

Marine mammals and good environmental status: science, policy and society; challenges and opportunities

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Abstract

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive has become the key instrument for marine conservation in European seas. We review its implementation, focusing on cetacean biodiversity, using the examples of Spain and the Regional Seas Convention, OSPAR. The MSFD has been widely criticised for legal vagueness, lack of coordination, uncertainty about funding, and poor governance; its future role within EU Integrated Maritime Policy remains unclear. Nevertheless, the first stages of the process have run broadly to schedule: current status, environmental objectives and indicators have been described and the design of monitoring programmes is in progress, drawing on experience with other environmental legislation. The MSFD is now entering its critical phase, with lack of funding for monitoring, limited scope for management interventions, and uncertainty about how conservation objectives will be reconciled

with the needs of other marine and maritime sectors, being among the main concerns. Clarity in governance, about the roles of the EU, Member States, Regional Seas Conventions and stakeholders, is needed to ensure success. However, even if (as seems likely) good environmental status cannot be achieved by 2020, significant steps will have been taken to place environmental sustainability centre-stage in the development of Integrated Maritime Policy for EU seas.

Keywords

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Introduction

The EU's Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD, 2008/56/EC) has been described as the key environmental instrument of European Union (EU) maritime policy, one designed to formalise an ecosystem-based approach to marine environmental management (De Santo, 2010; Bellas, 2014).

The MSFD was adopted in June 2008 and transposed into National Legislation by EU Member States in 2010. The overall aim of the MSFD is to enable sustainable use of marine goods and services by effectively managing human activities and pressures through an ecosystem-based approach. To achieve this aim, it sets the requirement that Member States must achieve (or maintain) good environmental status (GES) across all European waters by 2020. GES is defined as being reached when “*the overall state of the environment in marine*