

National maritime plans are misaligned within and across borders, fail to account for climate change, and are off track to achieve [renewable energy](#) and marine protection targets.

A new WWF assessment of maritime spatial planning (MSP)* in the EU Mediterranean reveals the region is significantly lagging behind in applying an ecosystem-based approach to the long-term management of the basin.

Four Member States, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece and Italy, were not able to be assessed as they still have not implemented plans for their marine areas and are under infringement procedures by the European Commission for their failure to prepare these plans by the legal deadline of March 2021.

Of the Member States WWF was able to assess, the best-performing country in the assessment, **Slovenia**, still only ranked a partially-successful achievement (56%) for applying an ecosystem-based approach to managing its waters. If the unfinished plans (four out of eight) had been included in the analysis and given a 0% score for not being implemented, the regional average score for an ecosystem-based approach to MSP would plummet from 45% to 22%.

"At a time where our nature and climate are in crisis, maritime spatial planning in the Mediterranean is a catastrophe that puts job security, ecosystem services to mitigate climate change impacts and the future of one of our planet's most iconic seas at risk," said **Dr. Antonia Leroy**, Head of Ocean Policy at WWF European Policy Office. "To ensure the health of Mediterranean ecosystems, secure the vitality of maritime industries and deliver a sustainable blue economy, it is crucial that national plans be immediately developed where not already done. Existing plans must be improved, with particular focus on further investment in effective nature protection and restoration."

The report also shows that no Mediterranean Member State is on track to achieve the European Green Deal objective to increase the total share of renewable energy to 40% by 2030, which will require further work to plan sites for offshore renewable energy development in alignment with EU environmental standards and legislation, and in balance with onshore energy deployment. In fact, Italy and Cyprus continue to designate space for fossil fuel extraction while simultaneously delaying the allocation of "acceleration areas" for offshore wind energy development.

Further, no national plan has successfully addressed the spatial and temporal uncertainties of climate change, despite the region's vulnerability to sea level rise and temperature increases**. The continued absence of an ecosystem-based approach to MSP will make it

increasingly difficult for the EU and its neighbours to overcome the impacts of climate change, which are not only diminishing the productivity of fisheries in the region but also permanently altering coastlines due to erosion and sea level rise.

Positively, France and Spain, two countries with territorial waters in more than one regional sea, both scored higher in the Mediterranean than in the other European sea basins, highlighting the social, economic and cultural importance of this region to the EU's largest blue economies. Further, both countries have specific strategies in place to help deliver the EU Biodiversity Strategy goal of protecting at least 30% of marine and coastal areas, in addition to mitigation measures that restore blue carbon ecosystems such as seagrass meadows. However, apart from Slovenia and Malta, all Member States in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean remain without a national plan despite these nations' heavy reliance on marine-related tourism.

One category of the assessment where the region scored particularly poorly (12.5% average) was cross-border cooperation for sound planning, monitoring and enforcement. Without this, any national effort to deliver the good environmental status of the Mediterranean Sea will ultimately be unsuccessful. Good cooperation is especially important to ensure that safeguards for marine mammal migration corridors, currently enshrined in RepowerEU, are effectively upheld at both national and regional levels.

Further, the overall lack of public participation in the planning process is a huge misstep for the region, as it relies heavily on small-scale enterprises in sectors such as tourism and fisheries. The result is that no Member State has been successful in considering all industries and stakeholders in their national plans, sidelining important communities such as small-scale fishers, which represent 82% of the EU Mediterranean fleet.

Mauro Randone, Sustainable Blue Economy Manager at WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative said, "Being among the largest national contributors to the EU Blue Economy, Mediterranean Member States have the power to accelerate the transition towards a sustainable and inclusive ocean economy where harmful activities such as fossil fuel extraction are no longer an option. But this can only happen when the protection of natural assets is at the core of marine planning processes and all stakeholders have their say in developing robust strategies at national, cross-border and regional scales to ultimately strengthen the Mediterranean's environmental, social, and economic resilience."

WWF is advocating for the establishment of a dedicated regional working group to focus on the integration and implementation of an ecosystem-based approach to MSP. This would help ensure that neighbouring EU and non-EU countries are jointly aligned in their commitments to address the climate and [biodiversity](#) crises, and safeguard maritime



Patchwork planning by EU Member States puts Mediterranean Sea's ecologic and economic future at risk

livelihoods for generations to come.

Source: WWF