Deutsches Meeresmuseum Stralsund

Federal Agency for Nature Conservation

6th International Conference on Progress in Marine Conservation 2023

How to Stop Biodiversity Loss - from Knowledge to Action

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Note of the Chairs

Photo Solvin Zankl

Chair of the conference: Britta Knefelkamp

Chairs of the Workshops:
Samuli Korpinen
Jochen Krause
Emily Corcoran
Alexander Liebschner
Peter Südbeck
Gerold Janssen
Christian Pusch
Miriam Müller

The Action Points presented in this Note are the outcome of the discussions in the workshops of the conference “Progress in Marine Conservation 2023” and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of BfN.

6th International Conference on Progress in Marine Conservation

How to Stop Biodiversity Loss – from Knowledge to Action

Since 2006, the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation has been organizing the international conference series "Progress in Marine Conservation" in cooperation with the German Oceanographic Museum / Ozeaneum Stralsund. The conference is an important forum to discuss current developments in marine nature conservation, new research results and possible protective measures. This year, 200 international and national experts from science, federal and state authorities, nature conservation associations and other nongovernmental organizations came together to discuss "How to Stop Biodiversity Loss – from Knowledge to Action". This year's discussions were structured in three main topics:

1. **Marine protected areas and the implementation of the EU biodiversity strategy with its goal of placing 30% of the seas under protection and 10% under strict protection,**
2. **the nature-friendly expansion of offshore wind energy and**
3. **reducing the effects of fishing on marine ecosystems.**

In eight workshops, participants were invited to bring in their expertise and different perspectives on these topics. They discussed the implementation of **marine conservation targets**, **management effectiveness** of single Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and **ecological effectiveness** of MPA networks. Regarding measures for nature-friendly, sustainable uses of the seas, they considered **impact mitigation** as well as **ecological risks and chances** of Offshore Wind Farms. Moreover, they shared ideas on instruments for managing **conflicting interests** arising from the offshore wind energy expansion. Concerning the impacts of fisheries, the participants exchanged their views on possible mitigation measures and management options to reduce the effects of **bottom trawling** and **gill nets** on marine biodiversity.

Based on these discussions, every workshop came forward with **Action Points** on how to come from knowledge into action. These are intended to support the national processes to implement the EU requirements on marine nature conservation and the elaboration of the German national Marine Strategy. Moreover, they can be fed into the regional conventions OSPAR and HELCOM and to DG Environment to give input on the implementation of the EU Action Plan.

Action Points

Action points on the 30/10 targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy

- Establish strictly protected areas which protect **all** species and habitats including their **ecological functions**. The primary aim is to establish areas without human activities.
- To reach the 30 % EU target, focus on legally protected areas and include MSFD obligations.
- **Regulate or ban** fishery and shipping in all MPAs.
- Use the existing international fora to coordinate the location and management plans to reach **cross-boundary protected areas**.

Actions Points on ecological effectiveness of MPAs

- We need **prioritisation of long-term marine biodiversity goals** above short term economic interests
- We need an implementation of **ecological coherence** at biogeographical region
- Within our MPA networks we need at least 10 % strictly protected areas
- We need a reduction of the cumulative anthropogenic pressures outside and inside the MPA networks

Action Points on management of MPAs

The group agreed that effective management is about achieving the conservation objectives of a site/network. Priority should be on implementing management measures and not on measuring effectiveness.

- Put priority to deliver on nature conservation objectives by
  - **allocating the full competence for MPA management to the Environment Ministry** and
  - creating governance structures for effective **cross-sectoral collaboration** on MPA matters.

- Early continuous and effective engagement to enable collaboration is needed. Make sure that the stakeholders share the same knowledge and take part in formulating **a joint vision**. Make use of the full array of tools available in different sectors/competent bodies.

- **Proper resourcing (human, finance)** of MPA management, particularly for such communication, engagement and cross sector collaboration is needed.

- Apply a more **holistic, ecosystem approach** to MPAs (ecosystems, ecosystem services, food webs) with a need to reach urgently 10 percent strict protection with no use. Take ecological connectivity into account for planning MPA networks to achieve conservation objectives.

- Any assessment of management effectiveness should be done to inform the **adaptive management cycle**.

Action Points on impact mitigation of offshore wind farms

The participants of the workshop agreed that we have knowledge about impacts but that there are still knowledge gaps that need to be addressed. In Germany, we also have some mitigation measures in place. considering the planned increase of Offshore windfarms, there is a need to adapt and improve them. Furthermore, the group shared the general view that this planned expansion also needs to take a more holistic approach that accounts for ecological, economic as well as site specific aspects.

- Keep existing **underwater noise regulations** but setting strong impulses (incentives or regulations) towards development of
  - alternative foundations and
  - noise reduction systems.

- **Reduction of light emissions**, e.g. by extending regulations on demand-driven night marking to offshore wind parks.

- Reducing the **effects of service traffic** by creating opportunities for accommodation of service workers close to the project site, rerouting, speed reduction and/or implementation of noise reduced vessels.

- Implementation of intelligent system control to **shut down turbine activity** during e.g. mass migration events.

- Implement **wide-range mapping and clearance of ammunition** within the entire wind park area before construction in order to prevent safety and environmental risks due to hard or not to reach ammunition within future wind parks.

- **No construction/planning of wind farms in MPAs** and conduct a sensitivity mapping for all other areas.

- Analyse sensible plant size, distribution and design (holistic, site-specific approach, integrating ecological and economic aspects). The discussion should **include all stakeholders** (federal/state agencies, researchers, wind farm operators).

Action Points on ecological risks and chances of offshore wind farms

Participants of the workshop shared the view that the limits of the ecosystem have already been exceeded in many respects, since the German North and Baltic Seas are heavily overused systems. There is a need to transfer from only "no use" of OWF by any other activities, to "co-use" by nature conservation. The following action points are recommended to be included in the German Marine Strategy:

- Past **nature conservation achievements will not be sacrificed** for delivering offshore renewable goals. Protected areas and national parks should not be considered for OWF construction.

- The goals for protected areas (30/10 goals) need to be achieved by MPAs, not by potential OECMs in OWF. Identification of strictly protected areas should particularly consider habitats and species put at risk by OWF construction. **Additional no-use zones** are urgently needed to balance OWF impacts, and ideally as reference areas.

- Tendering and licensing procedures need to be **modernised to include ecological criteria** and account for the quality of proposals. Sustainable engineering shall be prioritised to prolongate the period of ecological chances.

- Ecological chances of OWF, such as habitat creation and enhancement of connectivity, need to be recognised also in the National Biodiversity Strategy, taken advantage of, and be supported (e.g. by inclusion in tendering criteria).

- It needs to be ensured that **adverse uses** – including in particularly bottom-trawling in OWF – **remain excluded** from OWF also in the future, and are prohibited by law.

- **Research needs access** to OWF, and improved data policies. Monitoring needs to be harmonised across countries.

- There is a need to **identify and reduce compounding stressors**, and to **quantify tipping points**. For this purpose, an additional level of assessment is needed to enable a holistic, cross-sectoral, basin-wide approach in planning.

- Dialogue between authorities and across borders urgently needs to be improved towards a **system-oriented dialogue**.

- **Transdisciplinary dialogue between stakeholders** needs to be enhanced.

Action Points on instruments for managing conflicting interests occurring through future offshore wind energy expansion

- Establishing a **holistic and ecosystem-based national marine strategy**, that ensures Germany reaches existing nature restoration and conservation objectives (MSFD, Natura 2000, CBD, BSAP).

- Evaluation and strengthening of environmental and energy law to **align the expansion of offshore wind with nature conservation objectives** for example by implementing (sectoral) marine landscape planning.

- Introduce **environmental assessment independent** from planning and consenting authorities.

- Create **instruments for better public participation** and parliamentary engagement in planning processes and decision making.

- **Create incentives** to pilot nature friendly offshore wind farms which go beyond the legal requirements voluntary multi-stakeholder partnerships or strengthen tendering criteria.

- Support regional research projects to provide ecosystem-based planning and develop nature friendly offshore wind.

Action Points on Impact mitigation and management of bottom trawl fisheries, focus North Sea

Participants of the group agreed that any management decisions need to respect ecological boundaries and should be driven by long-term societal aims. Management needs and options are obvious, but are not easily implemented, and achievable compromises are often not sufficient. The following Action Points are recommended to be included in the Marine Strategy:

- Fully implement an ecosystem-based fisheries management
- Substantially **reduce fishing effort for overexploited populations**, and reconsider established concepts in fisheries management (e.g. single-species approach) in the light of the current situation of climate change and degraded marine ecosystems
- Apply instruments such as an **independent impact assessment** for fisheries
- Implement the EU Action Plan: exclude mobile bottom-contacting fishing gear from MPAs with a **phasing-out scheme for a just and fair transition** to sustainable fisheries, including the possibility of exemptions based on a specific set of social and ecological criteria (carefully considering the specific situation in the Wadden Sea National Parks)
- Put in place **further management areas** where mobile bottom-contacting fishing gear is excluded, also in areas outside MPAs, **covering all habitat types** (including muddy habitats in particular)
- Develop and implement **technical mitigation measures** to reduce impacts of mobile bottom-contacting fishing gear
- Strengthen the **dialogue with fishermen** for a transformation towards regional, sustainable, low-impact fisheries

Action Points on impact mitigation and management of gill net fisheries, focus Baltic Sea

What are necessary action points to prevent bycatches of protected species from static net fisheries inside and outside MPAs to achieve the goals of policy?

- Establish:
  - a **ban of static nets and other gear with bycatch risk** in MPAs
  - **no take zones** within MPA (50 %)

- **buffer zones** around MPA in combination with camera surveillance and tracking devices to monitor potential bycatch

- **Promote alternative gear** use, shift to modified gillnets reducing bycatch of sensitive species outside MPAs (e.g. perlnets, kites, …) and reduce effort

- Ban:
  - recreational gillnet fishing in the Baltic
  - targeted catching for fishmeal

- Establish:
  - **"Emergency closures**" as a tool for short term reaction to extreme weather events
  - **climate refugia** to protect fish populations and act as fish recovery area

- **Improve dialogue** between research, conservation and fishermen

- Facilitate connection between the fishermen and **knowledge transfer** between fishermen on mitigation options and alternative gear --> supply material in each language for fishermen

- **Funding** for transition of fishery – diversification

- Establish:
  - a **control and surveillance and sanctioning system** (e.g. point system, quota and licence loss)
  - AIS or other tracking system mandatory for every vessel independent of boat size (at least in MPAs)
  - a reporting scheme of gear loss and a system for removal of ghost nets

- Produce a **sensitivity map "bycatch risk map"** including all species

- Establish **independent and harmonized data collection** on national and international level