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Workshop: Safeguarding Biodiversity Strengthening Marine Protected Area Networks, policy coherence and community involvement.

Date: Wednesday, November 15th, 2023

Theme: Marine Protection

organised by:



The objective of the workshop was to discuss the current state and actions in place, challenges, needs and opportunities to support the protection and restoration of marine biodiversity and the achievement of 2030 targets. The session targeting MPA managers, MPA policy/decision makers at different levels, marine planners, researchers and experts, representatives of blue economy sectors, NGOs, local communities and citizens, was divided into four sessions:

Session I: From protected to strictly protected areas

Keynote speaker: Johanna Fox, WWF Baltic | **Panel session:** Steven Degraer, RBINS
Lena Tingstrom, SwAM and Johanna Fox, WWF Baltic.

The relevance of achieving a set target (10% strict protection) when currently in the EU only 1.8% of the MPAs count with a management plan seems to be prioritising quantity over quality. Furthermore, in the northern EU, 59% of MPAs are commercially trawled. The focus should rather be placed on distributing funds to design and implement management plans, to monitoring and enforcement activities. Local community involvement is key and we have the tools available.

Session II: Networks of MPAs and Blue Corridors

Keynote speaker: Lena Tingstrom, SwAM | **Panel session:** Jannica Haldin, HELCOM and Francisco Rafael Barboza Gonzalez, UTARTU, and Lena Tingstrom, SwAM.

Discussions revolved around the importance of ensuring ecologically coherent MPAs, taking into account representativity, connectivity, and functionality. Challenges in achieving conservation goals were highlighted, notably in the Baltic part of Sweden despite existing commitments. The emphasis shifted towards recognising the importance of functional biodiversity rather than fixating on specific percentage targets, and the need for regional cooperation as biodiversity transcends national borders. Ongoing efforts by the Protect Baltic project to upscale the Swedish framework to the Baltic region were highlighted, as well as those by BLUE4ALL project to integrate and share the existing tools produced in various projects for more effective management. The discussions underlined the impact of climate change and the necessity to protect areas where biodiversity is expected to thrive under changing scenarios. Collaborative efforts were emphasised not

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only in terms of management plans but also in research and across different sectors, highlighting the significance of a holistic and cooperative approach to marine conservation.

Session III: Marine Protected Areas & Marine Spatial Planning integration

Keynote speaker: Kemal Pinarbasi, HELCOM | **Panel session:** Jan Schmidtbauer Crona, SwAM, Froukje Maria Platjouw, NIVA and Kemal Pinarbasi, HELCOM.

The discussion emphasized a bottom-up approach, encouraging openness to all ideas coming from local participation and participatory mapping, and highlighting the extension of focus beyond policy development, breaking down policy silos and giving people the opportunity to do the job instead of doing it for them. The panel discussion underscored MSP's limitation to do everything and also MPA managers' reluctance to involve MSP suggesting to rather designate areas next to MPAs that complement and help a sustainable use adjacent to the protected areas. The concept of ecosystem-based MSP was introduced, emphasising the identification and consideration of areas with high ecological value and functionality. The importance of mainstreaming biodiversity across different sectors was also highlighted, and the need for policy coherence to successfully integrate marine protection efforts. The discussion closed by emphasising the importance of considering temporal dynamics, and projecting efforts into the future (20-30 years from now) rather than focusing solely on the present given climate changing scenarios.

Session IV: Opportunities for MPA co-management

Keynote speaker: Haidi Cecilie Petersen, SDU | **Panel session:** Johanna Fox, WWF Baltic, Frederick Bruce, and Haidi Cecilie Petersen, SDU.

The session emphasised that engaging local communities is crucial to reduce resistance to MPA creation. This engagement serves as a source of local knowledge, citizen involvement and citizen science, creating a sense of buy-in and ownership of the MPA. Co-creation processes were highlighted as essential, starting at the earliest stages of ideation and design, with an emphasis on flexibility and adaptive management, and stressing on focusing on the small things such as organising the meetings close to stakeholders and reimbursing their expenses for reaching the meeting. The panel discussion delved into the need of MPA stewardship programs for local communities in the Baltic Sea, emphasizing that local communities often have a good understanding of their desires for an MPA. The need for adequate resources was underscored as a key factor in sustaining engagement processes, developing and implementing management plans, and avoiding a top-down approach that may lead to resistance. Effective communication strategies were stressed, advocating for empathy and an understanding of local perspectives to build trust. Overall, the panelists highlighted the importance of avoiding a static perspective and embracing change, recognising the dynamic nature of systems.