

# The challenges of transboundary marine biodiversity conservation

## Policy Brief

### Key points

- A shared macro-regional vision and support system is required to conserve marine biodiversity both within and across political borders;
- Protected areas should be designated and designed to function within a broader transboundary planning framework;
- Consideration of the socio-economic and political context of all conservation is required, but especially at transboundary level.

*MarCons aims to facilitate the integration of marine conservation policy into macro-regional maritime spatial planning agendas for the European and contiguous seas, thereby offsetting the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.*

*This and other policy briefs are available from [www.marcons-cost.eu](http://www.marcons-cost.eu)*

### What are the issues?

**Connectivity:** All seas are highly connected which makes their effective conservation a transboundary issue that can only be resolved by cooperation between states;

**Application:** Marine protected areas and the Natura 2000 network have not been systematically planned or embedded within a broader marine spatial planning framework;

**Coordination:** Transboundary systematic conservation planning on a macro-regional scale is necessary to balance Blue Growth with ecological resilience;

**Alternatives:** Mechanisms such as the Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas have not been given full consideration by the international community.

### What are the associated challenges?

**Responsibilities:** Disagreements remain over the jurisdictions of the nation states and the roles of the different international institutional frameworks;

**Uncertainty:** Climate crisis, overexploitation of resources, and economic volatility are increasing, leading to isolationism, border disputes and ocean grabbing;

**Timeliness:** International negotiations are complex and slow;

**Mandates:** The lack of statutory power and funding of macro-regional agreements and other international conservation instruments undermine their effectiveness;

**Power:** The differences in power dynamics between states need to be explicitly recognised and characterised.

### Proposed solutions

**Leadership:** Macro-regional and coordinating organizations must be provided with both the legal instruments and funding to facilitate on-demand agreements between member states leading to transboundary conservation;

**Recognition:** Marine rather than maritime spatial planning, recognising that the integrity and health of the marine environment are the foundations on which Blue Growth is based, and hence adequate conservation should be prioritised over other uses;

**Confidence:** Greater knowledge of the marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction is needed, to inform best practices in the development of Ecosystem Based Marine Spatial Management at the global level;

**Methodical:** The application of Systematic Conservation Planning principles (resilience, representativeness, connectivity, adequacy, prioritization and replication), to reduce intersectoral and intercountry conflicts;

**Engagement:** Working with industry and other stakeholders, as part of the planning process, to change the business-as-usual model from the concept of sustainability towards ecological resilience, social equity and economic responsibility;

**Precaution:** Actively promoting the precautionary approach to the use of marine resources, especially in transboundary ecosystems and areas beyond national jurisdiction, including the use of different forms of conservation such as zoning and spatially dynamic arrangements;

**Integration:** Meeting the challenge of integrating science, policy, and society through promoting and facilitating interdisciplinary research, stakeholder engagement and relevant authority support.