



EUROPEAN UNION



EU MISSIONS

RESTORE OUR OCEAN AND WATERS



April 2024

EU Blue Parks Initiative:

Report of the Second EU Blue Parks Community Workshop (7 March 2024, Brussels)

Effective Management of Marine Protected Areas

1. Summary

The second EU Blue Parks Community workshop, which took place as part of the European Ocean Days in Brussels in March 2024, brought together marine conservation experts, researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders to discuss and develop strategies for advancing marine conservation efforts in Europe. The aim was to foster a comprehensive understanding of the effective management of EU Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including the crucial coastal zones and the dynamic land-sea interfaces. The workshop provided a platform for stakeholders to exchange knowledge, collaborate on innovative solutions, network, and chart a course towards more effective and inclusive marine conservation strategies. This report presents the key takeaways that emerged throughout the sessions of this workshop.

Participants emphasized the importance of engaging diverse stakeholders, including local communities, governments, NGOs, and private sectors, in marine conservation initiatives. **Collaboration** was seen as essential for sharing knowledge, resources, and best practices and for promoting innovative solutions to complex marine conservation issues.

Discussions also centered around the significance of **scientific research** and **data-driven approaches** for understanding marine ecosystems, identifying conservation priorities, and evaluating the effectiveness of conservation interventions. Participants emphasized the importance of integrating scientific findings into policymaking processes to ensure **evidence-based decision-making** and promote **adaptive management practices**.

Participants discussed the importance of adopting **holistic approaches** that consider social, economic, and environmental dimensions of marine conservation. This integrated approach aimed to balance conservation objectives with the needs of coastal communities, sustainable resource use, and economic development, ultimately promoting long-term resilience and sustainability of marine ecosystems.

Participants emphasized the need for investing in **education, training, and awareness-raising** initiatives to build scientific literacy, foster stewardship ethics, and promote community-led conservation actions. Capacity building was viewed as essential for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of marine conservation initiatives at local and regional levels.

Political will and policy support are key in driving meaningful progress in marine conservation. Participants discussed the need for governments to enact and enforce robust conservation policies, establish effective marine protected areas (MPAs), and implement sustainable management practices. Advocacy efforts were highlighted as crucial for mobilizing public support, raising awareness about marine conservation issues, and holding decision-makers accountable for conservation commitments.

2. Introduction

While Objective 1 of Mission Ocean and Waters is primarily quantitative, i.e. to protect 30% of our oceans by 2030, the EU Blue Parks Community (EU BPC) has, from its very first event in December 2023 (outcomes available [here](#)), emphasized the associated qualitative need: **marine protected areas (MPAs) must be both designed and managed effectively.**

On 7 March 2024, the EU Blue Parks Community met in Brussels for its second workshop, with the aim of collectively addressing some of the key underlying challenges: how to increase stakeholders' and marine users' engagement towards effectively managed MPAs? How to accurately demonstrate the effective management of MPAs? How can restoration techniques increase MPA benefits? What are further challenges and opportunities in marine and coastal biodiversity protection and restoration, including the role of fisheries in effective marine management? To discuss these challenges, 17 speakers from EU-funded projects, national and regional agencies, NGOs and restoration professionals were invited to share ideas and exchange best practices on the effective management of MPAs.

As part of the European Ocean Days, a week-long series of events delving into European maritime actions, including the second [Mission Ocean and Waters Forum](#), this second instalment of the EU BPC workshop series gathered more than a hundred participants, coming from a range of sectors, including national and regional agencies for marine and environmental management, researchers, regional sea basin organizations, NGOs, donors, and sustainable investors.

All presentations from the second EU BPC workshop can be accessed [online](#). The workshop agenda can be found in the Annex of this report.

What is the EU Blue Parks Community?

The EU Blue Parks is an initiative under the Mission Ocean and Waters dedicated to science-based solutions to support the establishment and effective management of marine protected areas in the EU. The EU Blue Parks Community, as part of the Blue Parks Initiative, is a platform that brings together EU Member States national and regional authorities, European marine networks, stakeholders, and research and innovation projects. It aims to help identify and address challenges, share tools, solutions and good practices, and promote innovative approaches to push forward progress in marine protection and restoration in the EU sea-basins. The Community gathers bi-annually at in-person and virtual workshops.

We invite you to [become an active member](#) of this Community.

This report summarizes the talks and discussion from the second EU BPC workshop, highlighting key takeaways as identified by the speakers and participants. The workshop will be followed by further workshops of the EU BPC in 2024 and the following years.

3. From Research to Action: A Common Voice from the EU Blue Parks Community

Since before the launch of the Mission Ocean and Waters, the European Commission has been deeply committed to fostering research projects supporting marine protection. Over the years, more than 840 projects have dealt with the issue in one way or another, in all European sea basins. Today, with the subject high on the political agenda, the Commission's commitment is even more pronounced, and the number of related projects continues to grow. So far, EUR 365 million have been invested in Mission Ocean calls, EUR 42 million of which in Blue Parks calls. As of March 2024, CINEA counts 41 ongoing most relevant projects that have a direct interest for the achievement of Objective 1 of the Mission Ocean and Waters (Protect and Restore Biodiversity) in the marine environment under Horizon-Europe, LIFE and EMFAF, with a total budget of EUR 318 million. This is a very significant investment where the need for dialogue and sharing between these projects is increasingly obvious, to promote the complementarity and replicability of actions as well as the uptake of project results by policy makers.

This second workshop of the EU Blue Parks Community offered a platform to look at the latest developments in 8 European projects with a focus on marine protection, including EU Blue Parks projects funded under Mission Ocean and Waters and LIFE projects: [Blue4ALL](#), [EFFECTIVE](#), [PROTECT Baltic](#), [Ocean Citizen](#), [Climarest](#), [LIFE Delfi](#), [Tarta-LIFE](#) and [LIFE MareNatura](#). These were put into perspective with a European overview of protection and restoration frameworks and progress by EC DG-ENV, two national contributions from Portugal and Belgium, and a local input from [Velje Fjord](#), Denmark. Supporting research efforts and the implementation of MPAs, international organizations and foundations also had the opportunity to present their approaches, namely [IUCN](#), [Oceano Azul](#) and [BSAG](#). In addition, testimonies from [Ecocean](#) and [Submon](#), two private companies having endorsed the [Mission Charter](#), demonstrated the dynamism of the private sector in the field of marine conservation and restoration.

The bottom line appears universally shared: **within the 6000 European MPAs**, many are still considered “paper parks” struggling with implementation on the ground. As a result, the workshop participants collectively stressed that efforts must be made to implement appropriate and effective conservation measures. To this end, key transversal recommendations were highlighted in the workshop:

- a. **Increasing stakeholders' engagement and fostering bottom-up initiatives**
- b. **Providing managers and decision-makers with better assessment methods and tools**
- c. **Using restoration techniques as catalysts for environmental recovery**
- d. **Addressing the fisheries challenge: from technical innovations to European regulatory frameworks implementation**

These are detailed below.

a. Increasing Stakeholder's Engagement and Fostering Bottom-up Initiatives

While the speakers acknowledged the responsibility of the national authorities in implementing regulations and providing the necessary resources for their application, most of them stressed the importance of bottom-up initiatives and stakeholder engagement in defining and applying effective management measures. The risk of encountering public reluctance is often cited as the main obstacle to national actions, and the examples of bottom-up initiatives presented throughout the day demonstrated that raising public awareness can generate genuine stewardship, which can in turn become the driving force behind conservation. Harnessing long term local support within sustainable governance structures is therefore key to the effective management of MPAs.

In Denmark, the **Velje Fjord restoration** project undertaken by the municipality highlighted the crucial role of local authorities, while the community-led conservation initiatives from BSAG demonstrated the power of civil society in Finnish waters. To further study bottom-up processes for marine conservation, Blue4all has set up dedicated **living labs across European sea basins**, which will be documented regularly. Most projects and initiatives emphasized the importance of undertaking outreach actions to foster a deeper understanding of the significance of marine conservation and its benefits, cultivating a stronger stewardship ethic, involving schoolchildren (Oceano Azul, Ecocean), professionals (Submon, LIFE Delfi), and the overall civil society (Ocean Citizen).

b. Providing Managers and Decision-makers with Better Assessment Methods and Tools

Measuring the level of effectiveness of MPAs management practices is a complex exercise. From design and planning to governance practices, enforcement and funding, and the monitoring of environmental and economic benefits, many parameters and criteria need to be analyzed. In response, efforts are underway to provide managers and decision-makers with **enhanced assessment methods and tools**, aimed at better targeting priority areas and actions. In this dynamic and plural context, the methods developed by the IUCN for its Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas' Programme are asserting themselves as an international standard certifying the sound management of protected areas, including marine ones. All MPAs can [apply for the label](#), whose accreditation process involves several months of analysis.

DG-ENV has been working on a specific declination for European MPAs, stress-tested on 75 sites, and still being fine-tuned to support the assessment of European MPAs' status. In addition, Blue4ALL is developing a toolbox geared towards increasing MPA effectiveness with an emphasis on collaborative approaches involving stakeholders. Furthermore, initiatives such as Protect Baltic aim to integrate adaptability into MPA management strategies. These efforts underscore a concerted push to improve MPA management and decision-making processes.

c. Using Restoration Techniques as catalysts for Environmental Recovery

While effectively managed MPAs allow to regulate and control human impacts on marine ecosystems, these sometimes bear the scars of past damage, and can therefore **benefit from additional active restoration actions**. The various inspiring examples presented underlined the dynamism of all the players in this field, from scientists to NGOs and private companies, in all the European basins. Ranging from **algae and seagrass restoration** projects (Effective, Ocean Citizen, Velje Fjord) to the recovery of the **nursery function** in artificialized areas (Ecocean, Climarest), these actions are proving to be real catalysts for environmental recovery, and therefore a great complement to protection, in line with principles of the upcoming **EU Nature Restoration Law**.

d. Addressing the Fisheries Challenge: From Technical Innovations to European Regulations

Successful implementation and management of MPAs requires **close collaboration with fishing communities** to facilitate practice shifts and ensure a **win-win approach**. Several projects exemplify these efforts, such as the LIFE Delfi and TartaLife initiatives, which focus on promoting co-existence between fishing and protected species within MPAs, by training and engaging fishers directly in conservation efforts and providing them with alternative gears and by-catch reduction technologies. In Spain, SUBMON trained over 2000 individuals to handle turtles and identified crucial habitats for cetaceans, demonstrating the significance of building scientific knowledge, raising awareness, and actively engaging stakeholders for effective marine conservation efforts. Through **case studies** such as the Selvagens Islands and Marine Natural Park of Algarve reef presented by the Ocean Azul Foundation, the importance of co-management with local communities and scientific expertise was underscored.

However, challenges were also pointed out, particularly regarding the Common Fisheries Policy (Article 11). This sometimes hinders protection objectives at national level, despite the overall objective for Member States to deliver on the 30x30 objective of MPAs. These challenges need to be clarified, studied in detail and discussed by the EU policy actors, Member States and EU BPC members.

4. Looking Forward

From the Baltic to the Mediterranean Sea basins, presentations at the second EU Blue Parks Community workshop highlighted the **shared will to develop and strengthen the European network of MPAs**. In addition to improving management effectiveness, most of the projects and actions presented are also concerned with expanding the MPA network, and therefore identifying new areas for protection, such as in Greece (LIFE MareNatura), in the Baltic (Protect Baltic) and in the Mediterranean (EFFECTIVE). These newly identified areas should ultimately be included in regional and national Maritime Spatial Plans (MSP).

The EU Blue Parks Community (EU BPC) remains **pivotal** for the Mission Oceans and Waters, with the European Commission firmly committed to its support. Upcoming priorities include effective management measures for European seas, highlighting the importance of marine protected areas and Mission Charter actions in **deploying solutions**. Attention is gradually turning to offshore areas, which are still largely under-studied and will be the focus of the Mission's next EU Blue Parks call. Looking forward, collaboration within the EU Blue Parks Community, active engagement of MPA managers, dissemination of information, and concerted efforts at the EU level are crucial for achieving international targets and addressing urgent environmental needs.

5. Impressions from the Workshop



6. Appendix: Workshop Agenda

‘Effective management of marine protected areas

(and the land-sea interface including coastal zones)’

*This workshop, part of the **EU Blue Parks Initiative** under the **EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030"**, aims to foster a comprehensive understanding of the effective management of EU Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including the crucial coastal zones and the dynamic land-sea interfaces. The workshop will bring together experts and stakeholders to discuss and share insights on the challenges and opportunities in marine and coastal biodiversity protection and restoration. Through presentations, case studies, and interactive discussions, the workshop will highlight key EU funded projects and research innovations in effective marine management, delve into policy development needs, and explore participatory approaches from EU Member States, regional, and local stakeholders.*

Why join: *Be a part of this insightful event to contribute to and learn from discussions on research and policy developments focused on effectiveness of marine protection across Europe. This is the second event of the series of workshops of the EU Blue Parks Community, and **we invite you to become an active member of this Community.***

7 March 09:00-16:30 CET – physical attendance in *The Square (Mont des Arts), Brussels*

(Moderators: Eduardo Carqueijero DG RTD B.4 and Marcin Sadowski DG MARE A.1)

08:30-09:00 Registration & Welcome Coffee

AGENDA

09:00 Opening statement by *Andreea Strachinescu-Olteanu DG MARE HEAD of Unit A1*

1st Session – Exploring EU funded projects and R&I on effective marine management

09:15 EU Blue Parks Community: 1st event recap, Community membership & support services

Gregory Fuchs, Researcher, Ecologic Institute / MIP Ocean

09:25 Overview of EU funded projects on MPAs and Marine Ecosystems (LIFE and Horizon Europe)

Alberto Zocchi, CINEA C.C1.2

09:40 EU Research & Innovation on effective marine management:

Horizon Europe Mission Ocean Work Programme – EU Blue Parks projects

- BLUE4ALL, facilitating the Blue Parks Community

Steven Degraer, Project Coordinator, Institute of Natural Sciences

- EFFECTIVE - Enhancing social well-being and economic prosperity by reinforcing the EFFECTIVENESS of protection and restoration management in Mediterranean MPAs

Iván Felis, Head of the R&D department, CTN-Marine Technology Centre, Spain

- PROTECT BALTIC - Ensuring sufficient protection and restoration in the Baltic Sea's marine environment

Jannica Haldin, Project Coordinator, HELCOM

- OCEAN CITIZEN - A multidisciplinary approach integrating science and society in Marine Forests regeneration for ocean management and protection

Lorenzo Bramanti, Researcher, LECOB-CNRS

10:40 Coffee Break | In the venue room - projection of Life DELFI: A Conflict to Resolve

Synopsis: In the Mediterranean, fish stocks are generally declining, dolphins are increasingly in conflict with different fishing activities. Concerns arise from unintentional catches during fishing operations, known as "bycatch," as well as depredation, where dolphins remove fish from nets. This documentary highlights the challenges posed by these interactions and underscores the innovative solutions implemented by the Life DELFI project.

11:10 LIFE projects on effective marine management

- LIFE Delfi and LIFE TartaLife: On the coexistence between professional fishing and protected species within MPAs

Alessandro Lucchetti, Project Coordinator, National Research Council Italy (CNR-IRBIM)

- LIFE MareNatura on enlarging the Greek MPA network to adequately protect marine megafauna

Panagiotis Kasapidis, Project Coordinator, Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR)

11:40 Q&A of the 1st session

2nd Session - Pledging towards 30x30, state of play and next steps

11:55 Biodiversity strategy targets for a coherent and effectively managed EU MPA network

Vedran Nikolić, Team leader, Nature Conservation Unit, DG Environment

12:10 Member State testimonies

- Situation, challenges and solutions for the network of marine protected areas in Portugal

Nuno Banza, President of the Board, ICNF, National Authority for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity

- Marine Protected Areas in Belgium: status, challenges, and case studies

Gizem Poffyn, Marine Policy Officer, FPS Public Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment

12:40 Q&A of the 2nd session

13:00-14:00 Lunch Break & Networking

3rd Session - Sharing case studies and good practices

14:00 Governance & community-led initiatives

- IUCN green list and effective management of MPAs
Jean-François Sys, Marine Biodiversity Project Leader, IUCN French Committee
- The Living Baltic Sea: towards community-led conservation
Ville Wahlberg, Managing Director, Baltic Sea Action Group (BSAG)
- From government leadership to community-based approaches: case studies for effective marine protection

Emanuel Gonçalves, Chief Scientist, Executive member of the Board, Oceano Azul Foundation

- Marine nature restoration in Vejle Fjord. Restoration of degraded coastal habitats: the Vejle Fjord case study
Rune Christian Husted Steinfurth, Postdoc, University of Southern Denmark (SDU)

15:00 Q&A

15:15 Innovation and good practices

- CLIMAREST. Coastal restoration in the Atlantic and Arctic Lighthouse: case studies from Svalbard to Madeira
Ida Beathe Øverjordet, Project Leader, SINTEF
- SUBMON's Collaborative Regional Approach to Marine Conservation
Tecla Maggioni, Project Technician, and Juanita Zorrilla, Project Manager, SUBMON
- Artificial fish nurseries. Rehabilitation and restoration of marine habitats: the added value of artificial structures.
Etienne Abadie, Project Manager, and Alexandre Belly, Ecological Engineering Apprentice, Ecocean

16:00 Q&A

16:20 Closing statement by *Elisabetta Balzi, HEAD of Unit Ocean and Waters, DG RTD*



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