

**The Mediterranean leading the way - A cooperative framework to strengthen area-based nature conservation actions (MBPC/SEArca intergroup event)**

**Friday 4 November 2022, session 1: Area-based nature conservation actions and the review of marine and maritime EU policies**

*DG ENV's keynote speech delivered by Laurent Markovic on behalf of DG ENV's Director-General Florika Fink-Hooijer*

1. Thank you for inviting Director-General Fink-Hooijer to deliver this keynote speech. Unfortunately, Florika is not available today and she asked me to deliver it on her behalf.
2. I would like to thank the organisers, the Members of the European Parliament of the SEArca inter-group, the members of MBPC and of CPMR. I would also like to welcome the representatives of the regional and local authorities from around the Mediterranean, of Plan Bleu, of the Barcelona Convention, of the Union for the Mediterranean, as well as the representatives of the scientific community, the NGOs and my colleagues of the Commission.
3. I am myself a marine biologist coming from the Mediterranean region, so needless to say that the Mediterranean Sea is a subject very dear to me.
4. As we all very well know, the triple crises of biodiversity, pollution, climate and the war in Ukraine affect of course all regions of the world, but some are more affected than others. For example, the day before yesterday, a report of the World Meteorological Organization showed that temperatures in Europe increased more than twice the global average. It gives the EU a particular stake and responsibility.
5. So: what do we need? Action. When do we need it? Now. Time is not on our side. The scientists say we have a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to slow the climate and biodiversity crisis and secure a liveable future for humanity. I repeat this: a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity.
6. These crises call for a transformative change and a green transition. We need a nature-positive economy and a transition that is fair and leaves no one behind. The European Green Deal aims exactly at this and covers initiatives such as Farm to Fork, the Zero pollution action plan, Fit for 55 (climate law), but also research such as 'Mission Ocean' and initiatives on Nature-based solutions. Please be assured that all the Commission services are on the deck to deliver the Green Deal vision of a transformative change.
7. Let me give you more concrete examples: under the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, we have two flagship initiatives that apply both at land and at sea – 1) the proposal for a Nature restoration law and 2) enlarging the existing Natura 2000 network to protect 30% of the EU's territory by 2030, of which one-third strictly protected. For the marine part, this will be completed by the upcoming Commission's Action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems. And last but not least, we are also reviewing the Marine strategy framework directive.
8. **NRL** - The Commission adopted its proposal for a Nature restoration law on 22 June. The ambition here is to ensure a continuous and long-term recovery of EU's natural capital through the restoration of ecosystems. Article 5 is dedicated to the marine environment. Concretely speaking: by 2030, restoration measures should cover 20% of EU's land and sea. In addition, by 2050, measures should be put in place gradually for all ecosystems in need of restoration (30% by 2030, 60% by 2040). For the marine environment, we have selected habitat types that sustain marine life and contribute best to climate change mitigation, in line with Nature Directives and the Marine strategy framework directive. On the institutional

side, the Commission has started presenting the proposal to the co-legislators (Council and European Parliament) and the Commission really hopes to achieve good progress and to finalise discussions within this mandate.

9. **MPAs** – Of course, areas under restoration need protection. This is why we want that, by 2030, Marine protected areas to cover at least 30% of the EU seas, of which at least 10% strictly protected. Let me remind you that this is political target, and the EU Member States have endorsed it unanimously in October 2020. The Commission recently published a guidance document to help Member States designate new areas and achieve a network that is effective and coherent.
10. **MSFD** – A few words about the Marine strategy framework directive now: we had planned to evaluate and revise the directive by next year, but we want to favour quality over speed. We want to make sure that all stakeholders have their say and we are conscious that the policy context is continuously changing (Repower EU, implementation report on the Common fisheries policy, Nature restoration law discussed as we speak, etc). This is why we have decided that we will concentrate on the evaluation of the directive under this mandate, and we will take more time to work on revision of the directive, under next mandate. The preliminary results of the evaluation confirm the added value of the MSFD: for instance, the directive stimulated the collection of vast quantities of data, including in areas previously little known, for example underwater noise and marine litter. This has created opportunities for new research initiatives. However, the preliminary results also show that the revision should focus in particular on: 1) better implementation, 2) coherence with other legislation protecting the marine environment, 3) regional coordination, 4) improving data collection and 5) reducing complexity.
11. **Funding** - Okay, this is all nice paperwork, but none of this will happen without funding. I have very good news here: in line with the biodiversity target under the multiannual financial framework, the EU is set to invest 7.5% of EU budget in biodiversity in 2024, rising to 10% in 2026 and 2027. This will concern all EU funding instruments and we are working on leveraging private money to help deliver the Green Deal. And this is not a dream, the private sector can also meet its interest. For example, a 2019 study showed that EUR 1,000 spent on improving MPA management in the Mediterranean can generate up to EUR 13,000 of benefits within 10 years.
12. Of course, we need action at the EU level, but the actions themselves need to be rooted in local reality and the MBPC Interreg project (Mediterranean biodiversity protection community) ticks very many boxes: it aims at improving networking and management inside and outside protected areas, it puts together EU and third countries actors as well as public and private partners.
13. We need to act local, but we also need to think global. The EU and its Member States share the high ambition of transforming the way we interact with our planet and will push for ambitious results at the ongoing CoP 27 climate and upcoming CoP 15 of the Convention on Biodiversity. In relation to the latter, I would like to recall that the EU will push for 30\*30 target, i.e. 30% MPAs globally by 2030.
14. I would like to finish my speech with a concrete example of regional cooperation that serves well the citizens around the Mediterranean basin: in 2022, the Mediterranean countries and the EU jointly requested the International Maritime Organisation to designate the Mediterranean as an Sulphur emission control area (Med SECA) to protect both human health and the environment from ship's air pollution. Next month, the IMO will finalise this 10-year work under the Barcelona Convention and adopt the SECA protected area. The Commission has spurred efforts at the technical, legal and diplomatic levels to make this happen and pushed for an entry into force already in 2025.

15. We believe that the Med SECA will bring 'green reputation' to the region, that it will attract investments and facilitate access to EU and other funds such as the European investment bank and European bank for reconstruction and development. This could cover policies such as ship emissions, decarbonisation, a clean and healthy Mediterranean, regional cohesion, transport and innovation funds. I think this is good news for the region and for the members of MedCities who are with us today.
16. Ladies and gentlemen, I see in this room a wide array of legislators, policymakers, of local and international actors. This is the community we need, and we need you to continue working together and with us to make sure our species has a future on our beautiful blue planet. We have no magic wand but we have a vision and a will; and where there is a will, there is a path. We need action and we need it now.
17. I would like to thank you for your attention and I wish you fruitful discussions!