

DEVELOPMENT OF THE LATVIAN MARITIME SPATIAL PLAN AND STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Report from the meeting

Date: 23 July, 2015, 13:00-16:00

Venue: Pärnu County Council

PARTICIPANTS: see Annex 1

PROCEEDINGS:

Opening:

The meeting was opened by Raine Viitas, Pärnu County Government, Estonia. She welcomed the participants and highlighted both countries are connected by land and sea border as well as by common fish (herring) resource in the Gulf of Riga. She informed that Pärnu County is also involved in MSP since 2012 by development of the regional MSP. Now public and transboundary consultation is ongoing on Pärnu MSP but the Council is ready to accept the plan. Ms. Viitas pointed out the lack of data as one of the key difficulty in developing MSP. Furthermore, she stressed that the identification of the most optimal offshore wind park areas was also most challenging task. It has been difficult as the proper data is missing to be certain about the siting turbines in areas with least impacts and in the same time to be most economically viable. There is a definitely need for more studies on this subject. The Pärnu MSP does not automatically grants building permits. The developers will still comply with other regulations including environmental impact assessment procedure.

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

Kristine Kedo, Head of Spatial planning policy division, Ministry of the Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Latvia

Ms. Kedo introduced to the work on Latvian MSP. She briefly characterised the time planning of the whole process pointing out that the stocktaking has been mainly performed in the first half of the year, while the next period will be dedicated to finding the optimum solutions and defining strategic priorities. The MSP shall be approved by the Government at the end of the process, however, the exact format is still debated.

Ms. Kedo introduced the key components and contents of the Latvian MSP. She briefly characterised the key economic sectors to be addressed by the MSP. The involvement of the stakeholders in collection of the information and defining priorities is very essential task. A link between MSP and Marine Strategy Framework Directive was briefly characterised. It was highlighted that its essential that such links are established and that both planning policies are coordinated.

A question was posed about the planning area and ownership and planning rights of the municipality to plan 2km zone. It was clarified that the coastal waters still remain as state property and ownership whereas municipalities can take the area in their possession and have right to use the area to fulfil their duties. The coastal municipalities are mostly interested to develop recreational and tourism activities and they are also in charge for planning the discharge locations of the waste water treatment plants (2 km zone is set because the longest tubes are placed nearly up 2 km in the sea). The municipalities will have the right to plan land and sea use of area, but there is no experience in that yet. It was also discussed about the hierarchy of the planning – local versus national interests; private versus public. Ms. Kedo stressed that the zone is and will be state property thus the public and state interests will have priority. As there is strong involvement in MSP, all interests are communicated with stakeholders in transparent way and the consensus looked for, if any need.

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.

Discussion focused on offshore wind park areas in terms of the issued licences, their status and development potential. It was pointed out that the energy network shall be coordinated between countries in terms of the infrastructure capacities and possible connections. Since MSP for Latvian waters shall be developed for period up 2030, participants suggested not to focus too much on present grid capacity, but to be more ambitious regarding offshore wind energy development potentials and to consider grid connection possibilities to Sweden.

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 existing environmental knowledge and data gaps to prepare scientifically sound MSP. For example, the availability of the information on fish spawning, nursery areas as well as migration in the Gulf of Riga. Ms. Strake commented that information on benthic habitats which is important for fish resources has been included in the characterisation of the environment and will be considered in the next steps of the planning process. However, the Latvian experts also acknowledge that data on habitats is still fragmented, thus MSP will point out the data gaps and research needs for future.

It was also pointed out that during the stocktaking on the existing situation, the information from different projects, including transboundary or Baltic scale have been taken into account. It also concerns assessment of the fish resources, however, the information on fish corridors has not been yet specifically addressed in the frame of the known fish projects.

The importance of the precautionary principle was discussed. This might be in particularly essential with regard to mitigating conflicts with potential environmental impacts. At this stage of the MSP development, the precautionary principle has not been yet used as an argument, however, it might be applied in next steps of the MSP.

The experience of the identification and assessment of the ecosystem services was reviewed in the context of MSP. Latvian experts pointed out that the developed map on the diversity of the ecosystem services provided by benthic habitats will be used as one of the information levels to define optimum sea use solutions. It will be used for detailed assessment of the developed scenarios by identifying the development directions with impacts on the habitats in the most diverse areas.

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 radically different scenarios, built on different policy priorities as confronting choices for the development. Scenarios are rather provocative 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.

A question on national security was addressed. It was pointed out that the requirements of the national security are treated as given conditions to be complied with in any case. However, the

security issues might hinder the intentions of the development, for example military training activities in the areas potentially considered as the navigation routes for ferry traffic. Another aspect is off-shore wind parks and their impact on the observation/surveillance system in territorial waters.

It was also recommended to review the off-shore wind energy from social perspective. People need electricity and the off-shore energy production can increase the independency of the country in environmental friendly way.

The issue of the oil extraction was debated as it is foreseen as potential activities in scenarios. Ms. Ruskule informed about the existing licences on investigation and exploration of oils resource in the Baltic Sea. There has been an attempt to investigate on the quality of the resource few years ago, however, it resulted with conclusion that the oil extraction is not yet economically viable to due high water content in sample. Thus, there is a rather high certainty that oil will not be explored by 2030, whereas investigations might be continued.

Participants asked to check the data on shipping routes around Ruhnu island. It was mentioned that the actual shipping intensity and route information is still compiled by HELCOM, thus the shipping information will be updated in coming month.

The issue of the aquaculture development was also briefly debated. The participants drew attention that large scale fish farming causes environmental impact. Latvian experts explain that there is no intention to develop fish farming in the Gulf of Riga due to possible negative impacts on the very sensitive ecosystem of this sub-basin. The development could be rather focused on mussels and algae farming which in turn is taking up nutrients thus mitigating eutrophication.

In overall, it was concluded that Latvian MSP is not anticipating to introduce new activities in the Gulf of Riga. The key issue would be to communicate between Estonia and Latvia about the shipping routes. The issue on electricity grid connections should be also once more clarified between relevant authorities of the countries.

At the end of the meeting, the participants were briefly informed that Estonian-Latvian cooperation at expert level will be also continued within the new project "Baltic SCOPE" focusing on the coordination of the MSP issues between countries in the Baltic Sea region (<http://www.balticscope.eu>).

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

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