

Conference report

International Workshop on Marine Spatial Planning, UNESCO, Paris, 8–10 November 2006: A summary

Increased development pressures on the marine environment, resulting from the expansion of offshore activities, including oil and gas, wind and wave energy, fishing and aquaculture, dredging and minerals extraction, and shipping activities, have led to two important types of conflict. First, these conflicts have resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss and damage to the diversity of life in marine and coastal areas (use–environment conflicts, e.g., habitat loss). Second, because resources are limited both in space and amount, multiple-use conflicts are emerging among the various uses themselves (use–use conflicts, e.g., between shipping and wind farms).

Historically, management approaches have focused on single sectors with little consideration of the potential conflicts across sectors. During the past decade, the traditional sectoral approach to natural resource and environmental management has been recognized to be insufficient to address the cumulative effects of human activities on the marine environment and has shifted to a more holistic “ecosystem approach” that calls for comprehensive analysis of all dimensions of environmental problems.

Despite its general acceptance, however, so far the ecosystem approach has been more a concept, widely discussed at scientific fora, but with few examples of actual practice. It is increasingly clear that governments lack concrete tools to make an ecosystem approach operational in the marine environment. The key challenge today is to bring the ecosystem approach beyond the conceptual level, and one practical way to do this is through the use of marine spatial planning.

While initially the concept of marine spatial planning (and its primary outcome, ocean zoning) was stimulated by international and national interests in developing marine protected areas, e.g., the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in Australia, more recent attention has been placed on planning and managing the multiple use of marine space, particularly in areas where use conflicts are already clear, e.g., the North Sea. The UK is drafting national marine legislation that will authorize marine spatial planning in its seas. The Federal Spatial Planning Act of Germany has recently been amended to extend national sectoral competencies to its EEZ and territorial sea while Belgium is one of the first countries to actually implement its marine spatial plan. In its recently launched Maritime Policy, the

European Commission considers marine spatial planning as a core aspect to manage a growing and increasingly competing maritime economy, while at the same time safeguarding biodiversity. The People’s Republic of China already has national legislation that requires zoning of uses in its territorial sea. In California, experiments with marine spatial planning have begun in the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and the State of California’s proposal for a system of marine protected areas, while several major NGOs have begun regional initiatives involving marine spatial planning practices.

From 8–10 November 2006, UNESCO held the first International workshop on the use of marine spatial planning as a tool to implement ecosystem-based, sea use management. The workshop was a cooperative initiative between UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and the Man and the Biosphere Programme of the Ecological and Earth Sciences Division. About 50 participants from over 20 countries were invited, based on their practical experience in sea use management, marine spatial planning, and ocean zoning. The purpose of the workshop was to review and document the state-of-the-art and good practices of marine spatial planning through a series of thematic presentations and discussions on the various elements of the management process, e.g., authorization, research, planning, analysis, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, institutional arrangements, and capacity building.

After introductory comments by the co-chairs that framed the objectives of the workshop, its organization, and basic definitions, Frank Maes, University of Ghent (Belgium), described the international, European and Belgian legal context of marine spatial planning—noting that legislation was a desirable, but not necessarily, critical prerequisite. Elliott Norse of the Marine Conservation Biology Institute (USA) and Larry Crowder of Duke University pointed out incompatibilities between some human uses (e.g., bottom trawling) and the maintenance of biodiversity and effectively argued the case for using marine spatial planning to protect and recover biodiversity and ecosystem functions. At the same time, they pointed out the need to keep the ecosystem in “ecosystem-based management” and marine spatial planning. Paul Gilliland and Dan Lafolley of Natural England presented a clear ecosystem-based process for marine spatial planning, emphasizing the importance of specific objectives, meaningful indicators, effective stakeholder involvement, and mitigating conflicts through planning. Kevin St. Martin of

Rutgers University made a strong case for adding the “human dimension” and the “missing layer” to marine spatial planning, particularly by relating offshore activities to onshore communities, livelihoods, and cultures through community participation, incorporation of local knowledge, and geographic information systems. Yves Auffret of the European Commission’s Maritime Policy Task Force described the alternative institutional arrangements for marine spatial planning considered through the draft Maritime Policy of the EU. The realities of implementing marine spatial plans, especially the different evaluation criteria, were highlighted by an elected public official, Cathy Plasman of the Belgian Ministry of Mobility and North Sea Affairs. Jon Day of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef Marine Park emphasized the need for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and adaptive management, based a major re-zoning of the GBRMP after 30 years. Finally, Antonio Diaz de Leon, Director-General of Mexico’s Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, focused on capacity building needed for effective sea use planning in the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of California.

Some of the main findings of the workshop are that: (1) marine spatial planning is the component of ecosystem-based management that can influence the location of human activities. Other components will be needed to influence the performance of human activities; (2) zoning is only one tool of marine spatial planning and sea use management—actual applications will include a mix of control measures both regulatory and non-regulatory incentives; (3) early and continuing engagement of stakeholders in a clear management process is critical to success and engenders trust and ownership of the process; (4) monitoring and evaluation are critical elements of the MSP process; (5) integrating the human dimension into marine spatial planning requires the same diversity of

disciplines/perspectives as does the ecosystem approach relative to the biophysical environment; and (6) marine spatial planning, its implementation tools and benefits need to be defined more clearly from a problem–solution perspective.

The initiative has produced a Website (<http://ioc3.unesco.org/marinesp>) that contains background documents, presentations, and links to other marine spatial planning sites, and preliminary conclusions of the workshop. The results of the workshop will be documented in a UNESCO technical report and a special issue of the international journal, *Marine Policy*. Longer-term activities include preparation of guidelines on marine spatial management and training for building capacity. These results will be part of UNESCO’s contributions to the implementation of the work plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity. In the longer run, these activities could provide an opportunity to develop broader international and regional partnerships that could lead to better integration of spatial management of human activities in terrestrial areas, watersheds, the coast—and oceans.

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Workshop Co-Chairs

Fanny Douvere

Charles N. Ehler

*UNESCO MAB/IOC Consultants, 1, Rue Miollis Office
3.21 (B/7), 75732 Paris, France*

E-mail address: f.douvere@unesco.org (F. Douvere)