

What is MSP?

“Marine spatial planning is a process to develop a blueprint for area-based management that accounts for multiple management objectives.”

In marine policy and management, the standard practice has been to make decisions on management issues or sectors separately. For example, management decisions for fisheries in a geographic region are typically made independently, without accounting for interconnections or knock-on effects. Decisions about seabed mining may occur without factoring in the effects on fisheries or biodiversity conservation.

In many cases, even though it is well known that trade-offs exist between management objectives in different sectors, there is no mandate or mechanism for explicitly balancing the competing objectives to arrive at the best overall solution. Too often, the outcome of such fractured governance is a failure to achieve the objectives for each individual sectors, much less the best overall solution. Recognizing the shortcomings of single-sector management, many government agencies and non-government organizations are developing approaches for multi-objective management. The goal is to think holistically across management sectors, so that objectives can be identified

In response to these shortcomings, Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) emerged in 2006 as a solution for implementing ecosystem-based management and developing integrated, multi-objective marine plans that were comprehensive, participatory, and changed the status quo of governance structures or frameworks that were failing to address the complexity of decisions confronting governments. MSP processes simultaneously address ecological, economic, social and cultural objectives, and develop marine plans to safeguard long-term ecosystem health and the well being of human communities.

Over the last 10 years, MSP has evolved from a focus on planning for one or two major economic sectors and marine protected area networks to supporting a broad set of objectives that include marine protection, supporting local economies, addressing climate change impacts, and developing long-term innovative financing mechanisms to implement a plan. Today, MSP is being used in over 40 nations to allocate space for existing and future uses, and expand marine protected areas or conservation areas. Marine spatial planning is now considered best practices by large public

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lending institutions to safeguard ocean ecosystems during economic development proposals, and by 2021 more than 80 nations are likely to have an MSP.

MSP is effective at identifying long-term issues related to coordination and integration in ocean governance and, if necessary can spur the development of new governance arrangements and integrated management plans for multiple sectors, such as fisheries, tourism, renewable energy and non-renewable energy. Best practices in MSP use evidence-based approaches to plan and design participatory and transparent approaches with stakeholders, thereby developing buy-in for implementation – balancing the needs of nature and people.