



Coherent & Cross-compliant Ocean Governance for Delivering the EU Green Deal for European Seas

From the Green Deal to the Ocean Pact: Strengthening Policy Coherence for Our Most Ambitious Marine Goals

Workshop synthesis



Funded by the European Union under the Grant Agreement Grant agreement ID 101060958. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

The workshop in a nutshell

Speakers : **Xavier Guillou** (DG MARE, European Commission), **Tobias Troll** (Seas at Risk), **Steve White** (DG ENV, European Commission), **Alice Belin** (DG ENV, European Commission), **Froukje Maria Platjouw** (NIVA/CrossGov), **Kemal Pinarbasi** (HELCOM/MSP4Bio), **Gianluca Ferraro** (University of Portsmouth/BlueGreen Governance), **Ben Boteler** (RIFS/Permagov)

Panelists: **Celine Frank** (DG MARE, European Commission), **Louis Lambrechts** (Oceano Azul Foundation), **Riku Varjopuro** (SYKE/MSP4Bio & Permagov), **John Condon** (Client Earth)

Co-organised by the Horizon-Europe CrossGov and MSP4Bio projects with support from the Permagov & BlueGreen Governance (BGG) projects, the workshop mobilized 35 experts from research, civil society and (EU) policy. Conversations were inspired by presentations in plenary sessions, results and recommendations from the CrossGov and MSP4Bio projects in interactive group sessions, as well as contributions from panelists who brought the day's collective exchanges to wider policy and societal perspectives including in light of the priorities and ambitions of the recently launched EU Ocean Pact.



Main Takeaways

Policy coherence is not a black & white phenomenon

Better alignment between objectives, rules and actions, synergies between (implementation) processes and adequate conditionalities in financing instruments facilitates implementation and enhance effectiveness – in particular for policies that have been set for the same policy domain (e.g. biodiversity or energy). At the same time, each policy needs to give priority to its own objectives and requirements with frictions, tensions and need to decide on tradeoffs expected. In some cases, frictions and tensions resulting from policy incoherences can steer innovations and the search for new approaches and solutions, thus can be positive in the long run within a wider EU iterative policy process. Thus, it is important to identify “how much” coherence is good enough, and what the optimal level of policy coherence and integration is for sustainable ocean governance.



Policy coherence challenges are not new

They exist since (EU) policies are being developed. The importance of “better” policy coherence is fully recognized in the Better Regulation Framework, with internal and external policy coherence being systematically addressed in evaluations (that assess the performance of the existing legislation), impact assessments (that assess new policy options), well as stakeholder consultations via the European Commission’s inter-service consultations. However, the attention given to “better” policy coherence and integration is receiving higher political attention today: central to the EU Green Deal, enhancing policy coherence and challenges is also central to the new EU Ocean Pact reflected e.g. in its guiding principles such

as a source-to-sea or ecosystem-based approaches or its ambition to strengthen the ocean governance framework.



Assessing policy coherence is important

Both CrossGov & MSP4BIO have developed assessment frameworks to assess policy coherence and integration in a more systematic and “objectivized” manner, as there is no agreed (common) methodology for such assessments. Such frameworks aim at identifying policy coherence challenges and bottlenecks and the main factors that explain these challenges – as the basis for developing recommendations and solutions for enhancing policy coherence and deliver policy outcomes more cost-effectively and efficiently. Both projects covered both vertical (EU-national-subnational-local) and horizontal (across sectors) coherences investigating it throughout the policy cycle, examining: the setting up of the policy agenda; policy objectives and measures; governance structures, science-policy-society interfaces (SPSI) and stakeholder involvement. The BlueGreen Governance project investigated also the alignment with the international policy and governance framework. And the Permagov Project focused on governance systems, placing governance arrangements at the center of the policy coherence and integration debate, emphasizing the significance of multilevel dynamics and scale mismatches affecting governance effectiveness.



From paper to practical implementation

By design and on paper, each EU policy needs to account for other (already existing) policies thereby contributing to policy coherence and integration. When implemented, however, challenges and misalignment arise and we see policies that work “against each other” with opportunities set in regulations for delivering more coherence implementation not being seized. This is the case for the alignment between the ‘environmental directives’: Water Framework Directive (WFD), Habitat Directive (HD), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD). It is even more so the case for the coherence between sector policies related to renewable energy, agriculture, fisheries, and other activities, and biodiversity-focused policies such as those mentioned above.



1.1 As many solutions as policy interfaces and challenges

Solutions for addressing policy coherence and integration challenges are many, depending on the policy interface investigated and the policy cycle phase or scale at which policy coherence and integration challenges are investigated. Examples from very operational to wider political solutions include:

1. Strengthen Strategic Impact Assessments/Environmental Impact Assessments to account for e.g. ecosystem boundaries, transboundary effects and multiple pressures;
2. Establish standardised approaches to account for minimum (marine) ecological standards into permits;
3. Co-design a standardized common monitoring system for both the MSFD and MSPD;
4. Strengthen consultation processes, improving traceability and transparency of how stakeholders contributions impacted (or not) decision making outcomes;
5. Support (allocate financial resources) in priority the transition of “unsustainable” sectors;
6. Develop one ocean knowledge system that is co-managed by the relevant institutions representing different policies and sectors (e.g. environment, fisheries, transport, energy);
7. Give clear responsibility for policy integration to one authority;
8. Bring biodiversity at a higher political priority level;
9. Strengthen policy literacy, so policy makers and stakeholders from one domain better understand other policy domains (in terms of ambitions, priorities, actions, conditionalities, governance...);
10. Harmonize data, reporting and assessments among policies/policy domains.

From paper solutions to real changes! For solutions to be effectively considered in the policy cycle from design to implementation, these need to be: (i) as practical and operational as possible (some of the solutions discussed remain rather general and difficult to bring on board of the policy cycle); (ii) shared to the right person(s) at the right time! Note that some of the solutions discussed are already put in practice by some Member States (MS), Regional Sea Conventions (RSC) or at the European Commission (EC) scale: these could receive further publicity and be shared as source of inspiration.



1.2 Opportunities ahead for strengthening (marine) policy coherence

Overall, the Ocean Pact represents a great opportunity for addressing some of the priority policy integration challenges that limit the protection and sustainable use of the ocean! In the short term, the revision of the MSFD combined with the revision of the MSPD required under the Ocean Pact offer the possibility to enhance the coherence and synergies between these two central EU (marine/maritime) policy frameworks. Establishing closer links between the two directives (in terms of implementation cycles, consultation & stakeholder processes, knowledge & assessments etc), applying effectively Ecosystem-Based Approaches (EBA) or strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation between different governmental bodies are among the areas that can receive particular attention in these revision processes. In the longer term, we need to reconsider the overall paradigm of EU policy and societal framework: (i) ensuring full consideration of ecological (e.g. ecological ceiling) and social (equity & justice) foundations in the development of the EU Blue Economy; (ii) strengthening the application of socio-ecological approaches to the protection and sustainable use of the ocean; and, (iii) bringing regeneration rather than exploitation, combined with a fair and equitable distribution of wealth and prosperity, at the forefront of our actions and decisions.



1.3 Food for thought

As solutions for enhancing policy coherence are considered, a broader dialogue is still needed to address the question of “How coherent is coherent enough?”. Progress is made to develop assessment frameworks that help identifying challenges, bottlenecks and factors that explain these to design solutions. However, more evidence on the practical implications, impacts (costs and benefits, short to long-terms) and added-value (and for whom) of different levels of policy coherence and integration is required. In parallel, it is essential to shed light (and develop knowledge) on the politics and political processes related to the ocean, as this will help designing political pathways that give chances for policy coherence and integration to be realised. This is of particular importance today if we want the policy integration opportunities offered by the Ocean Pact to be fully seized.