



Third Seminar for the Baltic Marine Biogeographical Region Riga, Latvia 8 – 10 November 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/balticregion/>

Cover photographs by NatureBureau: Delegate group trip to “Vidzemes akmeņainā jūrmala” Nature Reserve and “Vitrupe - Tūja” Marine Protected Area, the sandstone cliffs of “Vidzemes akmeņainā jūrmala” Nature Reserve, seminar working groups, and the knowledge market.

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1 Introduction

The Natura 2000 biogeographical process was launched by the European Commission in 2011 to assist Member States to implement their legal obligations under the EU Birds and Habitats Directive and manage Natura 2000 as a coherent ecological network. The Process provides 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 EU Biodiversity Strategy 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.

The 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}. The 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 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

¹ http://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>

⁸ Format for the protected areas target: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/6f30d1d2-d6f2-4c6e-a4dc-1feb66201929/library/55ebe353-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>

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.

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 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.

1.1 Context of the seminar

The third marine Natura 2000 seminar for the Baltic biogeographical region took place in Riga, Latvia from 8 - 10 November 2023 and was attended by 52 participants from the Member States and other relevant organisations (see Annexes 2 and 3).

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 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 Riga by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia. The participants engaged in the progress of pledge production and the challenges faced in this process, as well as three predetermined relevant themes linked to marine

conservation and management of the Natura 2000 network. Evaluation of the seminar by the participants is given in Annex 4.

1.2 Seminar work plan

The seminar comprised an opening session and five working sessions (Annex 2). Following each session, the participants were split into three break-out groups for in-depth discussion on the different topics. 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.

Introductory remarks:

Welcoming addresses were made by:

- Dr. Rudite Vesere, Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia
- Andrea Vettori, Head of Unit for the Nature Conservation unit at the European Commission, through video message.

In addition, Vedran Nikolić from the European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit gave a presentation on the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: 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, 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 PROTECT BALTIC Project from HELCOM. The Biogeographical Process consortium ended the plenary session by presenting the methodology for the analysis of the pledges for protected area targets. The presentations were followed by a discussion in three 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 LIFE REEF project on researching marine protected habitats in the Latvian EEZ and the determination of necessary conservation statuses, and a presentation from the Biogeographical Process consortium on the methodology for the analysis of the pledges for conservation status targets. The presentations were followed by a discussion in three 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/COASTal LIFE on the EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs and the improvement of natural habitats for coastal birds respectively. Following the presentations, discussions were held in three 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 – Renewable energy and marine conservation

Presentations were made by the European Commission on achieving renewable energy targets whilst protecting and restoring biodiversity, and from NOVIGE AB on the upscaling of NoviOcean – The Hydro Power Plant at Sea. Following the presentations, discussions were held in three 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.

Session 5: Theme 3 – Strict protection in the Baltic marine region

Presentations were delivered by the European Commission on strict protection in the context of the Strategy, Biodiversea LIFE IP for Marine Nature, and the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Germany) on the management of existing uses in areas suitable for strict protection. Following the presentations, discussions were held in three 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.

Closing remarks:

Concluding remarks were made by the European Commission, summarising the next steps for the pledge process, and how the discussions at the seminar will aid future work. A closing plenary and farewell was convened by the European Commission, hosts and organisers.

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

1.3 Field trip to Veczemju cliffs

On the third day of the seminar (10 November), participants visited the “Vidzemes akmeņainā jūrmala” Nature Reserve and “Vitrūpe - Tūja” Marine Protected Area. Talks about the local wildlife and habitats were given by researchers at the Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology, and an ornithologist from the Nature Conservation Agency.

“Vidzemes akmeņainā jūrmala” Nature Reserve is a unique coastal landscape of steep banks and rock beaches. There are 22 types of specially protected habitats of EU importance within the territory along with a very large diversity of coastal habitats (marine, beach, and dune habitats as well as forests and grasslands). The site is an important complex of habitats for many rare and protected plant and animal species. “Vitrūpe - Tūja” Marine Protected Area covers waters which contain biologically high-value reefs found in a narrow 2-5m shallow-water strip. These reefs contain species such as *Sphacelaria arctica* and *Polysiphonia fucoides*, as well as *Ceramium tenuicorne* and *Furcellaria lumbricalis*. At 5-20m there is a separate and unique reef of geological origin made up of sandstone outcrops covered with a layer of boulders. This kind of substrate is not found anywhere else in the Gulf of Riga.



The group receiving a talk about the unique cliffs found in the Nature Reserve.



The group receiving a talk about seaweed species prevalent in the MPA boulder reefs.

2 Welcome and introductory session

The aim of the opening session was to provide an overview of the Strategy targets and present them in the EU policy context.

The session was held in plenary and consisted of welcome talks from the hosts and a video message from the Head of Unit for Nature Conservation at DG Environment. This was followed by a presentation from the Nature Conservation Unit at DG Environment on the Biodiversity strategy for 2030: Policy context for the Biogeographical Process.

The presentation introduced the participants to the biogeographical process and its role in the current context of 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

Furthermore, following an expansion in the scope of the Biogeographical Process, it now supports the pledge and review process of the Strategy. Under this process, Member States submit pledges which outline work towards the relevant targets which are then reviewed using a methodology developed by the Biogeographical Process consortium. 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 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 status are in that category by 2030 or show a strong positive trend.
 - 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 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 area 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 restore marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries by protecting the seabed, improving gear selectivity, and addressing bycatch. This will also help to improve the conservations 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 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 evaluates progress in 2024.

3 Session 1: Protected Area Targets

The aims of Session 1 were to provide an overview of the current position with regards to protected areas and the distance to achieving 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 production 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.
- Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Richard White, Biogeographical Process Team
- Scientific basis for identification of MPAs – Anna Maria Addamo, Horizon Europe Project, MPA EUROPE.
- PROJECT BALTIC Project – Paul Trouth, Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - HELCOM
- Pledges and approaches:
 - Finland – Penina Blankett, Ministry of the Environment
 - Denmark - Caroline Vestergaard Mikkelsen, Ministry of Environment

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>

- Sweden - Lena Tingström, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management
- Contributions from other member states

A short Questions and Answers session was held after each of the presentations, a summary table of which can be found in Annex 1 for each of the five sessions.

3.1 Overview and distance to protected area targets

The Nature Conservation Unit of DG Environment presented 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 17% of the Baltic Sea was covered by MPAs. This is the second highest coverage of MPAs throughout the marine biogeographical regions after the Mediterranean Sea at 19.1%. Within this 17%, just one Member State (Germany) has an MPA coverage of over 30%.

In addition, the structure and expected content in the Member State protected area pledges was explained. Information to be provided in the pledges includes current protected areas, existing nationally designated areas, OECMs and Natura 2000 sites, as well as pledges for future protected areas and OECMs. The European Environment Agency has designed and published a dashboard tool¹⁰ for the presentation of both existing and future protected areas which will be updated gradually as new pledges are submitted. Currently, three Member States (Sweden, Denmark, and Germany) have submitted pledges for protected areas in the Baltic region.

3.2 Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges

The Biogeographical Process team presented the methodology designed for the analysis of protected area pledges, and the initial analysis produced of pledges received. So far, pledges from the Baltic region have only been received from Sweden, Denmark, and Germany and therefore analysis at a regional level is not yet possible. However, analysis at a Member State level has been carried out in relation to total current and expected area covered by protected areas, OECMs and strict protection. This showed that the expected protected areas after pledge implementation meet the 30% target in one out of the three submitted pledges, with Denmark and Sweden reaching around 25% and 17% respectively. Denmark provides an estimate of strict protection of around 1.9% of its marine waters. Germany aims to strictly protect 2,030km² of its waters by 2030. None of the three submitted pledges report future and current areas to be covered by OECMs. The analysis will be updated as Member States continue to develop and submit pledges.

3.3 Scientific basis for the identification of MPAs

Nord University presented the MPA Europe project¹¹, which aims to provide the scientific basis for the identification of MPAs in European Seas. MPAs have been mapped by the project to prioritise biodiversity and blue carbon benefits. Furthermore, species richness, potential geographic distribution of important biogenic habitats and data-driven classifications of ecosystems have also been mapped. This 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

¹⁰ <https://reportnet.europa.eu/public/dataflow/703>

¹¹ <https://mpa-europe.eu/>

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.

3.4 PROJECT BALTIC Project

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) presented PROJECT BALTIC¹². The project aims to address biodiversity loss and climate change by ensuring sufficient spatial protection and restoration of the marine environment (at a regional, EU, and global level). In response to the State of the Baltic Report (2023), the project will work to ensure that MPAs in the Baltic are not just isolated islands of protection. Enabling sufficient spatial protection will achieve a reduction in pressures, which will lead as the ultimate impact to secure and positive marine biodiversity outcomes. PROJECT BALTIC categorised actions for spatial protection measures into three groups: (i) good governance; (ii) sound design and planning; and (iii) effective management. These actions will be carried out through a 4-phase approach, with phase one spanning from mid-2023 to mid-2026, and phases two, three and four each spanning one year until mid-2028. The Baltic Stakeholder Conference 2024 in Helsinki will be dedicated to PROJECT BALTIC and its work.

3.5 Pledge preparations in Finland's marine environment

The Finnish Ministry of the Environment presented the pledge preparations in Finland's marine environment. The pledge preparation process began in 2022 with the nomination of a broad-based high level steering group and a working group. At the end of 2022 the steering group decided that political decisions were needed about the content of the pledges. The Ministry of the Environment has continued the technical preparation of pledges while a government resolution about pledge content will be made in early 2024. Using data from the Velmu programme¹³ (over 170,000 observations of species and habitats since 2004), systematic conservation planning (zonation) is used to locate the most valuable unprotected areas. In 2018, only 27% of the ecologically most valuable features were covered by the MPA network, but this figure can be improved. Challenges faced by Finland in the pledge process were pressures such as eutrophication which require coordination with watershed measures, conflicting interests over marine use (e.g. wind energy) and private landowners of high biodiversity areas. Finland predicts that the estimation of areas needed for effective protection will be ready by the end of 2023, and a detailed roadmap for development of a coherent MPA network will be produced during the Biodiversea Life IP project¹⁴ in 2024/25.

3.6 Denmark preliminary pledge on protected areas

Caroline Vestergaard Mikkelsen from the Danish Ministry of Environment presented the preliminary protected area pledge submitted by Denmark. She summarised the current situation of protected areas in Denmark, as well as the new areas proposed in the pledge. New proposals include six new bird protection sites (Natura 2000) and 19 new marine protection sites, 18 of which will have strictly protected areas (Marine Strategy Framework Directive). One of the new bird protection sites was designated in

¹² <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/protect-baltic/>

¹³ <https://www.ymparisto.fi/en/nature-waters-and-seas/natural-diversity/conservation-and-research-programmes/velmu-programme>

¹⁴ <https://www.metsa.fi/en/project/biodiversea-eng/>

November 2021. 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 submission means that protected areas in the Baltic marine region will increase from 18.2% coverage to 26.8%, with 2.3% strict protected. 6% of the strictly protected marine areas are in public hearing currently, and by 2030 a further 4% will be strictly protected.

3.7 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 12.5% coverage to 18% coverage in the Baltic marine region, the introduction of 0.8% 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 nor for OECMs. 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.

3.8 Contribution from other Member States

There was only one contribution made from other Member States. Estonia explained that almost 20% of their waters are under protected areas (with 1% of this strictly protected), and that they are in the early stages of the pledge preparation, collating initial proposals by NGOs. The remaining Member States are at various stages of the preparation of protected area pledges.

3.9 Session 1 break-out group discussion and feedback

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

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

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	Challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legality – unclear definitions • Lack of political ambition • Lack of understanding of what protected areas will look like Solutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict legal definitions • Persistence – keep pointing out economic benefits of protected areas and the reduced cost of acting sooner. • Consistent demonstration of positive outcomes • Education for stakeholders and the public • Bring together stakeholders at events to find common ground.
Group 2	Challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict protection implementation – what needs to be regulated?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of data to be used for identifying protected areas and monitoring them. Collecting data for new MPAs with a wider focus is more difficult. • Political will • The time needed to prepare pledges – changing governments can delay progress on an already time-consuming process. • Borders <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic mapping • The process of implementing protected areas needs to be flexible. • All stakeholders should be involved from different sectors. • Be pragmatic and concrete. • A steering group made up of all sectors/ministries and NGOs should be involved from early on.
Group 3	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The different impact of Member States in different regions – some Member States need to do more as it is a shared burden. • Fisheries rules are made in the EU whilst national thinking prevails – there is a lack of communication between stakeholder, EU, and regional levels. • There is still a national and regional competition for use of marine areas. • Despite HELCOM and other communication there is dialogue and reporting across regions, but there is no regional level planning. • REPowerEU – coherence of policy from the EU • Eutrophication is not helped by MPAs and is impacted by terrestrial systems. • Climate change • Different ranges of protection – nationally decided. • Political will and political turnover • Capacity – lack of resources for effective MPA management. • Lack of data • Privately owned areas – Finland • MPA designation is not prioritised by environment ministries – the process can be rushed. • Competition for specific areas. • Lack of management plans or outdated plans for existing MPAs. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More complete MPAs and PAs. • More coherent EU policy. • Look at data and listen to science. • Clearer communication between sectors. • PROJECT BALTIC • Transboundary MPA panning – Helcom, LIFE and MSP related projects and formal national process for coordination of these projects. • MPAs to be coordinated with the MSP process. • Decision makers need to begin talking alongside technical people. • Involvement of other ministries. • More coherency between targets and commitments. • Involving more interdisciplinary staff in projects (e.g. social scientists)

3.9.2 Identify a potential cross-border marine area in the Baltic Sea suitable to be designated as protected area by two or more Member States? Describe the area and its features and possible conservation measures to be taken.

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southern Mid-Sea bank – (SE/PL) • Åland Islands – (SE/FI) • Are cross-border marine areas the answer, or is more harmonisation at the borders is required. • Informal discussions between member states are needed to ensure that they are working in harmony and to avoid MPAs being designated on one side of a border long before the other (making the MPA less effective).
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNESCO heritage site – (SE/FI) - potential OECM • EBSAs territories – 7 years ago all Member States identified EBSAs – this would be a good starting point for joint MPAs. • Coherent analysis of MPAs – source and sink coherence analysis (does the MPA network cover both source and sink habitats so that source habitats can populate sink habitats successfully and sink habitats can provide refuge for species which are overcrowded in source habitats) • Critical areas for migratory species • Systematic cooperation within the Baltic region
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bay of Bothnia and Archipelago Sea – (SE/FI) • EBSA process could be used to identify possible areas. • Pan-Baltic project located in the Bornholm Basin (SE/PL/DK) • Pomeranian Bay – existing MPA – (DK/DE/PL) – considered for strict protection. • Extension of the Irbe Strait existing MPA – (EE/LV) • Øresund – extension of the existing MPA and potential for strict protection (DK/SE).

4 Session 2: Conservation status targets

The aims of Session 2 were to provide an overview of the current conservation statuses and the distance to achieving 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 – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit.
- Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Richard White, Biogeographical Process Team
- Research of marine protected habitats in EEZ and determination of the necessary conservation status in Latvia – LIFE REEF – Solvita Strāķe, Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology
- Pledges and approaches:
 - Finnish Pledge Experience - Penina Blankett, Ministry of the Environment

4.1 Overview and distance to conservation status improvement targets

The Nature Conservation Unit at 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 size of 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 in the EU State of Nature report show that in the Baltic marine region, all marine habitats are in unfavourable conservation status and there has been improvement seen in only one habitat which was in unfavourable/bad status. Only one species is in favourable conservation status, and one population of strictly protected species is facing extinction. Furthermore, marine birds are in favourable status at EU level in just 39% of assessments. Although deterioration of status is more frequent for habitats not well covered by the Natura 2000 network, there are still cases of deterioration of status even for habitats well covered, which would indicate poor effectiveness of 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 the main pressures on these species and habitats, such as agriculture, urbanisation, fishing and aquaculture, and energy production. 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 conservation status improvement.

4.2 Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges

The Biogeographical Process Team presented the methodology designed for the analysis of conservation status pledges, and the initial analysis produced of pledges received. Currently, conservation status pledges from the Baltic region have only been received from Sweden, Denmark and Germany. Therefore, analysis at a regional level is not yet possible (and birds are not assessed at a biogeographical 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, is there a target to gather the required information. Finally, it should be noted that aspects of conservation status targets (e.g. 30% improvement) need to include terrestrial pledges, and analysis methods will develop as Member States continue to develop and submit pledges.

4.3 Research of marine protected habitats in EEZ and determination of the necessary conservation status in Latvia - LIFE REEF

The Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology presented the LIFE REEF project¹⁵ which aims to identify potential marine protected sites and develop proposals for new MPAs, and assess the effectiveness of the MPA network and of ecosystem services. The project has used side-scan sonar and underwater video to map over 500,000 km² of stony reefs and 70,000 km² of sandbanks in Latvian waters. Investigations show predominantly healthy reef habitats with rich fish and bird communities and no sign of invasive fish species influence. Challenges in identifying opportunities for area-based nature conservation measures often originate from the assumptions of a geographically distinct zone. However, a lot of the main threats

¹⁵ <https://reef.daba.gov.lv/public/eng/>

are not local such as eutrophication, invasive species, hazardous substances, and the introduction of activities such as wind energy farms. Solutions for these challenges include mitigating eutrophication by effectively implementing River Basin Management Plans and controlling invasive species by effective fisheries management. The project has identified six marine protected areas across the coast of Latvia which could be expanded to cover more of the EEZ. This would help towards achieving the 30% protected area target, and hopefully towards improving the conservation status of species/habitats within these areas.

4.4 Finnish pledge experience – conservation status

The Finnish Ministry of the Environment presented the pledge preparations in Finland’s marine environment. The pledge preparation process began in 2022 with the nomination of a broad-based high level steering group and a working group. At the end of 2022 the steering group decided that political decisions are needed about the content of the pledges. The Ministry of the Environment has continued the technical preparation of pledges, while a government resolution about pledge content will be made in early 2024. Analysis of Finnish marine habitats have shown that the conservation status of the six reported Habitats Directive marine habitats is either unfavourable inadequate or unfavourable bad. Some of the measures proposed by Finland for the improvement of the conservation status of sandbanks include the improvement of the condition of the habitats through the reintroduction of *Zostera marina* and environmental monitoring or reduction of pressures such as nutrient loads from agriculture and forestry. The final reporting for the conservation status pledge will include lists of species/habitats for which status could be improved, maintained, and not deteriorate by 2030, as well as measures on how to reach these goals. The main challenges facing the preparation of the pledge are eutrophication (which impacts biodiversity and is not easily controlled in a defined area), and conflicting interests over marine use.

4.5 Session 2 break-out session 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?

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for restoration. • Lack of knowledge. • Political will at a national level. • Habitat restoration is not liked by other sectors as the positive effects are often long term, not immediate. • Stakeholder resistance. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private finance involvement. • Consider whether current funding sources can suit needs. • Funding for monitoring after implementation for at least 5 years is required. • Perseverance with regards to political will • Provide positive results as often as possible to gain support through the monitoring of projects.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate the economic gain from restoration. • Open and early dialogue on all levels (e.g. experts and stakeholders).
Group 2	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eutrophication – challenge for habitats more than for species as it requires measures both outside and inside the marine environment. • Hazardous substances • Measures beyond MPAs • Fisheries – bottom trawling and bycatch • Lack of resources and data • Conflict of interest – e.g. pinger equipment and the military. • Construction (e.g. wind farms) and dredging • Aquaculture • Too many unknowns • Bird migration routes • Marine Spatial Planning – wind farms and ecology – potential for data gathering. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing – prioritise required activities. • Increase the quality and quantity of data. • Marine Spatial Planning can be part of the solution – sensitivity analysis. • Implement the MSFD and WFD
Group 3	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple institutes are preparing pledges and terrestrial is often prioritised over marine. • Quantifying sufficiency of measures to predict if conservation status will meet the target. • Predicting increase in human pressure. • Pledging does not equal ensuring that the measures will work which causes a reluctance to pledge. • Communicating to stakeholders about the pledges. • Possible disappointment in the case of no measures being implemented by any other sectors. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication must be clearer and more targeted (e.g. clear roadmaps). • Best practices must be shared. • Communication to the public must be increased. • Include sensitivity mapping in Marine Spatial Planning. • Consider the cumulative impact when designing MPAs. • Multiple projects could be run on sensitivity mapping but focusing on once specific human pressure. • EIA to include a cumulative impact assessment.

4.5.2 Identify a habitat or a species which could be pledged in a coordinated way by several Baltic Member States? For this habitat/species, can you suggest the most important conservation measures, indicating which additional actions need to be taken compared to present situation?

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of species/habitats that could be pledged in a coordinated way include migratory birds and fish, marine mammals (porpoise), sturgeon, and sandbanks. <p>Important conservation measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diving feeders – seabed disturbance should be reduced, for example trawling and wind turbines. Dam removal paired with effective fisheries management along the coastline. Seasonal coastal fisheries closures. Restocking and population monitoring.
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of species/habitats that could be pledged in a coordinated way include migratory fish and birds, and invasive species. <p>Important conservation measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking Split between commercial and non-commercial species. Good collaboration and joint working groups. Cooperation on planning and development. Determine the locations of impacted populations.
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of species/habitats that could be pledged in a coordinated way include harbour porpoise, sturgeon, long-tailed duck, and stony reefs. <p>Important conservation measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moratorium on hunting. Eradication of IAS and ban on bottom trawling. Species release – alongside increased spawning grounds/restoration of spawning habitats. Ban on gillnets. Tackle contaminants. Better monitoring of bycatch. Limit offshore development in sensitive areas.

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 discuss 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 of the 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 a pioneering new legal instrument proposed as a key initiative of the European Green Deal and the Strategy for 2030. 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 set to achieve the overall objectives of the law 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 of 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, 90% by 2050).
- Put in place the restoration measures necessary to improve the quality and quantity of habitats and species listed in Art. II, IV, V HD and wild birds + Annex III of regulation (including re-establishing them) and enhance connectivity until sufficient quality and quantity is achieved.

Areas under restoration do not have to be protected areas. However, 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 involves 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 Man¹⁶. 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

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.im/media/1376550/ltmp-10-260522.pdf>

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

ELMEN EEIG presented the Better BirdLIFE project¹⁷ which aims to improve the natural habitats for coastal birds in the Denmark Baltic Sea.

The Blue Reef LIFE project was a very successful restoration project which took place in the Denmark Baltic from 2006 to 2013, restoring the favourable conservation status of the offshore reefs. 5 ha of degraded reef were restored, and 6.5 ha 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 6-8 m depth. Currently, there is voluntary protection on about 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 focuses of the restoration 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.

¹⁷ <https://betterbirdlife.dk/om-better-birdlife/>

5.3 Session 3 break out session discussion and feedback

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

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

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<p>Successful examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-establishing of stone reefs • Fishing of invasive species • <i>Zostera</i> planting. • Maintaining fish spawning areas. • Preventing/managing bottom trawling. • Noise prevention. • Decrease of eutrophication. <p>Upscaling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upscaling even across the Baltic is very complex due to differing environmental conditions/threats. • Could we use environmental data to map similar areas for restoration on a large scale? • Every site is specific, but the concepts could be upscaled (good practice guidelines).
Group 2	<p>Successful examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source to sea holistic approach • Re-introduction • Assess bigger system problems to allow active restoration to work. • Fully protect pristine habitats. • Effective strict protection • Analyse – passive – active • Active restoration is not an excuse for a lack of action elsewhere. • Understanding ecosystems.
Group 3	<p>Successful examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive restoration e.g. fisheries restoration, removal of nutrients, and strict protection. • A combination of active and passive restoration. • Reintroduction of mussel colonies by providing suitable substrate. • Removal of IAS • Removal of predators (e.g. small mammals)

5.3.2 What are the main challenges in marine restoration in MPAs and how can we overcome them?

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying sites for restoration. • Finance • Pressures from other areas (e.g. eutrophication). • Legislative barriers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marine litter. • Cross-border cooperation. • Competition for space. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of best practice guidelines. • Open dialogue with other sectors. • Strict regulations within MPAs to reduce/remove pressures. • Take measures on land which will improve the quality of marine conditions. • Systematic approach. • Private sector funding. • Engagement of local communities.
Group 2	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding ecosystems. • Lack of data. • Lack of resources. • Broken feedback loops. • Lack of political will. • Lack of forward planning and a long-term design. • Understanding and reducing pressures. • Restoration vs compensation. • Contradictory messages from the EU. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New fora in which to hold discussions. • Regional restoration plans. • Build understanding of the bigger picture.
Group 3	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressures from outside the EU. • Capacity, funding, and resource issues. • Political will. • Coherence with other policies and regulations. • It takes time to see any positive effects – causes demotivation in stakeholders. • Since restoration is a combination of activities, it is hard to tell what contributed most to the result. • Convincing stakeholders that it is needed for biodiversity despite these species not being the typical charismatic species. • Prioritisation of other uses e.g renewable energy. <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating the benefits for stakeholders and spillover effects • Ocean literacy initiatives • Education of decision-makers responsible for allowing harmful activities. • Involvement of volunteers • Investment of more money – EU funds. • Offsetting the damage – compensation by developers. • Increased Member State budgets for restoration.

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?

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<p>Yes, overall, this statement could be true, however...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is dependent on regulations and their enforcement. • It is dependent on the location of the designation. • Is the deterioration due to pressures that we cannot regulate? (e.g. pressures from outside the MPA). • It is dependent on political will to regulate pressures.
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on the pressures at play e.g. eutrophication and fisheries. • Are the measures within the MPA appropriate? • Are the relevant processes protected by the MPA? • Look to existing MPAs for restoration first and then designate additional MPAs where needed.
Group 3	<p>Ensuring non-deterioration would require a combination of measures, not necessarily just the designation of an MPA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on the protection and the pressures outside the MPA. • Setting up regulations that prohibit activities damaging the habitat outside MPAs too (e.g. prohibiting specific gear). • EU regulations.

6 Session 4: 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 energy¹⁸ 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 aims of Session 4 were to discuss the achievement of renewable energy targets in the Baltic marine region, while 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.
- Upscaling and demonstration of NoviOcean, a breakthrough wave energy converter: The Hydro Power Plant at Sea – Anders Tengelin, NOVIGE AB

6.1 Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity

The Nature Conservation Unit of DG Environment presenting 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 crisis globally and there is a need for an integrated approach allowing the expansion of renewable energy which doesn't compromise protection and restoration of biodiversity but reinforce it where possible.

Existing environmental policy and legislation (Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Birds and Habitats Directive, Water Framework, Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Maritime Spatial Planning Directives and others) plays a role in avoiding conflicts between renewables and biodiversity. The SEA, EIA, HD, WFD and MSFD (and others) provide tools to avoid conflict between renewables and biodiversity. and 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 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

¹⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2020:741:FIN&qid=1605792629666>

sensitivity mapping, and recommendations on speeding-up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy projects.

The REPowerEU plan¹⁹ 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 of 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 dataset to identify suitable areas. EIGL²⁰ 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 European wind power action plan, published in the last two weeks, encouraged the Commission and Member States to work together to accelerate the permitting of wind farms. By April 2024, the Commission will update the Recommendation on speeding up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy projects and issue guidance to the Member States on the designation of the renewable acceleration areas.

6.2 Upscaling and demonstration of NoviOcean

NOVIGE AB presented NoviOcean, a wave energy converter which combines a wave, wind, and solar power plant at sea. The NoviOcean aims to save the climate with profitable ocean energy. With half the weight to power ratio of floating offshore wind and half the number of parts and sea area used of conventional turbines, this converter makes the production of ocean energy far more efficient. Simulations and preliminary tests of the device show 3 – 30 times more output than the competition for wave energy conversion, as well as the floating wind and solar cost being 25-40% of other solutions, and the device being proven to survive the highest waves. Furthermore, the real performance data for the device matches the simulations, allowing predictions to be made of the quantity of energy that could be produced in any given conditions (for example, the wave power unit will deliver 600 kW of energy in 4-meter waves).

Wind and waves are off-phased in the marine environment, meaning when the wind is low, the waves are high and vice versa. Utilising a device which can produce energy from both these sources will therefore allow near constant production. In addition, solar and wave energy are complementary, with solar energy peaking in the summer months (June-August), and wind energy peaking in the winter months (November-February). The device has been designed not to be visually or audibly disturbing and not to harm wildlife. The project is currently moving into stage 4, having constructed a 1:1 scale pilot design which will now be prepared for a demonstration. After this, the device is hoped to become commercial from 2029.

¹⁹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-recovery-plan/repowerEU/>

²⁰ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-tools-databases/energy-and-industry-geography-lab_en

The 2030/2050 targets for climate action cannot be met without ocean energy as a huge part of the solutions. Other solutions will be both too costly and have lengthy carbon payback times. Projects such as NoviOcean will be either the only, or one of very few solutions that can make this breakthrough.

6.3 Session 4 break out session discussion feedback

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

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

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is too early to say whether there are good synergies between renewable energy and conservation/restoration. • We must focus on monitoring wind farms to determine their effects before any synergies can be made using standardised EIAs and data collection. • It is still unclear how to assess the cumulative impacts of wind farms. • Non-price criteria can help with upscaling once this stage has been reached.
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep MPAs and wind farms separate for birds (and some other species) • Prevent wind farms within MPAs. • Conduct research on the artificial reef functions of wind turbines e.g. can they encourage invasive species. • Wind farms are often constructed by large consultancies and therefore any data is often not open access. • The question we should be asking is can conservation and renewables co-exist? • Scientific studies should be carried out at the same time as the construction of the wind farms (live full scale experiments). • All results of studies should be shared.
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trials – making artificial reefs – MariParks • Finland – parks service is doing inventories in the waters where wind power will be introduced. • Monitoring of impacts on birds and mammals. • Deployment of vertical turbines and new technology even at a cost of less energy production. • Identify areas for wind farms which will cause least harm to the environment. • Focus efforts on innovation and new technology such as NoviOcean. • Set standards in EIAs and monitoring effects of windfarms.

6.3.2 How to plan offshore renewable energy in a way that is compatible with protected area targets in the Biodiversity strategy?

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to identify “no go” and “go to” areas for wind farms. • We need an agreed method for identifying “got to” areas to ensure that data is good quality.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The planning process should also be refined – “go to” zones are not only produced by scientific data, but we must also consider energy targets. • What are crucial mitigation measures that we may need in the Baltic for any negative wind farm effects?
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivity mapping. • Prioritise limited funding. • Energy from air – reduced wind energy impacts. • Focus on cumulative impacts. • Country collaboration on planning – better use of resources, compatible plans, shared data. • Do not allow hotspots to be used for wind farms. • Gain experience and learn to adapt.
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data and models to identify “go to” areas which will cause minimal harm and maximise benefit. • Estonia is currently undertaking small mapping projects and monitoring for wind farms. • Make sure that MPAs are “no go” areas. • Empty spaces in MSPs are not to be interpreted as areas to deploy renewable energy, but as areas of unknown which need to be researched. • Combine wind maps with biodiversity data. • Explore new technologies and their impact. • If wind farms can cause benefits to biodiversity in MPAs, they could help the environment but would likely then not count towards the 30% target. • Sweden is currently undertaking a national marine mapping project.

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

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep MSPs up to date with new data and targets. • Independent MSP authority. • Proper regional planning, not just a patchwork. • Improved communication with different audiences (which require different levels of detail). • Nature conservation and renewables should be discussed together, not as one or the other. • More integration in the planning phase, and then clear roles in the implementation phase.
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the MSP before the development begins. • Take into account all impacts. • Use all available data. • MSP collaboration at a regional level. • Update older plans with new data. • Use MSP to mitigate the conflict of users and space – make sure MSP are aware of issues.
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing could include criteria on nature-based solutions and compensation measures and not just pricing. • ASCOBANS could work with MSP to map sensitive cetacean areas which can be implemented in guidelines.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In German auctions, part of the money for renewables goes to the government, with a large part of this given to the Ministry of Environment (5% to marine conservation and 5% to fisheries). The other 90% goes towards maintenance e.g. of cables.• Biodiversity Net Gain in the marine environment.• More ecological criteria (e.g. sensitivity mapping) when licensing a project.• Planners' forum – share information about projects and take a more synchronised approach across Member States.• MSPs to include coastal areas.• Better requirements for marine spatial planners to consider ecological data – make the data more science-based.• Including marine conservation stakeholders in MSP (not just user stakeholders) – in SE/FI they are currently consulted but ultimate decisions are often user-based.• EMMA process – ecologically meaningful marine areas – similar to EBSA.
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7 Session 5: Strict protection in the Baltic 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 aims of Session 5 were to discuss the importance, implications, and successful implementation of strictly protected areas in the Baltic 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
- Biodiversea LIFE IP for Marine Nature - Maija Häggblom, Government of Åland, Finland
- Management of existing uses in areas that are ecologically suitable as strictly protected areas – Jochen Krause, Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Germany

7.1 Strict protection in the context of Biodiversity Strategy targets

The Nature Conservation Unit at DG Environment explained what is meant by strict protection in the context of 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.

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 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 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.

Strict 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 in the marine environment can sometimes be enough to allow restoration of natural habitats.

Currently, most Member States 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 (536 km²) that would be under strict protection in the Baltic marine region in its pledges for 2030.

7.2 LIFE-IP Biodiversea for Marine Nature

The Government of Åland, Finland, presented the LIFE-IP project Biodiversea for marine nature. The aim of the project is to enhance the protection of marine nature and promote the sustainable use of natural resources in the marine and coastal areas of Finland. Current studies focus on the island of Åland. The project mapped sea areas to identify and establish new protected areas, creating a more coherent network along the entire coast of Finland. Management plans and monitoring programmes will then be established for these protected areas.

Åland is an autonomous part of Finland, with its own parliament, government, and legislation. It is home to 30,500 people and is made up of over 6,000 islands, 60 of which have settlements. Within Åland there is currently 3,570 ha of protected land, and over 37,000 ha of protected water (3.2% of total). The goal is for 10% of both the land and the water to be protected. An example of a successful protected area in Åland is the Storklyndan nature reserve which consists of 713 ha of pristine underwater nature. All activities except management/research, recreation and boating are banned in this protected area. The largest challenge facing the project is the traditions of the islands and the local people. There is a long tradition of “free fishing and hunting” as a customary law in some areas, and many see protection posing a threat of loss of fishing to meet household needs.

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

Jochen Krause from the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Germany gave a presentation outlining the methods used by Germany to identify existing use areas that are ecologically suitable as strictly protected areas. While 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.

7.4 Session 5 break out session discussion feedback

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

7.4.1 What Baltic habitats are likely to benefit most from strict protection?

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	All species and habitats will benefit from strict protection to some degree. Characteristics of habitats and species that could benefit most are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High biodiversity • Immobile species/site-specific species • Important sites for migratory species (birds/mammals).
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish spawning areas/habitats • Harbour porpoise • Birds • Highest density species in an area • Diving ducks • Low hanging fruit • Migratory species • Reefs • Adaptive strictly protected areas would help mitigate negative impacts of climate change for species.
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maerl beds • Spawning areas – e.g. cod – which can be hard to protect under Natura 2000. • Deep mud habitats which are not in the directives. • Species/habitats which can be helped by the removal of pressures. • Harbour porpoise. • Pelagic habitats. • Pristine habitats.

7.4.2 How can strictly protected areas be planned in the way to also bring benefits to economic sectors such as fisheries? Please indicate any available research on this topic from the Baltic Sea.

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect spawning sites and nurseries – for example between Denmark and Sweden, cod spawning sites are protected. • Gain knowledge and take time to plan the protected areas effectively. • Ecosystem services. • Reference areas. • Fishing tourism (benefits from spillover) – In Sweden and Denmark the protection of a salmon estuary (river and sea) has resulted in increased fishing tourism.
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of fish spawning areas will cause spillover. • Tourism – coastal parks – kayaking

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and education opportunities • Health and quality of life benefits • It would be necessary to determine what activities would be allowed inside or around the strictly protected area. This will impact economic benefit.
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before planning the strictly protected area, show evidence of the likely spillover effects – communication. • Show the level of harm that deterioration of the environment would cause to these other sectors. • Demonstrate how strict protection can impact the entire life cycle of an animal. • North Sea and Baltic– research on the effects of a ban on bottom trawling – German alliance of marine research. • Southern Baltic – looking at video footage after the implementation of no-take zones to assess impacts. • Denmark North Sea – ban for bottom trawling on a small scale for 15 years– now looking at monitoring.

7.4.3 How can we improve acceptance and ensure a broad support for strictly protected areas in the Baltic context?

Discussion group	Discussion notes
Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication/education – inform people about endangered species. • Communication should not just be down to NGOs; governments should be involved as they have a larger reach and can educate those with power. • Funding • Different methods of communication e.g. art. • Create resources such as classes for teachers to teach children across countries.
Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication – relay the results of the strict protection. • Fishermen – educate them on the long-term perspective. • Dialogue with all stakeholders.
Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local fishermen and understand what their main concerns are. Ensure that the fishermen contribute to form a sense of ownership. • Zonation – e.g. Biosphere reserve. Implementing strict protection zones is easier if there are alternative areas outlined in which activities are allowed. • Demonstrate the negative impact of harmful levels of activities on different industries. • Explain clearly what conservationists want to protect and why. • Regulations within the strictly protected areas should be clear. If compliance is there, eventually acceptance will increase. • Volunteers could help with aspects such as monitoring after implementation/designation. • Start with smaller strictly protected areas and then increase the size of these areas once positive effects are seen and acceptance is increased. • Allow fishermen a forum at which to make their own proposals e.g. in DK. • Work on pressures outside the strictly protected area to demonstrate positive impacts.

8 Closing Plenary

Two days of interesting, useful, and lively discussions were brought to a close by Anna Cheilari and Vedran Nikolić from the European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit. The Commission thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions as well as the organising team for the smooth running of the event.

Following the closing of the seminar, participants were invited to attend the Knowledge Market at which a selection of projects had set up posters. These posters are available online at the Biogeographical Process wiki²¹.

²¹ <https://biogeoprocess.net/balticregion/>

ANNEX 1 – Summary tables of the Q&A held at the end of each seminar session.

PROTECTED AREA TARGETS

Presentation	Question	Answer
The Finnish Pledge Experience.	How much are you working with your neighbours?	Finland is working with their neighbours where possible.
	What can you do about privately owned waters?	It depends on what activities are occurring within the privately owned area. To stop activities such as fishing in these areas a very good reason must be provided. It is usually a case of hoping for a cooperative owner.
Swedish experience in preparing the pledge for marine protected areas.	Will climate change refugee zones and small and large other protected zones be included in the 30% target? Has this been discussed?	Discussions are being held on this topic. These zones are not currently formally in the 30% target, but Sweden hope to include them.
	Could you elaborate on the discussions being held on strict protection to define the concept?	Discussions involve what activities can be allowed in these areas, and where best to locate them in Swedish waters.
	Will you be including small-scale low impact fishing (e.g. recreational) under strict protection?	There are currently no plans to include recreational fishing in strictly protected areas.
Overview and distance to protected area targets - Commission	There has been a lot of queries about the definition of strict protection. Do you have a process in pledge design used to define "strict protection"?	There was a detailed process of defining strict protection which was carried out alongside the Member States and therefore designed with them in mind. There is a clear definition for the concept from the Commission.

CONSERVATION STATUS TARGETS

Presentation	Question	Answer
Finnish pledge experience.	Are you looking at improving food webs are ensuring there are predators present in good numbers to reduce eutrophication?	Finland is not directly looking at this ecosystem based conservation but is running a number of restoration projects to help reduce the pressure of eutrophication.
	What do you mean by the "active restoration" of habitats?	Active restoration of the sandbank habitats includes planting <i>Zostera</i> species as well as species release.
	Are you utilising successful ongoing restoration and transplantation projects?	Successful restoration projects are being used to make a "restoration toolbox".
Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges.	Do we have more information on the measures from the Members States who have submitted pledges? For example, what was in place already and what will happen now as a result of the pledge.	There is more information available on the measures in the relevant Member State pledges, however, there has not been time before this seminar to analyse/summarise and present this information.

Presentation	Question	Answer
	How can the species conservation status be applied to (migratory) birds?	There is a specific methodology to be applied to birds which has been designed to take into account aspects such as migration.
	How will it be assessed that targets are met in 2030? For other projects reporting from 6 years before would be used but this is not realistic in this case.	In order to assess whether targets have been met the Commission will be looking at the 2025 and the 2031 reporting.

ROLE OF NATURA 2000 SITES AND OTHER MPAS IN MARINE RESTORATION

Presentation	Question	Answer
EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs	Is there any scientific backing for the Nature Restoration Law targets?	The targets listed refer to the specific habitats which are listed in the Nature Restoration Law. Member States must first map these specific habitats and then consider what good condition may look like. Member States should focus on the areas which are most feasible to restore.
	If an environment has a limiting factor such as eutrophication, is restoration the best solution?	Addressing eutrophication is a requirement under EU legislation and so will need to be considered in any case. Active restoration has been shown in some cases to help mitigate eutrophication.
	Have there not already been successful restoration examples for eutrophication?	There are examples being carried out but they are in early stages and therefore it is too early to say if they are successful.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND MARINE CONSERVATION

Presentation	Question	Answer
Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring Biodiversity.	It states in the background document for this seminar that renewables help to replenish fish stocks. Do you have the scientific backing to say this?	This statement in the background paper refers to the fact that wind farms often cause a reduction or prevention of fishing in the surrounding area, which can help to replenish fish stocks. The biogeographical process team agreed that this is a potential effect and is not certain.
Upscaling and demonstration of NoviOcean.	Does the device work in ice conditions?	The device has been tested in ice conditions in Stockholm and worked well, but extreme ice such as polar conditions has not yet been tested.
	Is there a risk of animals such as seals using the device for haul-out?	The lowest surface of the device is 3m above the water level so it is a possibility that a seal could haul out onto it. NOVIGE will consider this.
	Can the device be used to conduct other environmental tests?	A range of equipment can be attached to the device, for example to measure salinity or hydrogen levels or to take water samples.
	How often should the device be maintained and what is its lifespan?	The device has a simple structure and therefore should have around a 40-year life span. However, the wind turbines and solar panels fitted to the device will have a shorter lifespan of around 15-25 years.
	How do you avoid salt crust on the solar panels?	This is currently a challenge that NOVIGE are trying to solve.

STRICT PROTECTION

Presentation	Question	Answer
Biodiversesea LIFE IP for Marine Nature	There was a reservoir mentioned in Åland, is this privately owned, or can it be protected?	The reservoir is now owned by the government.
	It was stated that protected areas will allow some activities but not fishing, which activities are you referring to?	Leisure boating.
	Will you be using zonation in strictly protected areas?	Zonation will be one of the tools used in the strictly protected areas.
Management of existing use areas that are ecologically suitable as strictly protected areas.	Is it realistic to move the military for MPAs in the current political climate?	The German government have stated that they will investigate this when it is politically appropriate.
	Which of the stakeholders are the most complex to work with?	Shipping and shipping noise are two very complex factors to work with.
	Do you have priorities for specific habitats/species that you would like in these strictly protected areas?	Fragile or useful (blue carbon) habitats will be prioritised as these are the low-hanging fruits.

ANNEX 2 - Programme of the Seminar

Day 1: Wednesday 8 November

Time	Activity
8.30 – 9.00	Registration
9.00 – 09.30	<p>Official welcome & introductions Dr Rudite Vesere, Deputy State Secretary, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia. Video message from Andrea Vettori, Head of Unit, Nature Conservation Unit, DG Environment, European Commission. Opening and Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: policy context for the biogeographical process – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit Overview of the seminar programme, housekeeping rules – Luna Milatović (Biogeographical Process)</p>
09.30 – 10.00	Break
10.00 – 11.00	<p>Protected area targets Where are we –overview and distance to target – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Richard Whites (Biogeographical Process). Scientific basis for identification of MPAs – Anna Maria Adamo, Horizon Europe Project - MPA EUROPE PROTECT BALTIC Project -Paul Truth, Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - HELCOM Pledges and approaches: Denmark - Caroline Vestergaard Mikkelsen, Ministry of Environment Sweden - Lena Tingström, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management Contribution from other Member States. Q&A</p>
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee Break
11.30 – 13.00	<p>Discussion on way forward in groups Reporting back to plenary</p>
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch Break – self paid, see information email for suggestions
14.30 – 15.30	<p>Conservation status targets Where are we – initial analysis, overview and distance to target –Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Richard Whites (Biogeographical Process). Research of marine protected habitats in EEZ and determination of the necessary conservation status in Latvia - LIFE REEF – Solvita Strake, Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology Pledges and approaches Q&A</p>
15.30 – 16.00	Coffee Break
16.00 – 17.30	<p>Discussion on way forward in groups Reporting back to plenary</p>
18.30 – 21.30	Gala dinner

Day 2: Thursday 9 November

Time	Activity
8.30 – 9.00	Registration
9.00 – 9.15	Opening plenary
9.15 – 11.15	Session 1 - Role of Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs in marine restoration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit • Better Bird LIFE and COASTal LIFE – Bent Jepsen, ELMEN EEIG • Q&A • Moderated discussion • Reporting back to the plenary
11.15 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 13.30	Session 2 – Renewable energy and marine conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit • Upscaling and demonstration of NoviOcean, a breakthrough wave energy converter: The Hydro Power Plant at Sea – Anders Tengelin, NOVIGE AB • Q&A • Moderated discussion Reporting back to the plenary
13.30 - 15.00	Lunch Break – self paid, see information email for suggestions
15.00 – 17.00	Session 3 - Strict protection in the Baltic Sea marine region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict protection in the context of Biodiversity strategy targets – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit • Biodiversea LIFE-IP for Marine Nature – Charlotta Björklund, Government of Åland, Finland • Q&A • Moderated discussion • Reporting back to the plenary
17.00 – 17.30	Next steps for the pledge process and summary of discussions
18.00 – 20.00	Knowledge market and buffet dinner

Day 3: Friday 10 November

All day	Excursion
9.00 – 15.00	Veczemju rocks, Limbaži district (optional, organised by the host)

ANNEX 3 - List of Participating Organisations

Member State and Commission participants

Country	Organisation
Belgium	European Commission
Belgium	Environmental Justice Foundation
Belgium	European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE)
Denmark	Ministry of Environment
Denmark	Danish Environmental Protection Agency
Estonia	Ministry of the Regional Affairs and Agriculture
Estonia	Ministry of Climate
Finland	Ministry of Environment
Finland	Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland
Finland	Government of Åland
Germany	Federal Agency for Nature Conservation
Latvia	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development
Latvia	Baltic Environmental Forum
Latvia	Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology
Latvia	Nature Conservation Agency
Lithuania	Ministry of Environment
Lithuania	Marine Research Institute of Klaipėda University
Lithuania	State Service for Protected Areas
Sweden	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM)

Stakeholder participants

ELMEN European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)
ASCOBANS
Coalition Clean Baltic
Climazul
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)
Seas at Risk
NoviOcean by Novige AB
MPA EUROPE
Client Earth NGO Coalition
Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife Finland
Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union
HELCOM

ANNEX 4 - Evaluation of the Seminar by the Participants

1. Seminar organisation

Activity	Average score	Main comments and suggestions:
1. Overall organisation of the seminar	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hosted and moderated expertly some slipping from schedule bigger screens needed some announcements and documents could have come earlier
2. Opening plenary session (opening speeches, presentations)	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
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"> good discussion interesting to hear pledges more active participation needed every country should be talking about their pledge big quality difference between presentations
3.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> would be good to have questions before to be able to prepare depending on participation of the group, some said a lot, some – nothing -> better moderation good discussion
4. Conservation status targets session		
4.1. Overview presentation, CIBBRiNA LIFE presentation of pledges and approaches by MS	8.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LIFE REEF is an interesting project, but out of scope good examples
4.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more active participation was needed for the topic hard to understand what is holding countries back
5. Reception and Gala dinner	8.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> loud music -> hard to hear each other and have a talk need to have a vegetarian option suggestion to have a quiz or some entertainment during dinner
6. Session 1: Role of Nature 2000 sites and other MPAs in marine restoration		
6.1. Quality and relevance of the presentations	8.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> very clear and interesting presentations urge the EC to consider how to make N2000 protection more holistic
6.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
6.3. Interactions with other participants	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> big variation between groups mixing of groups was effective good breaks in a conference hotel

7. Session 2: Strict protection in the Baltic region		
8.1. Quality and relevance of the presentations	8.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more intense discussion on what MS understand under strict protection would be useful • would be better to have a discussion about which activities were allowed in strict PAs • discussion revealed significant contrast in approaches. this is important!
7.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • topic was harder to discuss for participants
7.3. Interactions with other participants	8.8	
8. Session 3: Renewable energy and marine conservation		
8.1 Quality and relevance of the presentations	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NoviOcean project as a company example was welcomed • need for someone from energy sector • very clear and interesting • some participants didn't understand the commercial presentation of NoviOcean
8.2 Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in work.	8.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • went very smoothly with this topic • too premature questions
8.3 Interactions with other participants	8.8	
9. Knowledge Market	8.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a bit late, some people left and people were tired • more people to attend • posters could be bigger
10. Excursion to Veczemju rocks		
10.1. Organisation of the excursion	8.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be more guided
10.2. Speakers on the excursion	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
11. Technical guidance (guidelines, instruction documents, mails) to access the meeting		
11.1 Distributed before the seminar	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it was hard to find the page for seminar and registration
11.2 Distributed during the seminar	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very good to have QR code to all materials

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	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	Most answers

3. Additional information

3.1. Indicate one thing you consider as a success:

- Communication with representatives from other countries to exchange information
- Discussions in working groups
- Good networking and exchange of ideas
- Opportunity to learn and meet other stakeholders
- Professional staff and very well organised seminar
- General organisation of the seminar
- Size of the breakout groups
- Learning that all MS face similar issues
- That it become clear how different MS interpret the definition of strictly protected areas differently.

3.2. Indicate one thing you would suggest improving:

- More presentations from MS
- Bigger screens for presentations
- Assure that the breakout questions are more targeted to avoid repetition of challenges
- Renewable energy and protection session
- More interactive group work, so everyone got involved
- Bad spread of expertise, some more relevant background of participants to the topics
- Sticking with the timetable
- More practical information from countries
- Use professional facilitators or instruct inexperienced staff on how to facilitate group discussions. Smaller break-out groups can make things easier - can help more quiet people to dare to share their thoughts

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

- Strictly protected areas
- Marine restoration
- Protected area targets session
- Status of pledges in MS

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

- More fruit
- Make stronger links with NRL for the next seminar
- Have each MS present their status (maybe with posters)
- Size of the groups was good (better than in Atlantic)
- Switching excursion to the day 2
- A bit too general: more depth-in discussions would be helpful. The whole pledging idea suffers from a vicious circle problem: the MS are encouraged to take commitments before the meaning of protective measures is defined.
- Make use of professional facilitators
- Presentation from OWF company on mitigation for the renewable energy