Interreg Baltic Sea Region

Co-funded by the European Union

PROJECT PLATFORMS SEABAS

Coalition Clean Baltic

Activity 1.5 SEA best practice consultation compilation in MSP:

Objectives, methodology, and presentation of outcomes and key criteria

SEABAS Expert Workshop | 27-05-2026
Coalition Clean Baltic
interreg-baltic.eu/project/SEABAS


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Overview

Introduction

Data collection

Methodology

Key criteria (framework)

Main outcomes

Preliminary process and outputs

Objectives of Activity 1.5

1

1) Collect insights from previous and ongoing projects and other literature sources

2

2) Identify, analyze, and synthesize best practices in SEA consultation processes for MSP

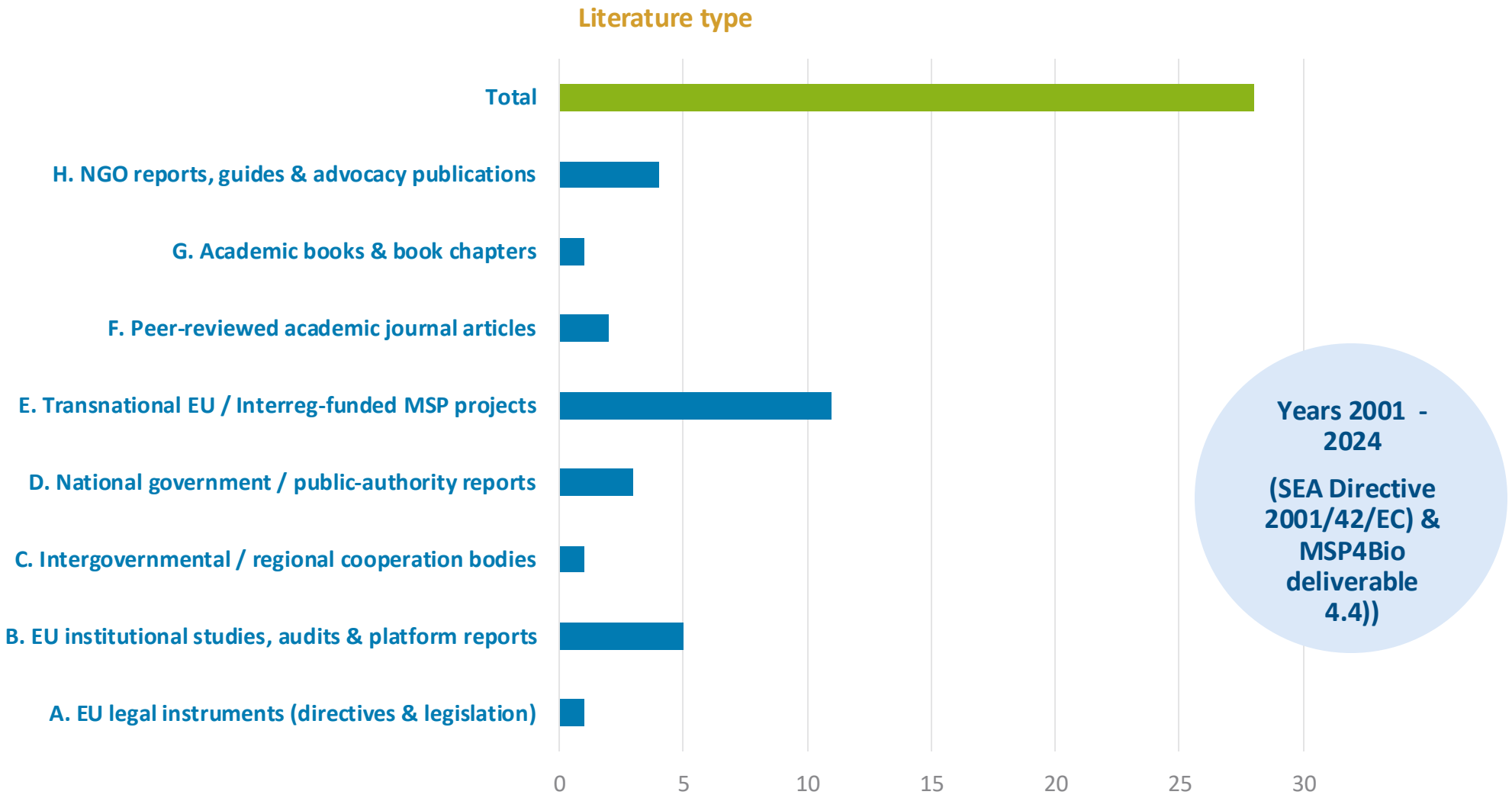
3

3) Bring relevance to effective communication and collaboration for successful SEA integration

4

4) Enhance stakeholder engagement, knowledge transfer, and multilevel coordination

Data collection



Methodology

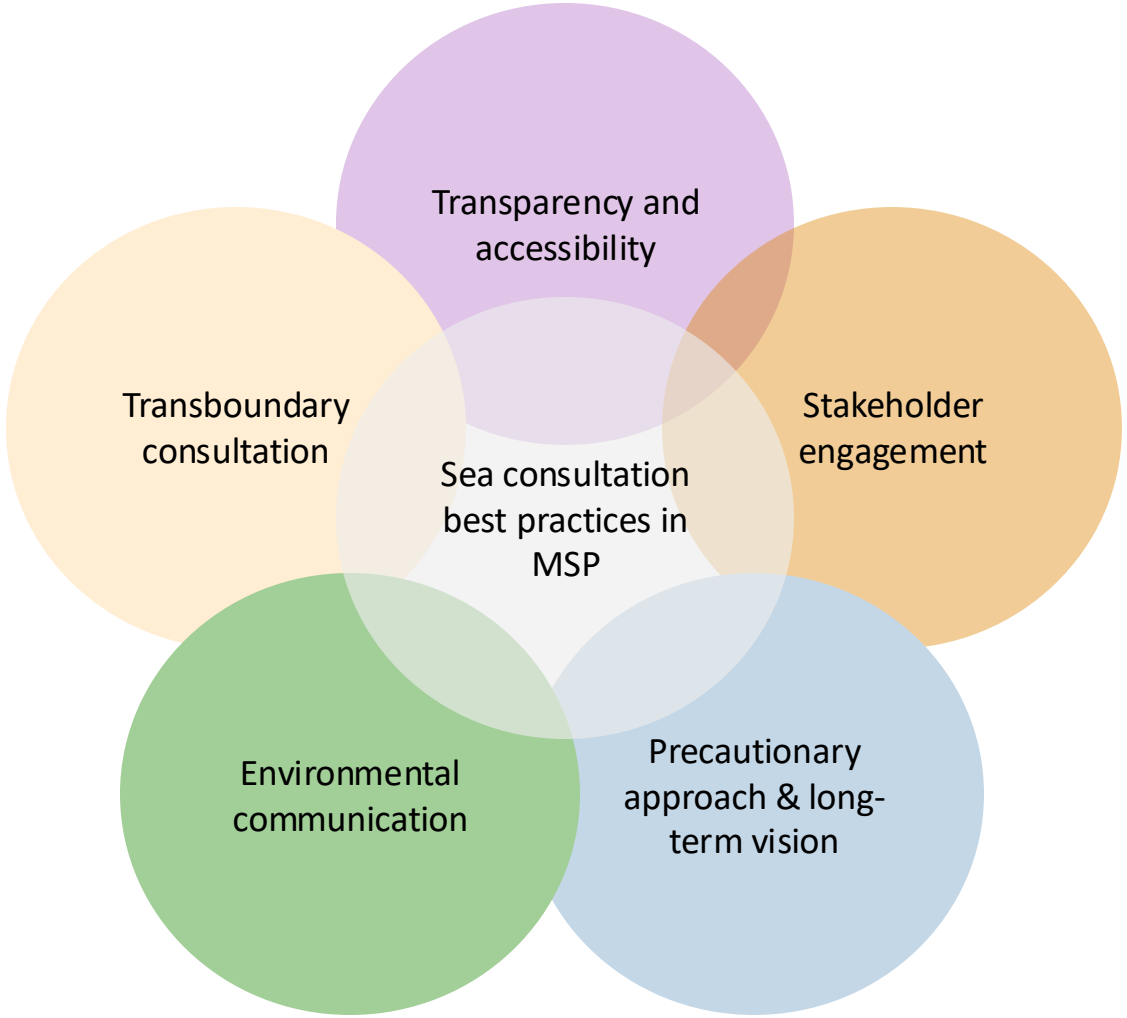
1. Literature gathering from experts and list
2. Online search for publications, cited work, EU
3. Harvesting all data related to SEA and MSP
4. One workshop with SEABAS group members
5. Gathering the important findings

Result

Five tables with best practices and challenges for each topic, enriching discussions and analyses about 1.5

Summary of consortium discussions

SEA best practice framework for MSP



Transboundary consultation: Best practices

1. **Ensure inclusivity and accessibility** (language, cultural, and institutional differences)
2. **Ensure involvement of neighbouring countries** (relevant authorities and the public) in consultation processes, e.g. invitation in writing to formally comment on a draft / potentially implement transboundary agreements (in national plans)
3. **Establish / use platforms for collaboration**:
    - Use peer-learning programmes and sea-basin workshops --> further exchange among MS
    - Form a permanent transboundary working group for collaboration among GIS specialists, data experts, and maritime spatial planners (e.g. to identify priority datasets to share)
    - Use established frameworks for collaboration: HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG, Baltic Planners Forum, Subregional Espoo Convention Network
4. **Establish a translation matrix**: Comparison of SEA terminology for an easier collaboration on MSP (interpretation of legal framework)
5. **Identify supporting information/guidelines** to improve SEA implementation, e.g. HELCOM-VASAB EBA Guidelines in MSP, survey on implementation guidelines on transboundary consultation (PL)
6. **Apply a holistic view** rather than only environmental - related to conflict resolution issues

Transboundary consultation: Challenges

1

1. **Timing:**
    - At what point in the MSP procedure is the consultation for the Espoo Convention conducted?
    - Lack of synchronization in the planning process, given that cross-border processes are different
    - To what extent is information from other countries integrated, even if there is a time mismatch?
    - At what point can countries be informed on the use of the information provided by other countries?

2. **Legal limitations and lack of communication:**
    - Are there limitations with the Espoo procedure?
    - Lack of real dialogue when communicating with other countries
    - Differing expectations on the extent of dialogue and what is required from neighbouring countries as part of the Espoo consultation

3. **Use of project products/results:** To what extent are the HELCOM-VASAB guidelines implemented/used (EMSP project – monitoring and evaluation WP)?

4. **Integration of tools:** To what extent and which tools are integrated for cross-border cumulative impact?

Transparency and accessibility: Best practices

2

Transparency:

1. **Ensure transparency of processes:** environmental impact assessment, scenario development
2. **Establish and communicate** clear procedures for participation
3. **Display environmental considerations**, e.g. illustrating marine protection sites and nature values in MSPs as part of EBA strategy
4. **Ensure that relevant documents are publicly available**,
5. **Integrate received statements** from consultations and **publish the final amended MSP** with a summary on how the SEA and responses have been considered

Accessibility:

1. **Ensure inclusivity and accessibility** (available and accessible information, institutional differences)
2. **Identify suitable platforms for sharing information** (e.g. geospatial information, consultation process, documents) **and for communication** with stakeholders
3. **Ensure/aim for provision of harmonised data** for users and tools for data access, including transboundary data
4. **Conduct consultations in person**, as they have an added value for stakeholders to understand context - online communication is not sufficient, need different channels for engagement (SoMe, courses, official emails)
5. **Ensure maintenance** of platforms and information updating.

Transparency and accessibility: Challenges

2

1. **Expert knowledge vs public knowledge:**
    - Balance between technical details and describing documents
    - Does inclusion of excessive technical detail risk explaining the entire planning process and reducing clarity, making it difficult to track what has been done?
    - Can technical information be targeted to experts while more easily readable information is provided to the public?
2. **Clear communication of processes:**
    - Insufficient transparency on environmental processes and mitigation strategies
    - A need of a clear timeline of the whole process + communication plan for stakeholder management, including expectations from stakeholders at each stage and the final aim of the consultation.
    - Can some aspects be discussed during meetings/workshops?
3. **Adaptation to rapidly changing technologies:**
    - Are tools being developed that incorporate AI (e.g. chatbots) to simplify usage of platforms?
    - Does the use of AI create accessibility challenges due to restrictions?

Stakeholder engagement: Best practices

3

1. **Ensure early and active engagement:**
    - Secure engagement before any major decisions are made
    - Ensure communication across different levels and feedback mechanisms
    - To building an evidence base and for development of scenarios/predictions
    - Co-design of innovative planning solutions and visioning
    - Establish follow-up arrangements (sequential process) and apply creativity and adaptability for engagement
    - Disseminate process at broader scale to ensure participation of all stakeholders
2. **Conduct targeted consultations:**
    - Defence and security bodies
    - Multi-use / coexistence should address involved stakeholders
    - MSP planners and MPA managers --> improve decision-making process considering MPA priorities
3. **Use existing tools and frameworks:**
    - ICZM (Integrated Coastal Zone Management) as support for participation and communication
    - MSP Forum

Stakeholder engagement: Challenges

3

1. **Lack of communication can lead to misinformation**

2. **Lack of understanding of tools and processes:**
   - Navigator tool perceived as excessive and complicated to use (despite being assessed positively in the MSP Forum)
   - Question if the tools provide benefits for multi-level governance and stakeholder involvement (particularly for scoping and alternative development stages)
   - Can SEABAS potentially refine usage challenges for end-users (planners and practitioners)?

Environmental communication and cumulative impact assessments: Best practices

4

1. **Ensure implementation of the ecosystem-based approach (EBA):**
    - Synergies for MSFD and MSPD
    - Demonstrate how EBA has been applied into the plan development for MSP - how it has been used to make decisions and identify spatial solutions to contribute to the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES)
    - Clarify the compatibility of alternatives/scenarios with EBA

2. **Determine the scoping of the environmental report** by incorporating relevant responses to consultation from the affected authorities

3. **Communicate and use a holistic systems perspective for planning:**
    - Identify and consider ecosystem services for socioeconomic evaluation
    - Ensure definition of blue economy objectives for all sectors in MSP

4. **Clarify the integration of emerging technologies for planning and MSP implementation** e.g. remote sensing/drones in monitoring

Environmental communication and cumulative impact assessments: Challenges

4

1. **Insufficient description/communication on mitigation measures** and monitoring and evaluation

2. **Insufficient description of what studies have been used**, or whether Best Available Data has been applied.

3. **Different approaches** for cumulative impact assessments – how well described are these processes?

4. **Lack of early dialogue and challenges for exchange** of information/data for CIAs – also a transboundary issue

Precautionary approach and long-term vision: Best practices

5

1. **Precautionary principle:**
    - Clearly communicate and indicate how the precaution principle has been considered in the planning process and the environmental assessment (SEA)
    - Identify and communicate uncertainties explicitly, including actions to cope with these in this SEA process
2. **Conflict resolution and unforeseen changes:**
    - Identify, establish and communicate conflict resolution strategies - link to stakeholder engagement
    - Describe clear plan-specific monitoring and evaluation, enabling the uptake of emerging insights/unforeseen effects into the plan
    - Changing policy landscape: Identify potential conflicts and synergetic opportunities for adaptation
    - Address and clearly communicate climate change adaptation strategies
    - Continuously apply and share adaptive management tools to evolve national MSP as new data becomes available.
3. **Long-term vision:**
    - Assess and communicate in a transparent manner long-term impacts and alternative solutions (considering sustainability approach for future generations)
    - Clearly communicate the reasons for selection of the most sustainable long-term scenario

Precautionary approach and long-term vision: Challenges

5

1. **Different understandings and interpretations** of the precautionary approach and precautionary principle:
    - Is communication from both sides problematic in this context?
    - What has been used in different courts, and how is the precautionary principle explained in MSP processes?
    - Is there a need for better understanding of how the precautionary principle is integrated into environmental assessment (SEA)?
    - Public understanding of how the precautionary principle is used/integrated
    - Insufficient description/communication on how the precautionary principle is used.

Preliminary process and outputs of SEABAS Activity 1.5

A 3-step approach:

1. For planners --> criteria defined as well as self-assessment of consultation process (different levels of involvement – extent of implementation of criteria)
2. For relevant authorities – integration into capacity building programme
3. For the wider public –> social media

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