



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels  
MARE/A2/CF

**Subject: Reply to the opinion on a lack of engagement of MEDAC members in Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) processes**

Dear Antonio Marzoa Notlevsen,

I would like to thank you for sharing the results of your survey and consultations regarding MEDAC members' involvement in national Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) processes and EU-funded MSP projects.

As requested by the MSP Directive (MSPD) <sup>(1)</sup>, through their maritime spatial plans, Member States shall aim to contribute to the sustainable development of their energy sectors at sea, of maritime transport, of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and to the preservation, protection, and restoration of the environment.

The MSPD and environmental marine Directives call for early involvement of stakeholders and local communities, notably through strategic and environmental impact assessments. The engagement of stakeholders is central to the whole MSP process. Article 9 of the MSPD requires that Member States establish means of public participation by informing all interested parties and by consulting the relevant stakeholders and authorities, and the public concerned, in MSP initiatives at an early stage in the development of maritime spatial plans.

It is important to note that several Member States are already revising their national Maritime Spatial Plans (MSP), while others are still working on the adoption of their plans or on the implementation of their first ever plan. Therefore, the level of involvement may also vary between different countries. Nevertheless, in its first report on the implementation of the MSPD <sup>(2)</sup>, the European Commission (hereunder, “the

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<sup>(1)</sup> Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning.

<sup>(2)</sup> REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL outlining the progress made in implementing Directive 2014/89/EU establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning. COM/2022/185 final.

Mr Antonio Marzoa Notlevsen – MEDAC Chair  
Via XX Settembre, 20  
00187 Roma (Italy)  
info@med-ac.eu

Commission”) concluded that the implementation of Article 9 was fulfilled and well documented in all the Member States having adopted a plan. The process for public participation is clearly described, stakeholders were included in the entire process, using various methodologies, and their feedback was to a varied extent integrated in the maritime spatial plans.

In addition to this obligation for Member States under the MSPD, the Commission has put in place several tools for stakeholders’ participation in planning at EU and regional level:

- A dedicated [Member States expert group on MSP](#) that meets at least twice a year (E01682/2) and welcomes observers from different stakeholders’ groups <sup>(3)</sup>,
- An [Assistance Mechanism](#) (team of experts on MSP) and a [European MSP Platform](#): funded by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), it acts as the central exchange forum for the rich knowledge generated in past, current and upcoming MSP processes and projects. The European MSP Platform allows officials, planners and other stakeholders interested in MSP to build on what is already available, avoid duplication of efforts, assist in capacity building and foster the development of new practices.
- EU-funded projects to enhance MSPD implementation and cross-border cooperation in MSP: all EU projects on MSP have been selected through public calls, open to all stakeholders to apply and advertised on Commission’s websites, e.g. on CINEA funding opportunities’ page <sup>(4)</sup>. For example, the last EMFAF call was closed for selection on 27 February 2024 <sup>(5)</sup>.
- The [European Blue Forum](#): a pan-European stakeholder group and a moderated space for all users of the sea, able to come together to discuss shared challenges and priorities with the aim of finding consensus, synergies and solutions towards a common vision. I had the pleasure to launch it officially in May 2023 and I would encourage you to register to the forum, in order to be kept informed and have the possibility to be involved in future events.
- A [multi-use compendium](#): launched in March 2024, it compiles good practices and information on projects involving two or more sectors working together at sea. Fisheries is one of the sectors for which we want to expand multi-use in the EU and beyond, notably through the identification of fishing zones and the inclusion of multi-use areas in national Maritime Spatial Plans.

To conclude, the Commission considers that the necessary regulatory and technical tools are in place to include all stakeholders in the Maritime Spatial Planning process and to steer multi-use of activities at sea. Significant means, notably from Horizon Europe and EMFAF, have been invested by the EU to steer participation and regional cooperation on MSP. The next report on the implementation of the MSPD is planned for the year 2026 and the Commission will pay particular attention to stakeholders’ involvement in MSP

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<sup>(3)</sup> The European Association of Fish Producers Organisations (EAPO) and Européche are both observers of this expert group since 2020. New observers can submit their applications via [MARE-MSP-MSEG@ec.europa.eu](mailto:MARE-MSP-MSEG@ec.europa.eu)

<sup>(4)</sup> [https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/european-maritime-fisheries-and-aquaculture-fund/emfaf-calls-tenders\\_en](https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/european-maritime-fisheries-and-aquaculture-fund/emfaf-calls-tenders_en)

<sup>(5)</sup> [https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/funding-opportunities/calls-proposals/emfaf-call-proposals-implement-maritime-spatial-planning-0\\_en](https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/funding-opportunities/calls-proposals/emfaf-call-proposals-implement-maritime-spatial-planning-0_en)

national and regional processes. We have just launched a new study on stakeholder consultation and involvement in Maritime Spatial Planning with the above-mentioned assistance mechanism on MSP and we would be glad to have your views through the [online survey](#) that is available until 3 September 2024. We also invite you to monitor calls for project proposals on MSP and on multi-use, and to get involved in these.

Finally, I am delighted to inform you that the Commission will organise a public event in Marseille, France, on 22 October 2024 to celebrate and reflect on the 10 years of the MSP Directive <sup>(6)</sup>, the evaluation of which is planned as part of the “European Ocean Pact” announced by the Commission re-elected president, Ursula von der Leyen, in her Political Guidelines <sup>(7)</sup>. You are welcome to register and participate in this event.

Please note that this reply has been prepared in consultation with Veronica Manfredi, Director for Zero Pollution, whom you address in your letter, and her team in DG ENV. Together with my colleagues in DG ENV, I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox [MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu](mailto:MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu).

Yours faithfully,

Charlina VITCHEVA

c.c.: TANKINK Valérie (MARE.D.3), BERCK Emmanuel (MARE.D.1), MANFREDI Veronica (ENV.C), BARTOLINI Silvia (ENV.C2)

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<sup>(6)</sup> <https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/events/european-msp-week>

<sup>(7)</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648\\_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029\\_EN.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf)