protection. • Displacement is a big issue that needs to be considered. • It is not possible to determine specific habitat types which will react well to strict protection - finding this out will involve studies of what the conditions are in each habitat, and how they change when considered on a country-specific scale.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All should be targeted but an approach could be to first look at the most degraded habitats, the most well-known habitats, the least “popular” (e.g. mudflats), those with the most biodiversity recovery potential, and those with the longest-lived species. • Carbon sinks are under-represented and very important to protect. • Holistic protection. • Protection must be representative.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Netherlands – long lived species, reef/biogenic reef habitats, and areas that provide ecosystem services. • Carbon sequestration habitats and high biodiversity areas. • Resilient areas on the coast would not need as much protection. • Nursery and spawning habitats. • Almost pristine remaining sites would benefit as there are not many of them.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitats: coastal lagoons, bays, reefs, benthic seabed habitats • The question could be asked “are there any habitats that are <u>not</u> likely to benefit from strict protection?” • Existing sensitive habitats, those with the highest restoration potential, and biogenic habitats. • Strictly protected marine areas must take the entire water column into consideration. All habitats need protection, and all damaging activities need to be prohibited, rather than focusing on just some.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus resources in areas of high biodiversity value with high activities. • Lack of information/data on the areas that require strict protection is an issue – apply the precautionary principle to act now.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of habitats would benefit from stopping trawling and many habitats might benefit from protection, but not all uses must be stopped. • The benefit of strict protection depends on the conservation objectives. What is the MPA for? This is based on habitats. • Prioritising exercise – find highly sensitive, slow recovery, fragile, degraded habitats. (Biogenic reefs). • Is it better to have the less degraded strictly protected to ensure non-deterioration? • Would habitats benefit from other types of protection? Does it have to be strict?
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maerl, deep water coral/pen communities • Gravel beds – less resilient • Carbon rich ecosystems: coastal and deep water • Do we prioritise protection of sites under high pressure or those which are in good condition to maintain the status? • Prioritise areas where medium to low impacts occurs as this could be more effective in achieving the objectives. • Can sites such as estuaries be strictly protected (whether they benefit or not) given the diverse, broad scale influences that can negatively impact them?

6.4.2 Can you highlight examples of best practice in the regulation and enforcement of strictly protected marine areas?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Ireland has introduced fishing management and prohibited bottom trawling through a process of engaging with the fishing industry and allowing them to co-design the management. Stakeholder management and communication is essential. • Some good examples were also shown in the presentation about MarHA, but the group struggled to come up with any more in discussion.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core no-go areas with restricted openings for educational purposes. • Control areas – MPAs included in area targets so each year an administration must carry out certain controls. A dynamic map of regulation per area should be available to the administration so they can view shipping movement and to aid in the enforcement of MPA regulations. (e.g. in France) • Web application for the public to view regulations. (e.g. in France) • Control and enforcement of regulations – blackbox or remote electronic monitoring for fisheries. • Stakeholder support.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network of marine reserves which have strict protected areas inside them in Spain – well protected and working well with fishers. • Designated under fisheries law but do not have conservation objectives, but have a consistent approach to the management of fisheries resources. • Some of the monitoring showing spillover effects. • Dutch areas – resting areas of birds where enforcement is working well.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas where you cannot have any activity combined with areas where there is a managed approach to allow certain activities which don't affect biological processes and are compatible with the conservation objectives.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing monitoring of habitats where bottom trawling practices are banned in Sweden and the UK. • A distinction between restoration and precautionary protection.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of resources- human and financial. • In smaller parks its not as difficult – it depends on the scale. • Danish part of the North Sea – no fishing in the protected area in Natura 2000 – direct restriction of fisheries by the EA with only small-scale mussel picking and small vessels (with GPS) allowed. Fisheries rangers from the ministry patrol boats. • Webcams and drones for surveillance.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer back to the methods presented by France and Germany.

6.4.3 What mechanisms are available to ensure the wider benefits of strict protection are reflected in other sectors e.g. ecosystem services, cultural preservation, or local community resilience?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Education • Communication • Outreach and ocean literacy – this will encourage engagement/compliance from the local community.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate goals – for example, if seagrass beds are protected and included in Government Blue Carbon reports in the Paris Agreement. • Traditional seaweed harvest – no-take zone harvest areas within a seaweed harvest site used to show the benefits that traditional harvesting can have on biodiversity. This will also provide education in traditional methods. • Mechanism to share the benefits/importance of seaweed reference sites.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising the profile of the strictly protected areas among the public. • Other policies that affect the marine habitats must take account of the strictly protected areas. • Management, monitoring, and reporting of the results and benefits. • Need to measure the benefits of ecosystem services, cultural preservation, and local community by socio-economic research. • Work closely with stakeholders throughout for a more positive response. • Benefits for tourism if you have strictly protected areas.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural capital assessments demonstrating wider benefits to society. The value of ecosystem services, supply of food resources and provision of flood protection. • Biodiversity conservation/restoration and climate change measures are intertwined – protection of the ocean addresses the biodiversity and climate issues. • Demonstrating the interdependence of ecosystem services. The delivery of resilience through natural capital assessments and the implementation of systematic conservation planning.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising the profile of MPAs amongst the public, interested sectors, and political players.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denmark- benefit to other species as the seals are going from near the offshore windfarms. • Some fisheries benefits – spillover. • Cultural heritage • In many cases there are trade-offs, not benefits. • Educational and sustainability benefit. • Economic protection – coastal communities.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and education. Showcasing these sites to the public. • Engagement on a more regular basis for each stage of a project. • Demonstrate through examples how there is a wider benefit such as the spillover effect, controlled tourism opportunities etc.

6.4.4 How can we better support trans-boundary connectivity and collaborative management of strictly protected areas across the Atlantic and Macaronesian biogeographical regions?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group found this discussion complex with lots of aspects at play. • A dedicated process and an aspiration to designated collaborative ideas. • Identify the opportunities within the cross-border area. In areas in the EU where its more obvious that a joint management would make sense, get people around the table to explore the opportunities. • Ensure that the designation of the trans-boundary protection makes sense before it is designated, for example by exploring the areas where the boundary lies and identifying biodiversity hotspots. Protection can then be designated for these hotspots. • Drive or guide countries to work together. • MPA Europe results that would lead to evidence base for marine protection management.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing seminar/networking opportunities to advance communications between Member States on case studies to better inform discussion prior to events and to encourage collaborative management. • Communication between Member States via Regional Groups (e.g. OSPAR), who share or have close boundaries or who border infrastructure projects. • Connectivity studies – for example genetic studies to determine if species are connected and the impact of removing one link (e.g. <i>M. modulus</i>)
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By regional conventions like OSPAR, making decisions on shared responsibility e.g. Dogger bank. Regional communication is very important. • Talk directly to your neighbour Member State on a smaller scale. • Better implementation of Article 11 of the CFP and countries having specific time restrictions submitting joint recommendations. • Helpful to have more project funding available for strictly protected area research like MPA Europe for the scientific identification of MPAs.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fora for transnational discussion. • Better understanding of how individual countries/authorities manage their seas. Addressing border/boundary issues between neighbouring countries. • Regional Seas Convention (OSPAR). Countries can improve working together and implement connectivity of conservation efforts and plans.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research into the genetics/movement of species and ensuring that links/corridors between populations are maintained.
Table 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including the EU in the conversation of transboundary conservation. • All sectors are fighting for space in the seas. • In OSPAR, now they want to make accumulative assessment. • Collaboration is mostly about mobile species.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish buffer zones to the protected sites in areas of trans-boundary nature. • Sharing monitoring and enforcement actions between neighbouring states. • Develop a European level mechanism to resolve trans-boundary issues. • Migrating species can pose particular challenges. • Regional seas convention/OSPAR/HELCOM may help resolve. • Discussions/negotiation must be held at the appropriate governance level, equivalent state bodies/regions.

7 Session 5: Renewable energy and marine conservation

More sustainably sourced renewable energy will be essential to fight climate change and biodiversity loss, which are interlinked problems. The development of offshore renewable energy however provides both opportunities and threats to biodiversity conservation. It is therefore essential to explore such technologies and ways of implementing renewable energy projects in the marine environment that can be compatible with or even foster marine conservation and restoration. The EU strategy for offshore renewable energy¹¹ states that the development of offshore renewable energy must comply with the EU environmental legislation and the integrated maritime policy and that designated sea spaces for offshore energy exploitation should be compatible with biodiversity protection, consider socio-economic consequences, and integrate as much as possible other uses of the sea. Marine spatial planning is therefore an essential and well-established tool to anticipate change and prevent/mitigate conflicts between policy priorities. Offshore renewable energy can and should coexist with many other activities, especially in crowded areas.

The overall aim of Session 5 was to discuss the achievement of renewable energy targets in the Atlantic and Macaronesian marine region, whilst protecting and restoring biodiversity. The session was held in plenary, and the following presentations were made:

- Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity. – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit.
- SeaLIFE: Seas full of life – Richard Hill, Marine Conservation Society and Seas at Risk.

7.1 Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity

The Nature Conservation Unit at DG Environment presented the European-wide requirement to achieve renewable energy targets whilst protecting and restoring biodiversity. Time is short to address both the climate and the biodiversity crises globally and there is need for an integrated approach allowing the expansion of renewable energy which doesn't compromise protection and restoration of biodiversity but reinforces it wherever possible.

Existing environmental policy and legislation (Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Birds and Habitats, Water Framework, Marine Strategy Framework and Maritime Spatial Planning Directives) provide tools to avoid conflict between renewables and biodiversity. EU nature legislation allows for the effective deployment of renewable energy infrastructure and its coexistence with nature protection. The Habitats Directive allows the implementation of renewables projects if they do not harm the integrity of Natura 2000 sites, or in some cases even if the integrity is affected, if it is proven that there are

¹¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2020:741:FIN&qid=1605792629666>

no alternatives or if appropriate compensatory measures have been put in place and the plan or project is of overriding public interest.

Conflicts between renewable projects and nature conservation are best avoided through strategic planning. Maritime spatial plans must integrate nature protection/restoration, energy, fisheries, and all other uses of the sea. The strategic planning of renewables can be achieved through sensitivity mapping. Guidance documents are available on wind energy developments and EU nature legislation, wildlife sensitivity mapping, and recommendations on speeding-up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy projects.

The REPowerEU plan reinforces and accelerates the implementation of the European Green Deal. There are three pillars to the plan: diversifying energy sources, saving energy, and accelerating renewable energy. Initiatives include the EU solar strategy, the European solar rooftop initiative, and the introduction of heat pumps and hydrogen energy. The RES temporary emergency regulation adopted in December 2022 is directly applicable to all Member States for 18 months (until June 2024) and sets new, temporary, and targeted measures to accelerate the deployment of certain renewable energy projects. Member States are also to adopt plans designating Renewable Acceleration Areas (RAAs) for one or more types of renewable energy source projects which are not expected to have significant environmental impacts. These RAAs will benefit from faster and simpler permitting procedures, but must give priority to artificial and built surfaces, exclude Natura 2000 sites (and those under national protection schemes as well as migratory routes of various species and other sensitive areas), and use all appropriate and proportionate tools and datasets to identify suitable areas. EIGL¹² is an instrument to support planning choices for RAAs to be used by regional and national authorities who may not otherwise have access to relevant datasets.

The presentation concluded with coordinated examples of nature restoration and renewables:

- **TKI Wind op Zee - Project Eco-Friend / Oyster bed restoration:** <https://www.wur.nl/en/project/ecofriend.htm> and <https://projecten.topsectorenergie.nl/projecten/jip-eco-friend-31407>
- **The BENSO project - Scour protection and biodiversity enhancement:** <https://www.wur.nl/en/research-results/research-institutes/marine-research/show-marine/benso-3.htm> and <https://projecten.topsectorenergie.nl/projecten/scour-protection-design-for-biodiversity-enhancement-in-north-sea-offshore-wind-farms-33056>
- **The Rich North Sea project:** <https://www.derijkenoordzee.nl/en/>
- **TenneT (TSO) fish hotels:** https://offshore-documents.tennet.eu/fileadmin/offshore_document_uploads/Library/Leaflet_Green_gr_id_operator_EN_JUN2021.pdf
- **Research project EDEN2000:** <https://www.health.belgium.be/en/node/40715>

¹² https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-tools-databases/energy-and-industry-geography-lab_en

7.2 Offshore Wind Energy (OWE). Seabed Footprint: An eNGO Perspective

The Marine Conservation Society and Seas at Risk presented the offshore wind energy seabed footprint from an eNGO perspective. Offshore wind energy (OWE) is a renewable energy source which should allow decarbonising and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, providing affordable and clean energy (UNSD Goal 7). But OWE are also civil engineering projects with the potential to impacts the environment. Windfarms should be compatible with biodiversity protection and conservation objectives, but there are still considerable gaps in scientific knowledge about the ecological impacts of wind turbines.

The presentation outlined the Marine Conservation Society concerns and comments regarding the push for OWE. These can be summarised into five main points of discussion, with positive and negative components with regards to nature protection making up each point:

- Alteration of benthic/seabed by foundations, anchors, and cables
 - Sources of direct benthic interaction include the concrete mattress, scout protection, and the anchor for the floating foundation.
- Changes in benthic habitats and community structure and habitat conversion.
 - The primary considerations for benthic impacts include loss of habitat, conversion of habitat, introduction of non-native species, seabed disturbance, and water quality, sediment, and turbidity. These impacts can be seen throughout the project phases but are most concentrated in the construction and decommissioning phases.
 - Habitats can be converted by infrastructure from soft sediment to hard complex sediment with increased species diversity, biofouling organisms, and increased commercial fish species.
 - UK OWE sites often overlap with historic fishing grounds and/or MPAs. The use of bottom-towed gear decreases by 77% following OWE construction. This could mean that the OWE created “head room” for conservation and could mean that MPAs and OWE could co-locate.
- Extent of impact from infrastructure
 - Direct habitat loss from OWE within the farm boundary is less than 1% of the farm area. Design and siting of the windfarm should avoid sensitive or critical habitats (MPA features), as well as the need for environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and habitat regulation appraisals (HRAs) as part of licensing. However, this is on the small scale of just the windfarm area.
 - The larger scale impacts and the impacts of OWE in deeper waters are rarely studied. Predicated large scale impacts from modelling include the shallowing and/or widening of the seasonal mixed layer, localised increases/decreases of primary production, localised increased carbon sediment, reduced dissolved oxygen at the seabed, and potential impacts on commercial fish species and the local ecosystem.
 - Most OWE developments and identified impacts are within well-mixed near shore waters. These sites are therefore becoming limited and so OWE sites must move

deeper/further offshore. Seasonally stratified shelf areas (80-200 m depth) dissipate tidal energy and are important for biological production, fish stocks and carbon absorption. It is therefore important to determine the impacts of OWE to the primary production in these areas as well as the marine ecosystem and biogeochemical cycling.

- Period of benthic recovery
 - Habitat conversion is a real concern in OWE sites, causing effects such as increased diversity and abundance of species and the displacement of existing species. The colonisation trajectory for these conversions is 6+ years of successional change and benthic recovery is not likely to take less than 3-5 years.
- Cumulative environmental change
 - Seasonal stratification of coastal waters is a potential cumulative environmental change which may occur with the introduction of many OWE sites. If the infrastructure of the OWE impacts the mixing of the waters above and below the thermocline, this would impact important environmental measurements such as the Subsurface Chlorophyll Maximum by preventing spring-summer primary production from sinking to the seabed, allowing fresh nutrient-rich water to rise to the surface.

7.3 Session 5 break out group discussion and feedback

The feedback from each of the group discussions is summarised in the following table.

7.3.1 Are there good examples of synergies between renewable energy (or certain) technologies and marine conservation/restoration that can be upscaled in the region?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes- each renewable energy infrastructure can be data capture platform (e.g. what was seen on the field trip to Irish lights – buoy system) – technologies can be attached to record acoustics of marine life. • Environmental, chemical, and biological sampling and data collection. • Complementary by-product that renewable energy infrastructure can host a significant amount of equipment for tracking animals – this will allow long-term tracking of these species. • Reef effect around turbine – “build with nature”. • Need to be careful and plan renewable energy projects well. For example, if a wind turbine is installed in a degraded environment, it might provide a catalyst for habitat reestablishment/recovery. However, if turbines are placed in an area near a port, this could encourage the establishment of non-native species.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building with nature – for example, Holland offshore wind farm turbines need to be conceived as reefs to have space for fish within the turbine. • Non-price criteria as applicable in Holland with offshore wind farms • Funding – provided as part of the application process or state tax on the price of the energy produced. Used by the state to fund nature restoration and MPAs. • Offshore wind farm is divided into different sections – each has a permit for certain activities such as aquaculture and passive fishing, creating different multi-use sections. • Standstill procedure in Holland – stop turbine motion – based on a threshold for migrating birds. • License restrictions such as monitoring and nature inclusive design. • Surveillance and management devices such as radars for bats/birds. • Ban bottom contacting fisheries within the offshore wind park. • Install lighting on the turbines or paint them solid or patterned black to reduce bat/bird collisions.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical stone reefs where there is no fishing are potentially good sites. • Any examples about the design of different wind turbines? Could uniquely designed wind turbines be up scaled to take account of nature, for example the use of colour for blades on wind turbines for seabirds. • Difficult to get objective advice from the industry. • Working with other countries is necessary. • There are some examples of putting stones in around turbines to act like stone reefs, but we need to think about the location of turbines so as not to destroy existing habitats in good condition. • Certain species like cod and seals use the constructed habitat made by wind farm infrastructure. • Wind turbines should be placed in similar habitats so that any work that is completed to mitigate effects on nature can be upscaled successfully.

Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential of habitat restoration and creation. • Windfarm infrastructure provides a network of data capture mechanisms to enhance our understanding of the greater seas. • Overall benefit of moving away from fossil fuel – climate change measures. • Integrated habitats. • Inclusion of a non-price criteria at auctions – successful bidders not selected only on being the cheapest but must show that they will conserve/restore habitats and species.
Table 5	Table 5 combined with Table 3 for this session – please see Table 3 row for discussion summary notes.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research (for example, in Belgium) to date on ecological benefits of installed OWE is inconclusive. • Known benefits are on the climate change side only. • No real synergy exists as the original natural habitat has been replaced.

7.3.2 How do we plan offshore renewable energy in a way that is compatible with protected area targets in the Biodiversity Strategy?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance – the mitigation hierarchy to reduce, avoid and mitigate. • Nature needs to be prioritised. • Marine Spatial Planning should focus on marine protected areas to reflect the requirements of the nature within them – MPAs should not just be an add on layer on a map. • Plan for benefits which will reduce the pressure (EIAs). • Windfarms could be outside the protected areas and have the potential to become a form of OECM – an area of reduced pressure. • Collect and share data of findings with other Member States.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSFD and Maritime Spatial Planning Directive – one document to plan the economic and environmental level simultaneously. • MSFD to include renewable planning (France & Holland). • When designating 30% of MPAS, ensure sandbanks are incorporated as the development of offshore wind farms is primarily on sandbanks.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity analysis in the Irish sea is used to identify suitable areas for MPAs but also to find areas that are suitable for windfarms which do not conflict. • Stakeholder participation in the beginning is important in planning renewables. • Making sure environmental impacts are being considered at the beginning to ensure that time and resources used to design the wind farm are not wasted. • Marine spatial plans necessary. Certain areas that are sensitive can then be kept out of consideration. • Do the environmental assessments at a very early stage. • In Spain, Marine spatial planning and a traffic light mapping was used to show where wind energy projects can be considered and areas where they are forbidden. • Need to fund the monitoring required for offshore renewable energy. • Make sure there is an open process early so that energy development includes environmental considerations.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional cooperation is important, certain states have reached a spatial limit in terms of marine areas with renewable energy, so the responsibility is on the remaining Member States.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of OWE in areas of low species density / diversity. Banning of fishing within the OWE area, could be combined with a compensation scheme (paid by the windfarm operators) to the fishing sector to avoid fishing vessels moving to other areas and overfishing. Up to date sea floor, habitat, species mapping information. This will feed into detailed maritime spatial planning. Increase regional collaboration regarding the strategic location of OWE installations. Good communication between departments and agencies e.g military and planning agencies. A regional planning approach. Robust environmental impact statement (EIS) in place. Marine Spatial Planning needs to have nature at its core. Getting good data into the MSP process. Installation of tools such as radar to reduce levels of bat and bird collision and shutting down turbines at times of peak bird migration movements.
Table 5	Table 5 combined with Table 3 for this session – please see Table 3 row of the table for discussion summary notes.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design marine renewable energy (MRE) to mimic local environment as closely as possible ‘nature inclusive design’. Locating installations in areas with lowest potential for negative impact Ensure compensation from corporations is obtained to fund conservation/restoration actions. Allow for a ‘pause phase’ to assess impacts and potential solutions. Collect data – identify areas of interest where installations may be prohibited until sufficient data is collected to allow for an informed decision on the planning for the development. Masterplan for development of MRE between Member States and within marine regions. Allow corridors for migrating species – vital to consider during a master plan for MRE development.

7.3.3 How do we better use marine spatial planning to minimise conflicts between renewable energy and different uses of marine space, including on the sea basin level?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritisation of activities. Data modelling, sharing and collaboration. Data models need to be more accurate to provide more helpful indications. Protect biodiversity hotspots. Transboundary consideration, biogeographic region needs to be an entity. There should be sea basin plans that support the collaboration between Member and non-Member States. Should look at joint up thinking, agreement, and trading like NATO countries have for military exercises in the North Sea. Develop sea basin level entities that could support trading or sharing of targets.
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop offshore wind farms outside of MPAs.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International collaboration to ensure migration routes for birds remain open. • All Member States have national energy targets which allow them to export, will this be too much energy in the end? • Regional cooperation structure such as the Greater North Sea basin initiative.
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to consider the existing regional effects of current windfarms. • First thing is to have a marine spatial plan with a status, make them tighter documents. • Need for a multi sector group drawing up plans. Example given of a seabird users group provided by UK, made up of different people working in that section so they will respond individually to a proposed plan but can also provide a more coordinated response to the plan i.e. not just single sectors making their comments. • Early consultation. Example of Irish Sea Network bringing together transboundary issues during consultation.
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marine spatial planning based around “go to” areas and renewable acceleration areas. The most viable sites for OWE are likely the sites where we will also find most Habitats Directive Annex 1 habitats. • Bring sectors together. • Pre-agreeing areas can avoid costly public enquires and projects being cancelled. • How to better use MSP – identifying the best place to locate the OWE, looking at where energy is needed, and being more regional and collaborative in the approach? • Regional plans must have authority for them to work.
Table 5	Table 5 combined with Table 3 for this session – please see Table 3 row of the table for discussion summary notes.
Table 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint approach by Member States to design a Regional MRE development plan at the sea basin level. • Share the reasons why authorisations for wind farms may be given in each Member State. • Clearly defined mandate to support such regional development bodies. • Accept that a negative impact will occur from MRE developments: locate the area where least impact can occur. • Take a more holistic look at how terrestrial land use is zoned. • MSFD targets much incorporate planning.

8 Closing Plenary

Two days of interesting, useful, and lively discussions were brought to a close by Malcom Noonan, Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage who gave a well-received address. The Minister thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions as well as the organising team for the smooth running of the event.

ANNEX 1 – Seminar Programme

Day 1: Wednesday 11th October

Time	Activity
8.30 – 9.15	Registration
9.15 – 10.30	<p>Official welcome & introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Niall Ó Donnchú, Director General of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) • Video message from Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries • Andrea Vettori, Head of Unit, Nature Conservation Unit, DG Environment, European Commission <p>Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategy: policy context for the biogeographical process
10.30 – 11.00	Coffee break
11.00 – 13.30	<p>Protected area targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are we – overview and distance to target – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit • Scientific basis for identification of MPAs – Anna Maria Adamo, Horizon Europe Project - MPA EUROPE <p>Pledges and approaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denmark - Caroline Vestergaard Mikkelsen, Ministry of Environment • Sweden - Lena Tingström, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management • Spain - Jorge Alonso Rodríguez and Helena Moreno Colera, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge • Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Paul Goriup, Biogeographical Process consortium <p>Discussion on way forward in groups Reporting back to plenary</p>
13.30 - 14.30	Lunch break
14.30 – 17.00	<p>Conservation status targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are we – overview and distance to target – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit • CIBBRiNA LIFE: International bycatch project – Lejo van der Heiden, Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the Netherlands <p>Pledges and approaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spain - Jorge Alonso Rodríguez and Helena Moreno Colera, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge • Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Paul Goriup, Biogeographical Process consortium <p>Discussion on way forward in groups Reporting back to plenary</p>
18.30 - 21.30	<p>Reception and gala dinner</p> <p>Address from Darragh O'Brien - Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage</p>

Day 2: Thursday 12 October

All day	Excursion
9.00 – 17.00	Dublin Bay (optional, organised by the host)
19.00	Dinner

Day 3: Friday 13 October

Time	Activity
8.30 – 9.00	Registration
9.00 – 9.15	Opening plenary
9.15 – 10.45	<p>Session 1 - Role of Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs in marine restoration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit • Better BirdLIFE: Improvement of natural habitats for coastal birds - Jakob Pedersen, Middelfart Municipality, Denmark <p>Moderated discussion Reporting back to the plenary</p>
10.45 – 11.00	Coffee break
11.00 – 12.30	<p>Session 2 - Strict protection in the Atlantic and Macaronesian marine region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict protection in the context of Biodiversity strategy targets – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit • MarHA: Nature Integrated Project for effective and equitable management of marine habitats in France – Alain Pibot, Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB) <p>Moderated discussion Reporting back to the plenary</p>
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch break
13.30 – 15.00	<p>Session 3 – Renewable energy and marine conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit • SealIFE: Seas full of life – Richard Hill, Seas at Risk <p>Moderated discussion Reporting back to the plenary</p>
15.00 – 15.45	Next steps for the pledge process and summary of discussions - EC
15.45 – 16.00	<p>Closing plenary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address by Malcom Noonan, Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

ANNEX 2 – List of Participating Organisations

Member State and Commission participants

Country	Organisation
Belgium	European Commission
Belgium	Environmental Justice Foundation
Belgium	Federal Public Service, Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment
Denmark	Danish Society for Nature Conservation
Denmark	Danish Environmental Protection Agency
Denmark	Ministry of Environment
France	French Office for Biodiversity (OFB)
France	French Ministry for the Ecological Transition
Germany	Federal Agency for Nature Conservation
Ireland	National Parks and Wildlife Service
Ireland	Fair Seas Ireland – Irish Environmental Network
Ireland	Trinity College Dublin – Irish Environmental Network
Ireland	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Spain	Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge
Sweden	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM)
The Netherlands	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

Stakeholder participants

ELMEN European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)
Climazul
MPA EUROPE
Oceana Europe
Seas at Risk
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

ANNEX 3 – Evaluation of the Seminar by the Participants

1. Seminar organisation

Activity	Average score	Main comments and suggestions:
1. Overall organisation of the seminar	8.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfectly organised • 8/10 because the boat trip in the middle of the seminar, which limited who could participate as some people might have not had 3 days but 2 for such an event • More time needed for q&a after the presentations • Speakers should be able to see the screen so they know what they're presenting
2. Opening plenary session (opening speeches, presentations)	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very relevant and interesting • Informative
3. Protected area targets session		
3.1. Overview, basis for identification of MPAs, presentation of pledges and approaches by MS	8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There could be more focus on the bigger challenges and threats such as clean energy and fisheries • It would have been useful to have a more critical point of view of the pledges, providing possible solutions for MS to advance, instead of mere presentations of pledges; e.g., Spain doesn't have a plan for strict protection, and that was not highlighted at any time by the Commission (e.g., proposing Spain to form a group of experts, in the frame of INTEMARES, to deal with strict protection, as Germany, which has formed a group of experts with this purpose). • Interesting and the background document gave a good overview • Good diagrams in the background document
3.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It worked fine • Good concept to switch tables the second day • Suggest to add a final question on other suggestions and concerns from participants --not only responding to provided questions • Short time for reporting back in plenary
4. Conservation status targets session		
4.1. Overview presentation, CIBBRINA LIFE presentation of pledges and approaches by MS	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant and nicely represented
4.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More rotation between groups would be good • More question time • Open discussion before breaking into groups would be useful
5. Reception and Gala dinner	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great dinner • There should be a vegetarian/vegan option clearly indicated on the menu, preferably promoted • Good speech by the Minister
6. Excursion to Dublin Bay		
6.1. Organisation of the excursion	9.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very good and comprehensive • Well-organised • Lighthouses presentation had nothing to do with the seminar topic

6.2. Speakers of the excursion	9.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant and interesting
7. Session 1: Role of Nature 2000 sites and other MPAs in marine restoration		
7.1. Quality and relevance of the presentations	8.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very interesting to hear about projects, and how other MS are dealing with their MPAs
7.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More rotation would be good • More question time • Open discussion before breaking into groups would be useful
7.3. Interactions with other participants	8.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more nuanced questions • Would be good to have discussions on case studies presented • Organising groups according to similar challenges faced could be useful
8. Session 2: Strict protection in the Atlantic and Macaronesian region		
8.1. Quality and relevance of the presentations	8.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was great to see some countries are advancing on identifying areas for strict protection, but all of them are late (some have not even started) • Need to have fishing industry reps
8.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time needed for reporting to the plenary • More rotation of groups would be good
8.3. Interactions with other participants	8.9	
9. Session 3: Renewable energy and marine conservation		
9.1 Quality and relevance of the presentations	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to have energy sector reps
9.2 Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in work.	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time needed for reporting to the plenary
9.3 Interactions with other participants	8.9	
10. Concluding session Summary of the discussions	8.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very short, could be longer
11. Technical guidance (guidelines, instruction documents, mails) to access the meeting		
11.1 Distributed before the seminar	8.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More in depth questions could be asked to better guide discussions
11.2 Distributed during the seminar	8.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Didn't use the possibility to download more guidance with QR code

2. Value of the biogeographical process in the marine areas

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements on the values of the biogeographical process:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The talks and discussion I heard during the seminar have changed my view of the pledge and review process			Most answers		
The information provided at the seminar has given me a more in-depth understanding of the intricacies related to the pledge and review process			Most answers		
During the seminar I learned new information and useful ideas that I will use in my future work					Most answers
I am likely to use the information provided at the seminar at my work in areas related to pledge and review process or/and management of PAs				Most answers	
Through the seminar I learned that other countries are facing similar challenges in the pledge and review process				Most answers	

3. Additional information

3.1. Indicate one thing you consider as a success:

- Fieldtrip
- Networking

3.2. Indicate one thing you would suggest to improve:

- A bigger screen or the participants should be closer to the screen
- A more critical view from the commission on the status of the pledges and plans for restoration e.g., timeline for intermediate goals (5% strictly protected by 2025). Also, no link to pledges was provided, if I am not wrong, as well as pledges (excel files) were not shown during the meeting, nor explained.
- Formal mechanism for agreeing 10% strictly protected as a bio geo area
- More in depth discussion time

3.3. Please indicate the session or information you considered most useful:

- Background document

3.4. Do you have any other specific recommendations or comments to improve the seminar?

- Should be organised more often