



Water Note 11

Water Notes on the Implementation of the Water Framework Directive

From the rivers to the sea: Linking with the new Marine Strategy Framework Directive

Europe's seas are its lifeblood. They provide trade routes, regulate the climate and supply food and energy.

But these seas face a series of threats. One of these is land-based pollution originating in urban areas, and from industry and intensive agriculture. Another is the growing level of shipping and the risks it brings, such as oil slicks from accidents and intentional releases. Alien species from distant seas, often brought unintentionally by ship, also pose a danger to the fragile balance of certain ecosystems. Widespread throughout Europe's seas, overfishing is also reducing fishing yields across Europe, which fell between 2000 and 2005.

All these pressures harm the marine ecosystems, and in the decades to come climate change will aggravate their impact. Human activities that depend on the sea such as fishing and tourism will consequently suffer.



Protecting marine ecosystems is an objective of the new Marine Strategy Framework Directive

An ecosystem approach

The new Marine Strategy Framework Directive extends EU water legislation to the marine environment and constitutes the environmental component of Europe's new cross-sector Integrated Maritime Policy.

The new directive follows an approach similar to that of the Water Framework Directive. It calls on EU Member States to ensure the "good environmental status" of all of Europe's marine regions and sub-regions (see the box on the next page) in a similar fashion as the Water Framework Directive sets the "good status" of freshwater and coastal waters as its core objective.

Ensuring good environmental status involves protecting marine ecosystems. The new directive states that fishing and other activities should not push the populations of commercially exploited fish and shellfish beyond their safe limits and that non-indigenous species should not affect ecosystems.

Good environmental status also requires physical, chemical and acoustic conditions that support healthy ecosystems. Noise from human activities should be made compatible with the marine environment and its ecosystems. Meeting these requirements will protect renewable marine resources and may require a change in human activity and practices, such as ending the overexploitation of fish resources.

The Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive establishes a legal framework to protect and restore clean water across Europe and ensure its long-term and sustainable use. (Its official title is *Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy*.)

The directive establishes an innovative approach to water management based on river basins, the natural geographical and hydrological units, and sets specific deadlines for Member States to achieve ambitious environmental objectives for aquatic ecosystems.

The new Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC) establishes a common basis for the protection and management of Europe's seas.

Europe's marine regions and sub-regions

The new Marine Strategy Framework Directive identifies four marine regions: the Baltic Sea, the North East Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea.

The North East Atlantic has four sub-regions:

- The Greater North Sea, including the Kattegat and the English Channel
- The Celtic Seas
- The Bay of Biscay and the Iberian Coast
- The waters surrounding the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands

The Mediterranean has four sub-regions:

- The Western Mediterranean
- The Adriatic Sea
- The Ionian Sea and the Central Mediterranean Sea
- The Aegean-Levantine Sea

Steps to take

The 23 EU Member States with sea coasts are obliged to develop marine strategies to ensure the good environmental status of marine regions and sub-regions, similar to the river basin management plans being prepared under the Water Framework Directive. The box above lists the marine regions and sub-regions.

By 2012 Member States will need to make preliminary assessments of Europe's seas by determining the characteristics of good environmental status, identifying targets and indicators to be achieved and setting up monitoring programmes.

By 2015, they will need to have developed a programme of measures for each marine region and sub-region. Each programme will set out the actions to achieve good environmental status by 2020 or to maintain good status where it already exists.

During each of these steps Member States will need to provide information to the public and allow interested parties to participate in implementation.

Regional sea conventions

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive cites four existing conventions for the protection of Europe's regional seas: the Baltic Sea Area, the North-East Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. These four conventions will provide the framework for co-operation on the new marine strategies with neighbouring non-EU countries.

To learn more about Europe's waters, see the Water Information System for Europe (WISE) website at <http://water.europa.eu>. The European Commission's web pages on water management, which are linked to WISE, provide further information on the Water Framework Directive and the new Marine Strategy Framework Directive. For the latter, see http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/marine/index_en.htm.



Windpower turbines off Denmark's coast: under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, EU countries will need to ensure that the use of the marine environment is sustainable and compatible with good environmental status.

Working together

The EU's coastal countries share a number of marine regions and sub-regions. Member States will thus need to work together to ensure that their marine strategies are consistent. They will also have to work with their non-EU neighbours with whom they share common seas.

The EU and its neighbours already co-operate through a certain number of regional sea conventions (see box) which will provide the basis for coordination on marine strategies.

Member States will also need to coordinate the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive with their actions on the Water Framework Directive since the two pieces of legislation are closely linked. The Water Framework Directive will reduce pollution from land-based sources from reaching Europe's seas to improve marine conditions. The directive also protects coastal waters as well as transitional waters such as estuaries and coastal lagoons. These provide spawning grounds for many marine fish species and are a crucial link between freshwater and marine ecosystems. Together the two directives provide a complete structure for the protection and management of Europe's freshwater and marine waters.