



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE-A2/CF

Subject: Joint NWWAC/PelAC advice on the impacts of underwater noise and offshore wind energy developments on commercial fisheries
Ref.no. PELAC: 2223PAC09

Dear Mr. Brouckaert and Mr. O'Donogue,

Many thanks for your letter of 11 October 2022 and for your advice focusing specifically on the research that has been carried out concerning the impacts of underwater noise and of offshore wind energy developments on commercial fisheries. I believe some of the actions you recommend for the Commission are in our pipeline of work and projects already. Let me underline a few of these below.

First of all - as clearly stated in the Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy - planning offshore renewable energy developments for the long term, assessing their environmental, social and economic sustainability, and ensuring coexistence with other activities (such as fisheries) is a priority for the European Commission. To do this, a series of consultations take place at 2 levels: firstly, during the development (or revision) of national maritime spatial plans, as provided for in Directive 2014/89/EU on maritime spatial planning (MSPD), and then, at the project level, during the environmental impact assessment, as established in Directive 2014/52/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment. A good planning must ensure that activities promoting the development of the blue economy are strategically thought out and that the impact on the marine environment is known and limited. Most Member

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States now have a maritime spatial plan in line with the MSPD, making the EU a world leader in MSP.

In January 2023, three EU-funded projects ⁽¹⁾ were launched to increase the cross-border collaboration on MSP in order to reach a higher level of integration for the planning of EU seas. These add up to an increasing number of Horizon Europe and Interreg projects on multi-use between sectors at sea⁽²⁾.

A recent EU initiative, the Blue Forum of sea users, as announced in the Communication on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU⁽³⁾, should enable a dialogue between blue economy stakeholders, in all sectors, and seek to develop synergies. The launching event will take place in Brest on 26 May 2023, back-to-back to the European Maritime Days.

In addition to the crucial implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and the Blue Forum, several national and regional initiatives have been put in place to increase the dialogue between fisheries organisations and offshore renewable developers. Here are some examples which can be considered good practices:

- The energy agency of Galicia (INEGA) coordinates since 2021 an “Observatory of offshore wind energy in Galicia” which is a platform gathering the offshore and naval industry, fisheries associations, regional and local authorities.
- In Ireland, the Seafood - Offshore Renewable Energy Working Group has been established in December 2022 to facilitate discussion on matters arising from the interaction of the seafood and offshore renewable energy industries, with the support of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
- The Netherlands is developing, together with Belgium and Finland, the concept of “Mariparks” which consist of testing areas for multi-use and include the possibility for passive fisheries to develop within new pilot projects.

A recent report ⁽⁴⁾ on mapping potential environmental impacts of offshore renewable energy initiated by the European Environment Agency reviews all the known environmental risks associated to offshore renewable energy production. It also looks at the role of MSP approaches to manage environmental risks of offshore energy.

Main known impacts occur during the construction phase of an offshore wind park (6-12 months). The whole area is usually closed to any fishing activities and impacts on the marine environment are the strongest. Mitigation measures are increasingly implemented during that phase, notably to reduce underwater noise. Impacts of noise on fish vary across species and are rather low compared to the impact on other groups, such as marine mammals. It is also important to note that positive effects are less monitored and

⁽¹⁾ <https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/events/launch-three-eu-funded-msp-project>

⁽²⁾ e.g. UNITED with 5 pilot projects in 3 the North Sea, Baltic Sea and Mediterranean Sea, MUSICA in several islands around the EU, ULTFARMS and OLAMUR.

⁽³⁾ [COM/2021/240 final](#) of 17/05/2023.

⁽⁴⁾ Galparsoro, I., Menchaca, I., Seeger, I., Nurmi, M., McDonald, H., Garmendia, J.M., Pouso, S., Borja, Á., 2022, Mapping potential environmental impacts of offshore renewable energy. ETC/ ICM Report 2/2022: European Topic Centre on Inland, Coastal and Marine waters, 123 pp.

analysed in the scientific literature and have so far been mostly linked to fish and macroinvertebrates.

Pelagic species may be affected by dynamic cables suspended in the water column (e.g. floating wind), but there is not yet much understanding on the impacts of large-scale floating wind parks that are still at an early stage.

An important policy development in this context is the adoption of EU threshold values for underwater noise under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The European Commission has contributed to the discussions on setting these threshold values by facilitating discussions between Member State experts in the MSFD Technical group on underwater noise, which is composed of representatives from EU countries. The technical group will now also work on recommendations on how to use these values.

The threshold values will contribute to set limits on where and for how long marine habitats can be exposed to underwater noise from all sources, offshore renewable energy included. The new limits mean, that to be in tolerable status, no more than 20% of a given marine area can be exposed to continuous underwater noise over a year. Similarly, no more than 20% of a marine habitat can be exposed to impulsive noise over a given day, and no more than 10% over a year.

EU Member States will now need to take these threshold values into account when they update their marine strategies and eventually take actions in their programmes of measures.

Finally, I would like to underline that EUR 10 million are planned in the Horizon Europe work programme for 2024 for “Minimisation of environmental, and optimisation of socio-economic impacts in the deployment, operation and decommissioning of offshore wind farms”.

I hope to receive valuable inputs from the ongoing projects and the new ones on this topic, and my team will continue to support science at the best of their capacity.

Let me thank you again for your commitment and valuable input. Looking forward to our continued cooperation, I invite you to take contact with Ms Pascale Colson, coordinator of the ACs (Pascale.Colson@ec.europa.eu; +32 2 29 56273), should you have any question on this reply.

Yours sincerely,

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