



Report of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process Marine networking event

ICES Annual Science Conference, 11 Sept 2019, Gothenburg, Sweden

Author(s): Oscar Bos, Marloes Kraan, Amanda Schadeberg

Wageningen University &
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Summary

The European Commission launched the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process in 2012 to help meet the target of significantly improving the conservation status of species and habitats protected under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives by 2020. This process is a multi-stakeholder co-operation process at the biogeographical level and includes seminars, workshops and cooperation activities to enhance effective implementation, management, monitoring, financing and reporting of the Natura 2000 network¹.

As part of this process a marine Natura 2000 network meeting was held on 11 Sept 2019 during the ICES Annual Science Conference in Gothenburg (venue: Gothia Towers, room H2). The meeting was attended by about 30 people ranging from scientists to marine managers, mostly based in Europe. After a general presentation (topics: Natura 2000 network, relation between ICES and Natura 2000, biogeographical process), everyone was asked to take part in multiple rounds of short 'speed dating' sessions to get to know each other and take turns to discuss their Natura 2000 site issues. Next, the participants formed three groups to create project idea proposals on three topics related to Natura 2000: improving fishing net selectivity, improving understanding of less-studied fishing gears, and future monitoring techniques. The groups had to pitch a project idea with an imaginary budget of €2 million and the winner would be selected by a judge from ICES. After a playful brainstorm session the groups presented their ideas:

- 1) Improving fishing net selectivity to avoid protected species: Group 1 proposed to commercialize existing technical solutions for reducing bycatch. This should be done by fishermen who know how to scale up innovations and to increase the uptake of existing ideas and techniques.
- 2) Impact of less studied fishing gears (e.g. flyshoot) on N2000 areas: Group 2 proposed to organise a competition across Europe in which participants will have to prove that their fishing gear does not harm protected species and habitats in Natura 2000 site. The winner would be co-financed to develop their gear further.
- 3) Future monitoring techniques (e.g., eDNA, acoustics, video camera, photoID, machine learning): Group 3 proposed to develop an integrated monitoring technique using (e)DNA, video and acoustics in their project 'DEVIATE' (**D**NNA+**V**ideo+**A**coustic **T**echniques). The combined technique would be tested in contrasting habitat types (mud, reefs) to come up with an comprehensive and affordable method that can be applied in any habitat type in Europe.

The judge congratulated each group on their imagination and innovative ideas, and commented mainly on the feasibility of the proposals. Finally, he decided that the second idea had most potential for impact and congratulated the group.

At the end of the session, the participants indicated that they had learned about Natura 2000, the importance of communication, enjoyed the set-up of the meeting and made new contacts.

Overall, the format of the meeting was felt to be nice, and stimulated lots of discussion and interaction. Participants and ICES organisers were positive about the knowledge market. The informal setting stimulated discussion, and contacts were made with other participants. The used format is also suitable for other meetings, seminars and networking events.

More information can be found in the newsletters:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/news/newsletter/196_n2000_biogeographical_process_newsletter_en.htm

¹ source: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/seminars_en.htm

1 Introduction

The European Commission launched the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process in 2012 to help meet the target of significantly improving the conservation status of species and habitats protected under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives by 2020. This process is a multi-stakeholder co-operation process at the biogeographical level and includes seminars, workshops and cooperation activities to enhance effective implementation, management, monitoring, financing and reporting of the Natura 2000 network².

The key objectives of the biogeographical process are:

- collecting up-to-date information on threats and conservation needs for species and habitats;
- exchanging experiences, case studies and best practices;
- identifying common objectives, priorities and management actions;
- developing new management insights, (cross-border) stakeholder cooperation frameworks, networks of specialists and site managers, etc.; and
- promoting Natura 2000 management that integrates socio-economic objectives².

For the period 2018-2020, Wageningen Environmental Research is leading a consortium that organises terrestrial and marine seminars and network meetings for the European Commission. The consortium partners are Wageningen Marine Research (The Netherlands), NatureBureau Ltd (UK), Estonian University of Life Sciences (Estonia), TerraEcogest (Spain) and Mãe d'água (Portugal).

This report documents the marine networking and knowledge exchange event that was organised during the ICES Annual Science Conference 2019 in Gothenburg, Sweden, on 11 September 2019. This report also serves to describe the format and set-up, for use in future meetings.

Reports on past and upcoming events can be found on the Natura 2000 platform and in the Natura 2000 newsletter on the Natura 2000 Communication Platform website (https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/index_en.htm).

1.1 ICES Annual Science Conference

The ICES Annual Science Conference (9-12 Sept 2019) mainly attracts scientists working on fisheries and impacts of fisheries on the seafloor and ecosystems. Scientists studying other ecosystem compartments (birds, marine mammals, etc.) are usually less well represented at the ICES ASC. Theme sessions included: habitat models, aquaculture, machine learning, ecosystem vulnerability, fish stock management, harmful algal blooms and human impact.

Held during the ICES ASC, this networking event contributes to actions listed on the marine roadmap prepared by participants of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process. We selected a number of actions from the marine roadmap that could be addressed in this setting:

"Theme 1 – Setting conservation objectives at site, national and regional levels

- *Habitat definitions: Sharing of national and regional manuals for interpreting habitats, electronic media*
- *Establish a database of personal and organization contacts on specific habitats*

Theme 2 – Setting favourable reference values (FRVs)

Theme 3 – Developing conservation measures to achieve the conservation objectives"

The focus of the meeting was on a number of issues related to Natura 2000 and fisheries.

The aim of the meeting was to ensure that, after the networking event, participants

² source: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/seminars_en.htm

-
- were aware of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process
 - had enlarged their scientific Natura 2000-network
 - were stimulated to think in a strategic way about marine protection measures?
 - had the opportunity to sign up for the Natura 2000 BGP newsletter
(http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/natura2000nl_en.htm)

2 Marine networking event

2.1 Venue & Date

ICES Annual Science Conference 2019
Gothia Towers room H2, Gothenburg, Sweden
Wednesday, 11 September. 16:30 - 18:00 h



2.2 Conveners

Oscar Bos, Wageningen Marine Research (marine ecologist)
Amanda Schadeberg, Wageningen Marine Research (social scientist)
Marloes Kraan, Wageningen Marine Research (social scientist)

ICES staff supported the event by arranging the venue (for free) and by providing logistics and several assistants (students). Drinks and snacks were paid for by the project. The session was attended by 30 participants.

2.3 Programme

16:30 – Introduction
16:40 – Speed dating
17:10 – Call for proposals
17:40 – Pitches of project ideas
17:45 – Networking & drinks
17:55 – Announcement of the winners
18:00 – End

2.4 Results

16:30 – Introduction

The meeting took place in a large conference room (suited for ~150 people), which we had adapted to our needs. About 30 participants with different backgrounds and from different countries attended the session. Drinks and snacks were provided and the names of participants were marked on the conference's participants list. During the opening presentation, Oscar Bos explained Natura 2000 in general, the background of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process, issues that we as researchers encounter working with Natura 2000, as well as the possible role and contribution of the audience and ICES to the biogeographical process. The presentation was reviewed by the European Commission beforehand to ensure that the right message was provided regarding the background of Natura 2000.



Preparing the map of Europe for the speed dating

16:40 – Speed dating

To break the ice and to let participants get to know each other, 4 rounds of 3-minute speed dating were held. A map of Europe was drawn on the floor with masking tape. Participants were asked to choose an image they could identify with from a number of touristy postcards depicting marine habitats, species (seals, birds, sponges, corals, etc) and human activities (fisheries, recreation). Next, they would need to stand near their relevant location in Europe and meet others. Time was kept with a bicycle bell. Participants were told to spend some of their time introducing themselves and their research interests, and were then encouraged to discuss one of the following topics with their partner:

- Improving fishing selectivity: avoidance of protected species
- Knowledge gaps: impact of less studied fishing gears (e.g. flyshoot) on N2000 areas
- Future monitoring techniques: eDNA, acoustics, video camera, photoID, machine learning

The set-up was:

Person 1: introduction, key problems, any solutions

* ding *

Person 2: introduction, key problems, any solutions

* ding *

Exchange ideas about collaborations or new solutions

* ding ding ding *

Change partners

This gave participants time to meet one another, understand their areas of expertise, and get to know which problems they were interested, which was necessary for the next activity.



Speed dating

17:10 – Call for proposals and group collaboration

The moderator explained that there is an (imaginary) call for proposals to strengthen the N2000 network and solve one of the three problems discussed during the speed dating session. The participants sorted themselves into groups around one of the following subjects:

- Improving fishing net selectivity: avoidance of protected species
- Impact of less studied fishing gears (e.g. flyshoot) on N2000 areas
- Future monitoring techniques: eDNA, acoustics, video camera, photoID, machine learning

The groups were asked to develop a proposal for using their €2 million that answered the following questions:

- What problem could you tackle?
- How?
- Why is it important?
- Why is your solution feasible?
- Who will you collaborate with?



Presentation of ideas

17:40 – Pitches of project ideas

After the brainstorm, the specially invited judge, Neil Holdworth, head of the data centre of ICES, listened to each of the pitches given by the team captains. He asked some critical questions to the groups about feasibility, longevity, and how their idea fit within the budget constraints.

- 1) Improving fishing net selectivity to avoid protected species: Group 1 proposed to commercialize existing technical solutions for reducing bycatch. This should be done by fishermen who know how to scale up innovations and to increase the uptake of existing ideas and techniques.
- 2) Impact of less studied fishing gears (e.g. flyshoot) on N2000 areas: Group 2 proposed to organise a competition across Europe in which participants will have to prove that their fishing gear does not harm protected species and habitats in Natura 2000 site. The winner would be co-financed to develop their gear further.

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- 3) Future monitoring techniques (e.g., eDNA, acoustics, video camera, photoID, machine learning): Group 3 proposed to develop an integrated monitoring technique using (e)DNA, video and acoustics in their project idea playfully called 'DEVIATE' (**D**N**A**+**V**ideo+**A**coustic **T**echniques). The combined technique would be tested in contrasting habitat types (mud, reefs) to come up with a comprehensive and affordable method that can be applied in any habitat type in Europe.

17:45 – Networking & drinks (judge deliberation)

Participants were given drinks and snacks and encouraged to continue networking while waiting for the judge's verdict. In the background, a movie played showing underwater footage of Dutch Natura 2000 areas.

18:00 – Announcement of the winner and conclusion

The judge announced and justified his decision that the idea of Group 2 had the most potential. After the winner was congratulated the meeting was closed, but most people stayed after the session had ended to continue talking with their new Natura 2000 contacts.

Overall, the format of the meeting was felt to be nice, and stimulated lots of discussion and interaction. Participants and ICES organisers were positive about the knowledge market. The informal setting stimulated discussion, and contacts were made with other participants. The used format is also suitable for other meetings, seminars and networking events.

2.5 Follow up

Participants were e-mailed for feedback and were encouraged to sign up for the newsletter. Some feedback was provided.

2.6 Feedback

During and after the session, we received a hand full of positive comments with some tips. For example, the speed dating session was considered an effective way to meet others. According to a Belgian colleague, it was a very 'Dutch' (direct) in its set-up, but nevertheless fun to do. Another participant remarked that the three options for the proposals seem to all be focused on fisheries, but this was understandable given that most scientists attending an ICES conference were somehow linked to fisheries research. Another participant gave written feedback by email: *"I did find the session informative and enlightening and while my area of interest was slightly peripheral to the specific technical aspects of the session (my area is assessing aquaculture activities in Natura 2000 sites), I found the ability to communicate to others on Natura issues very helpful. I believe the speed dating process was very beneficial and I believe, would have benefited from a collective feedback session from the participants to determine what they learned and perhaps apply to their situation. Overall, I believe the session was very good, as it addressed a deficiency that I find common when dealing with Natura 2000 issues and assessments and that is the lack of communication among the various interested parties. I will admit to being part of the problem in that sometimes we just move along and do not really consider the need to communicate to diverse views on our processes. I do believe having worked on Risk Analysis for many years now that the issue of risk communication is critical to understanding and arriving at a robust conclusion."* The organisers enjoyed hosting the session and will take this feedback into account for further Natura 2000 events.

3 Quality Assurance

Wageningen Marine Research utilises an ISO 9001:2015 certified quality management system. This certificate is valid until 15 December 2021. The organisation has been certified since 27 February 2001. The certification was issued by DNV GL.

If the quality cannot be guaranteed, appropriate measures are taken.

References

- Roadmap for knowledge exchange and networking for the period 2019-2020. Version 1, following discussions at the Second marine Natura 2000 Seminar, held in Palma, Mallorca, 13-15 November 2018. Available from: Theo.vandersluis@wur.nl

Justification

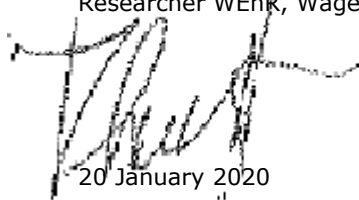
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Project Number: 431210080

The scientific quality of this report has been peer reviewed by a colleague scientist and a member of the Management Team of Wageningen Marine Research

Approved: Theo van der Sluis
Researcher WEnR, Wageningen; project leader Biogeographical Process

Signature:



Date: 20 January 2020

Approved: Jakob Asjes
Manager integration

Signature:



Date: 20 January 2020

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