

Surveillance and Enforcement for the Effectiveness of Marine Protected/Natura 2000 areas in the Adriatic Sea

A networking event entitled "Surveillance and Enforcement for the Effectiveness of Marine Protected/Natura 2000 areas in the Adriatic Sea" was organised by the non-governmental organisation Sunce¹ in Split, Croatia, on 26 March 2024 with support from the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process (BGP) for Marine Regions². The event brought together Croatian and Italian experts and stakeholders to discuss the importance of surveillance and enforcement in marine Natura 2000 areas (see Annex 1 for the agenda).

In total, 42 participants from 19 institutions attended the workshop in person: Sunce, Municipality of Ugento, Regional Park Ugento, NatureBureau, Biom, WWF, Drustvo istraživača mora – 20000 milja, Split-Dalmatia County, Public Institution Sea and Karst, Nature Park Lastovo, Nature Park Telascica, Public institution Sibenik-Knin County, Public institution Zadar County, Public institution Dubrovnik-Neretva County, Ministry of agriculture – fishery department, Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries, The Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia, 2 nautical sector representatives, and participants with expertise in nature protection.

Online participation was also provided, with 18 participants from 8 institutions: Institute for Marine Biology Montenegro, SELC Società Cooperativa Biologia e Geologia Applicate, National Park Mljet, National Park Brijuni, Public Institution Istra County, European Commission, PAP/RAC of UNEP/MAP, and participants with expertise in nature protection.

During the introductory part of the workshop, Sunce presented the current EFFICIENTN2K project³ that aims to strengthen institutional collaboration in surveillance of protected areas and increase the level of understanding about common challenges in achieving efficient surveillance and enforcement in coastal and marine Natura 2000 sites. The project began in August 2023 and will run until December 2024. It has carried out comprehensive legislative and institutional analysis of the surveillance schemes in Italy and Croatia. The results of this analysis were presented during the workshop.

A representative of the BGP support team (Kristina Wood, NatureBureau and CEEweb for Biodiversity) described the current cycle of the Biogeographical Process and its focus on assisting Member States to contribute to the full implementation of the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Vedran Nikolić (Nature Conservation Unit, DG Environment European Commission) presented the EU legislative framework for effective management of

¹ <https://sunce-st.org/en/about-sunce/who-we-are/>

² <https://biogeoprocess.net/>

³ <https://www.italy-croatia.eu/web/efficientn2k>

marine Natura 2000 sites and highlighted the need for effective protection and restoration of nature as key objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 related to marine areas. Member States have a clear obligation to establish and implement site-specific conservation objectives and necessary conservation measures for target habitat types and species and must take appropriate steps to prevent deterioration of natural habitats and significant disturbance of species (Article 6 of the Habitats Directive). As anchoring can cause significant deterioration of *Posidonia oceanica* meadows within Natura 2000 sites, allowing this activity can be seen as a clear violation of Article 6 of the Directive.

Giuseppe Scordella from the Regional Natural Park Litorale di Ugento and Matea Špika from Sunce presented the situation analysis of Natura 2000 site surveillance in Italy and Croatia respectively. In Italy, the Municipality of Ugento is running a pilot study of the EFFICIENTN2K project in the natural park. Three sites across the natural park were selected to understand the differences in management and monitoring and develop surveillance which is adapted to the different contexts and management systems. Priority pressures in the natural park for improved surveillance include illegal fishing, widespread pollution of surface waters due to agriculture, and fires along the coastline. The main challenges in surveillance and enforcement determined so far are inadequate coordination due to the fragmentation of responsibilities among multiple control bodies, limited resources (financial and human), and disparities in resource allocation. Following the pilot study, the Municipality has identified necessary future steps to be increasing funding, training surveillance staff, adopting advanced technologies for monitoring, and involving local communities.

In Croatia, five pilot study areas were selected for the EFFICIENTN2K project. Pressures in need of improved surveillance include marine litter, fishing, free-anchoring, and land-based waste. The pilot study revealed a need for improved competence of rangers, a comprehensive database of surveillance, increased presence in the field (inspections), development of infrastructure (to regulate anchoring and to receive wastewater), and implementation of strict fish protection.

During the discussion after the presentations, participants pointed out that public institutions for protected areas management in Croatia are now better equipped with boats, cars and other surveillance tools. However, there too few rangers to implement effective surveillance of all the sites, especially without cooperation from other institutions involved. Regarding capacity building, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development in Croatia has made some progress in developing educational modules for rangers, but more needs to be provided. Surveillance is challenging, especially in small local communities that are focused on tourism (for example on islands). Both potential offenders and rangers belong to the same local community making it hard on some occasions for them to act. Also, the salary for this type of job is not so high as in tourism, making it less attractive. The legal frameworks in Italy and

Croatia have some gaps that need to be addressed. A new Croatian Nature Protection Law is expected by the end of the year.

After the break, the State Institute for Environmental and Nature Protection in Croatia presented the current national focus on proposing new marine Natura 2000 sites in line with the 30% protection target for marine areas within the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. The activity also aims to refine conservation objectives for target species and habitat types in Natura 2000 sites, and establish anchoring regulations to protect *Posidonia* meadows.

Following the presentation, discussions were held within working groups on recommendations for improving the effectiveness of surveillance and enforcement.

The first working group discussed anchoring, with special attention to its control within Natura 2000 sites. The work of Split-Dalmatia County was highlighted as an example of making spatial plans at the county (regional) level that regulate the establishment of anchorages, An Anchorage Study was undertaken leading to an Anchorages Distribution Plan which provides guidelines for the development of ports with special-purpose anchorages in terms of location, size, and maximum capacity of anchorages. It can also be useful for addressing the issue of free anchoring in terms of protecting sensitive and valuable habitats and serves as a good example of cross-sectoral cooperation. What is important and necessary in the preparation phase for this approach is to raise awareness within institutions from other relevant sectors (especially those in charge of including anchorage and mooring sites in spatial plans).

Another example from the Zlatni Rat significant landscape area was mentioned as a positive initiative where the concessionaire informs nautical tourists about the negative impact of anchoring on *Posidonia* during the summer season, and requests them to move their boats. Communication is again very important, especially in sites where there is still no legal basis to regulate or ban anchoring.

The existing infrastructure in Croatia regarding anchorages and marinas remains very limited, so regulation should be gradually introduced. It should start with a ban for large boats and proceed towards a total ban of anchoring in sites where there are continuous and high quality *Posidonia* meadows. The regulation on anchoring within Natura 2000 sites must go through the national level in cooperation with the maritime sector. Communication will be important during this process and NGOs are willing to take this role.

The second working group focused on surveillance in protected areas, considering whether the current legislative framework enables the activities of rangers in the field, along with other institutions involved, especially for Natura 2000 sites. The need for new technologies was highlighted, as well as certain limitations on their use for surveillance purposes (e.g, concerning the use of private data). Enhanced cooperation between local authorities, regional public institutions and national parks and nature parks was proposed in order to increase the

effectiveness of marine protected area surveillance. Other topics raised in the discussions included the overlap of powers between rangers and inspectors, how to ensure sufficient funding for the surveillance of marine protected areas, and opportunities for improving the record-keeping of institutions involved in surveillance and enforcement. The legal framework should be improved to allow better management and powers of rangers, especially in Natura 2000 sites (the current Croatian Nature Protection Act does not impose misdemeanour measures regarding prohibited actions in Natura 2000 sites, and the current Italian legal framework for the Ugento Regional Park in the Puglia Region is outdated). By the end of the year, Croatia should have a new Nature Protection Act, and the role of NGOs will be to advocate changes concerning better surveillance (misdemeanour provisions for Natura 2000 sites, clearer distinction between rangers and inspectors).

The third working group discussed fire setting. The importance of fire prevention was emphasised, including education, cooperation and coordination between authorities, improving equipment, and involving private owners in fire prevention and mitigation efforts. The possibility of using advanced technologies for surveillance, such as remote monitoring systems and drones, as well as other innovative solutions to overcome the physical and logistical constraints of traditional monitoring, was also considered.

Recommendations for solving obstacles for reaching more efficient surveillance and enforcement:

- Both Croatia and Italy are working towards key objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 related to marine areas – increasing the percentage of protected (and strict protected) areas, more effective protection and restoration of nature.
- The existing legal framework is good, although in both countries it could be improved to allow better management, especially in Natura 2000 sites. The Croatian Nature Protection Act has some limitations regarding the powers of rangers to act, so the effort of NGOs should be to advocate for insertion of misdemeanour provisions in the new Nature Protection Act regarding Natura 2000 sites, as well as clearer distinction between the powers of rangers and inspectors. The legislation for Ugento Regional Park is outdated.
- Regulation of anchoring should be gradually increased, as current infrastructure is insufficient to accommodate all the boats visiting the countries/regions and anchoring freely. A prerequisite for a gradual ban is to have habitat maps and data on pressures in order to identify priority sites and propose regulation strategies. In addition, regulation of anchoring requires strong involvement of different sectors and spatial planning.

- Installation of eco-mooring is more expensive than current practices, but is needed to protect EU priority habitats. Efforts should be made to explain the benefits and technical specifications of such mooring systems, especially to potential concessionaires and users.
- Cooperation and coordination are crucial. There is a great need to improve coordination among competent authorities and organisations involved in surveillance to strengthen the management of protected areas. Both countries experience a lack of communication among the bodies involved in surveillance, although some progress has been made in recent years.
- Record-keeping by institutions involved in surveillance and enforcement should be improved (to allow comparisons) and linked so that everyone can have access to useful information and be able to track proceedings within the enforcement chain.
- Communication campaigns and activities are essential when preparing new regulations and prohibitions. These should focus on other sectors involved (as sometimes their level of awareness regarding nature conservation is quite low), users and beneficiaries (landowners, marinas, charter industry, nautical tourists) and the general public (as economic issues will be raised).
- The involvement of local communities in the management of Natura 2000 sites is a key element for the long-term success of conservation.
- The possibilities of new technologies for surveillance should be explored, as there are already some good examples of using them. However, concerns about the use of personal data in surveillance and enforcement should be considered.
- Funding levels significantly impact site management and surveillance, enabling the employment of qualified staff, procuring necessary equipment for effective surveillance and carrying out more frequent actions on the field. Thus, additional funding mechanisms should be considered.

Annex 1

AGENDA

Tuesday, 26 March 2024

8:30 – 9:00

Participants registration

9:00 – 10:00

Welcome

EFFICIENTN2K project, Zrinka Jakl, Sunce

EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 biogeographical process, Kristina Wood, NatureBureau

Protected/Natura 2000 areas management effectiveness policy framework, Vedran Nikolić, European Commission

10:00 – 10:30

Coffee break

10:30 – 12:00

Surveillance and enforcement effectiveness in the Adriatic MPAs/Natura 2000 sites – situation analysis:

- Italian case study, Giuseppe Scordella, Municipality of Ugento – Regional Natural Park Litorale di Ugento
- Croatian case study, Matea Špika, Sunce

12:00 – 13:00

Lunch break

13:00 – 15:30

Strategic approach towards achieving effective protected/Natura 2000 areas in Croatia by 2030 (tbc), Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Croatia

Facilitated discussion on recommendations for improving surveillance and enforcement effectiveness – workshop participants

Event closure