MSP and Migratory Fish

WORKSHOP REPORT 9.10.2024 KEMI

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The workshop participants represented the following organizations:
The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, Lännen Kalaleader, Regional State Administrative Agency for Northern Finland, Fish & Water Research LTD, The Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment Lapland, Council of Oulu Region, Regional Council of Lapland, Coordination of the Finnish Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) cooperation, Oulun Seudun Leader, The Museum of Torne Valley, Natural Resources Institute Finland, MIX research, Meri-Lapin lintutieteellinen yhdistys, Finnish–Swedish Transboundary River Commission.

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Background of the workshop

The workshop was organised as a part of the Interreg Baltic Sea2Land project. The project equips public authorities with the Navigator tool that helps harmonise land and marine planning and balance initiatives that impact coastal development. As a part of the creation of the tool, partners conduct pilots to test the applicability of the platform and its tools. The MSP and migratory fish workshop in Kemi was a part of the Finnish northern pilot (done in co-operation with the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, Council of Oulu region and Regional Council of Lapland) that aimed to strengthen the consideration of migratory fish in maritime spatial planning. Prior to this event, three events regarding the pilot had been organised during autumn 2023 from which you can find more information here (report in Finnish). The workshop organised on 9th October 2024 in Kemi was specifically targeted for planners and environmental experts working with migratory fish and offshore wind power.

Workshop objective

The aim of the event was to strengthen the consideration of migratory fish in Finnish maritime spatial planning. The development of offshore wind power, which is underway in the Gulf of Bothnia, may influence migratory fish and thereby have significant regional impacts not only on the Torne River in both Finland and Sweden, but also for the migratory fish populations in the whole Gulf of Bothnia. There was a need to take a closer look at how migratory fish are integrated into the Finnish maritime spatial plan and how issues related to migratory fish can further be strengthened by the Finnish strategic maritime spatial plan.

The workshop participants evaluated from their perspective how the *Maritime Spatial Plan for Finland 2030* considers migratory fish. The purpose was also to assess new possibilities for strengthening migratory fish related planning in the ongoing revision of the maritime spatial plan, as well as to learn from and compare with the approaches taken in the Swedish maritime spatial plan.

The workshop was structured in two parts. First, participants took part in two lectures that presented the Swedish and Finnish maritime spatial plans and how migratory fish are supported by them. After the introductions to the topic, the participants were divided into two groups (Finnish and Swedish speaking). To start off, both groups were asked whether they were familiar with and had used the maritime spatial plans in their work, and if not why. After this, the groups made a SWOT analysis of the Finnish MS plan in force with a focus on migratory fish. The objective of the second groupwork was to identify based on the SWOT development solutions for identified threats and weaknesses.

About the report and its contents

This report does not aim to provide an introduction into how maritime spatial planning is conducted in Finland and Sweden, but rather focuses on the results of the *MSP and Migratory Fish* workshop. However, the report provides links for further reading regarding maritime spatial planning in both countries for those interested to learn more.

Presentation from The Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management

Swedish Maritime Spatial Plan and migratory fish - Jan Schmidtbauer-Crona, senior analyst

A presentation on the Swedish MSP plan and planning solutions related to nature was given by Jan Schmidtbauer-Crona from the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management. In the Swedish draft plan, nature conservation requirements are designated by the symbol "N". Areas with high nature values where a need to preserve and enhance ecosystem services and good environmental status of the marine environment have been identified are designated with "n". This small "n" can be used in combination with other markings such as Energy (E) to highlight a need for coordination of different values and activities.

The Swedish maritime spatial plans, *Havsplaner för Bottniska viken, Östersjön och Västerhavet* can be found here. The planning document related to nature can be found here (*Natur i havsplaneringen. En fördjupning om utgångspunkter och underlag för natur och klimat i havsplaner för Bottniska viken, Östersjön och Västerhavet. Underlag till regeringen*).

Presentation from Finnish Maritime Spatial Planning Coordination Group

Finnish Maritime Spatial Planning and migratory fish - Mari Pohja-Mykrä, Coordinator of Maritime Spatial Planning Cooperation

Mari Pohja-Mykrä presented how the Finnish MSP plan in force considers migratory fish and nature values. The Finnish maritime spatial plan addresses areas with high nature values with corresponding map markings. In addition, a connection map marking designates areas with important ecological connections between the land and sea. The parts of the plan addressed in the presentation can be found through the following links:

- *The Maritime Spatial Plan and Ecological Connections Marking*
- The "*Ecological connection*" marking card
- *Roadmap for Nature Conservation and Management*
- *Roadmap for Fishing and Aquaculture*

Background check: Participants' experience with Maritime Spatial Plans

The Finnish MSP coordination group was interested to know whether the participants had previously used the MS plans and in what way. If the participants had no experience with MS plans, they were also asked to specify reasons behind it. The responses here synthesised provide valuable information about how the maritime spatial plans can be further developed and as a result their usage could be increased.
The responses are divided into two groups, those who had used the plans and those who had not, partly with details on why.

The MS plans have been used for:

- Planning marine inventories
- "In every possible manner"
- Both Finnish and Swedish MS plans as support for statements as well as guidance
- Parts of it, such as the scenario work as inspiration

- Has stumbled upon the MS plan due to offshore wind power issues and has given statements regarding other countries MS plans

No use of the plan until now:

- No need to use the plan
- Not familiar with the existence of a plan
- Use other more precise information provided by other suppliers
- Not familiar with the plan

The Maritime Spatial Plan and Migratory Fish Groupworks

Groupwork 1

The presentations in the workshop functioned as support and basis for the following tasks where the participants were asked to assess from their perspective with a SWOT analysis the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Finnish MS plan. The following lists show the answers from both Swedish and Finnish speaking groups.

Strengths

- It is good to have a marking called *ecological connection*. It shows that migratory fish are considered in the plan.
- From a migratory fish point of view, it is good to have a plan which covers ecological connections that extend inland.
- Overall, the MSP process enables for different perspectives to be included.

Weaknesses

- The *ecological connection* marking does not tell/indicate how the marking should be taken into consideration at sea – what does it mean for planning? It also does not show how the fish migrates. It only shows a part starting at the river mouth.
- When looking at an area further out at sea, noticing the ecological connection marking can be challenging. You might not know that a marking further out could be linked to the ecological connection marking since they are far away from each other. It can be hard to understand the "whole picture" with the current marking.
- The plan does not specifically show spawning and growth areas for fish. Also, the difference between the two would be important to show.
- The planning principle should be formulated in a stronger and more precise way in the ecological connection planning card. It should also be more concrete, but at the same time not be restrictive. The planning solution should have courage to indicate and show possible conflicts between sectors such as energy and nature (e.g. migration routes).
- Lacking knowledge of possible migration routes and their consequent absence in the plan.
- Biological factors should be made more visible. The whole lifecycle of species including growth, feeding and growing areas should be considered to demonstrate how a healthy life cycle can be maintained.

Opportunities

- The plan should show existing protected areas to better support migratory fish and other nature values.
- The Finnish MS plan could apply the same approach as the Swedish MS plan, use the small letter “n” (nature) after a capital letter indicating that specific areas need to consider nature values if another activity is planned at that area. Currently, this opportunity does not exist, but a similar solution could be considered.
- The plan should somehow identify or be able to show that a planning decision at one area might influence a different area. As an example, building offshore wind power in the Quark region might affect the salmon in the Torne River.
- It is good to maintain separate markings for important fishing areas and areas important for fish production (such as breeding and feeding grounds).
- The MS plan should take into reconsideration that some EU directives are controverse, e.g. Repower EU and Natura2000 areas and species. These controverse targets/directives should be made visible.
- Natura2000 areas should be incorporated better into the MSP or at least making it easier to quote to them, especially migrating species.
- Migrating routes could be made better visible, e.g. drawing the line of ecological connection a little bit further out to the sea.
- The plan/marking should consider also migratory fish species other than salmon and sea trout to indicate diversity of species in the sea and rivers.
- The migratory fish should be more widely understood as part of cultural heritage. This could also advance the prerequisites of tourism.
- In the existing plan, information is presented vertically. In a case such as migratory fish horizontal marking might be solution that could be considered.
- The research on migratory fish would benefit from a study concentrating on spatial bottlenecks. For example, areas such as Kvarken or Åland Sea would provide an excellent research area to study how salmon migrate in the Baltic Sea. After collecting this information, the map marking for the migratory fish would probably be easier to define on the plan.
- The precautionary principle could be an opportunity as well as a threat for migratory fish. In general, the precautionary principle is good when the amount of information available is insufficient.

Threats

- The salmon is a Natura2000 species and the whole Torne River is a Natura2000 area. Should not the Finnish MS plan somehow take this into reconsideration? Or more precisely how could it take it to reconsideration? A species protected in Sweden uses also Finnish waters but has no legal protected status here.
- Even though the understanding of migratory fish is not comprehensive, there is a lot of information that could be considered in the planning process. The challenge is how this scattered information can be brought into the plan and who should be responsible of it.

- Many things have already changed for the migratory fish during the last decades and changes will probably happen also in the future. The difficulty to predict future developments is one key thing that forms a threat for the protection of migratory fish.
- Finland and Sweden plan their maritime areas from different perspectives. Migratory fish would strongly benefit from closer cooperation between countries at each planning level.
- Large-scale offshore wind farming creates a threat for migratory fish. Also, in the current geopolitical situation, there is a risk that migratory fish will be neglected.
- On a general level, one important decision is to select the different activities concentrated on the free or already occupied maritime areas.

Summary of the SWOT analysis from a stakeholder perspective - Finnish MS plan and migratory fish

According to the stakeholder views gathered at the workshop, the Finnish maritime spatial plan, has several strengths from a migratory fish perspective. These include, for instance, the ecological connection marking, which supports migratory fish by covering ecological links from inland to the sea. The MSP process also allows overall diverse perspectives to be heard and included.

However, the stakeholders identified weaknesses such as the ecological marking lacking clarity on its implications for planning at sea and being hard to identify further out to sea. The plan omits details on fish spawning and growth areas, and the ecological connection planning principle needs a clearer formulation. There is also insufficient data on migration routes and biological factors.

Opportunities identified by stakeholders include showing protected areas to better support migratory fish and adopting the Swedish "n" approach for nature values. The plan could also highlight how planning decisions in one area affect another, such as wind power's impact on salmon migration. Separating fishing areas from fish production zones, addressing conflicting EU directives, and extending migratory routes further out to sea are additional opportunities.

Threats perceived by stakeholders involve inadequate consideration of Natura2000 protection areas and species, difficulties integrating scattered data into planning decisions, and unpredictable future developments posing risks to migratory fish. Differences in planning approaches between Finland and Sweden hinder cooperation, while large-scale offshore wind farming and geopolitical tensions could further neglect migratory fish consideration.

Groupwork 2

The second groupwork aimed at finding solutions for the identified threats and weaknesses based on the strengths and opportunities that were recognised. The thoughts set out below are based on discussions from both groups.

- Inclusion of no-go zones/no-build zones would spare resources when important areas are indicated and can be taken into reconsideration at an early stage of planning.
- The strategic nature of the plan is seen as a strength worth keeping. The plan is recognised as a good guiding document.
- The planning principles in the marking card should give clearer instructions for planning.
- The ecological connection marking should continue further out to sea.
- Closer co-operation is needed with Swedish municipalities regarding markings and their significations, especially concerning the markings that end on national borders.
- Finland/ the Northern planning area could state in the written part that Salmon is a Natura 2000 species in Sweden. Currently, activities on the Finnish side take the species into account poorly even though planning solutions can affect them.
- Collaboration with fish experts is needed to show the migration routes of fish in the plan based on best available knowledge.
- A cumulative impact assessment on all planned energy areas needs to be done first at an international level in the Baltic Sea. The assessment can then be included in national marine planning. If the international approach is not taken first, cumulative impacts from other countries are missed. This is particularly important for migratory fish such as salmon, which live different phases of their lives in different countries' areas.
- Promoting research and co-operation to generate new information/data and use it in the plan needs to continue.
- The second maritime spatial plan in Finland should include the latest information of migratory fish routes based on research conducted by *Luonnonvarakeskus* and *SLU Aqua* in the Torne River mouth.
- Experts from different fields should be engaged in the planning process to ensure that scattered information on migratory fish and maritime areas will be brought to the second MS plan. Also, continuous monitoring and data production is needed so that MSP can adapt to future changes in the maritime areas. Organizing an expert workshop related to migratory fish was suggested. *HELCOM* could also be involved more closely in the planning process.
- Cooperation between countries is needed to guarantee that migratory fish are taken into consideration comprehensively enough.
- Cooperation between different stakeholders such as fishers, wind power developers and researchers should be continuous to ensure that migratory fish won’t suffer from the construction of offshore wind farms or other changes. MSP process enables open and wide-ranging discussions, which also cover challenging issues.

Summary of the suggested solutions for identified threats and weaknesses

Stakeholders emphasized the role of stronger cross-border cooperation and clearer planning guidance in finding solutions to address the threats and weaknesses regarding migratory fish in the Finnish maritime spatial plan. Closer collaboration between Finland and Sweden was seen as essential, particularly regarding migratory fish protection and markings at national borders. An international cumulative impact assessment for planned energy areas in the Baltic Sea was suggested to prevent cross-border ecological effects, especially on migratory species like salmon.

The need for clearer planning principles was highlighted, with recommendations to extend the ecological connection marking further out to sea and include specific instructions in the marking card. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of continuous data generation and expert involvement, recommending the integration of recent migratory fish data from *Luonnonvarakeskus* and *SLU Aqua* into the ongoing revision work of the Finnish maritime spatial plan.

The workshop participants also called for cooperation with fish experts and proposed organizing expert workshops as well as involving *HELCOM* more closely. The inclusion of no-go or no-build zones was suggested to protect key areas early in planning. Collaboration between fishermen, wind power developers, and researchers was encouraged to minimize harm to migratory species from offshore wind farms.

Conclusions from the workshop

Finland's Maritime Spatial Plan and migratory fish

The ecological connection map marking, and the marking card related to it are in need of an update. The marking itself should show migration routes of fish in the sea based on best available knowledge. Also, the planning principle linked to the card should offer more substance on how the marking should be taken into consideration in further planning.

Maritime spatial planning could offer a platform where the discussions between fishers, offshore wind power developers and fish researchers related to migratory fish can continue further. An identified opportunity for this is the interaction forums taking place in autumn 2025 in connection to the revision of the Finnish MS plan.

Furthermore, the plan should define clearly what it means by migratory fish, and consider whether it should include all fish species stated in the Finnish fishing act (4 §), namely: salmon, lake salmon, eel, lamprey, asp, trout and migratory stocks of char, grayling and whitefish.

The role of migratory fish as part of cultural heritage and tourism should also be identified and highlighted in the MS plan.

The Finnish MS plan should also consider showing more directly contradictory uses of maritime space. As for now, it shows potential and has overlapping markings. But it was stated that to truly promote the 3O/30 targets, it should be considered if some markings would not be overlapping since it indirectly indicates, that contradictory use of the overlapping area is possible. The use of the little "n" such as in the Swedish MS plan could be a solution.

Other conclusions

The Finnish Maritime Spatial Plan and the way it can be used by stakeholders should be considered more in-depth. MSP is still a rather new planning instrument and especially due to its strategic nature in Finland, the potential for its use by stakeholders other than land-use planners should be further investigated.

The Finnish Land Use and Building Act (17.6.2016/482) states regarding maritime spatial planning that "The regional councils must organise the preparation of the maritime spatial plan in such a way that the authorities and communities concerned can participate in the preparation of the plan. The regional councils shall seek the opinion of those authorities and communities whose competence or functions are substantially affected by the plan."

The process of giving authorities and communities the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the plan is well established. When an MS plan is developed together with stakeholders, it also engages them to make use of the plan. This in turn reinforces compliance with the strategic plan. In both cases, it is reasonable to ask to what extent it is hoped that stakeholders will be able to use the MS plan in their day-to-day work. If it is hoped that the plan will be widely used, efforts should be made to make it usable, both visually and verbally. When updating the MS plan, stakeholders should be systemically asked how and in what kind of work they have used the plan and, conversely, why they may have not made use of the plan. Stakeholders should also be given a justification as to why this information is being collected. The feedback will help build a plan that better serves all stakeholders and, presumably, will increase its uptake. The responses given could also be used as examples when communicating the revised plan, so that other stakeholders can better understand situations in which the plan could be used.