

DEVELOPMENT OF THE LATVIAN MARITIME SPATIAL PLAN AND STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Report from the meeting

Date: 14 July, 2015, 14:00-16:00

Venue: Klaipeda Science and Technology Park, V. Berbomo street 10, Room 10

PARTICIPANTS: see Annex 1

PROCEEDINGS:

Opening:

The meeting was opened by the Nerijus Blažauskas, Coastal Research and Planning Institute, Lithuania. He briefly introduced aim of the meeting as well as referred to the recently adopted the supplement to the Lithuanian general plan covering marine areas which is similar type of the strategic policy planning document as currently developed for marine waters in Latvia.

Overview on the MSP in Latvia: planning process, status, main components of the plan

Inguna Urtāne, Director of the Spatial Planning Department, Ministry of the Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia

Ms. Urtane introduced to the work on Latvian MSP, highlighting importance of the applying the ecosystem approach to define future sea uses. She briefly characterised the scope and structure of the MSP, as well as a role of the involved stakeholders through out the planning process. Ms. Urtane highlighted the potential challenge in defining the implementation of MSP in practice. The competencies of the institutions and coordination after the adoption of the plan are open issues which needs solutions as well.

A question was posed about the time period for which the plan will be developed. According to the legislation the time period for implementation is 12 years. The Ministry is anticipating that the MSP could be adopted by 2017, thus the time period could be up to 2030.

Introduction to the procedure and scope of the strategic environmental assessment (SEA) of the Latvian MSP

Kristina Veidemane, Project Manager of the Development of the MSP, Baltic Environmental Forum, Latvia

Ms. Veidemane introduced legal requirements of the implementation of the SEA in Latvia as well already taken steps in terms of scoping the Environmental report. The time line and activities for transboundary consultations on SEA and MSP was presented as well. It was highlighted that the same information will be used for both – MSP and SEA reports to characterise the situation and

environmental problems. It is feasible as the MSP is developed taking into account ecosystem approach.

Stocktaking of the existing situation in sea uses and interests (environment, nature, cultural heritage) in Latvian waters

Kristina Veidemane, Baltic Environmental Forum, Latvia

Ms. Veidemane introduced major results delivered by the stocktaking of the existing situation in sea uses and interests. She presented the issues related to public interests (nature conservation, environmental quality, fish resources; ecosystem services as well national security) and economic sectors (marine transport and ports, fishery, tourism, energy, etc.). An overview map on sea uses and interests was presented as well.

Questions:

- A question was asked, if any conflicting areas of sea uses have been identified. A. Ruskule explained that with regard to present sea uses there are no major conflicts in use of sea space. The conflicts are expected with regard to new uses, e.g. wind farm development and marine aquaculture, however there are not yet officially fixed claims for space (except licensed areas for oil investigation and extraction). Therefore we try to predict different options of sea space development and model the possible conflict situations through strategic sea use scenarios.
- The chemical weapon/mine fields on border with Lithuania and Sweden was noted as a possible cross-border consultation issue.
- The oil exploration and extraction area close to Lithuanian border shall be assessed with regard to impacts on access to Butinge oil terminal.
- It was suggested to take into account in the planning process the possible impacts of climate change, e.g. rise of sea water level.

State of the environment of the marine waters in Latvia

Solvita Strāķe, Latvian Institute of Aquatic Ecology

Ms. Strake presented the key environmental issues relevant for MSP. The Latvian waters cover two sub-basins of the Baltic Sea – open Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga. This division is determined by abiotic factors which results in different environmental conditions such as salinity, temperature and oxygen. During the work on MSP, the map of benthic habitats has been prepared based on marine geology map, depth and water transparency data as well as benthic habitat survey data. The benthic habitat map was used for mapping of the ecosystem services. She pointed out a link with the assessment prepared for the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The same descriptors and indicators are also applied in the development of the MSP.

The discussion was about the role of the habitats and communities in purification of the water, thus replacing a necessity for waste water treatment plants. It was explained that this issue is dealt within the concept on the ecosystem services, in particular on the habitats providing the regulating services on denitrification. At the moment the provision potential of the services has been mapped based on distribution of benthic habitats, but it is aimed also to add quantified information at later stage.

The discussion on the potential damage to valuable ecosystem/s due to new marine activities continued on the complexity of the impacts on the ecosystem. Results of the previous projects implemented in Latvia actually do not provide straight link between pressure or pollution load and the effects on the biodiversity. Thus it is difficult to identify the exact cause –effect relationship as the pressures have cumulative character. Nevertheless, it is possible to recommend which species or parameters shall be monitored to identify the change in the state of the biodiversity.

Scenarios for potential development in the marine waters and the trans-boundary aspects for MSP and SEA

Anda Ruskule, Baltic Environmental Forum, Latvia

Ms. Ruskule introduced to the methodology of building up of the scenarios to identify potential development directions on sea uses. She also briefly described the elaborated four scenarios which are rather radical and thus initiates discussion and provide good input to the defining the optimal solution for the use of the sea in Latvia.

It was pointed out that shipping routes/reserved areas are very important in all scenarios. Ms. Ruskule commented, that existing shipping regulations are respected in all scenarios, while the difference is with regard to additional reservation of the areas for shipping as priority. This reservation area depends on the driving forces and priorities of the particular scenario.

As many sea uses occur in several or even all scenarios, it would be reasonable to overlay all scenarios to see more exactly the spatial differences and similarities.

The Lithuanian colleagues recognised that an approach of diversification of driving forces while defining the four radical scenarios might be an excessive exercise - artificially created and a bit contradicting with MSP principles of sustainable development and weighted integration of all components into the proposed alternative solutions.

The Lithuanian colleagues pointed out that an approach to use the indicators to illustrate the trends, current situation and expected results in development was pointed out as useful tool to track the effects of the MSP implementation.

The discussion was briefly on the role of the different international and national policy documents in setting the objectives also for MSP. It was confirmed that the MSP shall consider all existing policies, including VASAB documents. However, it was commented that Latvian policies are rather ambitious and would like to cover all potential aspects, thus streamlining of the goals and objectives is challenging too. Moreover, majority of the policies are targeted to 2020, while very few sectors look at long-term perspective - 2030.

Report prepared by Kristina Veidemane & Anda Ruskule, Baltic Environmental Forum

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