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## **Implementation Challenges for Marine Strategy Framework Directive in the Republic of Croatia**

### **Abstract**

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive adopted in 2008 aims to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) of the EU's marine waters by 2020 and to protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. To that end each Member State is required to develop its Marine Strategy, keep it up-to-date and have it reviewed every 6 years. The Republic of Croatia has by mid-2019 not adopted its national strategic document. The paper analyses the chronology, content of EU official country reports on marine environment, possible obstacles in adoption procedure and presents proposal for more efficient approach to protecting the Adriatic Sea. Marine spatial planning is also considered key instrument for managing the conflicts resulting from the increasing utilization and industrialization of the world's seas and oceans. The process of national marine policy adoption should be made more clear and transparent to general public which is at the same time the public concerned, and to expert community. Strategic vision can only be built on knowledge, education and awareness of wider public.

**Keywords:** marine strategy, environmental governance, Adriatic Sea, marine spatial planning, transparency

### **1. Introduction**

The adoption of national marine strategy has since long been both the obligation for complying with international documents and a domestic interest. The Environmental Protection Act [1] defines it as being one of the fundamental sustainable development and environmental protection documents. Its development has followed two different tracks, one being pursuant to Barcelona Convention, and another for fulfilling the obligations of the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive [2] (hereinafter:

MSFD). Neither one has as yet resulted in a completed and valid multisectoral strategy policy document essential for the pronouncedly coastal country such as Croatia.

The paper reviews institutional framework for environmental governance of the seas, presents the rules for implementing the European MSFD, and analyses actual implementation of MSFD with particular reference to the Republic of Croatia. Some examples of communicating temporal achievements to the public are presented, apart from formal public consultation procedures, and also the deferrals and delays in the process of its adoption are analysed. The paper concludes with proposals for making the process clearer, more transparent and efficient.

## **2. Environmental governance of the seas – institutional framework and integrating sectoral ocean policies**

The adoption of UN Convention on the Law of the SEA (UNCLOS) in 1982 marked a significant phase in the development of a foundational framework for managing and governing the oceans and placed an emphasis on the protection of the marine environment. UN General Assembly (UNGA) and its organs and specialized institutions contribute to marine environmental protection. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has made significant progress in regulating navigational safety and marine pollution through its subsidiary committees such as the Maritime Safety Committee and the Marine Environment Protection Committee. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and its Committee on Fisheries has made significant contribution to fishery science and the conservation of marine living resources [3]. The UN Sustainable Development Goals of 2015, in particular Goal 13, emphasize the need to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development [4]. The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) and its Regional Seas Programme (RSP) perform a vital role in the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environment. UNEP also operates to tackle marine pollution from land-based sources. Furthermore, the Convention on Biological Diversity 1992 (CBD) has a long-standing relationship with UNCLOS [3].

The European coastline is approximately 66,000 km long, bordering the Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, North Sea and Baltic Sea. Most EU Member States are coastal states. Integrating ocean policies in Europe is based on two different pillars: an ongoing process for an integrated maritime policy and a framework directive for the protection of European seas. The political process towards an integrated European maritime policy started in 2006 and was initiated by six Directorates-General. For this process, a green and a blue paper were published with a focus on use of the seas, the quality of life in coastal regions, tools for managing relations with the oceans, governance, and Europe's maritime heritage and maritime identity. Also, EU Member States are encouraged to develop their own national integrated maritime policy. Very significant for an integrated approach in the management of European seas is the Marine

Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC (MSFD) adopted on 17 June 2008. With this directive, for the first time a comprehensive approach (in the sense that it covers the entire spectrum of marine pollution) on the protection of the marine environment in Europe was established. The Directive enshrines in a legislative framework the ecosystem approach to the management of human activities having an impact on the marine environment, integrating the concepts of environmental protection and sustainable use [5].

The establishment of marine protected areas, including areas already designated or to be designated under Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora [6] (hereinafter referred to as the 'Habitats Directive'), Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds [7] (hereinafter referred to as the 'Birds Directive'), and under international or regional agreements to which the European Community or Member States concerned are Parties, is an important contribution to the achievement of good environmental status under MSFD Directive. Until now 6% of European seas are designated as MPAs [8]. Under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 [9] the EU has committed to ensure the conservation of 10% of its coastal and marine areas by 2020 [10], that also being reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 14 [4].

Marine spatial planning (MSP) is considered key instrument for managing the conflicts resulting from the increasing utilization and industrialization of the world's seas and oceans [11] since its essential elements are the ecosystem-approach, the strategic environmental assessment, and participation and consultation. Thus, under the MSP Directive 2014/89/EU [12] the ecosystem-approach is meant to restrain the economic and social development of marine space by setting boundaries marked by the MSFD [13].

Namely, to ensure that the expansion of the blue economy happens, that it is sustainable and that Europe's seas will achieve good environmental status it is necessary to establish the state of the sea now, how it was in the past and how it might change in the future and ensure marine data availability, interconnection and interoperability [14].

### **3. Rules for implementing European MSFD**

Along with MSFD, European Commission also produced and with time revised a series of detailed criteria and methodological standards to help Member States implement the MSFD [15]. Its Annex III was amended in 2017 to better link ecosystem components, anthropogenic pressures and impacts on the marine environment with the

MSFD's 11 descriptors<sup>1</sup> and with the 2017 Decision on Good Environmental Status<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter: GES). Seas in GES are clean, healthy and productive.

The MSFD aims to achieve GES of the EU's marine waters by 2020 and to protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. In order to achieve its goal, the Directive establishes European marine regions and sub-regions on the basis of geographical and environmental criteria. The Directive lists four European marine regions – the Baltic Sea, the North-east Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea – located within the geographical boundaries of the existing Regional Sea Conventions<sup>3</sup>.

In order to achieve GES by 2020, each Member State is required to develop a strategy for its marine waters (or Marine Strategy). Furthermore, since the Directive follows an adaptive management approach, the Marine Strategies must be kept up-to-date and reviewed every 6 years [15].

A Marine Strategy includes: (a) the initial assessment of the current environmental status of national marine waters and the environmental impact and socio-economic analysis of human activities in these waters (Article 8); (b) the determination of what GES means for national marine waters (Article 9); (c) the establishment of environmental targets and associated indicators to achieve GES by 2020 (Article 10); (d) the establishment of a monitoring programme for the ongoing assessment and the regular update of targets (Article 11); and (e) the development of a programme of measures designed to achieve or maintain GES by 2020 (Article 13). Member States should integrate the measures taking into account relevant measures required under

- 1 **Descriptor 1.** Biodiversity is maintained, **Descriptor 2.** Non-indigenous species do not adversely alter the ecosystem, **Descriptor 3.** The population of commercial fish species is healthy, **Descriptor 4.** Elements of food webs ensure long-term abundance and reproduction, **Descriptor 5.** Eutrophication is minimised, **Descriptor 6.** The sea floor integrity ensures functioning of the ecosystem, **Descriptor 7.** Permanent alteration of hydrographical conditions does not adversely affect the ecosystem, **Descriptor 8.** Concentrations of contaminants give no effects, **Descriptor 9.** Contaminants in seafood are below safe levels, **Descriptor 10.** Marine litter does not cause harm, **Descriptor 11.** Introduction of energy (including underwater noise) does not adversely affect the ecosystem.
- 2 The environmental status of marine waters where these provide ecologically diverse and dynamic oceans and seas which are clean, health and productive within their intrinsic conditions, and the use of the marine environment is at a level that is sustainable, thus safeguarding the potential for uses and activities by current and future generations [15].
- 3 The four European Regional Sea Conventions are: The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment in the North-East Atlantic of 1992 (further to earlier versions of 1972 and 1974) – the OSPAR Convention (OSPAR); The Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment in the Baltic Sea Area of 1992 (further to the earlier version of 1974) – the Helsinki Convention (HELCOM); The Convention for the Protection of Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean of 1995 (further to the earlier version of 1976) – the Barcelona Convention (UNEP-MAP); The Convention for the Protection of the Black Sea of 1992 – the Bucharest Convention. The European Community is a party to the first three Conventions. For the Black Sea region, one priority of the European Commission is that the Bucharest Convention is amended to allow the European Community to accede.

Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) and Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC) and forthcoming legislation on environmental quality standards in the field of water policy, or international agreements. When drawing up the programme of measures, Member States shall give due consideration to sustainable development and, in particular, to the social and economic impacts of the measures envisaged. Programme of measures shall include spatial protection measures, contributing to coherent and representative networks of marine protected areas, adequately covering the diversity of the constituent ecosystems, such as special areas of conservation pursuant to the Habitats Directive, special protection areas pursuant to the Birds Directive, and marine protected areas as agreed by the Community or Member States concerned in the framework of international or regional agreements to which they are parties. The process is envisaged as stepwise following a set timetable and cyclical, with the second cycle starting again in 2018, see figure 1.



*Figure 1: Marine Strategy includes the initial assessment of the current environmental status of national marine waters and the environmental impact and socio-economic analysis of human activities in these waters, the determination of what GES means for national marine waters, the establishment of environmental targets and associated indicators to achieve GES by 2020, the establishment of a monitoring programme for the ongoing assessment and the regular update of targets, and the development of a programme of measures designed to achieve or maintain GES by 2020. The process is cyclical and the second cycle starts again in 2018 [15].*

Thus, Member States shall ensure that, in respect of each marine region or subregion concerned, marine strategies are kept up to date. Member States shall review, in a coordinated manner the following elements of their marine strategies every six years after their initial establishment: the initial assessment and the determination of good environmental status (Articles 8 and 9), the environmental targets (Article 10), the monitoring programmes (Article 11) and the programme of measures (Article 13). Details of any updates made following the reviews shall be sent to the Commission, to the Regional Sea Conventions and to any other Member States concerned within three months of their publication.

Apart from updating and reporting to the Commission, Member States have an obligation to inform and carry out public consultation. They must ensure that all interested parties are given early and effective opportunities to participate in the implementation of this Directive, involving, where possible, existing management bodies or structures, including Regional Sea Conventions, Scientific Advisory Bodies and Regional Advisory Councils. Member States shall publish, and make available to the public for comment, summaries of the following elements of their marine strategies, or the related updates: initial assessment and determination of good environmental status, the environmental targets, the monitoring programmes, and the programmes of measures. With regard to access to environmental information, Directive 2003/4/EC on public access to environmental information [16] shall apply.

Pursuant to Article 5 of MSFD, each Member State should have, in respect of each marine region or subregion concerned, developed a marine strategy for its marine waters in accordance with the following plan of action with regard to (a) preparation:

1. an initial assessment, to be completed by 15 July 2012 of the current environmental status of the waters concerned and the environmental impact of human activities thereon (Article 8)
  2. a determination, to be established by 15 July 2012 of good environmental status for the waters concerned (Article 9)
  3. establishment, by 15 July 2012, of a series of environmental targets and associated indicators (Article 10)
  4. establishment and implementation, by 15 July 2014 of a monitoring programme for ongoing assessment and regular updating of targets (Article 11)
- and (b) the programme of measures:
5. development, by 2015 at the latest, of a programme of measures designed to achieve or maintain good environmental status (Article 13)
  6. entry into operation of the programme provided for in point (i), by 2016 at the latest.

#### **4. Actual implementation of MSFD**

With regard to reporting [10] on steps i to iii (initial assessment, good environmental status and targets), in 2012, for the first time, Member States reported on the state of

the environment in their marine waters [17] on what they consider as being a “good environmental status” and on the objectives and targets they have set themselves to reach it by 2020. The result showed that more efforts were urgently needed if the EU is to reach its 2020 goal. The Commission assessed those first elements against the Directive’s requirements.

As for step iv (monitoring programmes), on 16 January 2017, the Commission adopted a report [18] assessing monitoring programmes submitted by most Member States in 2014 and 2015 to verify compliance with the Directive. The Commission’s report and its accompanying Staff Working Document [19] contain the Commission’s findings and provide guidance on changes needed, globally and for each Member State, including per descriptor.

With regard to step v (programmes of measures), by March 2016, Member States had to set up and implement programmes of measures to achieve good environmental status in their marine waters. On 31 July 2018, the Commission adopted its report assessing these programmes [20] and concluded that while considerable efforts have been made by Member States, not all pressures are covered properly by the measures and provided recommendations to Member States.

## **5. Activities on MSFD implementation undertaken by the Republic of Croatia reported to date**

Website of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Energy [21] states that the implementation of MSFD in Croatia consists of (1) Alignment of national legislation with provisions of MSFD and (2) Drafting of marine strategy for marine waters under national jurisdiction in accordance with proposed approach or action plan along with realization/continuation of sub-regional cooperation with neighbouring countries in the Adriatic as well as regional collaboration within the framework of Barcelona Convention.

It is also stated that MSFD was transposed into national legislation by adoption of the Regulation establishing the framework for action of the Republic of Croatia in protection of marine environment [22] and Regulation on preparation and implementation of documents under the Marine Environment and Coastal Area Management Strategy [23] that provides for baseline and standards for drafting, development, implementation and monitoring the implementation of Marine Environment Protection Strategy or the so-called “Marine strategy” the drafting whereof has its legal basis in the Environmental Protection Act. Furthermore, basic scope of the Directive is achieving and maintenance of GSE by 2020 through achieving general goals of marine environment protection involving:

1. protection, preservation, rendering possible the recovery and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems and sustainable use of ecosystem services,
2. preservation of protected areas in the sea and ecologically significant EU NATURA 2000 areas,

3. reducing the pollution in marine and coastal environment with the aim of preserving health of people, ecosystems and rendering possible the use of the sea and coast,
4. restoring and/or maintaining the balance between human activities and natural resources through the application of ecosystem approach.

It also states that Marine strategy represents a tool for meeting mentioned targets and lists preparatory documents of marine strategy, i.e. Initial assessment of the state of marine waters environment of 2012 [24], Good state of marine environment and set of targets in protection of the environment and indicators associated therewith of 2014 (not accessible through [21]), Economic and social analysis of the use of cost of degradation of marine environment and coastal area of June 2015 [25] and its action programmes Monitoring and observation system of 2014 [26] and Programme of measures for management of the marine environment and coastal zone of 2017 [27]. It also states that Marine Environment and Coastal Area Management Strategy is considered to be one of the basic documents of environmental protection under the Environmental Protection Act.

The authority competent for implementing the Regulation is the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Energy which is at the same time also the coordinator for collaboration with other competent bodies. The coordination is implemented via the Committee for coordination which consists of the ministers and Expert national committee composed of scientists, experts and representatives of competent bodies in charge of implementing the obligations under the Regulation for drafting and implementing the Marine strategy [28].

On its web page on environmental impact assessment – strategic environmental assessment (EIA-SEA) [29], the Ministry lists the documents related to the Programme of measures associated with public consultation procedures which took place in years 2015 and 2016. On 23.5.2018 the Draft strategic framework for marine environment and coastal area management of the Republic of Croatia for 2017-2013 was referred to e-consultation procedure [30]. On 22.7.2019. the Ministry launched public consultation procedure concerning the Draft of updated documents of the Marine environment and coastal area management strategy under Articles 8, 9, 10, and 17 of MSFD [31]. The document on 319 pages provides enormous quantity of valuable data, it is too complex for any public participation.

## 6. Communicating with the public

By the adoption of the Act Ratifying the Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean [32] back in 2012, Croatia undertook to integrate throughout its coastal area the spatial and economic planning and protection of the environment, nature and cultural heritage. In order to fulfil the targets set out by the Protocol, Croatia was to upgrade its economic planning, build the capacity of public



administration, improve the methodology of drawing up development documents and by ex-ante participation of development stakeholders accelerate their implementation. However, institutional inertia and unwillingness for interdisciplinary collaboration were perceived already in 2013 [33].

With regard to development of the Croatian Marine Strategy, it had been decided in 2015 that single strategy for marine environment and coastal zone management should be developed for achieving the objectives of the MSFD and the Protocol to the Barcelona Convention on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean. Draft Strategy of September 2015 that is still pending was available at [http://mio-strategija-hr.pap-thecoastcentre.org/docs/strategija\\_prvi\\_nacrt.pdf](http://mio-strategija-hr.pap-thecoastcentre.org/docs/strategija_prvi_nacrt.pdf). It was published in the media at the time that activities on producing the Marine Environment Management Strategy are proceeding and that Croatia will be the first country in the Mediterranean that will integrate the protection and management of coastal and marine area [34]. The notice states that website containing the information on drafting the Marine Environment and Coastal Area Management Strategy has been launched with the aim to involve in the final stage of production of Marine Strategy the interested public with their proposals. It also points out that by accession to EU, Croatia assumed the obligation to draw up the strategy for protection of marine environment, while by ratifying the Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) it assumed the obligation to draft national strategy of integrated coastal area management, so declared intention was to combine two strategies into a single strategic document. Workshops were organised in coastal counties. The plan was to adopt the strategy the following year, i.e. in 2016.

In the same year 2015 it could be read that based on the analyses of the state of marine environment and management system, chaotic management of coastal and marine area is discernible, apart from physical planning that is greatly influenced by speculation with land and real estate trade, for which reason physical plans have the sole purpose of value change for a particular property and satisfying rentier-type mentality. The strategy would finally introduce in Croatia the European standards of managing the most important resources, protect it from short-term plans, devastation and speculators, and render possible smart development of coastal and marine area in long term [35].

## 7. Deferrals and delays

Croatian coast, or its terrestrial part, constitutes 44% of the land of the Republic of Croatia, and roughly half of that area is coastal. Insular part of coastal area is made of 1,246 islands, cliffs and reefs, totalling 3,260 km<sup>2</sup>, which makes 5,8% of land of the country. Total shoreline is 6,278 km long, of which 4,398 km is island coast and 1,880 mainland coast. Coastal area, apart from land part also includes coastal seas

whose area is 31,479 km<sup>2</sup> (internal waters 12,498 km<sup>2</sup> and territorial sea 18,981 km<sup>2</sup>. Average population density of coastal area is 97 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, that being higher than national average, but lower than in some other coastal areas in EU [31]. Namely, significant part of hinterland are mountains along coastal strip and karst valleys which are not particularly fertile, but are precious geologically.

In spite of all above figures showing importance of the sea and potential national marine policies thereon, the Republic of Croatia not only failed to complete and adopt to date its marine strategy document (although drafts thereof have been in production for years), but it is also frequently in delay in submitting requisite documents concerning MSFD to the European Commission.

Thus for instance, the EC report [36] stated that 26 Member States designated their Competent Authority or Authorities for the MSFD on time, but that the new Member State Croatia has not yet reported this information to the Commission. Also, national reports received after July 2013 which includes submission from Croatia have not been included in this assessment.

With regard to step 4 (monitoring programmes) [18] it is stated that the accompanying staff working document also includes an assessment of some elements reported under the first implementation phase of the MSFD for those Member States having reported late – among them Croatia. Commission Staff Working Document [19] states that even though Croatia reports that its monitoring of GES will be in place by 2014, it reports that monitoring of targets will not be in place until 2018 or 2020. It furthermore states that according to the technical assessment, the Croatian monitoring programmes and sub-programmes show a number of weaknesses that affect their coverage of GES and targets. This is applicable, to various extents, to all descriptors including descriptors considered less advanced in terms of knowledge and methodologies, i.e. non-indigenous species (Descriptor 2), hydrographical changes (Descriptor 7), marine litter (Descriptor 10), energy, including underwater noise (Descriptor 11). Same document also points out that it was difficult to assess the monitoring programme and sub-programmes for hydrographical changes (Descriptor 7) with regard to the achievement of targets: Croatia's monitoring programme only monitors long-term large scale changes, while the targets defined by Croatia concern the impact of human activities, which the reported monitoring programme does not cover. It also says that Croatia reports limited information on monitoring transboundary impacts or any other major environmental changes or emerging issues.

Subsequent Report [20] and the accompanying Staff Working Document [37] noted that, out of the 23 maritime Member States, seven had reported their national programmes after the cut-off date of February 2017 and could therefore not be assessed in time.

Recommendations for Croatia are to consider whether it is feasible to reduce current levels of certain pressures in the marine environment. It is observed that most measures aim to address ongoing and new inputs of pressures, whilst very few seek to remove or reduce what is already present in the marine environment due to past

activities (e.g. non-indigenous species, contaminants, litter). GES and target definitions should be better addressed for hydrographical changes (D7), contaminants (D8), marine litter (D10), underwater noise (D11), birds (D1, 4), mammals and reptiles (D1, 4) and seabed habitats (D1, 4, 6). The Member State should strive to determine the timelines for achieving GES. It should also establish more links with existing EU policies and international agreements (e.g. for D2 — Non-indigenous species, D5 — Eutrophication, D8 — Contaminants, D9 — Contaminants in seafood, D10 — Marine litter and D11 — Underwater noise and energy). Furthermore, it states that the Member State should address the introduction of non-indigenous species in its marine waters from tourism and recreational activities. With regard to D3 — Commercial fish and shellfish, Croatia should cover recreational fishing (or, if this is already the case, provide more details). As for D5 — Eutrophication, the Member State should establish more synergies with key pieces of legislation such as the UWWTD, the Nitrates Directive, Industrial Emissions Directive and the National Emission Ceilings Directive. Concerning D7 — Hydrographical changes, the Member State should clearly address Heavily Modified Water Bodies, or, if it is already the case, explain better how the measures cover them. For D8/D9 — Contaminants and Contaminants in seafood, Member State should establish more links with existing EU policies for Contaminants in seafood (D9). With regard to D10 — Marine litter, the Member State should address marine litter from urban activities, preferably through direct measures in addition to indirect measures, and tourism/recreational activities. Croatia should consider establishing measures about removal of litter from beaches and about products responsible for beach litter coming from both sea-based and land-based sources (such as single-use plastic items). The Member State should also make efforts to identify pollution hot spots (e.g. from plastic pellets, lost fishing gear, etc.). As for D11 — Underwater noise and energy, in its programme, Croatia should consider establishing measures having direct effects on the pressure, especially from marine research and shipping, in addition to indirect measures. The Member State should consider establishing measures that target other energy inputs if possible and if relevant (e.g., heat, light). It should utilise more synergies with relevant existing EU legal acts, such as the EIA Directive; as well as implement measures in accordance to relevant IMO Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life.

In March 2019 Croatia was presented a letter of formal notice No 2019/2008 [38] whereby European Commission calls on 9 Member States, Croatia among them, to protect their marine waters. Croatia is urged to comply with the reporting obligations on the environmental status of marine waters under the MSFD. It states that the Directive provides a holistic framework to protect the EU's seas and oceans, and ensures that their resources are managed sustainably. In June 2008, Member States agreed to review and update their assessment of the environmental status of the waters concerned, the environmental impact of human activities, their determination of good environmental status and their environmental targets by 15 October 2018. The countries failed to submit reports to the Commission by the required deadline. As a result, the Commission

decided to open the infringement proceedings by sending a letter of formal notice to these Member States. They now have two months to reply; otherwise, the Commission may decide to send a reasoned opinion.

The Government of the Republic of Croatia at the closed part of its 155th Session on 2 May 2019 formulated the reply which was never communicated to the public. Also, the reply by the Government to author's inquiry to reveal the response for scientific purposes was negative, as was also the reply from the European Commission.

With regard to MSP which is by its nature closely associated with marine strategy, Croatia has in 2017 amended its Physical Planning Act [39] in the process of reaching compliance with MSP Directive. However, it is to be seen whether maritime spatial plans shall be established at the latest by 31 March 2021 as provided for under MSP Directive.

## 8. Conclusion

The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive is an attempt to integrate various sectoral policies in reaching the balance between protection of marine ecosystems and development that needs to be sustainable. The process is long, stepwise and cyclical and it is yet to be seen whether it will yield satisfactory results.

The Republic of Croatia which fulfils all the prerequisites to have prudent national marine policy a dominant one, is in fact close to default with regard to compliance with its national and EU marine obligations. That situation deserves serious analysis from the part of scientists and experts as to whether the regulator of marine policy, that is the body competent for marine protection, has sufficient capacity to fulfil the obligations assumed by the state.

The process is currently ongoing and it is to be expected that Croatia will finally define its marine strategy, but the procedure it has been applying in producing the document should not serve as a model for adopting other multisectoral policies which are of vital importance for the country.

Namely, the procedure of national marine policy adoption should be made more clear and transparent to general public which is at the same time the public concerned, and to expert community. Any strategic vision can only be built on knowledge, education and awareness of wider public.

In authors' opinion, the Ministry of Environment Protection and Energy should even in its very name incorporate the word „marine “or „the seas “and also in such a manner place major importance to marine ecosystem which should be appropriately represented in environmental protection regulatory body.

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