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| logo_ec_17_colors_300dpi | EUROPEAN COMMISSION  DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES  BALTIC SEA, NORTH SEA AND LANDLOCKED MEMBER STATES  **MARITIME POLICY BALTIC AND NORTH SEA** |

Brussels, 3/5/2016

**23rd meeting of the Member States experts Group on Maritime Policy**

*21 April 2016*

**Meeting report**

**Implementation of work programme**

EASME reported MSEG on the implementation of Integrated Maritime Policy under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Large parts of the actions are delegated to EASME, except for Marine Strategy Framework Directive (DG ENV) and governance (DG MARE). Of the 6.4 bn EUR allocated to EMFF 2014-2020, about 10% is managed directly at EU level. Thematically, the largest clusters of actions under the IMP budget in direct management for the years 2014-2015 were Marine knowledge (1/3), Maritime spatial planning (1/4) and Integrated Maritime Surveillance (1/5). There has been some under-execution of the 2014 EMFF budget notably on IMS and MSP. Main reason for this has been limited demand for some very targeted calls for proposals on national authorities and having less expensive contracts than budgeted for procurement of studies and other services. Due to the late adoption of the EMFF Regulation and the 2014 WP, 2015 was used to catch up on 2014 actions and to start 2015 actions. Also, due to the concurring implementation of 2014 and 2015 WP, EASME will still be launching and contracting a number of actions this year. For the 2016 WP, EASME has already launched three calls for proposals and several invitations to apply for ad hoc grants.

NL pointed out that the need to evaluate the impact of actions and calls for proposals and steer funding to actions that create most practical added value. NL also underlined that it takes a lot of work and investment from applicants to prepare a proposal, so success rates should be reasonable.

FR thanked for the presentation and asked if synergies could be found by grouping actions together more efficiently, as the EMFF proposes currently many actions with relatively small amounts of money available for projects.

MARE answered that by taking a very considered approach, MARE is trying to be as efficient and effective as possible in management of funds. This way MARE will reach the best results with fund allocation. MARE is hopeful that other actions can stem from these smaller pilot projects. The 2016 Blue Growth Calls for Proposals are an example of trying to group actions together to create a bigger impact by funding projects with concrete outcomes that will serve in real life.

ITALY posed a question on statistical experts meeting which last took place in 2015 and if this work will be carried out in the future. MARE answered that economic data collection is indeed an ongoing project but an expert meeting has not yet been planned. MARE thanked for the suggestion and thought it could be useful to consider setting up a statistical expert meeting. This could be more beneficial in such time that the contractor has more information to share.

EASME also briefly presented the Blue Growth Calls for Proposals under the 2016 WP, for which a successful launch event was held 5 April with 120 participants. With a budget of over 7,5M€, the calls '[Blue careers](https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/call-proposals-blue-careers-europe)', '[Blue labs](https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/call-proposals-blue-labs-innovative-solutions-maritime-challenges)' and '[Blue technology](https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/call-proposals-blue-technology-transfer-innovative-solutions-sea-basin-economies)' will respectively help enhancing career opportunities in the maritime economy, stimulating the creativity of young researchers and set-up cooperations that will help bring research results to the market in promising Blue Growth technology areas. Firstly, there is a need to bring industry and education/training providers together to promote and support the development of career opportunities in the blue economy. The Blue Careers call is aimed to designing and implementing concrete actions to fill the skills gap and to raise awareness of blue careers. Total budget is 3.452.000 EUR with an expected grant of 500.000-700.000 EUR per project. The Blue Labs call aims at creating an interface between research and industry, mobilizing young researchers to innovate and create viable projects, products and services to address marine and maritime challenges in specific sea basins. Blue Labs has a total budget of 1.700.000 EUR with an expected grant of 200.000-500.000 EUR per project. The Blue Technology call seeks to facilitate transferring innovation to sea-basin economies by having cluster and business network organisations working together transnationally in at least three MS to develop an investment roadmap in a particularly promising area of the blue economy and deliver a set of ready-to-invest commercial pilots or demonstration projects. Blue Tech is working with a total budget of 2.520.000 EUR with an expected grant of 600.000-800.000 EUR per project.

NL asked for clarification on the Blue Technology call as NL experience is that innovation rarely happens this way. MARE answered that the idea is to create more concrete innovative products and/or services than before. MARE is interested in moving from an innovative stage to producing actual marketable products. Another objective of the Blue Growth calls is to avoid overlapping with existing structures and to develop solutions that could be replicated in other sea basins as well. NL concluded that there is need to work more based on substance and market demand with stakeholders’ interests in mind.

**High Level Meeting on Energy cooperation North seas, Amsterdam 4 February 2016**

NL presented the progress made on IMP under the NL Presidency, highlighting particularly the results of IMP related events held under the Presidency so far. The High Level meeting on the Energy Union, held on 4 February 2016 in Amsterdam, focused especially on regional maritime cooperation on sustainable energy. Offshore wind in the North Sea basin was selected as an example for discussion. An informal Ministerial meeting on energy took place on 9-10 April 2016 with conclusion that regional cooperation in the field of energy ought to be supported, as regional cooperation can contribute to dealing with shared challenges. The Energy Council meeting on 6 June 2016 will be discussing the ways forward.

In the field of short sea shipping, energy-efficiency and sustainability of maritime transport was highlighted during the High Level meeting in Amsterdam on 15 February 2016. The High Level Meeting recommended strengthening short sea shipping as a part of the logistical chain by supporting the Motorways of the Sea programme to include all transport operators and digitalisation in its policy development. However, the administrative burden for intra-EU trade requires reducing by implementing a European Maritime Single Window, developing a harmonised data and electronic cargo manifest for multiple uses by all partners in the logistics chain and by identifying opportunities for automated vessel tracking services to retain Community status for goods transported over sea between EU ports. The meeting stressed the full potential of maritime transport has not yet been reached and that the sector has huge potential to contribute to economic growth and investment in the EU. NL will be circulating minutes from the meeting.

NL also informed MSEG of discussions on 18-19 February at the High Level Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) organized on Blue Growth. The main topic of the High Level Conference addressed the obstacles to investment and access to finance for the maritime economy. Of a little over 150 projects under the Juncker fund mechanism, only 6 are related to maritime sectors. NL also pointed the importance of land-sea interaction for an effective implementation of the MSP Directive and the role of the regions in creating most of the maritime and marine related jobs in Europe.

NL also invited MS to the informal High Level Focal Point preparatory meeting organised on 22 April 2016.

**Social Chapter fisheries**

MARE gave an update on social questions related to the maritime sector, namely working conditions in the fisheries sector. The Commission is currently considering the request of the EU social partners to implement their agreement on the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007, in EU law. The College of Commissioners is expected to take a decision on the subject in the near future. In 2013, the social partners negotiated an agreement on the Convention, containing minimum requirements for working conditions. The ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007, will apply to all fishermen working in fishing vessels flying the flag of an ILO Member State, regardless of the nationality of the fishermen. The Commission is promoting its ratification both within the EU and worldwide.

MARE is working together with EMPL and MOVE to make progress in this area and to help set standards for training, conditions, watch-keeping, health protection etc. in maritime professions. MARE encourages MS to be in constant contact with social partners to hear ideas, proposals and concerns and to give information and to raise awareness on maritime issues amongst the social partners.

MARE is also concerned about reports on alleged cases of illegal labour practices in the European fisheries sector. The Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Sea Fisheries has expressed the belief that exploitative practices towards migrant fishers exist in several MS. The Commission recently sent a letter to the Ministers responsible for Fisheries in each MS asking the authorities whether they are aware of practices of this nature and if any measures have been taken to address or prevent them.

The IUU Regulation does not cover labour issues, but by tackling IUU, working conditions in fisheries are likely to be improved.

**Update Mediterranean and Black Sea basin**

MARE informed MSEG on the latest developments on the initiative for the sustainable development of the Blue Economy in the Western Mediterranean. This initiative is proposed as follow up to the Union for Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy endorsed on 17 November 2015, which invites exploring the added value and feasibility of maritime appropriate strategies, including at sub-regional level, notably building on the 5+5 dialogue. All 5+5 countries (Portugal, Spain France, Italy Malta, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania) expressed their concerns and potential interest during a meeting held on 21 March 2016. A draft report has been circulated to the participants. Following this meeting, the Commission has significantly revised its approach, especially aiming to ensure a stronger involvement of the UfM Secretariat to this exploratory work (i.e. a specific support action grant for the UfM Secretariat has been envisaged and will focus *inter alia* on this initiative) a closer association to the UfM process (i.e. having a point for information at the meeting of the UfM Working Group for the blue economy on 17 May 2016 in Turku) and to the 5+5 dialogue, the latter to be clarified by the countries. Accordingly, whilst the geographical scope of the initiative is based on the Western Mediterranean sub-basin, it will be fed from contributions and actions, where appropriate and on a variable geographical setting depending on the countries’ needs and willingness to work together.

This initiative is intended to address cross-sectorial challenges and to improve coordination amongst several sectors and policies and to identify concrete, strategic projects of added value to the region, particularly on topics such as maritime safety and security, reconciliation of conflicting interests in the use of the maritime space, maritime research and innovation, maritime cluster networks, fisheries conservation and MPA coordination. In agreement with concerned countries, DG MARE is currently working on mapping possible gaps in existing frameworks and identifying the areas where the initiative can provide enough substance and added value for the benefit of the 5+5 countries.

All MS are invited to participate in the UfM Blue economy working group meeting, which will take place on 217 May 2016 in Turku, Finland.

MALTA thanked MARE and expressed full support and interest in cooperating on this initiative. MALTA stated its appreciation for having Blue Growth on the agenda for the Western Mediterranean. Malta supports exchanging data and best practices with West MED countries and this roadmap presents a good opportunity for further dialogue. Malta is keen to move forward, also keeping in mind the upcoming Maltese Presidency.

SPAIN thanked MARE on very potential 5+5 opportunity to create dialogue on Blue Economy in the region and recalled the importance to take in due consideration the Water Strategy (5+5). DG MARE acknowledged that this request was evocated at the meeting on 21 March as well and that it will be explored.

FR thanked for the presentation and for MARE communicating MS views presented on 21 March. FR also pointed out not necessarily being against creating a proper West MED Strategy. However, FR called for more clarification on the nature and essence of the group meeting in Turku 17 May and, given the multiplicity of IMP groups, asked how it sits in the organigram of IMP.

MARE thanked MS for their comments and interest in the matter and noted that it is for the countries to decide the way forward under the 5+5 set up. The meeting on 21 March 2016 was not meant as creating a permanent group but as a tool to support the work on the West MED and assess the added value it could create. The report of the above meeting will be also circulated to the members of the IMP on MSEG as soon as approved by the participating countries/institutions. The aim is having a more specific debate in the autumn. The UfM Blue Economy working group, which will meet on 17 May 2016 in Turku, is a permanent group under the UfM umbrella and it will serve to support the regional dialogue and define and establish the UfM Forum on the blue economy.

GREECE thanked MARE for the presentation. As an Eastern Mediterranean country, GR is not directly involved but would be interested in receiving information on meetings. GR echoed FR point on collaboration in practice and using meetings in an efficient manner as IMP groups are already multiple. GR also asked for contact details in MARE for national governments to be able to ask for information and to present any questions.

NL, with regards to the Turku meeting, pointed out the need to clarify the agenda and add more content in order to have a more productive discussion on the Blue Economy. NL also pointed out the need for having a single shared understanding of how Blue Economy is defined in MS. MARE replied to NL that discussions in Turku will be based on current works on definition of Blue Economy (MARE C1 is attending to ensure coherence). There is a request from partner countries to better understand and define the Blue economy. DG MARE will circulate a more detailed draft agenda as soon as it will be agreed with the Jordan co-Presidency.

ITALY thanked MARE on a very important initiative and pointed the importance, and indeed advisability to coordinate the above sub-regional initiative with existing conventions and structures that are already in place in the West MED region.

**Black Sea**

MARE presented the work on Black Sea region where considerable effort has been made to increase coherence within maritime sector on the sea-basin level. The concept of IMP is still quite new to the region, but interest exists both in public and private sectors in the benefits of coordination and cooperation on IMP. The Commission objectives are to strengthen stakeholder community collaboration and involvement and to mainstream IMP planning policies on national and regional level. In long term, the goal is to produce a common maritime strategy for the region. MARE is supporting public and private actions (especially cluster formation) and research in order to enhance knowledge of the sea by involving local research facilities in seabed mapping and environmental observation projects. Depending on the needs of each country, MARE is supporting initiatives in maritime domains by cross-border cooperation programmes, integrating the Black Sea countries to EU standards on IMP.

In addition, forming a working group on IMP on Black Sea sea-basin level is presently underway. An annual stakeholder conference on maritime policy in the Black Sea region will be held on 14 June 2016 in Ukraine to facilitate cross-sectorial integration and to raise awareness on Blue Economy issues.

**Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) projects in the Mediterranean Sea**

MARE presented three pilot projects currently ongoing in the Mediterranean Sea with main objective to link sustainable exploitation with environmental protection while promoting bottom-up approaches for preservation of sensitive and essential habitats for commercial fish species. Sustainable fisheries depend on healthy state of fish stocks, which in turn rely on healthy habitats. Therefore, promoting an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management supports the conservation of ecosystems and habitats while looking to attain sustainable high yields. In practical terms, this translates to protecting biologically sensitive areas in the Mediterranean with a view to further enhance synergies between the CFP and MSFD. Through these three 36-month pilot projects lasting until December 2018, PROTOMEDEA in the Eastern Mediterranean, MANTIS in the Central and SAFENET in the Western Mediterranean, MARE is aiming to understand whether and how the different types of protected areas could contribute to achieving the maximum sustainable yield objectives, particularly in case of multispecies and mixed fisheries. The goal for the next three years is to identify coherent networks of MPAs in the Mediterranean based on sound scientific knowledge to promote sustainable Blue Economy in the region.

FR pointed out difficulties in communicating to the public and stakeholders, how the designation of MPAs can be made attractive and beneficial for everyone by linking the pilot areas with CFP and IMP. MARE answered that a coherent, representative network is in the interests of every stakeholder, including fishermen. This requires successful communication and raising awareness on the subject amongst both general public and members of stakeholder groups. By proper planning, protected areas do not work against the interest of fisheries but the two complement each other. By improving fish stocks by creating protected areas, new opportunities are created also for fishermen not only in fisheries, but also in related maritime sectors such as maritime tourism.

FR informed MSEG representatives of a biodiversity bill currently under parliamentary review in France, which will create fish conservation zones within French territorial waters. MARE commended France on this initiative and reminded that under the CFP, MS are allowed to take fisheries measures in waters under national jurisdiction as long as compliance with EU procedures and cooperation with MS neighbours are ensured.

**Presentation of ongoing work on nautical tourism**

The European Strategy for more Jobs and Growth in Coastal and Maritime Tourism was launched in 2014 to boost competitiveness and sustainability of the sector, and to unlock its potential for growth and jobs. There are in total 4 pillars and 14 actions at EU level to stimulate performance and competitiveness, to promote skills and innovation, to strengthen sustainability and to maximize available EU funding. Coastal tourism itself is the largest maritime activity in Europe employing almost 3.2 million people and generating a total of EUR 183 billion in gross value added.

Under the third pillar of president Juncker’s investment plan (removing obstacles to growth by structural reforms) MARE has launched a study to investigate six topics in the field of nautical tourism. Firstly, how much is the apparent absence of cross border skippers’ licence recognition a barrier to growth in particular for the charter business? Secondly, polymer plastic boat recycling becoming an increasingly important issue, what can be learned from MS existing actions? Thirdly, how can marina and boating related developments boost jobs and growth in a sustainable manner? Fourthly, to what extent can marinas evolve more towards profit centres for surrounding local and regional development? Fifthly, is there a market potential for combined nautical and coastal tourism products and how may such development be fostered? Sixthly, do current on-board equipment rules for leisure boats hinder the economic development of the sector and is there a potential for further developments in applications for nautical tourism?

NL noted that nautical tourism and its link to marine litter presents an opportunity to engage in cooperation with others actors even outside EU. NL gave an example from Australia ‘The Seabin Project’ that could be a potential way of internationally cooperating in this field.

MALTA expressed interest in the topics MARE presented with regards to its coming Presidency. Nautical tourism will be one of Maltese Presidency priorities on IMP.

**Collection of marine data and marine knowledge**

**EMODnet**

EMODnet consists of more than 100 organisations assembling marine data, products and metadata to make these fragmented resources more available to public and private users relying on quality-assured, standardised and harmonised marine data which are interoperable and free of restrictions on use. EMODnet is currently in its second development phase with the target to be fully deployed by 2020. EMODnet links to other initiatives in three ways: 1. standard sharing 2. effort sharing and 3. data sharing. First of all, EMODnet is well ahead of terrestrial initiatives in complying with INSPIRE standards and even has some requirements that go further than INSPIRE. Secondly, some data processing effort are already shared with the European earth observation programme Copernicus and the Data Collection Framework (DCF) for fisheries. Thirdly, considerable work has already been done in the field of data sharing with regards to the MSFD. Similar efforts are beginning with MSP and are ongoing with CISE. EMODnet checkpoints are used to evaluate the quality of data in terms of accessibility, availability, multiple-use, reliability as well as temporal and spatial consistency. The next step will be setting up user group to provide feedback on EMODnet, signing a memorandum of understanding with Copernicus and reflecting on post-2020 development.

NL thanked MARE for the overview and supported the idea of setting up user groups, as user groups can identify the data needed to create knowledge.

ITALY underlined the importance for MS to discuss data acquisition and suggested to have a more detailed discussion in MSEG also about Copernicus.

SPAIN expressed its interest to be fully involved in EMODnet process and asked MARE how the user group will be formed, as there is interest by Spanish stakeholders to participate. Spain also pointed out the importance of financial transparency and setting realistic goals. Spain also asked MARE to explain the links between EMODnet, EMSA and EUBC. As EMODnet is progressing towards the third phase, Spain expressed interest in having more information on this process. Spain also asked what part of the European Fisheries Fund will be allocated to EMODnet and Copernicus. It was agreed that Spain will deliver the questions to MARE in writing.

FR thanked MARE for the interesting overview and asked for more information of when and how EMODnet will be evaluated and what this process will entail. ES asked MARE how user opinions will be taken on-board and used to develop EMODnet and how the user group will link to the evaluation of EMODnet.

MARE answered that, in terms of the user group, everyone can apply to participate. The user group should provide a good spread of sectors and geographical areas. EMODnet also provides real-time data for EMSA. A call for tender for the third phase should be launched in May. Evaluation of the direct management component of EMFF will begin soon. This includes EMODnet. Calls for tender will be launched in the next few months. Evaluation of EMODnet itself, its efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and relevance and whether it has achieved the objectives set out at the outset, will begin in mid-2017. It will be implemented by call for tender or under a framework contract.

NL highlighted the importance of clarifying how the marine system works and is affected by human action. This is not just in the interest of policymakers, but also the business community and civils society as their operations are often dependent on the healthy status of seas. NL also questioned why it is not possible to gather information from all national protected areas under a common umbrella (e.g. Atlas of the Seas) and expressed NL willingness to share knowledge and provide more information on seas and oceans.

MARE replied that the aim is to allow all EMODnet data layers to be imported into national systems. This is working already for some data layers. In addition, the central portal should allow users to search for, visualise and download data from all portals. This is harder than had been thought but progress is being made.

**Maritime CISE**

MARE presented the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE) for the EU maritime domain and detailed how CISE links to other initiatives such as EMODnet. CISE will create interoperability between the systems of over 300 surveillance authorities from seven relevant sectors throughout the EU. CISE shall allow each of these authorities to automatically interact with any other chosen authorities (appropriate agreements on access rights are needed) to access the information they need for their missions at sea. Currently only 30% of useful data is shared across sectors. The goal is to move from 30% towards 100% information sharing as enhanced and automated information services between authorities that trust each other improves awareness, effectiveness and cost efficiency. Technically and legally data sharing is already being made feasible, but more political will is needed to implement added value information services across sectors and borders. The EUCISE2020 project, gathering 14 MS and Norway, will develop and test CISE at large scale. MS engaged in EUCISE2020 are meant to show that CISE can work by exchanging new information services across sectors and borders. Such tested SICE information services may be maintained beyond the duration of the EUCISE project to show the way ahead. Other such services should then follow depending on MS political willingness to do so. CISE is thus meant to evolve according to user needs. The users being mainly the Coast Guard functions from seven relevant sectors, including defence. EMODnet should become a main provider of information under the CISE environment layer e.g. on wind and current information, oceanographic maps, protection areas etc. MARE also presented examples of high level scenarios where EMODnet data would be useful to various Coast Guard functions.

NL thanked MARE for the comprehensive presentation and pointed out the value of data sharing. NL noted that it is necessary to be as precise as possible with regards to sharing data across sectors and over national boundaries to ensure common standards and definitions in order for CISE users to have accurate information. NL concluded that in its view CISE is moving to the right direction. NL also called for more accuracy to examples of potential CISE use, as end-users in MS are skilled professionals on the subject. Accuracy is therefore vital to justify CISE to end-users, to keep momentum and provide added value to MS.

MARE answered to NL that the objective is to achieve an added value process for operators throughout the EU and that MARE is attempting to present the added value of how different systems, such as CISE, EMODnet and DCF fit together and benefit one another. MARE also noted that MS are currently on different levels in their maritime surveillance information sharing and data collection efforts and support needs to be provided to all actors at various levels.

**Data Collection Framework**

MARE reported on the ongoing development and work on the Data Collection Framework which establishes rules on the collection, management and use of biological, technical, environmental and socio-economic data concerning fisheries, aquaculture and processing sectors. The data is used in the framework of the Common Fisheries Policy, for the purpose of scientific analysis and to form the basis of scientific advice. Under DCF, MS have the obligation to collect and transmit data in response to data calls launched by end users or as part of reporting obligations to RFMO. New legislation is currently being negotiated aiming at increasing synergies with MSFD, removing duplication and overlaps with other EU Regulations and improving data use and availability. As part of the new legislation, more weight is put in regional cooperation. The Current Regional Coordination Meetings (RCMs), held once a year on regional sea-basin level and dealing with data collection issues, will become Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) and meet several times per year to plan regional sampling

Two grant agreements were signed last year; one on strengthening regional cooperation in the area of fisheries data collection in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, and the other in the North Sea and Eastern Arctic. The aim of these grants is to analyse the main coordination activities and to propose a regional sampling plan for each area. The report will be used for the establishment of the Regional Coordination Groups and for national work plans. The final outcomes of the grants will be a regional work plan for a number of stocks for each area and a wide stakeholder consultation. The Call for Tenders of a study on the ‘Availability and Dissemination of DCF data’ is currently under evaluation and aims at harmonizing databases and exchange systems in MS and to facilitate availability and dissemination of information to end users and the wider public. As part of this Call for Tenders, the requirements for developing a Fisheries Data Hub will be explored.

NL welcomed MARE’s presentation on DCF. NL also expressed both surprise that harmonization is not yet finished but also content that process is on-going. NL was also interested to know how information collected under the DCF could prove useful in assessing the impact of climate change on fish stocks. NL also wondered why data is collected only on commercial stock.

FR thanked MARE for the presentation as it has been some time since DCF was last discussed in MSEG. FR noted that DCF has been running for quite some time now and there is almost certain automatisation in the process.

**MSP Platform Technical Study**

S.Pro presented the work on Maritime Spatial Planning Platform Technical study which aims to identifying what data and knowledge are needed by MS for MSP decision-making, taking into account different scales and different points in the MSP cycle. The study is designed to identify data and knowledge issues currently relevant to the implementation of MSP by MS and to provide suggestions on how they could be overcome. Availability of and access to high quality, interoperable spatial data is a key requirement for successful maritime spatial planning. Specifically, the study aims to identify the main data, information and knowledge issues from the perspective of MS at the different stages (and scale) of MSP implementation, evaluate data and knowledge gaps that may act as obstacles to implementing MSP, correlate these data gaps with information and data held in existing databases, including products and marine information services that support the MSP decision-making process and suggest ways of bridging existing data and knowledge gaps, and mechanisms that could allow MS to obtain the “best available data and information” as stipulated in the MSP Directive.

Through this study, MARE is aiming to identify which additional information services and modelling tools could play a role in filling knowledge gaps, and this way to provide a framework to assist MS with their MSP processes. Final report will be published at end of year 2016 and the assistance mechanism website will be made available at the end of the project. MARE also pointed out that the topic was discussed in MSEG on MSP in Madrid on 14-15 March 2016 and MARE is waiting for feedback from some MS.

NL saw some problems arising from not having data on fisheries and recreational activities. NL also highlighted the ecosystem approach and land-sea cooperation in MSP process and acknowledged the benefit of the study for MSP process in identifying knowledge gaps concerning MSP.

ITALY remarked that they had no participation, along with many other MS, in MSEG on MSP in Spain and that they had not been provided with the template which MS are expected to fill in on MSP. S.Pro replied that they will be in contact with Italy to clarify if Italy has received a Country Information Sheet. If MS experts have questions on MSP process, they are encouraged to contact MARE. MARE also stressed that the MSP Directive is meant as a guidance tool and to create coherence between MS maritime planning.

**Discussion with Mr Jan-Bart Calewaert, EMODnet Secretariat**

Mr. Calewaert thanked MSEG for the invitation to discuss EMODnet and to hear MS concerns. The EMODnet Secretariat was established in 2013 in Oostende, Belgium, and it is providing support for MARE and EMODnet projects while raising awareness of EMODnet and dealing with related communication tasks. The Secretariat is doing outreach to communities who are less familiar with EMODnet, e.g. Blue Growth industry partners, civil society and NGOs. The Secretariat is also managing EMODnet technical operability testing. Phase three of EMODnet will be starting later this year with harmonisation work to be done. However, the current system with seven thematic portals will remain in place. At this time, user surveys are becoming more and more important to improve the functionality of the service.

Mr Calewaert welcomed the MSP data study to add to identifying data gaps and would also welcome a discussion with MARE and other actors on the usefulness of EMODnet in MSP context.

NL asked for clarification on how EMODnet and the Atlas of the Seas work together, if they are overlapping in some areas and whether these services could be combined as one-stop-shop approach. Mr Calewert answered that the Atlas is mainly intended as a communication tool for broader public, whereas EMODnet targets more technical and professional users. EMODnet also goes deeper, making available the underlying data (metadata) for professional use.

**AOB**

MARE informed the MSEG on the European Investment Project Portal which is a new web portal enabling EU based public and private project promoters to reach potential investors worldwide. The EIPP is part of the Investment Plan for Europe initiative to mobilise investment, promote economic growth and create more jobs across the EU. MARE is trying to raise awareness of the portal to attract more projects related to Blue Growth.