

Workshop 3.-4.november 2005

The European Marine Strategy - Nordic and Baltic Perspectives

ORGANISERS' OBSERVATIONS

The workshop presented speakers from the EU Commission, ICES, OSPAR, national administrations, universities, research institutions, and private consultants and attracted about 100 participants.

An introductory presentation dealing with the background and the proposal for a Framework Directive for the implementation of the European Marine Strategy (EMS) was followed by three sessions dealing with national, regional and local level respectively. The final session was devoted to future monitoring.

Welcome to the EMS

The EMS proposal was generally appreciated. It was acknowledged that the EMS could constitute a useful framework with wide implications for future work on the protection and conservation of the marine environment in Europe and for a strengthened regional co-operation in Europe using existing institutional arrangements. The strategy should also be used to strengthen co-operation on marine research and monitoring and to push for the implementation of an ecosystem approach.

Governance

Many mechanisms for dealing with the marine environmental problems have been developed at international and EU level, mainly in a sector-wise way. There is therefore, a need for an integrated approach in order to solve the problems in a sustainable way. The proposed EMS directive provides such an approach, and since it is a legally binding instrument, the EU Commission will be able to enforce implementation.

The EMS will help to put focus on fisheries as components of the marine ecosystem, but it was noted that the regulation of EU fisheries must be conducted under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Hence, there is a need for better integration of fisheries and environmental objectives towards long-term sustainable use of resources. During the discussion it was questioned whether the Regional Advisory Committees (RACs) could also deal with environmental and nature conservation issues. This would be time consuming and would possibly cause problems at national level. The link between the EMS Directive and the Water Framework Directive (WFD) is not clear. It can be foreseen that several measures will be needed to improve the status of marine areas in relation to land-based activities (such as oxygen depletion) and these should be provided under the WFD.

Main problems

The main threats to the marine environment were identified as caused by fisheries (habitat destruction, impacts on species, reduction of stocks), agriculture (nutrients) and industry (hazardous substances). Many regulating measures have been launched but implementation and enforcement are often weak. The EMS aims to put focus on the main issues and to force Member States (MS) to identify and implement measures.

Good Environmental Status (GES)

The proposal establishes a framework for the development of marine strategies to achieve "good environmental status" (GES). GES is not defined in the text but generic descriptors will be developed by a Committee procedure. Definitions of GES are supposed to emerge at regional level and must be approved by the Commission. An intercalibration phase (like that under the WFD) is not included in the proposal, but would have been useful to ensure a common understanding of GES and the elaboration of common goals.

Ensuring consistency

Several of the activities and concepts under the EMS proposal are already in place and should be used.

Characterisation, assessment and analysis of pressures and impacts (§7) are done under the Regional Marine Conventions OSPAR and HELCOM and establishment of environmental targets should correspond with or supplement the targets being established under the WFD and the Habitats Directive. Generally, different wording for similar issues are used under the EMS, the WFD and the Habitats Directive. Characterisation and assessment of GES (Annex II) should correspond to the WFD and be based on typology and should use the Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQOs) being developed by the regional conventions.

When approving the Marine Strategies the Commission should ensure consistency between the objectives established by the EMS Directive, the WFD and the Habitats Directive for bordering or overlapping areas.

Science and research

The demand for good science is great and knowledge must be improved. Fisheries science is well developed and the advice given to politicians is scientifically sound. Fisheries management has, however, failed because the political decisions do not follow the scientific advice, mainly for socio-economic reasons. It seems that the Fisheries Commissions are old fashioned and operate in a sector-wise way. Fisheries management problems should be solved by taking

environmental issues into account and possibly by improved communication between scientists, managers and fishermen who in principle should have common interests and goals.

Marine research is dispersed and more international coordination is needed. Research should be multi-disciplinary and science, monitoring and policy/decision making should be linked. More research is needed on impacts of fisheries and fishing gear on biodiversity and habitats, habitat loss and environment - fish stock productivity interactions (contaminants and climate change). There is also a knowledge gap on benthic habitats and resilience effects.

The overall question is: Do we have the knowledge to develop measures with reference to targets? Scientific work supporting the EMS should be included in the EU 7th Framework Programme.

Monitoring

The monitoring programmes are not scientifically up-to-date and must be improved. A variety of programmes exist all over Europe and the diversity is large. Programmes overlap and duplicating and the sampling frequencies are not optimal. Some programmes are not able to identify trends within 10 - 25 years.

Monitoring programmes should be hierarchical and include modelling. The challenge is to develop operational indicators and to integrate information from monitoring and results from modelling. Marine management needs operational models and data.

The new generation of marine monitoring strategies will be closely linked to the EU directives and it is important to integrate the monitoring programmes under the EMS and the WFD. Worry was expressed as regards (lack of) funding of the development and implementation of future monitoring programmes.

Cooperation

According to the EMS proposal, the EU Member States must develop and implement Marine Strategies, but the collective responsibility for the Marine Regions is not acknowledged. It is important to avoid re-doing work that has already been done and in that respect ensure sufficient cooperation between different regional organisations, in particular regarding transboundary pollution. A special issue is cooperation with third countries where enforcement could be a problem.

Management of marine resources

Resources are not utilised in an optimal way. Countries where marine resources contribute substantially to the national economy cannot afford to fail in marine management. The resources of the sea are overexploited and must be managed in a sustainable way based on the ecosystem approach and the precautionary principle.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

MPAs are considered as a useful tool in both fisheries management and ecosystem conservation. MPAs may help to alleviate marine environmental problems such as habitat loss, biodiversity reduction and removal of large individuals in fish stocks. Mapping of sensitive, vulnerable and important areas and development of a strategy for their protection is needed.

More research is needed regarding optimal design, location, timing, size and number of MPAs for the conservation or protection of habitats. There is also a need to develop better tools for monitoring and evaluation of MPAs.

Economy and Cost-benefit considerations

The value of ecosystems is often first realised when they cease to function. The marine ecosystem is a capital good and provides valuable goods and services. Human impacts affect functions of and interactions in ecosystems and threaten the production of services. As for fisheries, the rate of economic return from investment in the fish stocks should be made higher in order to make incentives for the fishermen to protect and conserve the marine resources.

A decision support system (NEST) being developed under the MARE project combines cost calculations with nutrient and fish models and can be used for scenario evaluation.

Cost-benefit calculations in relation to nutrient reductions in the Baltic Sea showed benefit differences between Baltic countries; Poland, for example, would have a negative balance.

This will certainly affect political decision-making.

Timetable

The proposed timetable is long and does not correspond with those of the Habitats Directive and the WFD. It is important to ensure that existing initiatives and implementations are not undermined or delayed due to the EMS.

Information

Condensed information needs to be provided to the public.

Making the public participate and understand that unsustainable use of resources is not acceptable will support the political will to make the right decisions. Understanding is the key to good management and the EMS will support development towards better-informed policy-making.

Recommendations

The process of developing the EMS strategy and proposal has taken several years. It is now important to ensure that it is included in the agenda of the Council with a view to adopting it.

Because the proposal as it stands does not define GES, it is impossible to estimate the cost. It is felt that this will hamper national political support for the proposal. Hope was expressed that more specific sets of characteristics and criteria from previous drafts would be reinstated during the Council negotiations.

It is important that the wording for similar issues under the EMS, the WFD and the Habitat Directive is harmonised.

Characterisation and assessment of GES must correspond to the use of "typology" and "good ecological status" *sensu* the WFD and mapping and classification of "marine landscapes" and "nature types" in order to assess favourable conservation status *sensu* the Habitats Directive.

The development of new and improved monitoring methods is needed and more efforts should be put into research on the mutual impacts of fisheries and environmental conditions.

Emphasis and support should be given to international coordination and cooperation on research and monitoring programmes.

There is a need for increasing public awareness and understanding of the marine environment and the intentions of the proposal.

Claus Hagebro
Rapporteur