COUNTRY SUMMARIES: FINLAND

MSP in Finland

The Finnish Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 was approved in December 2020. The plan has been prepared in parts in three planning areas (Northern Bothnian Sea, Quark and Bothnian Bay, Archipelago Sea and Southern Bothnian Sea, and Gulf of Finland) and covers the whole sea area of Finland starting from the coastline and including territorial waters and the EEZ. Eight coastal regional councils together with the Ministry of the Environment are responsible for the plan preparation. The MSP plan is a strategic document with an indirect impact on planning through a guiding effect on the plans of the Finnish land use planning system. Additionally, the impact arises from the linkages with other policy guidelines and strategies, regional programmes and from supporting the goals of regional development projects and other maritime management, conservation, and restoration plans. The MSP plan does not set any quantitative objectives.

The European Green Deal in Finnish MSP Plan

1. Climate change mitigation

In the Finnish MSP plan climate change mitigation is mostly considered by the promotion of offshore wind farms (OWF) and the use of new technologies and innovations in maritime sectors. The 2030 vision for the sustainable use of marine areas foresees a transition to a low-carbon and resource efficient society mainly through these methods. On the objective level, the plan aims to improve the operating environment for OWF by promoting topics such as the role of the government and regional land use plans in supporting and guiding the development. The plan map identifies potential areas for OWF development. To support the energy transition in the maritime sectors and ports the plan considers objectives for the use of new technologies and supporting research and innovation.

2. Climate change adaptation

Climate change adaptation as a concept is not used in the Finnish MSP plan, but there are direct and indirect references to the topic. A central measure is the identification of significant underwater natural values which are considered key areas for the provision of ecosystem services such as the protection of coastal areas in the future. The plan also includes many areas with no strategic objectives identified, providing flexibility regarding the future. To achieve the objective of a good status of the marine environment in the long-term, further consideration of how to adapt to climate change is needed. The impact of climate change on marine sectors will be further considered during the second cycle of MSP in Finland.

3. Sustainable seafood production

The plan identifies fisheries and fish farming as the main actors in sustainable seafood production in the visions, objectives, and measures. The vision identifies them as sustainable and climate-friendly sources for food in the future. The objectives support sustainable fishing that has a positive impact on the status of the marine environment and the continuation of the fishing profession. Eutrophication is a challenge for fish farming: to reduce the nutrient loads the plan identifies multiple objectives to support both technological and practical solutions. The plan map identifies potential areas for professional coastal net fishing and open sea trawl fishing. The MSP plan considers the aims of the Finnish Aquaculture Strategy to increase production and identifies potential areas for fish farming with a generalised strategic map marking. Mussel and algae farming is challenging due to the environmental settings, but the plan does address them to a lesser extent.

4. Biodiversity and ecosystem protection and restoration

One of the main objectives of the Finnish MSP plan is to support the achievement of the good status of the marine environment. This topic together with biodiversity and ecosystem protection are considered in the visions, objectives, and measures of the plan. The plan aims to create an overview of the network of valuable marine nature areas and ecological connections but does not suggest new conservation areas. The plan does not promote any potential marine uses that are likely to lead to conflict with significant nature values. The plan map identifies areas with significant underwater natural values, where special focus needs to be put on the preservation of the characteristics of the underwater habitats when developing marine uses. Restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems will be further investigated during the upcoming planning cycles.

5. Blue Circular Economy

Blue circular economy is to some extent considered a cross-cutting theme for many of the sectors covered by the plan. The vision promotes a future where resource-efficient and circular economy solutions form the basis for a sustainable blue economy. To some extent, the objectives consider solutions for promoting circular economy actions in the sectors. The MSP plan considers other relevant strategies and policies related to the maritime sectors, such as the Finland's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, but is not directly connected to their objectives.

6. Zero pollution

Zero pollution is considered to a lesser extent in the MSP plan. The refences to the topic in the visions and objectives mostly focus on pollution prevention in the different marine sectors. For example, the plan considers the risks of oil and chemical accidents which could occur in maritime traffic. The MSP process examined the future needs for dredging of ports and merchant shipping fairway and the most suitable banking sites for dredging masses in terms of protecting the marine environment.

Fair and just transition

The Finnish MSP plan was formed through a collaborative planning process. All authorities and organisations whose areas of activity are covered by the plan and the public interested in MSP were engaged in the plan preparation. The aim was to secure equal representation of stakeholders and the planning areas. The actualization of this goal was also followed throughout the process. The involvement of the coastal regional councils supported the promotion of regionally important actions. In practice, national and regional events were organized in all stages of planning, starting with the definition of a common approach for MSP in Finland. The aim was the co-creation of knowledge and the formation of a shared understanding and vision for MSP. The resulting MSP plan aims to cover all areas equally, by considering the operating environment for different sectors in all parts of the planning area. The planning process included an examination of the impacts that the realisation of the plan would have on multiple socio-environmental aspects such as human living conditions, biodiversity, and natural resources.

Challenges and obstacles identified

The EGD adds new objectives that MSP needs to adapt to. For example, the societal pressure to guide the green energy transition at sea requires fast and adaptable planning. MSP is a new planning tool and the ways that it can support the EGD in practice are still developing. Although Finland has extensive experience and a collection of valuable data regarding the marine topics, lack of information or understanding supporting sustainable planning decisions was identified as one of the most difficult and urgent challenges to overcome. Further assessment of the cumulative impacts of planning solutions is needed, but achieving this is challenging due to the complexity of the marine environment and the multiple new sea uses. Understanding the national and regional environmental context is crucial to solving these challenges.