

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Commission review gives Member States a ‘must do better’ report for Marine Strategies

Brussels, 20 February 2014. Poor implementation, poor coordination, poor integration. This, in a nutshell, is the Commission’s view of progress in implementing the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) so far. NGOs are dismayed by the low level of ambition most countries take on achieving Good Environmental Status (GES) of their marine waters in 2020, the overarching goal of the Directive.

The MSFD is the first all-encompassing piece of European legislation specifically aimed at the protection of the marine environment with clear deadlines for its implementation. In 2012, Member States reported on the current condition of their marine waters, defined GES and established targets and indicators to reach and measure GES. Today, the Commission published its review of these reports, and its conclusions are clear: there is a poor level of implementation, a lack in common understanding of what GES is really about, and targets that are often weak and non-measurable. The report also points to shortcomings in coordination between countries across regional seas and in the integration with other environmental legislation.

The Commission will give recommendations to the Member States on how to address the challenges identified, but does not intend to enforce these. Instead, the Commission will organise a series of regional meetings in order to agree on follow-up actions. Some Member States have already indicated they will only consider taking on board the recommendations at the start of the next MSFD implementation cycle in 2018.

Monica Verbeek, Executive Director of Seas At Risk said: *“The business-as-usual approach most countries take is seriously undermining the value added of the MSFD. Waiting till 2018 to step up ambition is absolutely not an option. Weak targets will simply lead to equally weak and ineffective measures, and will not bring us the healthy oceans all Member States said they wanted to have by 2020.”*

Countries often point to the lacks of financial resources and gaps in data and knowledge to justify their low-key approach. Stronger coordination and cooperation would make implementation more cost-effective, as costs and resources could be shared. The MSFD therefore gives an important role to the Regional Seas Conventions (RSCs) to coordinate national implementation. However, efforts by RSCs are sometimes lagging behind, as the Commission review shows, and their work was not always used in national reports.

Nils Höglund of Coalition Clean Baltic says: *“This is not a one man race, and even though we see individual countries having good ambitions, it will fall flat if other countries sharing the same sea do nothing or very little.”*

As to integration with other environmental policies, the review shows that a number of countries did not include targets of other related environmental legislation, such as the Habitats and Birds Directives and the Water Framework Directive.

“Halting biodiversity loss is a pre-requisite to move towards good environmental status. In a number of national reports, reference to the marine species and habitats in need of protection according to the Habitats and Birds Directives was sadly omitted. This sets a bad precedent for the further development of a coherent network of marine protected areas, as required by the MSFD.” Stephan Lutter, WWF International Marine Policy Officer pointed out.

Bruna Campos, EU Marine and Fisheries Policy Officer at BirdLife Europe, summed up the situation as: *“If this was a school report, most Member States would be in detention. There can be no further excuses; action is needed now to deliver the healthy marine environment we all need.”*

END

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

1. The European Commission’s report together with in-depth analysis of Member State's reports: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/implementation/reports_en.htm
2. Seas At Risk is a European association of non-governmental environmental organisations working to protect and restore to health the marine environment of the European seas and the wider North East Atlantic.
3. Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) is a network of environmental NGOs in the Baltic Sea catchment area committed to protecting and restoring the Baltic Sea coastal and marine environments.
4. The Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE), is a non-profit Federation of Mediterranean Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for Environment and Sustainable Development. Black Sea NGO Network
5. The Black Sea NGO Network (BSNN) is a regional independent, non-political, non-profit public benefit association of environmental NGOs from the 6 Black Sea coastal countries working on Black Sea and sustainability issues.
6. BirdLife Europe is the European division of BirdLife International, a global alliance of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.
7. World Wide Fund is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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