

PRESS RELEASE – June 2016

Two new European projects will improve transnational coordination in Maritime Spatial Planning in the North and Baltic Sea

Because human activities and their impacts do not stop at national sea borders, there is a need for coordination among national maritime spatial planners and planning processes. With this in mind relevant MSP authorities have decided to cooperate within the two sister projects “NorthSEE” and “Baltic LINes”, funded through Interreg. Coordinated and led by the German Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency – this is for the first time that two projects in the North and Baltic Sea are jointly being undertaken and can therefore increase synergy even across two sea-basins. Together with expert institutions as well as sector stakeholders, they will work on developing coherent transnational planning solutions on a large spatial scale over the coming three years.

Offshore wind farms, cables and pipelines, shipping routes connecting major harbours and unique nature conservation areas: the North Sea and Baltic Sea have it all. All these human and natural activities require space in the sea. With a growing amount of human activity, the demand for space will be growing too, while existing functions like fisheries and fish farming is there to stay for our marine protein food supply. Coordination among different sectors is important to prevent conflicts, foster co-use and synergies and thereby ensure sustainable blue development. To stimulate this process of ecosystem based blue growth, the European Union has adopted legislation requiring all coastal EU countries to plan their maritime activities. These national Maritime Spatial Plans have to be coherent and coordinated within the sea basin, and finalized by 2021 (EU MSP Directive 2014). In addition to the EU countries, Norway participates with more than 10 years of experience with cross-sector and eco-system based planning.

Shipping routes, energy corridors and environmental protection are issues which are of a highly transnational nature. Thus, the Baltic LINes project aims at developing pan-Baltic

planning solutions for shipping routes and linear energy infrastructure and integration of these in national plans. This prevents cross-border mismatches and secures transnational connectivity as well as efficient use of sea space. NorthSEE also aims to improve cooperation between the MSP authorities in the North Sea Region and to achieve greater coherence between national plans and planning processes in the fields of shipping, energy and environmental protection.

Coordination is more successful when it is backed up with evidence, such as data and information on natural conditions, current and planned uses, as well as future trends and resulting spatial needs for shipping and energy as well as environmental objectives. The puzzle for maritime spatial planners becomes even more challenging when taking into account the effects of climate change and shifts in global economies. The reduction of ice-covered areas may for instance have dramatic consequences for shipping routes.

To obtain information, NorthSEE and Baltic LINes actively involve stakeholders to integrate their input in their projects. For this an innovative gaming tool, called the MSP Challenge will be used, which engages participants in scenario building for both sea basins and helps reflect upon questions arising from blue growth objectives and future challenges.

The NorthSEE and Baltic LINes projects work closely together, share findings and thereby strengthening the outcome of both projects. When both projects have finished in three years' time, transnational coherent planning solutions will be on the table, information and data portals will be set up, the network of stakeholders will be larger and closer and concrete recommendations for MSP coordination will be suggested to relevant governments.