



# Third Seminar for the Mediterranean and Black Sea Marine Biogeographical Regions

## Marseille, France

12- 14 March 2024



## SEMINAR REPORT



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

**Cover photographs by NatureBureau:** Palais Du Pharo in Marseille, the seminar venue; group photograph of the seminar participants; the presenting stage at the venue; participants working in break-out groups; Parc national des Calanques.

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# 1 Introduction

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

Since the first marine Natura 2000 biogeographical seminar held in St Malo, France in 2015<sup>1</sup>, the strategic orientations of the Natura 2000 biogeographical process have been further developed. The most recent addition is the support for the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (**hereinafter “the Strategy”**) aim of “bringing nature back into our lives”<sup>2</sup> which was adopted by the European Commission in 2020 and supported by Member States<sup>3</sup>. 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 Birds<sup>4</sup> and Habitats<sup>5</sup> Directives not currently in favourable status are in that category or show a strong positive trend, as well as ensure no deterioration in conservation trends and status of all protected habitats and species.

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

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

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<sup>1</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/documents/marine\\_biogeographical\\_kick\\_off\\_seminar\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/documents/marine_biogeographical_kick_off_seminar_report_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 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>

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Commission guidance on the protected areas targets: [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/publications/criteria-and-guidance-protected-areas-designations-staff-working-document\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/publications/criteria-and-guidance-protected-areas-designations-staff-working-document_en)

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

protected area and conservation status targets. These should follow the format<sup>8</sup> and contents agreed between the Member States, the Commission, and the European Environment Agency (EEA), using an Excel file template developed by the EEA and the European Topic Centre for Biodiversity (ETC-BD) for pledge submission to the EEA's Reportnet platform. Pledges will be peer reviewed by the Commission, the EEA, and Member States. The expanded Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process seminars are central to this review process.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>8</sup> Format for the protected areas target: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/6f30d1d2-d6f2-4c6e-a4dc-1feb66201929/library/55e3e353-e369-49ab-92b1-4ddab67424b0/details>

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

## 1.1 Context of the seminar

The third marine Natura 2000 seminar for the Mediterranean and Black Sea biogeographical regions took place in Marseille, France from 12 - 14 March 2024 (Annex 2). It was attended by 56 participants and 3 observers from Member States and other relevant organisations (Annex 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 had submitted in the context of the commitments made under the EU Biodiversity 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 Marseille jointly by the French Ministry of Ecological Transition and the French Biodiversity Agency (OFB). The participants discussed the progress of pledges and the challenges faced in this process, as well as three specific themes linked to marine conservation and management of the Natura 2000 network. An evaluation of the seminar by the participants is given in Annex 4.

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

## 1.2 Seminar work plan

The seminar was organised in five main sessions, as well as introductory and closing remarks. Following each session, the participants were split into break-out groups for in-depth discussion on questions which were posed by the Biogeographical Process team. Discussion groups were chaired by the hosts and the organisation team, and a note taker and rapporteur were selected from the participants. Rapporteurs gave an account of the group discussions to the plenary. The feedback from the groups has been summarised in tables for each session.

### Introductory remarks:

- Marie-Lauren Metayer, Deputy Director, Water and Biodiversity Directorate, Ministry of Ecological Transition (video)
- Andrea Vettori, Head of Unit, Nature Conservation Unit, DG Environment, European Commission

In addition, Vedran Nikolić (European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit) spoke about the policy context of the Strategy for the biogeographical process.

### Session 1: Protected Area Targets

An overview of the progress made towards the protected area targets of the Strategy was provided by the European Environment Agency. This was followed by the presentation of pledges and approaches by Member States and a presentation by the MPA EUROPE Horizon project on



the scientific basis for the identification of MPAs. Presentations were followed by discussions in four break-out groups on the challenges faced when addressing protected area targets and how these can be overcome.

### **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. The Biogeographical Process Consortium gave a presentation on the methodology for and results of the initial analysis of conservation status pledges. The MarHA project gave a presentation on effective management of French marine habitats. Cyprus and Spain then presented their conservation status pledges before other Member States were invited to share their progress with the group. Presentations were followed by discussions in four break-out groups on the challenges faced when adopting conservation status targets and how these can be overcome.

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

The first presentation for Theme 1 was delivered by the European Commission on the EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs. REEForest and LIFE ECOREST then presented their experiences of human-impacted benthic marine habitat restoration through the cultivation of *Cystoseria* macroalgal forests employing a participatory approach. Following presentations, discussions were held in four break-out groups which covered examples of successful restoration activities in MPAs, the main challenges of marine habitat and species restoration in MPAs, and whether the designation of MPAs ensures non-deterioration of conservation status.

### **Session 4: Theme 2 – Strict protection in the Mediterranean and Black Seas**

Presentations were delivered by the European Commission on strict protection in the context of the Strategy, the French National Centre for Scientific Research on the ecological and socio-economic benefits of strict protection, and AMP Côte Agathoise on strict protection in Aire Marine Protégée de la Côte Agathoise. Discussions were held in four break-out groups which covered the habitats likely to benefit most from strict protection, what criteria and scientific evidence should be considered when planning strictly protected areas to maximise benefits, and how to improve acceptance and ensure broad support for strictly protected areas.

### **Session 5: Theme 3 – Renewable energy and marine conservation**

Presentations were delivered by the European Commission, the Office Français de la Biodiversité, and OCEANWINDS on achieving renewable energy targets whilst protecting and restoring marine biodiversity. Discussions were held in four break-out groups which covered synergies between renewable energy and marine conservation, and how to use marine spatial planning to minimise any negative effects of offshore energy.

### **Closing remarks**

The concluding address was delivered by the European Commission and the Biogeographical Process team, summarising the next steps for the pledge process, the discussions had at the seminar, and how these discussions will aid future progress. The closing plenary and farewell message was delivered by the Nature Conservation Unit, DG Environment, European Commission.



### 1.3 Field trip to Parc national des Calanques

On the third day of the seminar (14 March), participants had a boat excursion around the Calanques National Park in Marseille. The excursion included Calanque of Podesta and the strictly protected area, Calanque of Cortiou and its restoration measures, and Calanque of Sormiou and the SAC and SPA in the national park. Whilst on board, the participants received a talk from the National Park team about the ongoing work in the protected areas and the successes achieved so far. The strictly protected area is the largest of its kind in Mediterranean waters, allowing vulnerable habitats such as large *Posidonia* beds to remain undisturbed. The participants were also informed about the restoration efforts in Cortiou under the Rexcor project<sup>9</sup> which is rebuilding the local reefs using artificial 3D structures. The National Park team have designed a detailed plan of actions for restoring and maintaining the health of the Calanques alongside spatial protection such as the instalment of pathways to reduce soil erosion, outreach and education programmes in France and Europe, and limiting the number of visitors to beaches in the protected area using an online booking system<sup>10</sup>.



Participants onboard the vessel (NatureBureau)



Calanques National Park (NatureBureau)

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.calanques-parcnational.fr/en/cortiou>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.calanques-parcnational.fr/en/protect-and-restore>

## 2 Welcome and introductory session

The introductory plenary session provided an overview of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (“the Strategy”) targets and present them in the EU policy context. The session consisted of welcome talks from the hosts and the Head of Unit for Nature Conservation at DG Environment.

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

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

The scope of the current Biogeographical Process had expanded to also support the pledge and review process of the Strategy. Under this process, Member States submit pledges for reaching the relevant targets:

- Protected areas:
  - 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 (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 or show a strong positive trend.
  - To know the conservation status of all species and habitats.

The pledges are assessed by the EEA for the protected area target while those for the status improvement target are assessed by the Biogeographical Process consortia using a methodology developed jointly for both the terrestrial and marine biomes.

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 managed<sup>11</sup>. The current challenges to reach the Strategy protected areas targets include improving the scientific underpinning for locating new protected areas, discussing the role of other effective areas-based conservation measures, and improving the management of marine protected areas. To make progress towards protected area targets, the effective management of Natura 2000 must be supported.

The EU is developing a methodology to assess MPA management effectiveness which uses effort-based and outcome-based criteria and indicators. So far, 75 Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs have been tested and the development continues. Currently, Horizon Europe, the LIFE programme and the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund invest around 225 million euros into projects which support the targets of the Strategy, allowing the development of further tools and methods to overcome challenges for spatial protection. DG Environment is also supporting the development of a web viewer of spatial data to assist the pledge process by displaying data for species and habitats, scientific identification of important biodiversity areas, and currently designated 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 proposed Nature Restoration Law and the “EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries” 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. The EU Action Plan aims to protect and restore marine ecosystems by protecting the seabed, improving gear selectivity, and addressing bycatch. This will improve the conservation status of both target species and those impacted indirectly by fishing activities.

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

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

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-icm/products/etc-icm-report-3-2020-spatial-analysis-of-marine-protected-area-networks-in-europe2019s-seas-iii/@@download/file/Spatial%20Analysis%20of%20Marine%20Protected%20Area%20Networks%20in%20Europe%E2%80%99s%20Seas%20III.pdf>

### 3 Session 1: Protected Area Targets

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

- Where are we – overview and distance to target, initial analysis of received pledges – Johnny Reker, European Environment Agency (EEA)
- Scientific basis for identification of MPAs – Anna Maria Addamo, Horizon Europe Project, MPA EUROPE.
- Pledges and approaches:
  - Spain – José Maria Rodriguez Ochagevia, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge
  - France – Ilinca Mathieu, Ministry of Ecological Transition
  - Contribution from other Member States
- Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Paul Goriup, Marine Biogeographical Process consortium.

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

#### 3.1 Overview of distance to protected area targets and preliminary analysis

The European Environment Agency (EEA) gave an account of the current status of protected areas in EU waters (and thus before pledges have been implemented) as well as a summary of the preliminary analysis of pledges. Natura 2000 data reported before December 2020 and nationally designated area data reported before March 2021 shows that in the Mediterranean there is a total MPA coverage of 19.1%, and 14.3% in the Black Sea. The current baseline before the pledge process is therefore below the target of 30% coverage in the region.

Each pledge follows the same structure and therefore contains similar information. The pledge begins with general information including the current and expected (by 2030) extent of protected areas, strictly protected areas, and OECMs and the coherence of the current network. Member States then report the existing nationally designated areas, and OECMs, which should be counted towards the 30% target, and nationally designated areas or Natura 2000 sites which should be counted towards the 10% strict target before reporting pledges for future designation of protected areas and OECMs.

Only two Member States from the Mediterranean and Black Sea region have submitted pledges for protected areas. Initial protected area pledge analysis for France shows that the majority of the MPA coverage is made up by currently protected areas which is marked as “unknown”. Similarly, in the case of Spain around half of the MPA coverage is made up of the expected additional protected area by 2030 which is again marked as “unknown”. Natura 2000 sites make

up 10% of the Spanish pledge and 14-15% of the French pledge. 29 designation types were reported by Spain and 17 by France towards the 30% protection target. Both pledges, however, currently have restricted access and require action from the Member States to make the data public. The current area of strict protection in France (not reported individually as strictly protected sites) is 112 km<sup>2</sup> and in Spain is 1305 km<sup>2</sup>. The EEA noted that the North-West Mediterranean Sea particularly sensitive sea area (PSSA) is not included in their statistics for MPA coverage as effects on marine biodiversity in general (outside of the targeted cetaceans) will be difficult to document.

New EEA statistics on protected areas will be released in 2024 based on the Natura 2000 dataset and nationally designated areas reported in 2023. The dashboards on Member State protected area coverage will be updated gradually as new pledges are submitted.

### **3.2 Scientific basis for the identification of MPAs**

Nord University presented the MPA Europe project<sup>12</sup>, which aims to provide the scientific basis for the identification of MPAs in European seas. Species richness, potential geographic distribution of important biogenic habitats and data-driven classifications of ecosystems are being mapped (the sources of the datasets for species distribution and blue carbon were provided). This has allowed the project to produce an online European marine biodiversity atlas, which can be used to design MPA networks covering 10% and 30% of European seas that maximise biodiversity protection and blue carbon benefits. A demonstration was given on how the tool can be used to map environmental data which may impact the placement of new MPAs, such as spatial differences in temperature between today and 2090. Furthermore, ecosystem classification mapping of surface waters, near seabed and depth-integrated marine ecosystems were presented. The ecosystem classifications were estimated using cluster analysis of environmental data which can be used to identify areas of high pressure or vulnerable habitats for protection. The project has also undertaken species and habitat distribution modelling and has mapped over 15,000 marine species from Europe which can be used to monitor species range shifts and conservation statuses. The atlas can be used to predict species and biogenic habitat distribution changes over time and map the spatial coverage of organic carbon content (for example, on the top 10 cm of sediment for biogenic habitats).

Ongoing work under the project includes standardising species ranges, biomes, and functional ecosystem units, mapping oceanographic connectivity, and running models to select the best 10% and 30% for protection at European, sea basin, EEZ and territorial scales.

### **3.3 Spanish pledge for the target on protected areas**

The Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge presented the approach taken by Spain for the development of their protected area pledge. It began with a review of the current protected areas in Spanish waters, and the progress made over time. In

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<sup>12</sup> <https://mpa-europe.eu/>

2009 only 1% of Spanish waters were protected, which had increased to 12% by 2018 and 21% by December 2023. However, only one third of current MPAs have an approved management plan in place and less than 1% of Spanish waters are under strict protection.

The ministry explained the steps taken by Spain to determine which areas should be designated as protected, and how to make sure the protection is effective. These steps include the adoption of management plans for Natura 2000 sites through participatory processes and putting ecological monitoring and surveillance in place. Towards the 30% target, the steps consist of oceanographic campaigns and surveys to identify new marine areas for protection, and a gap analysis for the identification of proposals for potential new designations. So far 6 new areas have identified that represent around 3% of the Spanish marine area, and these are pending designation by the end of 2024.

The gap analysis was designed for the identification of proposals for potential Natura 2000 sites. The process included checking for insufficiencies in the Natura 2000 network (for example the lack of science-based decision-making), the coherence of the marine Natura 2000 network (using criteria and methodologies from the guidelines provided by the EEA, MRCs and Deltares) and the prioritisation of proposals. Spain proposed 7 more areas as high priority for protection making up a further 9% of Spanish waters; these were designated in 2023,.

The proposed areas include the submarine mountains in the Mallorca Channel and the Alboran Sea banks and gorges from the oceanographic campaigns and the Ibiza channel and the Western Galacian-Cantabric migratory corridor.

### **3.4 French pledge for the target on protected areas**

The Ministry of Ecological Transition presented the protected areas pledge for France. Protected areas are mentioned in several national strategies, with targets including the protection of 30% of national territory, the high protection of 10% of national territory, and an increase in the financial means and quality of MPA management. Currently, 33.4% of national territory is protected under 366 MPAs but only 4.1% of national territory is highly protected. The Mediterranean MPA network in France is made up of 102 MPAs and covers 52.3% of marine waters in that region. These protected areas range from National Parks to local protection decrees and UNESCO sites.

Within its national strategies, France defines highly protected areas (HPAs), which differ somewhat from the strict protection definition stated in the European Commission guidance. The definition for HPAs is:

“Geographical areas in which the pressures generated by human activities that might compromise the conservation of the ecological features are eliminated or significantly reduced, in the long term, through the implementation of protection through property or an adapted regulation, associated with an effective control of these activities”.



An example of a HPA is the National Reserve of Cerbère-Banyuls which is located at the southernmost end of the French Mediterranean coastline. Within this HPA there are two protection zones, the restoration zone which bans all potentially harmful activities, and the protection zone which allows some limited activities such as anchoring of boats.

Currently, there are no plans for new major MPAs in French waters aside from Natura 2000 sites depending on sufficiency analysis. Efforts are mainly being focused on developing HPAs to meet aims such as the high protection of all of threatened seagrass beds by 2030 and the high protection of 5% of Mediterranean waters by 2027. The Mediterranean has the highest target for high protection by 2027, with the South and North Atlantic at 3% and the North Sea at 1%.

For the creation of new HPAs, updated sea basin documents are drafted based on the National Strategies for protected areas, biodiversity, and marine and coastal areas, and then documents are finalised following a national public debate. Ecological features of interest for HPAs include seagrass beds, sub-aqueous dunes, current National Reserves, and Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems. There are some challenges to be overcome such as the areas of interest for wind farming development, which overlap with areas of interest for HPAs within the Gulf of Lion.

### **3.5 Contributions from other Member States**

#### **EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)**

EUSAIR presented their study on the possible scenarios for protected area contributions to the EU Biodiversity Strategy within the Adriatic and Ionian region Member States. The study aims to summarise the marine protection under national and international legislation within individual Member States and undertake a legal analysis evaluating the basis for expansion of MPAs under law (instruments available for marine protection with case studies and best practices).

The presentation went on to outline the legislation under which spatial protection can be implemented in EUSAIR Member States:

- Marine Strategy Framework Directive – MPAs should form part of the programmes of measures
- Marine Spatial Planning – spatial restrictions related to human uses can be established via the MSP Directive to form ecologically coherent networks of MPAs at eco-regional and sub-regional scales.
- Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures – OECMs, whilst indirectly contributing to conservation objectives, may be adopted also for other purposes.
- Fisheries Restricted Area (example of an OECM)- Geographically defined area in which some specific fishing activities are temporarily or permanently banned or restricted in order to improve the exploitation patterns and conservation of specific stocks as well as of habitats and deep-sea ecosystems.
- Barcelona Convention – joint proposals can be raised for transboundary Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs). For example, the northern,



central and southern Adriatic were designated as Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas by Croatia, Italy, and Slovenia.

The analysis of these current EU legislations under which MPAs can be created showed that through effective implementation and operational cooperation at the regional level, MPA areas could be extended from the existing 8.5% to 33% and strict protection could be extended to more than 12% from 0.1%. Areas of strict protection were mostly identified beyond 12 nm offshore.

### **Marine Protected Area targets in Greece: progress and achievements**

The Nature Environment and Climate Change Agency (NECCA) presented the progress and achievements for the marine protected areas targets in Greece. The presentation began with an overview of the Natura 2000 network in Greece and the relevant national legislation in place. Currently, Greece has over 22,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Natura 2000 protected areas, over 17,000 km<sup>2</sup> of sites of community importance, and over 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> of special protection areas. Relevant national legislation includes the establishment of a National Committee for Protected Areas to monitor compliance and implementation and a National Biodiversity Strategy for the years 2014-2029 with a five-year action plan.

Three examples of best practice in Greek waters were provided:

- National Marine Park of Zakynthos – the first duly constituted Protected Area in Greece. Restrictions are imposed on fishing, water sports, navigation, and swimming and protection is afforded for turtle nesting sites, the habitat of the Mediterranean monk seal, and coastal flora and fauna.
- National Marine Park of Alonissos – the largest MPA in Europe. It controls many human activities such as water sports, camping, snorkelling, and navigation to ensure the protection of several rare species of marine flora and fauna.
- Protected Area of Gyaros Island - SCI-SPA Wildlife Refuge. Fishing, fish farming, and hunting are banned in the protected area and there is a memorandum of cooperation in place as well as a remote surveillance system for the effective supervision of the MPA. Threatened species and significant marine habitats such as *Posidonia* meadows are protected.

The LIFE MareNatura project aims to identify and propose the designation of new offshore Natura 2000 sites in the Greek territorial waters and improved spatial planning in the Aegean, Ionian, and South Adriatic Seas. The project also aims to establish a modern and cost-effective monitoring scheme for the regular assessment of the conservation status of nine priority species. The project began last year and is set to end in 2029, part-funded by the European Commission. Expected outcomes of the project include over 100 trained site-managers for protected areas, over 30 new marine biodiversity hotspots and over 20 new marine Natura 2000 sites, 150 site-specific conservation objectives for the identified hotspots, and species-specific risk maps for the 9 target megafauna species.

Future work on measures regarding MPA targets includes the completion of special environmental studies, the prioritisation of strictly protected areas, an increase in the marine waters covered by protected areas (from 10.28% to >30% by 2030), gathering potential ecological data to designate more MPAs, and enhancing monitoring and surveillance in MPAs.

### **Pledge process in Croatia – Reaching the 30% target in the marine environment**

The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development presented the pledge process in Croatia. They are currently undertaking the consultation process with NGOs, scientists, and experts from the nature sector. The consultation process includes collecting data on species and habitats needing conservation, utilising questionnaires, online and expert meetings, and advancing dialogue between stakeholders. The current protected area coverage in Croatia is 9.4%, with only 0.39% strictly protected. Additional Natura 2000 site designations are planned for turtles, dolphins, *Posidonia* beds, and reefs, with SPAs planned for seabirds.

The consultation on proposal for additional protected areas in the Adriatic is ongoing as of 2024 and a joint proposal will be presented to gain support for the proposed new designations from ministries, agencies, and stakeholders. Efforts will be made to secure funding and resources for the implementation of conservation measures within the designated areas. It was noted that the Croatian pledge process could be delayed due to parliamentary elections in the next few months.

### **Protected areas target in Bulgaria**

The Ministry of Environment and Water presented the progress made so far in the pledge process in Bulgaria. Currently, the Natura 2000 network and national protected areas cover around 35% of the national territory (with marine Natura 2000 sites making up 37% of all Natura 2000 sites). This places Bulgaria at third place in the EU on this indicator.

The approach to the pledge process consists of four stages: working group, public hearing, Council of Ministers approval, and submission of the pledges to the European Commission. The working group includes scientists from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (so that pledges can be supported by scientific justification) and representatives from administrative institutions (to achieve a correspondence of the pledges with the departmental policies). The working group is in the process of collecting and analysing data from all participants before the national pledges can be determined.

Challenges facing Bulgaria for achieving the 30% protected area target focus mainly on interpretation of the requirements of the targets. The first issue is the question of which areas of the sea are included in the target (Bulgarian territorial sea, contiguous zone, continental shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone) as this affects the current percentage coverage. If all four zones are included in the 30% target then the current coverage is only 8%. The second challenge is how to simultaneously meet the 10% strict protection target and implement the requirements of Article 58 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea that all States shall enjoy the freedom of navigation and the laying of cables and pipelines. The final challenge is the depth to which

protection should be applied. There is no oxygen below 150 m in the Black Sea so it may not be relevant to protect more than the first 150 m of depth of seabed, and thereafter only for fish and cetaceans. For progress to be made in the pledge process, Bulgaria must first address these interpretation challenges.

### **Protected area targets – European strategies and the Italian scenario**

The National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) presented an overview of the protected area pledge process in Italy. Two principal measures are in place in Italy that can be classified as OECMs contributing towards the 30% protection target:

- The prohibition of prospecting, exploration and cultivation of liquid and gas hydrocarbons in sea areas located within 12 nm from the coastline along the entire national coastal perimeter and from the outer perimeter of protected marine and coastal areas.
- The ban of industrial fishing within 3 nm of the coast or at depths less than 50 m.

Two measures from the FAO which can be classified as OECMs were also presented:

- Fishing Restricted Areas in areas hosting Essential Fish Habitats, some of which are near Italian waters.
- Trawling prohibition at depths below 1,000 m declared in 2005 by the GFCM\_FAO to protect benthic marine habitats (VMEs) and slow-growing fish.

The target of 10% strict protection could be achieved by Italy through the national MPAs. For example, by giving new impetus to the establishment of new MPAs (now 31 and 53 planned), by expanding the perimeters and updating the zoning of established MPAs, and by identifying and applying new ways of utilising the marine environment in a more sustainable way. The strict protection targets could also be achieved using the Natura 2000 sites where industrial fishing is forbidden, and by establishing new protected marine sites of the high seas beyond 12 nm to protect habitats such as seamounts.

The presentation then outlined various projects underway which can contribute towards the pledge process:

- PNRR Marine Ecosystem Restoration Project (MASE and ISPRA) – aims to map 90% of marine habitats of conservation interest by 2026 and reinforce the national marine research and monitoring system in Italy. The project will provide evidence for implementing ecological restoration activities of benthic habitats through passive and active measures.
- National-scale mapping of seamounts and circalittoral and bathyal rock outcrops – this project aims to map 79 submarine mountains using AUV, multibeam, and ground truth in situ ROV. This will allow the characterisation of benthic assemblages of conservation interest which can be used to create a network of deep-sea Natura 2000 sites to protect reefs.

### 3.6 Session 1 break out group discussion and feedback

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

#### 3.6.1 Identify one main challenge for the pledge process and as many concrete solutions for that challenge as possible.

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative reactions from fishers</li> <li>• Lack of strong scientific evidence to take action</li> <li>• Lack of effective communication to tell a positive story</li> <li>• Lack of consistency between Common Fisheries Policy and Habitats and Birds Directives regarding legal provisions</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective communication about positive effects such as spillover</li> <li>• Customise protected areas and their management measures, especially for Natura 2000 sites</li> <li>• Stress the importance of objectives, measures, and monitoring</li> <li>• Address climate change challenges</li> <li>• Integrate issues such as tourism, energy, and pollution</li> <li>• Help fishers transition to sustainable practices (e.g. by-catch mitigation)</li> </ul>
Table 2	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overlapping/lack of data and the consolidation of the data still needed</li> <li>• Slow negotiation with other sectors due to different interests both between and within sectors</li> <li>• Consideration of OECMs – which areas would qualify? How would reporting work? Are transboundary OECMs different?</li> <li>• There are many different definitions and types of protected areas across Member States</li> <li>• Some habitats are more present in some Member States and therefore transboundary cooperation is needed</li> <li>• The definition of strict protection is different among stakeholders nationally</li> <li>• Little willingness of stakeholders to compromise</li> <li>• Sometimes science is not enough</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued engagement with stakeholders</li> <li>• Consolidation of different databases</li> <li>• Guidance from the European Commission (e.g. a dashboard) on how to account for OECMS</li> <li>• Patience – the process takes time</li> <li>• Engage different parts of administration</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>European Commission guidance on coherence of requirements under different policies (similar to the Marine Action Plan)</li> </ul>
Table 3	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The definition of 10% strict protection and the locations in which the 10% can be applied needs clarifying by the European Commission so that it can be interpreted</li> <li>Challenges faced by Member States in making pledges are not often shared and therefore neither are solutions</li> <li>Lack of coordination of management</li> <li>Offshore areas pose complications</li> <li>Lack of time or effort for negotiations</li> <li>Political instability e.g. upcoming elections</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>European Commission guidance on definition clarification and interpretation</li> <li>A means of sharing Member State difficulties and solutions should be created</li> </ul>
Table 4	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finding consensus between stakeholders</li> <li>Lack of data/availability of data</li> <li>Lack of political will/confidence</li> <li>Quick changes in climate</li> <li>Uniformity/overlapping of frameworks</li> <li>Cost of enforcement</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More technical support from the European Commission/Regional Seas Conventions on how to conduct biodiversity assessments</li> <li>Accurate socio-economic assessments of activities (benefit of ecosystem services)</li> <li>Stress the dangers of no action</li> <li>Propose concrete solutions</li> <li>Train policy makers to communicate effectively with relevant stakeholders</li> <li>Best practices: success stories</li> <li>Stress the importance of acting today</li> <li>Local ecological knowledge</li> </ul>

**3.6.2 Identify a potential cross-border marine area in the Mediterranean/Black 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.**

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spinola spur – a sea mount between Italy and France</li> <li>2000m depth and around 4000ha, 1170 reef habitat under the Directive</li> <li>Measures could include no take zone, governance on a bilateral basis, designation of a highly protected area (HPA)</li> </ul>

Table 2	Not discussed
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MarHA proposal for a canyon reef area between France and Spain – the agreement has not yet been signed by Spain</li> <li>• Vama Durankulak – Romania and Bulgaria – difficult implementation and monitoring as discussions are based in the Black Sea Convention. There is more collaboration under the MSFD than Natura 2000</li> <li>• Transboundary fishery restricted area – Italy and Croatia – regulations need to be stricter however it is clear that the countries are not ready to work together. Plans make sense at a national level but not at a larger extent</li> </ul>
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vama Durankulak – reef habitat between Romania and Bulgaria</li> <li>• Transboundary protection could close the gap between two existing MPAs which are currently not joined due to a lack of high-level coordination</li> <li>• Measures could include restricting coastal fisheries, activity zoning, and target fishing alien species</li> </ul>

## 4 Session 2: Conservation status targets

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

- Where are we – overview and distance to target – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit
- Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Paul Goriup, Marine Biogeographical Process consortium
- MarHA: Nature Integrated Project for effective and equitable management of marine habitats in France – Alain Pibot, Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB)
- Pledges and approaches:
  - Spain - Helena Moreno Colera, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge
  - Cyprus – Yianna Samuel, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
  - Contributions from other Member States

### 4.1 Overview and distance to conservation status improvement targets

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

Every six years, EU Member States are required to report on the trends in populations of birds, and the conservation status of and trends for habitats and species covered by the Birds and Habitats Directives. The results from the compilation of these reports (EU State of Nature) show that in the Mediterranean marine region, no habitats are in favourable conservation status and none of the trends are positive. In the Black Sea region, only one habitat (1180) is in favourable condition and all others are either unfavourable or unknown and none of the trends are positive. Although deterioration of status for habitats or species is more frequent in areas outside Natura 2000, there are still cases of deterioration even for habitats well covered by the Natura 2000 network, which would indicate poor effectiveness of conservation measures or the lack of the most important measures.

In the Mediterranean region, only two Habitats Directive species are in favourable conservation status, and in the Black Sea region 75% are in unfavourable status. The main identified issue is the lack of knowledge on these species. No change or deterioration in status is more frequent for species not well covered by the Natura 2000 network, and for species well covered by the network the status has remained favourable or is improving. 35% of marine birds are either threatened or near threatened at EU level and only 39% are in favourable status.



The main pressures on species and habitats are fishing and aquaculture, urbanisation, transport, and military activities. Pledges should ensure the effective management of Natura 2000 sites and introduce new or improved measures inside and outside Natura 2000 sites capable of reversing the negative trends. 60% of the necessary measures for habitats and 57% of measures for species are still not taken in the Mediterranean Sea and so conservation status is not improving for many species and habitats. Synergies with other legislation such as the MSFD programmes of measures, measures implemented through Regional Seas Conventions, and measures in the Marine Action Plan (as well as restoration measures under the Nature Restoration Law) are expected in the pledges.

## **4.2 Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges**

The Biogeographical Process consortium presented the methodology designed for the analysis of conservation status pledges, and the initial analysis produced of pledges received. Currently, conservation status pledges have only been received for the Mediterranean region from Cyprus and Spain. Therefore, analysis at a regional level is not yet possible and birds are not assessed at a biogeographical region level. Preliminary analysis at a Member State level was carried out to compare the current conservation status of each feature determined to be relevant to the Member State (favourable, unknown, unfavourable-inadequate, and unfavourable-bad) and the targets stated in the pledges. For example, if the status of a feature is assessed as unknown, there should be a target to gather the required information. 4 features (11%) were pledged for improvement by Spain and 18 bird species were pledged for non-deterioration. Finally, it should be noted that aspects of conservation status targets (e.g. 30% improvement) need to include terrestrial pledges, and results will evolve as Member States continue to submit pledges.

## **4.3 MarHA: Nature Integrated Project for effective and equitable management of marine habitats in France**

The Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB) gave a summary of the MarHA LIFE integrated project which aims to improve the implementation of Natura2000 at sea and the conservation status of marine habitats of community interest. The project was started to address ethnical, socio-economic, and legal responsibilities for the reduction or reversal of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The project began in 2018 and will run until 2025. It covers 600 operations under 6 different topics, and studies 164 Natura 2000 marine and lagoon sites and 9 habitats of community interest. The presentation was separated into two halves, thematic diagnostics, and corrective work.

During the thematic diagnostics section of the project, the team identifies dysfunctions and shortcomings in four areas:

- Habitat conservation status assessments
  - Assessments are general and based on expert opinion at a biogeographical scale which is insufficient to detect sources of pressure

- Protocols are inherited from the Water Framework Directive with no consideration of habitat functionality
- Gaps in knowledge and assessment protocols
- Governance
  - Passive governance
  - Steering committees too infrequent to maintain workflow
  - Top-down information with little participation
  - Most impactful decisions are made outside of committees
- Site management and administration
  - Insufficient implementation of the main method of regulating and reducing pressure
  - Lack of training for managers and state services
  - Lack of communication between instructors and managers
  - Lack of data and tools for management
- Awareness raising and communication
  - Awareness raising is undertaken by untrained managers
  - Lack of strategy (objectives, targets, message, medium)
  - Lack of tools and guidelines

The second section of the project is the corrective work which involves researching, testing, and eventually deploying solutions for these identified shortcomings. Solutions were mentioned for each of the four areas of dysfunction:

- Habitat conservation status assessment
  - Exploration and development of specific protocols and training managers to implement these evaluation methods
  - Exploration of methods for specific habitat types such as eelgrass, deep reefs, maerl banks, and coastal reefs
  - Habitat functional health assessment (EBQI)
  - Publication of marine habitat description sheets by MarHA
- Governance
  - MarHA are leading steering committees and setting up working groups
  - Publication of a guidance document for elected representatives
- Site management and administration
  - MarHA have been training managers in the recognition of habitats and signs of degradation, COPIL coordination, awareness-raising and communication and the drafting of objective documents (DOCOBs)
  - MarHA have been training government officials in the recognition of marine issues, impact assessments, and the implementation of specific Natura 2000 controls
  - Drafting of site management documents (18 sites management plans drafted)
  - Production of national thematic guidelines to avoid and reduce impacts
- Awareness raising and communication
  - National mobile application for the dissemination of official nautical information (NavCo)

The results of the study to date are encouraging, and although the trajectory of deterioration is difficult to reverse in an unfavourable context (European elections, economic and geopolitical crisis) there is a favourable social trend (increase in environmental competence of magistrates).

#### 4.4 Spanish conservation status targets

The Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge described the approach taken by Spain for the development of their conservation status pledge. A baseline report for the period 2013-2018 revealed that 12 assessments on habitats and 98 assessments for marine species had been undertaken under Article 17, and 54 assessments on species under Article 12. There are 89 assessments yet to be completed and the report revealed that 82% of species had unknown status and all habitats were assessed as unknown. For marine birds, 50% of the species had unknown status and many birds are in unfavourable status. The high proportion of unknowns was put down to a lack of monitoring in place for the relevant habitats and species or inadequate or insufficient data from the available monitoring. Conservation efforts will focus on the habitats and species which are most likely to see an improvement in their conservation status with intervention. These include *Posidonia* beds and submerged or partially submerged sea caves, *Phocoena Phocoena*, *Patella ferruginea* and *Lithophaga lithophaga*, and *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* and *Puffinus mauretanicus*. In addition, 2 habitats and 9 species (1 habitat and 6 species found in the Mediterranean Sea) have been selected for Spain's non-deterioration target. There are two species for which non-deterioration is unlikely to be possible (*Pinna nobilis* and *Uria aalge ibericus*) due to factors outside local control. Spain aims to reach the 30% target, non-deterioration target, and reducing unknown target using species and habitats across the marine regions. However, challenges remain concerning the lack of information on those habitats and species with unknown status, and the coordination of conservation measures across autonomous regions.

#### 4.5 Cyprus conservation status targets

The Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment presented the development of the Cypriot conservation status pledge. Currently, the marine protected areas in Cyprus include 7 marine Natura 2000 sites, 7 MPAs, 1 SPAMI area, and 6 MPAs with artificial reefs. Examples of these include the Oceanid offshore Natura 2000 Site and the Eratosthenes Underwater Seamount (fisheries restricted area). Cyprus reports on 45 Habitats Directive habitat types, 5 of which are marine, and 59 Habitats Directive species, 4 of which are marine. *Posidonia* meadows, reefs, sandbanks slightly covered by water all the time and submerged or partially submerged sea caves have been assessed as favourable with a stable trend and submarine structures made by leaking gases were assessed as unknown. *Caretta caretta* and *Tursiops truncatus* were assessed as favourable with a stable trend and *Chelonia mydas* and *Monachus monachus* were assessed as unfavourable with an improving trend. 37 breeding bird species in Cyprus are not assessed as secure at the EU-level of which 12 species show a decreasing trend at a national level.

Cyprus prioritises habitats and species using endemic and endangered/vulnerable status and secure funding for conservation efforts and prioritises birds with the same criteria with the addition of a decreasing short term population trend in Cyprus. Examples of species protection and management measures in Natura 2000 sites currently in place are:

- Cyprus Sea Turtle Conservation Project – protects and manages turtle nesting beaches, eggs, and hatchlings from predation and human activities, adult turtles, and monitors turtle population trends and nesting activity
- Monk Seal Monitoring Programme – collects data on monk seal populations in Cyprus
- Installation of signs for the promotion of environmental awareness – signs on site
- Employment of Park Rangers – patrolling of MPAs and ensuring the implementation of fisheries law and regulations
- Installation of live cameras – recording of nesting, predation and pressures

The presentation concluded with challenges facing Cyprus in the production of the conservation status pledge which include a lack of guidance on “strict protection”, a lack of connection between actions and protection, and a tight timeframe.

## 4.6 Contributions from other Member States

### Conservation status improvement targets in Greece

The Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency presented the progress and achievements in the pledge process for conservation status improvement in Greece. Ecological assessments show that in terms of range, 9 out of 10 Habitats Directive marine habitats show good conservation status, but in terms of specific structure and function, only two show favourable status (*Posidonia* beds and *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand), and the overall assessment of conservation status was shown as unfavourable for nine of the habitats, and unknown for submarine structures made by leaking gases. All habitat conservation trends are stable or declining. Of the species listed in the annexes of the Habitats Directive that were assessed, six were deemed in favourable status for range. However, only two assessed species were deemed favourable for population (and one for habitat) for the species. The overall assessment of conservation status was unfavourable for all assessed species, and unknown for *Stenella coeruleoalba*, *Acipenser sturio*, and *Petromyzon marinus*. Bird species protected by the Birds Directive showed mainly negative or stable short-term population trends.

The presentation gave an overview of the relevant national legislation. Work towards conservation status improvement is being undertaken through several national projects:

- LIFE-IP – 4 Natura – Strengthening the relevant national legislation
  - Development and legal adoption of an Action Plan for sea turtles
  - Establishment of conservation objectives for SACs and SPAs
  - Drafting/revision of the priority action framework (PAF 2021-2027) for the Natura 2000 Network in Greece
- Compilation of a red list of threatened species of plants, animals and fungi of Greece

- created a network of 140 Greek and foreign scientists
- assessed >11,000 species of animals, plants and fungi (around 250 marine animals) and classified them in threat categories
- created an openly accessible database (will be published at the end of March)
- enriched the International Red List (IUCN Red List) with the assessments of Greek endemic species
- LIFE PanPuffinus
  - Recording the extent and severity of *Puffinus* bycatch
  - Recording of predation area by *Rattus rattus* and reduction of predation levels
  - Installation of biosecurity measures
  - Production of sensitivity maps including the fishing activity
- Interreg Europe – INVALIDIS: Improve environmental policies, by supporting policy measures for the prevention, early detection and control of Invasive Alien Species
  - Six action plans to improve the addressed policy instruments
  - 3 interregional workshops, 2 site visits & 1 EU-wide policy learning event to promote capacity building among partners & stakeholders
  - 18 policy briefs to transfer INVALIDIS lessons learned to EU authorities
  - A risk assessment framework for EU public administrations to assess regional ecosystems' vulnerability to IAS
  - baseline analysis reports on territorial needs and IAS management practices

The presentation finished with an outline of future measures planned to improve conservation status which include the completion of special environmental studies, the establishment and implementation of national action plans, the establishment of a beaching network committee and the implementation of an integrated information system for recording beaching incidents.

### **Conservation status targets in Italy**

The Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research presented the Marine Ecosystem Restoration project in the framework of the Italian Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). The project is designed to address the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, the conservation status and protected area targets of the Strategy and the proposed Nature Restoration Law. It also aims to enhance national marine ecosystem observation systems and expand knowledge on benthic habitats of conservation interest. The two main targets of the project are to map 90% of marine habitats of conservation interest by 2026 and to reinforce national marine research and monitoring systems in Italy. Actions planned to achieve these targets include implementing non-stationary and *in situ* marine ecosystem observation systems, mapping coastal and deep-sea marine habitats of conservation interest, and implementing ecological restoration activities of benthic habitats through passive and active measures.

Two of these benthic habitat restoration projects are the active restoration of seagrasses and coralligenous habitats, and the active restoration of oyster beds, both undertaken by Marine Ecosystem Restoration (MER). Seagrass and coralligenous habitat restoration is taking place in 7 different Italian regions. Criteria for selecting areas suitable for restoration are at a local scale

and include the presence of data and information on the extent and condition of the habitats of interest, the identification of any disturbing elements that have led to degradation, the existence of previous positive experiences, and geographical distribution. Once sites are identified (restoration and donor), the restoration technique is selected, the systems are designed and installed, and monitoring of the restoration site and replacement of failures begins. Oyster reef restoration occurs in 7 sites along the Adriatic Sea coast and site selection criteria are similar (with the addition of depth, sediment, absence of fishing, sources of adult oysters and historical presence of the species). Oysters are collected through controlled fishing and aquaculture and deployed in cages.

## 4.7 Session 2 break out group discussion and feedback

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

### 4.7.1 Identify one main challenge for the pledge process and as many concrete solutions for that challenge as possible.

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting targets</li> <li>• Lack of data</li> <li>• Short timescale relative to Nature Restoration Law work</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on carrying capacity is required</li> <li>• Check the objectives in the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas Action Plan of the Barcelona Convention</li> <li>• Monitoring is a complex issue for migration so this must be considered</li> </ul>
Table 2	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of / outdated data – even when data is existing it is not centralised or not released</li> <li>• Management plans not taking into account new relationships/adaptations that species may develop (e.g., bottlenose dolphins and fishing boats)</li> <li>• Different competencies in a country across the different administrations</li> <li>• The Habitats Directive Annexes need updating or other lists should be considered</li> <li>• It is difficult to pledge species or habitats without the appropriate assessment of the pressures as it is hard to choose the correct measure</li> <li>• Financing</li> <li>• Stakeholder engagement/acceptance</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating systems for collecting data in one place</li> <li>• European Commission request Member States to share data from fisheries</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide scientific data for the updating of the Habitats Directive Annexes</li> <li>• NRL – an opportunity to select habitats and species beyond the Directives</li> <li>• More coordination between Member States on migratory species</li> <li>• More financial support for sub regional and regional planning (e.g., through CMS or ASCOBANS)</li> </ul>
Table 3	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The high percentage of habitats and species to be restored</li> <li>• Lack of data to be used to set a baseline</li> <li>• Implementation of targets</li> <li>• Appropriate legislation for stakeholders</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify framework of management measures to be applied to a specific conservation target at biogeographical level</li> <li>• Financing management and implementation, monitoring, and surveillance of regulations</li> <li>• Measure added value of protection (MPA) in relation to target species – what is happening in reference sites?</li> <li>• Instead of conservation status pledge move to “pressure” pledge – not all pressures are national</li> </ul>
Table 4	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High percentage of unknown status in marine species</li> <li>• Lack of data</li> <li>• High costs associated with conservation status assessments</li> <li>• A long time is taken for visible results of conservation measures to be seen</li> <li>• Non-visibility of marine habitats to the general public</li> <li>• Cross-border communication – shared responsibility of mobile species</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus communication on losses e.g. potential socio-economic losses</li> <li>• Start with assessing the status of habitats/species that are shared across borders and/or are most impacted by pressures</li> <li>• Start with the species for which we have the most information and data – low hanging fruit</li> <li>• Assess local pressures in areas where a species is known to occur</li> </ul>



**4.7.2 Identify a habitat or a species which could be pledged in a coordinated way by several Member States in these marine regions. For this habitat/species, can you suggest the most important conservation measures, indicating which additional actions need to be taken compared to present situation? Please indicate which measures can be coordinated at the regional level.**

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<p>Species/habitats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cetaceans</li> </ul> <p>Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data from ASCOBANS provides a common basis for transboundary pledges</li> <li>• ASCOBANS could be engaged to convene a multi-country target meeting</li> <li>• Similarly, the IMO could be a platform for determining navigation impacts</li> <li>• Similarly, the Barcelona Convention could be a platform for determining wind energy impacts</li> <li>• The coordination of the MSFD among Member States – bycatch and marine litter</li> </ul>
Table 2	<p>Species/habitats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European eel</li> <li>• Migratory species</li> <li>• Seagrass meadows (<i>Posidonia</i>)</li> <li>• <i>Pinna nobilis</i></li> <li>• Large elasmobranchs</li> </ul> <p>Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishing moratorium and the removal of barriers to create free-flowing rivers</li> <li>• Mapping of critical areas (breeding and foraging)</li> <li>• Recovery plan (e.g. reducing and reporting bycatch)</li> <li>• Common information systems (e.g. mapping of meadows)</li> <li>• Raise awareness</li> <li>• Proper enforcement</li> <li>• Active and passive restoration</li> <li>• Assess the current representativeness of the MPA network/OECMs</li> <li>• Sharing experiences on restoration activities</li> <li>• Reduce pressures (e.g., anchoring)</li> <li>• Research into historical species and habitat ranges</li> </ul>
Table 3	<p>Species/habitats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Posidonia</i></li> </ul> <p>Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishing – CRP, Marine Action Plan</li> <li>• Anchoring – regulation especially for large vessels</li> <li>• Pollution – WFD</li> <li>• Construction – SEA, EIA, MSP – zero impact and biodiversity net gain- natural capital assessment required</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beach replenishment – restricted activity</li> </ul>
Table 4	<p>Species/habitats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide migratory species such as mammals and birds – conservation measures could include reducing bycatch, reducing Bessel collisions and nesting site protection</li> <li>• Zostera – ecological indicator species</li> <li>• Turtles – implementation of rehabilitation programmes to reduce the impacts of vessel collisions</li> </ul> <p>Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge sharing</li> <li>• Capacity building</li> <li>• Coordinated trans-national approach</li> </ul>

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

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

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

- EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs - Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit.
- REEForest – Restoration of *Cystoseira* macroalgal FORESTs to enhance biodiversity along Mediterranean rocky REEFs – Annalise Falace, University of Trieste
- LIFE ECOREST – Ecological restoration of human-impacted benthic marine ecosystems through active strategies and participatory approach – Jordi Grinyó, Institut de Ciències del Mar (ICM-CSIC)

### 5.1 EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs

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

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

- Put in place the restoration measures necessary to improve to good condition areas of habitats in not good condition (for groups or habitat types: 30% by 2030, 60% by 2040, 90% by 2050)
- Put in place the restoration measures necessary to re-establish the habitat to reach the favourable reference area (for groups of habitat types: 30% by 2030, 60% by 2040, 100% by 2050)
- Put in place the restoration measures necessary to improve the quality and quantity of European protected habitats and species (including re-establishing them) and enhance connectivity until sufficient quality and quantity is achieved
- Ensure that the conditions is known of at least 50% of the area distributed over all habitat types listed in groups 1-6 of Annex II of the Habitats Directive by 2030 and the condition of all group 1-6 areas is known by 2040 (group 7 by 2050).

Member States whose national restoration plans include conservation measures to be adopted within the framework of the common fisheries policy (CFP) must make full use of the CFP tools. Furthermore, where national restoration plans include measures that require submission of a joint recommendation through the regionalisation procedure under the CFP, Member States must initiate consultations with other Member States to enable a timely agreement on and submission of the joint recommendation (at least 18 months before the respective target date).

Areas under restoration do not have to be protected areas, but if they comply with the relevant criteria, these areas can contribute towards protected area targets. Furthermore, conservation objectives and measures in many Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs already requires restoration of habitats, and protected areas provide the conditions for successful restoration and no deterioration. Strictly protected areas also have a key role in marine restoration by providing close to pristine conditions without pressures, allowing passive restoration, demonstrating the benefits nature can provide to society and economic sectors, and providing a control environment of good condition in which the best restoration methods can be determined.

Examples of protected areas allowing the restoration of species and habitats are already being seen. An example was presented from Torre Guaceto MPA in Italy. Within the no-take reserve the abundant population of sea breams control the numbers of sea urchins, enabling seaweeds to flourish. Outside of the reserve urchin barrens with high densities of urchins and very low seaweed coverage are common as the sea bream population is smaller due to human pressures.

## **5.2 REEForest – Restoration of *Cystoseira* macroalgal FORESTs to enhance biodiversity along Mediterranean rocky REEFs**

The University of Trieste presented REEForest, a LIFE project which aims to restore endangered *Cystoseira* algal forests in four MPAs across Italy and Greece where the causes of degradation have been addressed (Bergeggi, Sinis and Cilento in Italy and Gyros in Greece). Macroalgal forests are populations of large brown algae from the orders Laminariales, Tilopteridales, Desmarestiales, and Fucales. In the Mediterranean, these forests are often made up of *Cystoseira* species from the intertidal down to the sublittoral zone. 25 taxa of *Cystoseira* are endemic to the

Mediterranean and they have great taxonomic complexity and morphological plasticity. They also provide critical ecosystem services as ecosystem engineers, bioindicators of good ecological status, and important members of coastal food webs. The status of *Cystoseira* forests is currently threatened by rising temperatures and eutrophication on a global scale, coastal development, low water quality, sedimentation and grazing on a local scale.

There are two main approaches to reversing *Cystoseira* decline, protection and restoration. Protection provides undisturbed conditions in which natural recovery can occur; however, this is rare in *Cystoseira* species due to a limited dispersal capacity and rapid rate of zygote sinking. Therefore, active restoration is being investigated as a solution throughout the Mediterranean (e.g., Project ANIMA, CYSTORE Project, RENOVATE Project and AFRIMED Project). Restoration is currently being undertaken at a scale of less than 1000 m<sup>2</sup> but is aimed to be undertaken at a scale of more than 1000 m<sup>2</sup> by 2026.

REEForest actively seeks to restore *Cystoseira* forests using seedlings cultivated *ex situ* (laboratory-cultured juveniles from fertile branches collected from selected sites). These juveniles are then attached to the rocky shore to grow into mature plants *in situ*. Undertaking the process of restoration successfully has allowed lessons to be learned by the REEForest team:

- Increased knowledge of the reproductive phenology, embryology and seedling development of *Cystoseira* – informs cultivation protocols
- Use of algae bio-stimulant to accelerate the growth of seedlings – faster growth shortens deployment time (27 days to 15 days), increases out-planting success and reduces cost
- Hybrid method – after mesocosm the culture period is extended outdoors using suspended algacultures
- Drilling and screwing seedlings into a tile to grow is more effective than epoxy resin
- Climate change makes restoration urgent and limits its feasibility at the same time so some “future-proofing” is required, for example the use of warm-water adapted genotypes of the species for restoration efforts.

The restoration efficiency is determined using the survival/growth of seedlings, fertility (new recruits), Ecological Status, Natural Capital of the *Cystoseira* habitat, and ecosystem services (associated biodiversity). To date, the programme has been successful with high survival rates and specimens becoming fertile in the next reproductive season. Spillover from the original restoration area has also been recorded. The replication of these restoration efforts across the Mediterranean is important to ensure the success of the habitat on a large scale. Management plans will be updated in at least 11 MPAs with the inclusion of *Cystoseira* as a biodiversity target which will enable the inclusion of *Cystoseira* monitoring in their conservation strategies.

### **5.3 LIFE ECOREST – Ecological restoration of human-impacted benthic marine ecosystems through active strategies and participatory approach**

The Institut de Ciències del Mar presented the LIFE ECOREST project which focuses on Catalonia and the Catalan coast – an area of ecological interest that is also historically home to many fishing

communities. Trawling grounds previously stretched nearly the entire length of the Catalan coast causing overfishing (with some areas reaching 9,000 kg/km<sup>2</sup>) and a subsequent reduction in local populations. In 2019, twenty new permanent closure areas were enforced covering over 600 km<sup>2</sup> and almost 5% of the total fishing ground surface. Following the implementation of these new permanent closure areas, stocks of target species have increased significantly.

The objective of the ECOREST project is to restore approximately 30,000 ha of deep-sea benthic communities in Catalonia, in an area of high ecological value (inside no-take zones), with the participation of the fisher guilds and local stakeholders. The project covers the entire Catalan coast and has a duration of 2021 to 2026. The project has four components:

- Research
  - Oceanographic surveys to determine the current condition of the deep-sea benthic habitats
  - Developing monitoring approaches to be used for monitoring restored populations
  - Image analysis of footage from the seafloor
- Active restoration
  - Organisms are recovered from the deep-sea benthic habitat and then maintained in suitable aquariums
  - A register of organisms is kept, and once healthy they are returned to the benthic habitat
  - In order to return the specimens to depths of more than 100 m they are attached to rocks that allows the organism to remain upright when it sinks to the bottom
  - The next challenge is the restoration of soft-bodied organisms and hard substrates (boulder beds)
- Participation, capacitation, and governance
  - Fishers and other stakeholders are consulted throughout the process and their views taken on board by the project team
- Outreach, education, and knowledge transfer
  - Outreach activities are organised in local schools and clubs to inform local people about the importance of the habitats along the Catalan coastline

## 5.4 Session 3 break out group discussion and feedback

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

### 5.4.1 What are the main challenges in marine restoration in MPAs and how to overcome them?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	Challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perverse financial investments</li> <li>• Fishing</li> <li>• Knowing the baseline</li> <li>• Methods, costs, and resources</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressures – controllable and uncontrollable – fishing, pollution, tourism, climate change</li> <li>• Invasive alien species</li> <li>• Ecosystem context</li> <li>• Realistic expectations</li> </ul>
Table 2	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many restoration activities are only successful within MPAs</li> <li>• There is a lack of awareness on how to behave within an MPA</li> <li>• Co-financing in LIFE projects is not always possible for MPAs</li> <li>• Some restoration practices are in the experimental phase and hard to implement</li> <li>• It is difficult to obtain permits for restoration from multiple agencies</li> <li>• Limited area where restoration can be carried out (zonation in MPAs)</li> <li>• Reducing pressures to ensure success is difficult</li> <li>• Prioritising species can be challenging because of unknowns</li> <li>• Cost of facilities, manpower, and expertise</li> <li>• Long-term sustainability of restoration actions</li> <li>• Invasive species</li> <li>• Time lag between action and results – demonstrating to stakeholders</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating benefits in comparison to the costs of losing the habitat</li> <li>• More campaigns about the value of restoration</li> <li>• Go beyond LIFE for funding – promote spillover benefits to obtain fisheries funds</li> <li>• Promoting and training managers in how to apply for funding for MPAs</li> <li>• More specialised governance of MPAs</li> <li>• Continued monitoring to test different methods</li> <li>• Sharing of lessons learnt between countries</li> <li>• Passive restoration (strict protection)</li> <li>• Prioritising MPAs where restoration can be the main goal</li> <li>• Selective fishing where possible to reduce grazing</li> <li>• Including restoration activities in management plans to ensure long-term implementation</li> <li>• National restoration plans as part of the NRL</li> <li>• Continued engagement of stakeholders</li> <li>• Showing progress no matter how small</li> <li>• Manage expectations</li> </ul>
Table 3	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishing pressure</li> <li>• Getting off to a good start with resources and funding</li> <li>• Passive vs active restoration</li> <li>• Long and complicated procedures and EIAs</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of management</li> <li>• Lack of capacity – more people required</li> <li>• Need to review and upgrade MPAs</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure overall consensus on the restoration plan</li> <li>• Make a good strategy/action plan to stick to</li> <li>• Expand to a regional basis (transboundary) – more coordination from EU on keeping to deadlines</li> <li>• Explore innovative funding mechanisms e.g. blended finance for passive and active restoration</li> </ul>
Table 4	<p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of baseline/historical data for some habitats</li> <li>• Scale, time and money</li> <li>• Lack of capacity</li> <li>• Push-back from fishermen</li> <li>• Continuation beyond the scope of the project</li> <li>• Control of large-scale industrial or non-EU fishermen is difficult</li> <li>• Lack of acceptance from non-EU countries of EU legislation</li> </ul> <p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open and consistent communication with fishermen</li> <li>• Give the fishermen a positive/good image (not the bad guys)</li> <li>• Ensure fishermen involvement at every stage</li> <li>• Cross-border collaboration to increase capacity</li> <li>• After the project, a biologist could be part of the fishermen team to continue restoration efforts</li> <li>• Make lessons learnt/best practices from successful projects available on a large scale</li> <li>• Invest in communication of results</li> <li>• Establish an assistance mechanism</li> </ul>

**5.4.2 Which marine restoration activities in MPAs have been successful so far and why? Could they be upscaled to the EU MPA network?**

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oyster beds – no take zones</li> <li>• <i>Cystoseira</i> beds – anchorage management</li> <li>• Posidonia – monitoring</li> <li>• Monk seals – research and action plans</li> <li>• Stock and habitat spillover – resources and stakeholder engagement</li> <li>• Restoration is typically not scalable to a large scale but it can be replicated and repeated and experiences can be shared</li> </ul>

<p>Table 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing the restored area – Danish examples</li> <li>• Proper selection of the MPA with proper conditions for successful restoration – Italian examples</li> <li>• Proper zoning and management plans – Spanish examples (fishing reserves)</li> <li>• Proper selection of species/habitats</li> <li>• Local ownership – working with the community</li> <li>• Partnerships between organisation, research and communication</li> <li>• Offer alternatives/compensation/subsidies/training for fishermen</li> <li>• Upscaling is only possible for some species as using donor organisms could be damaging as we do not know how to cultivate currently – more research is needed</li> <li>• Passive protection could be upscaled to all strictly protected areas</li> </ul>
<p>Table 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passive restoration – removal of threats</li> <li>• Posidonia in Croatia</li> <li>• ECOREST</li> <li>• Ruppia Maritima – Venetian lagoon</li> <li>• Native oyster – Italy</li> <li>• Passive restoration can be upscaled but good practice in surveillance will be required as well as assurance of the removal of threats (strict protection?)</li> <li>• NORA – European Network for European Oysters – passive and active restoration and could be upscaled</li> <li>• ECOREST- could possibly be upscaled</li> </ul>
<p>Table 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No-take zones for passive restoration</li> <li>• The answer to this question depends on what we use to measure success – species density? Survival? Cost-effectiveness?</li> <li>• Restoration in different areas creates different challenges for upscaling, for example environmental and political differences</li> </ul>

## 6 Session 4: Strict protection in the Mediterranean and Black Sea marine regions

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

The overall aims of Session 4 were to discuss the importance, implications, and successful implementation of strictly protected areas in the Mediterranean and Black Sea 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
- Ecological and socio-economic benefits of strictly protected MPAs and scientific principles for their establishment - Charles Loiseau, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)
- Highly protected area inside the Côte Agathoise MPA (Natura 2000 Site *Posidonia* of Cap d'Agde) - Sylvain Blouet, AMP Côte Agathoise

### 6.1 Strict protection in the context of Biodiversity Strategy targets

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

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

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

In the marine environment, these protected areas are often called marine reserves, no-take zones or similar. Natural processes are left essentially undisturbed in these areas, with only activities compatible with the conservation objectives of the area permitted (e.g. research, invasive alien species control, restoration) on a case-by-case basis. Strictly protected areas should also be comprised of functionally meaningful areas which are of a sufficient size on their own or together with the relevant buffer zones. Areas covered by strict protection should include:

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

For a site to be formally designated as strictly protected it must be legally protected. The protected area may be strictly protected in its entirety or the areas under strict protection can be a smaller part of the wider protected area. The designation of strict protection can occur through specific national legal instruments, specific long-term contractual agreements, or through zoning in the management of planning wider areas. The strictly protected areas must always be clearly identified in the management plans of any wider protected areas, and those plans must have a legal standing. Extractive activities are not compatible with this level of protection, and non-extractive activities such as research, restoration, non-intrusive installations (e.g. energy transmission cables) or strictly controlled tourism can be exceptionally allowed when compatible with ecological requirements of the area (case by case).

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

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

Currently, two Member States submitted information on current areas under strict protection (Spain and France). Spain reported that the current area of strict protection covers 1,305 km<sup>2</sup> of its marine area and France reported that it covers 112 km<sup>2</sup> of its marine area in the Mediterranean Sea. Neither provided expected coverage by 2030.

## 6.2 Ecological and socio-economic benefits of strictly protected MPAs and scientific principles for their establishment

The French National Centre for Scientific Research gave a presentation on the various benefits of strict protection and the scientific principles behind their establishment. Placed at the apex of MPA classifications, with extremely limited permitted activities, well-managed strict protection has been shown to substantially increase fish size, density (x 1.4 in a Mediterranean study), biomass (x 2.3 in a Mediterranean study) and species richness.

In terms of ecological benefits, fully protected MPAs increase biodiversity both within and outside the boundaries of the protected area. Increases in population density and biomass within the protected areas leads to spillover of more species into the surrounding areas, and increased dispersal of larvae from mature specimens inside the protected zone. In terms of socio-economic benefits, fully protected MPAs have a positive impact on the income of fishermen, food security through an increase of catch per unit effort, and climate change mitigation through various pathways (carbon sequestration, pH buffering, wave attenuation).

Few MPAs are fully protected: the great majority of them permit damaging or disturbing human activities and are therefore only partially protected. When regulations which allow the reduction of human pressures are not properly implemented, no socio-ecological benefits accrue. Reviews have shown that in the Mediterranean, 72% of protected areas lack regulations which can reduce human impacts on biodiversity and the most effective levels of protection apply to just 0.23% of the basin. In addition, although 6% of the Mediterranean is protected, some 95% of this area does not have stronger regulation inside than outside MPAs.

A systematic conservation planning approach should be adopted for strictly protected areas which covers the following factors:

- Objectives and targets
  - The target is for 30% of marine waters to be under protection by 2030 including 10% to be under strong protection. In France, the reality is that 55% of French waters are protected in the Mediterranean, but only 0.1% are under strict protection.
- Ecological features
  - EUNIS habitats and Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) can be used to identify areas suitable for strict protection (e.g. VMEs are designated according to one or more of the following criteria: uniqueness, functional significance, fragility, low recovery, and structural complexity).
  - Targets can be set for different ecological features e.g. seagrass protection makes up 0.8% of the French EEZ so there is a target of 9.2% required to reach 10% of this feature under strict protection.

- Conservation cost
  - Must consider the distribution and intensity of fishing activities. This can be mapped using catch data for coastal fisheries and Automatic Identification System (AIS) data for offshore fisheries
- Constraints
  - Prioritise areas which are already fully protected
  - Do not prioritise wind-farm project areas

Preliminary results from a prioritisation analysis performed by the French National Centre for Scientific Research shows areas of high priority for strict protection along the coast of the Bay of Marseille and the southern coast of Corsica. The cost of this prioritisation is predicted to be 8% of the total cost relative to fishing effort. Cumulative impact assessments of human pressures (e.g. professional fishing, recreational fishing, transport of passengers and tourist activities) are an effective tool for prioritising the management measures within these designated strict protection areas.

### **6.3 Highly protected area inside the Côte Agathoise MPA (Natura 2000 Site Posidonia of Cap d'Agde)**

L'Aire marine protégée de la côte agathoise stated that the highly protected area inside the Côte Agathoise MPA is 6,152 ha and managed by Agde municipality (AMP). Small-scale fisheries, diving centres, recreational fisheries and nautical activities are all permitted within the MPA. These activities continue to have an impact on coralligenous habitats and fish stocks (anchoring, overfishing and diving) and conflict is increasing between the users. The objective was therefore to create a highly protected area inside the Natura 2000 site to protect coralligenous reef habitat, co-designed with fishermen and other stakeholders.

The process began with exchange meetings involving fishermen in other MPAs (e.g. Camargue). After that, 30 fishermen were asked to draw the reserve that they would suggest on a map which was then used in multi-criteria analysis to select an appropriate area to discuss with other stakeholders such as nautical activities and recreational fishing. The final marine reserve was approved by the MPA steering committee as a no-take area without anchoring, diving, or dredging. As a result, 45% of the coralligenous habitat within the MPA is now strictly protected.

The marine reserve is monitored by AMP staff and awareness is raised with users on a mobile application. The protection of the coralligenous habitat resulted in an increase in the density and size of colonies of erect bryzoans, an increase in the average weight of halieutic species with low movement (e.g., lobsters and scorpion fish), and an increase in notable species (e.g. corb and grouper). Lessons learned include the value of community-based management despite a long initial process (3 years to set up but 20 years of successful management), the exploitation of MPA success stories, and the difficulty in controlling activities at sea without the involvement of marine authorities (work is being done to strengthen the enforcement power of AMP agents).

## 6.3 Session 4 break out group discussion and feedback

### 6.3.1 Which habitats and species are likely to benefit most from strict protection?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long-lived, slow maturing – e.g., corals and Posidonia</li> <li>• Large specimens of species</li> <li>• Colonial species</li> <li>• Endemic/localised species</li> <li>• Most sensitive and impacted habitats (e.g., soft sediments)</li> <li>• Economically important species</li> <li>• Strict protection should be a minimum of 25km<sup>2</sup> and 50km between sites to ensure that most species are covered</li> </ul>
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This depends on the definition of strict protection</li> <li>• Sturgeons</li> <li>• Turbot in the Black Sea</li> <li>• Sensitive and slow growing species</li> <li>• Posidonia</li> <li>• Reefs</li> <li>• Nature Restoration Law Annex habitats</li> </ul>
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority habitats – Posidonia and coastal lagoons</li> <li>• Habitats/species with a sedentary range e.g. coralligenous</li> <li>• Nursery and spawning areas</li> <li>• Feeding areas</li> <li>• Red list species – Cystoseira and maerl beds</li> <li>• Areas that have been actively restored</li> <li>• Reefs from the Habitats Directive</li> <li>• Flagship species e.g., seahorse</li> <li>• Invasive alien species presence may be a factor</li> <li>• Species which are less suitable are those with large ranges/migratory species or areas where there are significant other pressures</li> </ul>
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is dependent on the size of the strictly protected area</li> <li>• Species most sensitive to disturbance</li> <li>• Species with low resilience</li> <li>• Deep water corals</li> <li>• <i>Pinna nobilis</i></li> <li>• Invasive alien species presence may need to be considered to ensure the area is not encouraged to remain in the area</li> <li>• Primary producers</li> <li>• Predators (those with a big range)</li> <li>• Ecosystem engineers (sponges, biogenic reef builders)</li> </ul>



**6.3.2 Which criteria and scientific evidence should be taken into account when planning strictly protected areas in order to maximise benefits to economic sectors such as fisheries? Please indicate any available research on this topic from the Mediterranean/Black Sea.**

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take account of existing knowledge</li> <li>• Address unknowns</li> <li>• Appreciate dynamic processes</li> <li>• Apply the network criteria e.g., connectivity, biodiversity, representativity</li> <li>• Acquire full data on fisheries</li> <li>• Accessibility for non-destructive recreation</li> <li>• Potential for carbon accumulation</li> <li>• Political feasibility</li> </ul> <p>Scientific evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are not many studies in the Mediterranean focused on strict protection so a review is needed of the data to identify the specific role of strict protection</li> <li>• Really strictly protected areas are few and small which limits the research base</li> </ul>
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• France – there is currently not enough evidence to show clearly the spillover effect of strict protection- a direct impact on commercial fishing species needs to be seen</li> <li>• Political will</li> <li>• Historical data of the species/habitat occupancy and modelling</li> <li>• Identify where it's possible to minimise pressures</li> <li>• Climate refugees and species resilience</li> <li>• Biodiversity hotspots</li> <li>• Future scenarios</li> <li>• Critical breeding/foraging grounds</li> <li>• Connectivity</li> <li>• Potential for transboundary cooperation with non-EU countries</li> </ul>
Table 3	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement of stakeholders and advisory council</li> <li>• Ecosystem service benefits</li> <li>• Controlling activities in the area</li> <li>• Assess threats</li> <li>• Availability of GIS data</li> <li>• Set within the coherence of the network</li> </ul> <p>Scientific evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of socio-economic and socio-environmental impacts</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GFCM – General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean – best practice guide to information needs</li> <li>• Advisory council to include blue economy sectors</li> <li>• Establish a reference portal – information and projects like WISE</li> </ul>
Table 4	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most recent data</li> <li>• Fisheries data – target species</li> <li>• Critical area for a particular species – spillover effect</li> <li>• No stressors in the buffer zones</li> <li>• Information about social context and history in the area</li> <li>• Show benefits for the whole community as well as the ecosystems</li> <li>• Equity (within communities, cross-sectoral, etc.)</li> <li>• Enforcement of measures and management</li> </ul> <p>Scientific evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Websites of MPAs</li> <li>• MedPAN</li> <li>• Universities close to the MPAs</li> <li>• Google Scholar</li> <li>• Grey literature</li> <li>• Local communities</li> <li>• Social data – e.g. Observers of the Sea in Spain</li> </ul>

### 6.3.3 How can we improve acceptance and ensure a broad support for strictly protected areas in the Mediterranean/Black sea context?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	Not discussed
Table 2	Not discussed
Table 3	Not discussed
Table 4	Not discussed

## 7 Session 5: Renewable energy and marine conservation

More sustainably sourced renewable energy will be essential to fight climate change and biodiversity loss, which are interlinked problems. The development of offshore renewable energy, however, provides both opportunities and threats to biodiversity conservation. It is therefore crucial 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 energy<sup>13</sup> 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 a critical and well-established tool to anticipate change and prevent/mitigate conflicts between policy priorities. Offshore renewable energy can and should coexist with many other activities, especially in crowded areas.

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

- Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity. – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit.
- National guide on measures to reduce the risk of environmental impact from offshore wind farms and the example of the Leucate-Barbares wind farm - Golfe du Lion- Thomas Bordron, OCEANWINDS
- Technical report for the preservation of the marine environment in offshore wind farms projects - Laëtitia Miquerol, Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB)

### 7.1 Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity

The Nature Conservation Unit at DG Environment stated that time is short to address both the climate and the biodiversity crises 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 rather reinforces it wherever possible.

Existing environmental policy and legislation (Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Birds and Habitats, Water Framework, Marine Strategy Framework and Maritime Spatial Planning Directives) provide tools to avoid conflict between renewables and biodiversity. EU nature legislation allows for the effective deployment of renewable energy infrastructure and its coexistence with nature protection. The Habitats Directive allows the implementation of renewables projects if they do not harm the integrity of

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<sup>13</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2020:741:FIN&qid=1605792629666>

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

The REPowerEU plan reinforces and accelerates the implementation of the European Green Deal. There are three pillars to the plan: diversifying energy sources, saving energy, and accelerating renewable energy. Initiatives include the EU solar strategy, the European solar rooftop initiative, and the introduction of heat pumps and hydrogen energy. In the revised Renewable Energy Directive, the EU sets its path towards a renewable energy future with a minimum binding target of 42.5% share by 2030 and an aspiration to reach 45%. The Directive also aims for a more strategic approach to spatial planning. The RES temporary emergency regulation adopted in December 2022 is directly applicable to all Member States for 18 months (until June 2024) and sets new, temporary, and targeted measures to accelerate the deployment of certain renewable energy projects. Member States are also to adopt plans designating Renewable Acceleration Areas (RAAs) for one or more types of renewable energy source projects which are not expected to have significant environmental impacts. These RAAs will benefit from faster and simpler permitting procedures, but must give priority to artificial and built surfaces, exclude Natura 2000 sites (and those under national protection schemes as well as migratory routes of various species and other sensitive areas), and use all appropriate and proportionate tools and datasets to identify suitable areas. EIGL<sup>14</sup> is an instrument to support planning choices for RAAs to be used by regional and national authorities who may not otherwise have access to relevant datasets.

The presentation concluded with the Mediterranean context. Wind energy development remains minimal in the Mediterranean, however there are coastal and offshore areas across the region which would be suitable for fixed and/or floating offshore wind energy. There are currently over 15 planned offshore wind farms in the Mediterranean and two approved plans. Possible synergies between these wind farms and restoration/conservation include artificial reefs, underwater 3D farming, and reintroducing reef building species.

## **7.2 National guide on measures to reduce the risk of environmental impact from offshore wind farms and the example of the Leucate-Barbares wind farm - Golfe du Lion**

Ocean Winds, an international company dedicated to developing, financing, building and running offshore wind energy projects, presented project EFGL (Les éoliennes flottantes du golfe du Lion).

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<sup>14</sup> [https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-tools-databases/energy-and-industry-geography-lab\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-tools-databases/energy-and-industry-geography-lab_en)

This project is pre-commercial and was awarded after a call for project from the French Government. The project will be located off Leucate-Le Barcares, which is within the perimeter of the Golfe of Lion Marine Natural Park. The wind farm will be 16-18 km offshore and in 70 m of water depth, and it has a planned lifetime of around 20 years from 2025.

There are potential environmental risks associated with offshore wind energy including light pollution, (benthic) habitat loss, collision, noise pollution, electromagnetic fields, and turbidity. However, there are also a number of potential environmental opportunities which can be realised. For example, knowledge improvement regarding movement of species such as seabirds, the development of new technologies to improve harmony with nature, environmental observatories, structure colonisation and reef effect. In addition, offshore wind farms provide job opportunities, the possibility for research and development projects, biodiversity funding from taxes, and low-carbon energy production.

Ocean Winds have taken several approaches to reduce these environmental risks and increase the potential for environmental opportunities. The first is local stakeholder engagement. There has been a strong engagement throughout with the Gulf of Lion Marine Natural Park, for example a joint definition of a low impact project area, a co-realisation of the EIA, and the sharing of data. A monitoring committee was also established in 2021 with local qualified stakeholders. The ERC approach has also been implemented (éviter- avoid impact at design stage, réduire- reduce impact, compenser- aim to preserve the initial quality of the environment). Examples of impact reducing measures include reducing the lighting as much as possible during installation and the operation, setting up deterrent devices to keep birds away, and using tension cables to reduce the resting effect on the seabed. Compensation measures include carrying out campaigns to eradicate pests on Porquerolles island and creating new nesting sites for waders. Finally, the turbines to be used on the site will be equipped to monitor wildlife with features such as bird landing wires and cameras, fish echosounders, and visibility sensors. Ocean Winds is also involved in the research and development of two floating turbines, in the framework of the CONNEXSTERE and ECOFEOL projects.

### **7.3 Technical report for the preservation of the marine environment in offshore wind farms projects**

The Office Français de la Biodiversité presented the second volume of a set of technical reports on offshore wind farms. These reports aim to improve and consolidate the integration of environmental aspects into wind energy management, centralise the state of knowledge on the potential environmental effects on marine ecosystems, and to target knowledge gaps. The first volume focused on the development of offshore wind farms in Europe and France and the institutional and legal framework of offshore wind farms regarding environmental issues. The second volume includes an analysis of the potential impacts in the marine ecosystem and an illustration of management measures to avoid and reduce pressures.

The technical report begins with the identification of the specific marine benthic habitats and species affected by offshore wind activities. It then describes potential pressures generated by

offshore wind farms by technology, the project phase, and the structural phase. A list of 23 physical, chemical, and biological pressures based on a national typology are included in the report (e.g. collisions, entanglement, introduction of species, noise and light pollution, turbidity). The pressure level generated by the wind energy farm activities are then reported based on JNCC work and an expert working group run by the OFB (for example, high magnitude noise pollution is linked to construction of turbines and the introduction of species can be caused by construction ships). Cumulative effects are not considered in the study.

Following the description of pressures, an assessment of the potential impacts of these pressures on marine ecosystems was carried out. This was completed in four stages:

- Defining potential pressures and assessing magnitude
- Defining the sensitivity of habitats to the pressures
- Defining the potential exposure to the pressure
- Environmental impact assessment (= vulnerability)

The result of this assessment was the classification of interaction risks between species and pressures from “known risk of interaction” at the top end to “not concerned” at the bottom end. Finally, the technical report recommends management measures to avoid and reduce pressures (avoid, reduce, compensate) as well as defining and applying measures agreed upon in France.

## 7.4 Session 5 break out group discussion and feedback

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

### 7.4.1 Are there good examples of design/technical solutions to ensure synergies between renewable energy (or certain technologies) and marine conservation/restoration that can be upscaled in the region?

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In France it is possible to have fisheries under fixed pylons, but not in floating farms because of conflict with fishers</li> <li>• In Romania, preparation for sites is underway and there will be possibility of first proposals for offshore wind farms in 2 years- there could be conflicts when new MPAs are made for the 30% target (and 10%)</li> </ul>
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developments are mostly in the experimental stages e.g., platforms to be used for aquaculture as a compensation measure for putting offshore wind in the fishery zone</li> <li>• There are developments in wave power in Spain and Portugal through the PIER funded wave energy research</li> <li>• There is a Spanish project exploring the use of the platform as an artificial reef and using existing infrastructure (e.g. old oil rigs) for offshore wind</li> <li>• Barcelona convention are looking into using specifically designed material for turbines to allow reefs to grow</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group believed that upscaling is unlikely in the Mediterranean with many Member States not planning offshore projects</li> <li>• In Romania there are plans for offshore exploration to define go-to areas for wind farms (however this may be delayed due to elections)</li> </ul>
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not aware of any good examples</li> <li>• There is a lack of knowledge on the topic (both across Member States and within the break-out group)</li> <li>• Nobody is against offshore wind energy in principle</li> <li>• Any kind of impact on biodiversity must be avoided</li> </ul>
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artificial reefs on the wind turbines – however this could also benefit invasive alien species</li> <li>• Wind turbines should be built on a hard surface to encourage these reefs to grow</li> <li>• Limit fisheries and other activities in wind farm areas</li> <li>• Build wind farms further offshore to reduce impacts</li> <li>• Establish the wind farms close to shipping corridors</li> </ul>

**7.4.2 Are there good examples of strategic planning (e.g. through MSP) of offshore renewable energy in a way that is compatible with protected area targets in the Biodiversity strategy?**

Table number	Discussion notes
Table 1	Not discussed
Table 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• France – strategic planning exercise which will identify areas for protection and areas for offshore renewable energy. This will be followed by a public consultation in April 2024 from which the output will be maps of potential sites to be sent for political decision (although many wind farm sites are proposed on the Atlantic coast)</li> <li>• Croatia- marine spatial planning in development – data being collected through a working group- this planning will include renewables</li> <li>• Cyprus – the marine spatial planning was submitted to the ministry and approved in 2023</li> <li>• Malta – marine spatial planning under review</li> <li>• Romania – marine spatial planning adopted</li> <li>• Spain – marine spatial planning adopted in 2023</li> </ul>
Table 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Italy – through marine spatial planning all existing and new MPAs were planned to avoid impacts such as bird corridors and migratory species – this is crucial to identifying hotspots</li> <li>• Black sea – the entire coast is a corridor for birds at some point in the year. There is a massive conflict between RepowerEU and the Habitats Directive</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spain – the new “rules” take away the tools to reduce impacts in bird corridors outside MPAs, especially cumulative impacts and impacts outside of national boundaries</li> </ul>
Table 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cumulative impact of the wind farm</li> <li>Proper marine spatial planning (with SPA/MPAs etc.) is required as we are in need of the energy that wind farms can provide</li> <li>Multi-use combined approach but with a priority for MPAs in the zoning</li> <li>Overlay the mapping of different needs to identify go to areas</li> <li>Avoid planning park-by-park, plan on a national/regional scale</li> </ul>

## 8 Closing Plenary

Two days of interesting, useful, and lively discussions were brought to a close by Vedran Nikolić from the Nature Conservation Unit at DG Environment, European Commission. Vedran thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions as well as the organising team for the smooth running of the event. There was a good attendance at the seminar with a useful exchange on challenges and solutions. The European Commission will reflect on suggestions made to better support the pledge process. It is expected that there will be another seminar series providing further opportunity for exchange between Member States.

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 wiki.

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

### PROTECTED AREA TARGETS

Presentation	Question	Answer
Scientific basis for identification of MPAs - MPA Europe	Why was the Black Sea not on the map shown in the presentation? Is it not included in the project?	The map on the slide is a hypothetical high priorities map and the Black Sea will be included in the end
	Have you included new MPAs under the pledges on your map?	They have not done it in the current work package but would like to do it to make sure the map is up to date
	Are you working to map biogenic habitats and coordinating with Regional Seas Conventions (Barcelona convention etc.)?	Yes, RSCs are being worked with already and they will continue to do so, biogenic habitats are planned to be mapped as they are important for any developments and also for the identification of optimal locations for MPAs
Protected areas target in Bulgaria	Which part of the sea should the 30% and 10% targets be applied to?	EU laws cover all sea under national jurisdiction so all of the areas mentioned in the presentation (Territorial Sea, Contiguous zone, Continental Shelf and EEZ) should be covered
	Is it relevant to protect only the first 150m depth and only for cetaceans and fish?	40-60m depth should be the focus area in the Black Sea as it is anoxic below 100m – so the coastline is the most important. Different strategy for the Black Sea and the Med due to the anoxic depths and also the higher biodiversity in the Med

**CONSERVATION STATUS TARGETS** – no questions asked.

## MARINE RESTORATION

Presentation	Question	Answer
REEForest – Restoration of <i>Cystoseria</i> macroalgal forests to enhance biodiversity along Mediterranean rocky reefs	Do you remove the substrate that you put down?	They only remove it once they die in the intertidal zone. Small tiles are kept in situ as well as there are too many to remove consistently. Subtidal specimens are attached to big structures that can be removed as there are fewer of them.
	What is the survival rate?	Very high currently but climate change is having an effect e.g. storms
	Is it cost effective?	The cost is high for the facilities so there is a high starting cost and it is expensive to pay cultivation scientists.
LIFE ECOREST – Ecological restoration of human-impacted benthic marine ecosystems through active strategies and participatory approach	Are the corals being dropped in permanent no-take zones?	Yes, in permanent no-take zones so they know they will not be destroyed after restoring them
	How are the fishermen taking the no-take zones? Do you have allies?	The no-take zones have been there for around 30 years so lots of trust has been built with fishermen over this time through showing them the positive effects (pictures etc.). All no-take zones are discussed and negotiated with the fishermen to make it feel like it is their no-take zone as well which will increase their catch

## STRICT PROTECTION

Presentation	Question	Answer
Ecological and socio-economic benefits of strictly protected MPAs and scientific principles for their establishment  And  Strict protection in Aire Marine Protégée de la Côte Agathoise	Have you considered the relationship between the size of the strict MPA and the effectiveness?	Yes, papers state smallest should be 3.6km <sup>2</sup> , but bigger doesn't necessarily mean better. The effective size of an MPA depends on the species/habitat that is to be protected. Connectivity within the strict protection network is more important than MPAs being big

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

Presentation	Question	Answer
<p>Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity</p>	<p>What do you interpret by fast permitting?</p>	<p>In renewable acceleration areas that exclude Natura 2000 sites, other protected areas, migratory corridors etc., the projects can be fast tracked for permitting as certain environmental impact assessments will no longer be required, as per new rules in the emergency regulation and revised EU Renewables Energy Directive.</p>
	<p>What is the threshold of overriding public interest? Because France will not have the knowledge to scientifically identify enough renewable energy farm areas by the end of the year (e.g. marine spatial mapping)</p>	<p>It is a challenge that you do not have data. Determining the thresholds for overriding public interest will be a challenge in particular as if there are few benefits in terms of energy production compared to expected damage to biodiversity, then the presumption of overriding public interest can be challenged. It will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.</p>

## ANNEX 2 – Seminar Programme

### Day 1: Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March

Time	Activity	Location
8.30 – 9.00	Registration	
9.00 – 09.30	<p>Official welcome &amp; introductions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Célia de Lavergne, Director, Water and Biodiversity Directorate, Ministry of Ecological Transition</li> <li>• Andrea Vettori, Head of Unit, Nature Conservation Unit, DG Environment, European Commission</li> <li>• Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: policy context for the biogeographical process – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit</li> <li>• Overview of the seminar programme, housekeeping rules – Luna Milatović (Biogeographical Process)</li> </ul>	La Major Plenary Room
09.30 – 10.00	<i>Coffee Break</i>	Eugenie Room
10.00 – 13.00	<p>Protected area targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where are we – overview and distance to target, initial analysis of received pledges – Johnny Reker, European Environment Agency</li> <li>• Scientific basis for identification of MPAs – Anna Maria Adamo, Horizon Europe Project - MPA EUROPE</li> <li>• Pledges and approaches: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spain – Jose Maria Rodriguez Ochagevia, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge</li> <li>• France – Ilinca Mathieu, Ministry of Ecological Transition</li> <li>• Contribution from other Member States</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> <li>• Discussion on way forward in groups</li> <li>• Reporting back to plenary</li> </ul>	La Major Plenary Room
13.00 – 14.00	<i>Lunch break</i>	Eugenie Room
14.00 – 15.30	<p>Conservation status targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where are we – overview and distance to target – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit</li> <li>• Methodology and initial analysis of received pledges – Paul Goriup, (Biogeographical Process)</li> <li>• MarHA: Natura Integrated project for effective and equitable management of marine habitats in France – Alain Pibot, Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB)</li> <li>• Pledges and approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spain - Helena Moreno Colera, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge</li> <li>• Cyprus – Yianna Samuel, Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment</li> <li>• Contribution from other Member States</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> </ul>	La Major Plenary Room
15.30 – 16.00	<i>Coffee Break</i>	Eugenie Room
16.00 – 17.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion on way forward in groups</li> <li>• Reporting back to plenary</li> </ul>	La Major Plenary Room
18.30 – 21.30	Gala dinner	Restaurant La Nautique

### Day 2: Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March

Time	Activity	Location
8.30 – 9.00	Registration	
9.00 – 9.15	Opening plenary	
9.15 – 11.15	<p>Session 1 - Role of Natura 2000 sites and other MPAs in marine restoration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU Nature Restoration Law and MPAs – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit</li> <li>• REEForest - Restoration of Cystoseira macroalgal FORESTs to enhance biodiversity along Mediterranean rocky REEFs – Annalisa Falace, University of Trieste</li> <li>• LIFE Ecorest - Ecological restoration of human-impacted benthic marine ecosystems through active strategies and participatory approach - Jordi Grinyo, Institut de Ciències del Mar (ICM-CSIC)</li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> <li>• Moderated discussion</li> <li>• Reporting back to the plenary</li> </ul>	La Major Plenary Room
11.15 – 11.30	<i>Coffee Break</i>	Eugenie Room
11.30 – 13.30	<p>Session 2 - Strict protection in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict protection in the context of Biodiversity strategy targets – Anna Cheilari, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit</li> <li>• Ecological and socio-economic benefits of strictly protected MPAs and scientific principles for their establishment - Charles Loiseau, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)</li> <li>• Strict protection in Aire Marine Protégée de la Côte Agathoise – Sylvain Blouet, AMP Côte Agathoise</li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> <li>• Moderated discussion</li> <li>• Reporting back to the plenary</li> </ul>	La Major Plenary Room
13.30 – 14.30	<i>Lunch break</i>	Eugenie Room
14.30 – 16.30	<p>Session 3 – Renewable energy and marine conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieving renewable energy targets while protecting and restoring biodiversity – Vedran Nikolić, European Commission, DG Environment, Nature Conservation Unit</li> <li>• National guide on measures to reduce the risk of environmental impact from offshore wind farms and the example of the Leucate-Barbares wind farm - Golfe du Lion- Laetitia Miquerol, Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB) and Thomas Bordron, OCEANWINDS</li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> <li>• Moderated discussion</li> <li>• Reporting back to the plenary</li> </ul>	La Major Plenary Room
16.30 – 17.00	Next steps for the pledge process and summary of discussions	
17.00 – 18.30	Knowledge market	
20.00	Dinner	Restaurant Le Lacydon

### Day 3: Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March

Time	Activity	Location
8.00 – 15.00	Calanques National Park (optional, organised by the host)	Meeting point Vieux Port

## ANNEX 3 – List of Participating Organisations

### Member State Participants

Country	Organisation
Belgium	European Commission
Bulgaria	Ministry of Environment and Water
Croatia	Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development
Croatia	Ministry of Agriculture
Cyprus	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development, and the Environment
France	French Office for Biodiversity (OFB)
France	Maritime Prefecture of the Mediterranean
France	French Ministry for the Ecological Transition
Greece	Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency
Italy	Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea
Italy	Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security
Romania	National Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture
Romania	Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests
Spain	Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge

### Stakeholder participants

Nord University – MPA EUROPE
University of Trieste - REEForest
MedPAN
National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) - France
Polytechnic University of the Marches
MEDREACT Foundation
ClientEarth
Association BIOM
European Environment Agency (EEA)
Institute of Marine Sciences (ICM-CSIC) - Spain
CCMAR, CRIOBE-CNRS, and INRAE
French Society for the Protection of Birds (LPO France)
Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA)
ProBiodiversitas SRL
WWF France
ELMEN European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)
Environmental Justice Foundation
Nature Park Strunjan
Mediterranean Advisory Council
NGO Sunce
Oceana
Mare Nostrum
Institute for Environment and Nature - Croatia
University of Santiago de Compostela



## ANNEX 4 – Evaluation of the Seminar by the Participants

### 1. Seminar organisation

Activity	Average score	Main comments and suggestions:
<b>1. Overall organisation of the seminar</b>	9.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellently organised</li> </ul>
<b>2. Opening plenary session</b> (opening speeches, presentations)	9.4	No comments
<b>3. Protected area targets session</b>		
3.1. Overview, basis for identification of MPAs, presentation of pledges and approaches by MS	9.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was not clear why some Member States did not present pledges</li> </ul>
3.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groups on different aspects should be kept throughout to limit overlap</li> <li>• Not all break-out groups were productive</li> <li>• A need for more practical questions</li> <li>• Smaller tables would have facilitated better dialogue</li> </ul>
<b>4. Conservation status targets session</b>		
4.1. Overview presentation, MarHa project presentation of pledges and approaches by MS	8.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More detail, context, and discussion with speakers would have been good</li> <li>• Really interesting</li> </ul>
4.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break-out group not knowledgeable on the topic</li> <li>• A need for more practical questions</li> <li>• Smaller tables would have facilitated better dialogue</li> </ul>
<b>5. Reception and Gala dinner</b>	9.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great dinner</li> <li>• Not really a gala</li> <li>• Speech by the Deputy Mayor not translated</li> </ul>
<b>6. Session 1: Role of Nature 2000 sites and other MPAs in marine restoration</b>		
6.1. Quality and relevance of the presentations	9.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More detail on legal framework and funding</li> </ul>
6.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of break-out group experience</li> <li>• More focus on Member State difficulties</li> <li>• Very few operational answers to questions found</li> </ul>
6.3. Interactions with other participants	8.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member States representatives lacked initiative</li> </ul>

<b>7. Session 2: Strict protection in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region</b>		
7.1. Quality and relevance of the presentations	9.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some discussion could have been more targeted</li> </ul>
7.2. Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in working groups	8.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should have been a question on challenges of strict protection and less focus on the definition in discussions</li> </ul>
7.3. Interactions with other participants	8.7	No comments
<b>8. Session 3: Renewable energy and marine conservation</b>		
8.1 Quality and relevance of the presentations	7.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private sector presentations not focused</li> <li>• Presentations were very similar</li> <li>• Lacked a presentation on the basic aspects of renewable energy</li> <li>• One presentation was not translated and so not understood</li> </ul>
8.2 Organisation and facilitation of the discussions in work.	8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break-out group questions were not adequate</li> <li>• Break-out group experience was limited</li> </ul>
8.3 Interactions with other participants	8.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break-out group experience was limited</li> </ul>
<b>9. Knowledge market</b>	8.7	No comments
<b>10. Excursion to Calanques National Park</b>		
10.1 Organisation of the excursion	9.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A tour of the terrestrial part of the National Park would have been good in addition</li> </ul>
10.2 Speakers on the excursion	9.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The translation could have been clearer</li> </ul>
<b>11. Technical guidance (guidelines, instruction documents, mails) to access the meeting</b>		
11.1 Distributed before the seminar	9.0	No comments
11.2 Distributed during the seminar	9.8	No comments

## 2. Value of the biogeographical process in the marine areas

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

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

## 3. Additional information

### 3.1. Indicate one thing you consider as a success:

- Fieldtrip
- Networking
- Brainstorming with stakeholders
- Sharing experiences between Member States
- Knowledge sharing (example of methods for managing MPAs)

### 3.2. Indicate one thing you would suggest to improve:

- More balanced break-out groups in terms of participant experience
- More time for Questions and Answers
- More consistent rapporteurs
- More encouragement for Member States to submit pledges
- More frequent seminars to encourage cooperation
- Renewable energy was possibly not entirely relevant as a topic

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

- Protected areas pledge – two mentions
- Strict protection – four mentions
- Conservation status pledge – one mention
- Restoration – three mentions

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

- More time allocated for the knowledge market
- Improve the break-out group questions
- A presentation about the Common Fisheries Policy would be beneficial as many participants believe that they cannot regulate fishing in their EEZ