

The status of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Baltic Sea

Jannica Haldin, Special Advisor, HELCOM

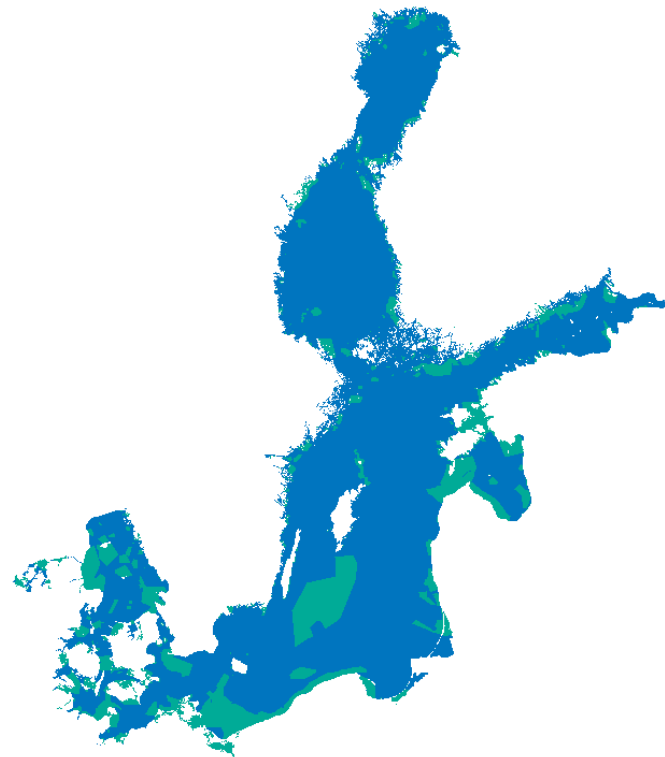


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Current situation – the good

- First proper overview of the Baltic Sea MPA network: 2640 MPAs, with designations across 9 countries (almost 15x higher than what was known in 2023).
- First region in the world to reach the global 10% target.
- As of October 2025, the Baltic MPA network covers approximately XXX of the Baltic sea, of which 18.4% is marine area (based on reported data).
- Included in this are 178 HELCOM MPAs (i.e. part of a recognised transboundary MPA network), amounting to about 13.2% of the Baltic Sea.



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Is it working?



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Trying to figure it out...



What did the countries realise?

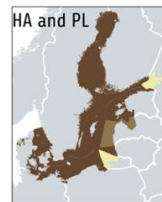
- On paper the situation looks good BUT:
- Incomplete knowledge base for decision making, planning and designation.
- Gaps in governance.
- Insufficient use of, and barriers to, adaptive management.
- It took 30 years to get where we are, now we need to almost double it in 5 years.
- But it isn't about getting to 30%, it's about getting there in a way that actually provides the biodiversity benefits.

Baltic Sea Pressure Index

Potential cumulative pressure (Index value)

High : 5,59

Low : 0,56



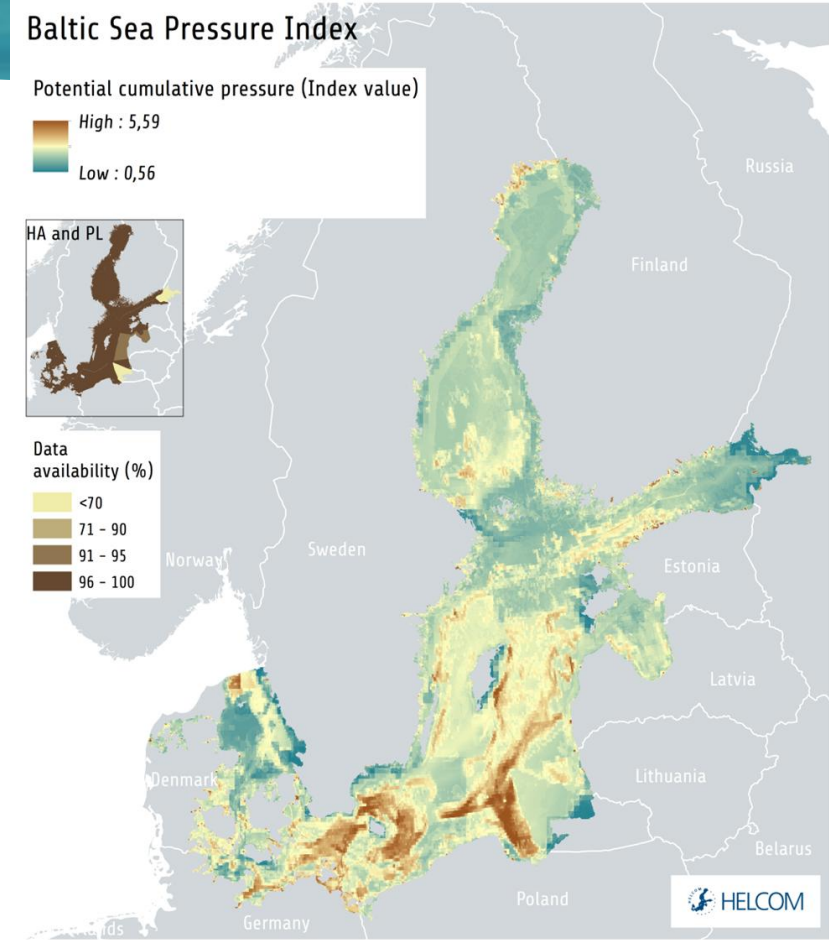
Data availability (%)

<70

71 - 90

91 - 95

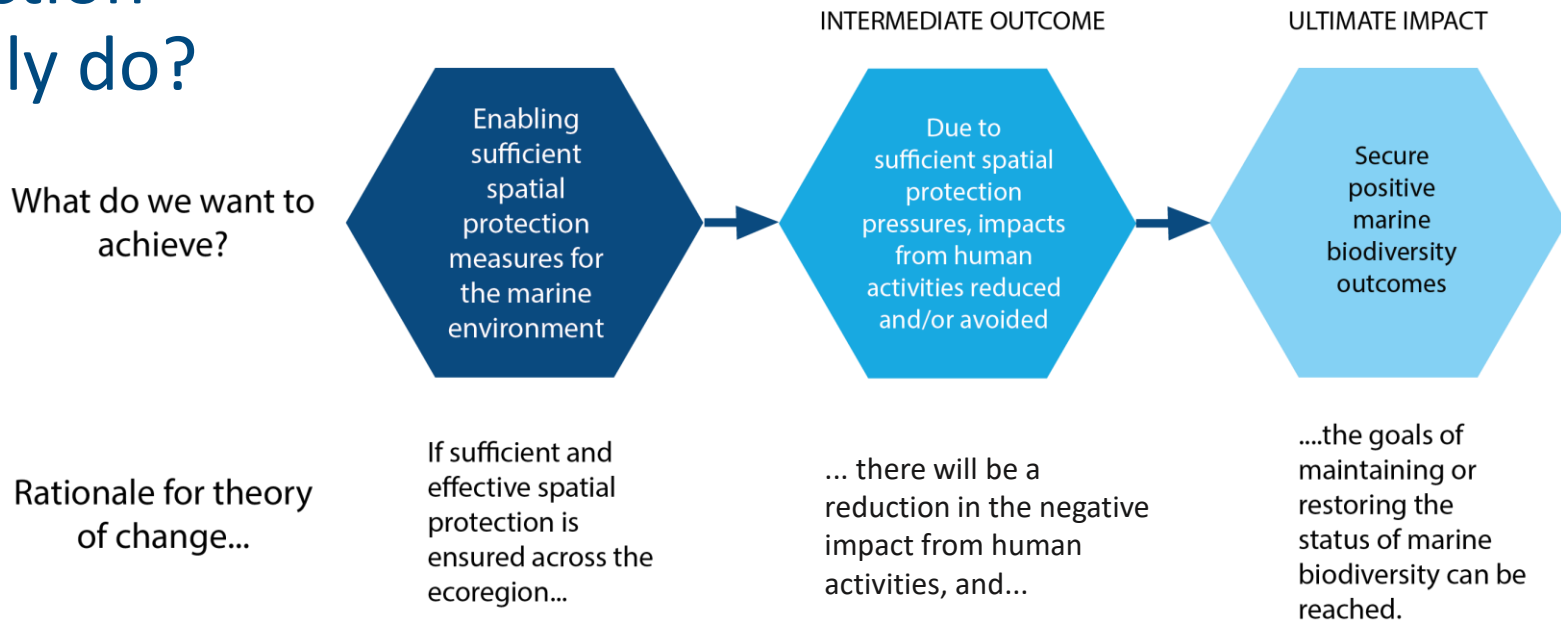
96 - 100



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What should protection actually do?



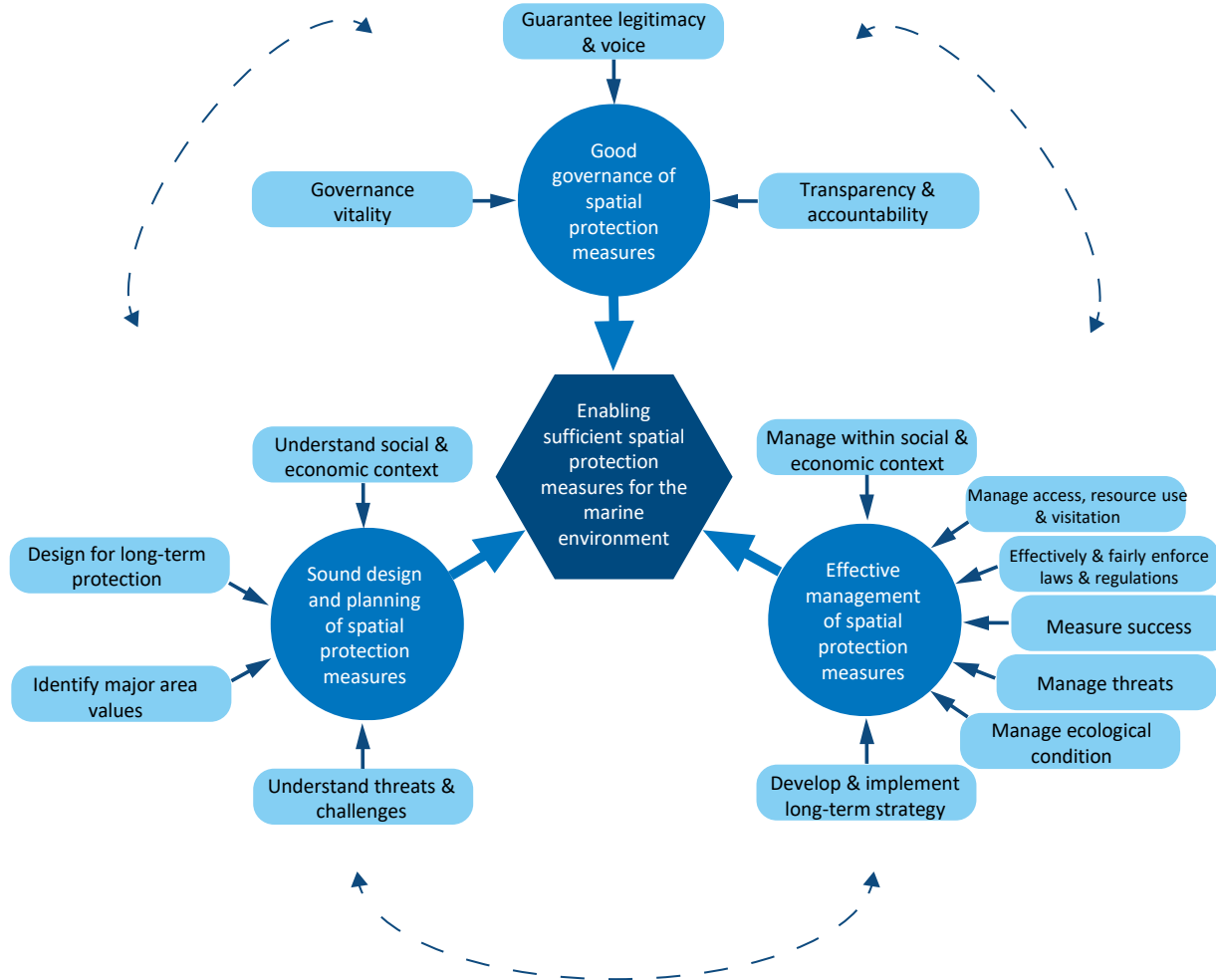
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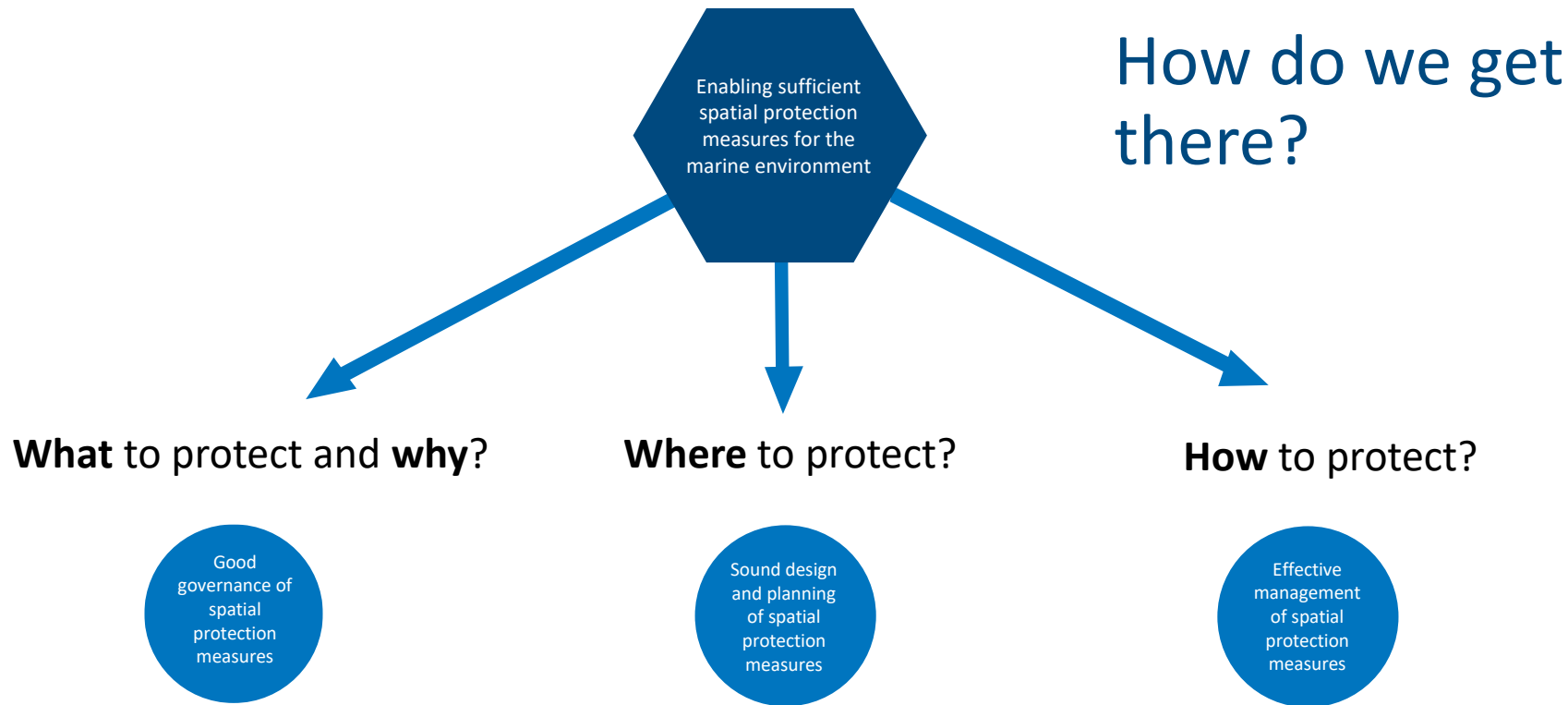


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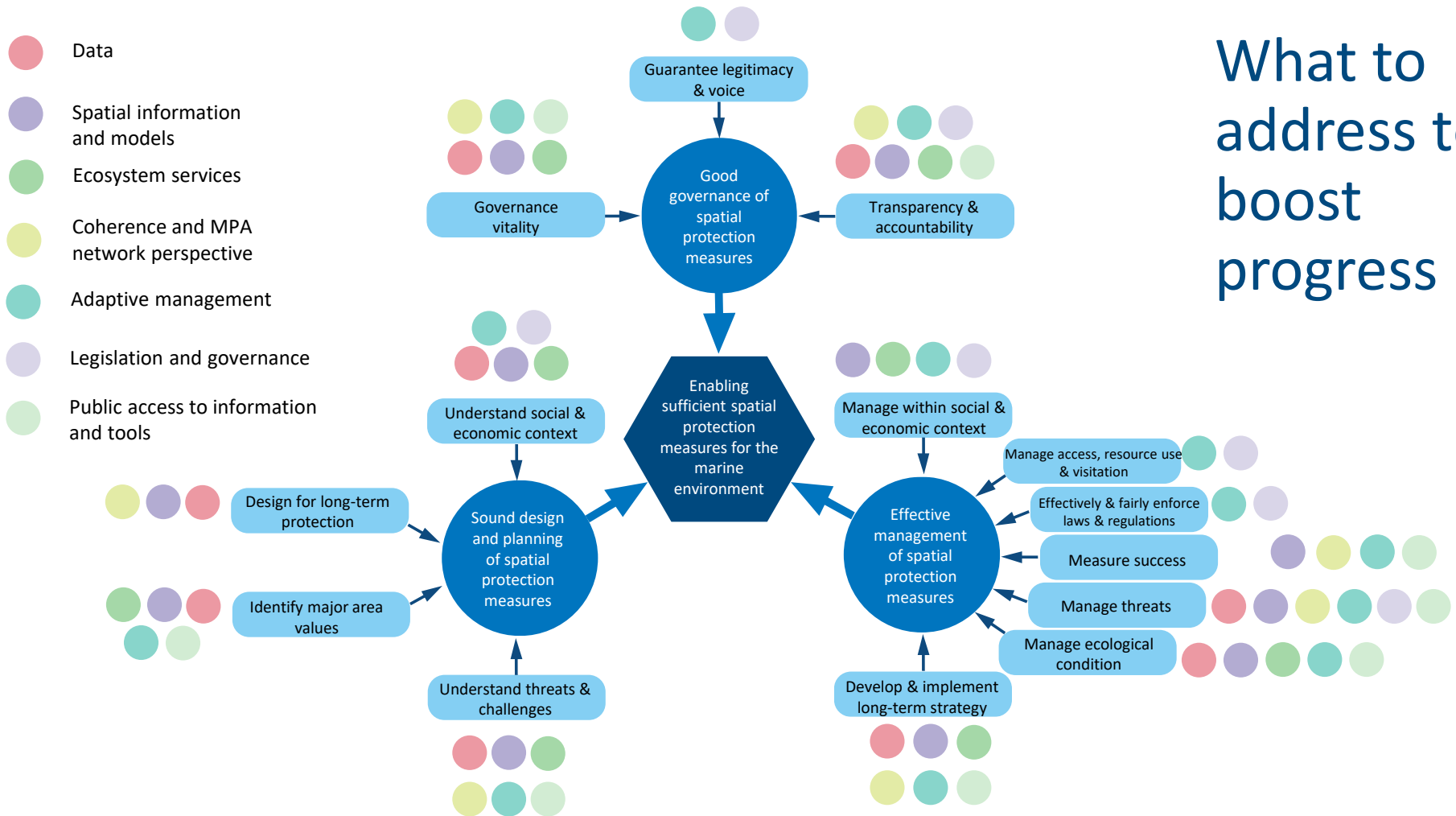


How do we get there?





What to address to boost progress



What to protect and **why**?

- Status of governance of the Baltic Sea MPA network



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Currently there is no common approach in the Baltic Sea e.g. on:

- What species and habitats we should be protecting?
- How to expand the idea of what to protect to protect ecosystem function and enhance resilience?
- Moving from single site to a network level approach, where if we cooperate everyone wins.
- Sharing information on protection efforts and what we are trying to protect and from what?
- Understanding of the protection policy and legislative landscape of the region.

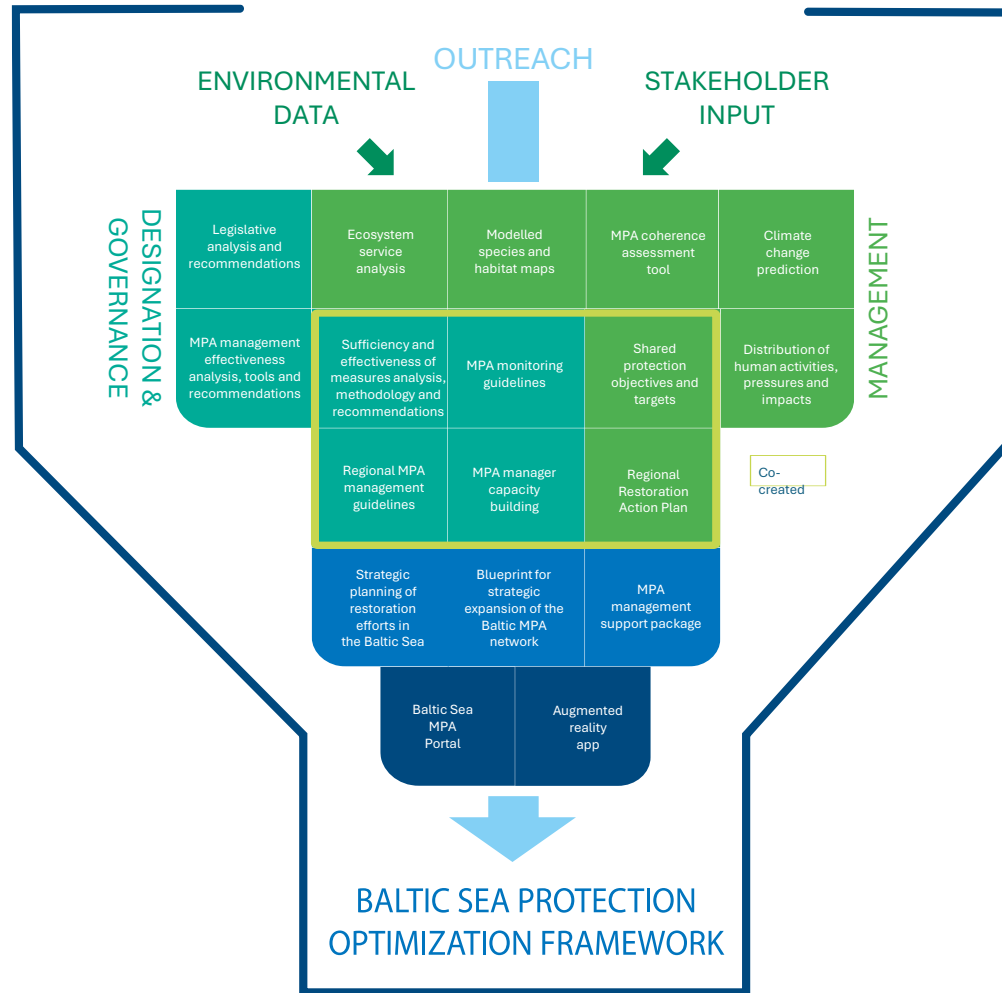


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Where to protect?

- Status of planning and designation of the Baltic Sea MPA network



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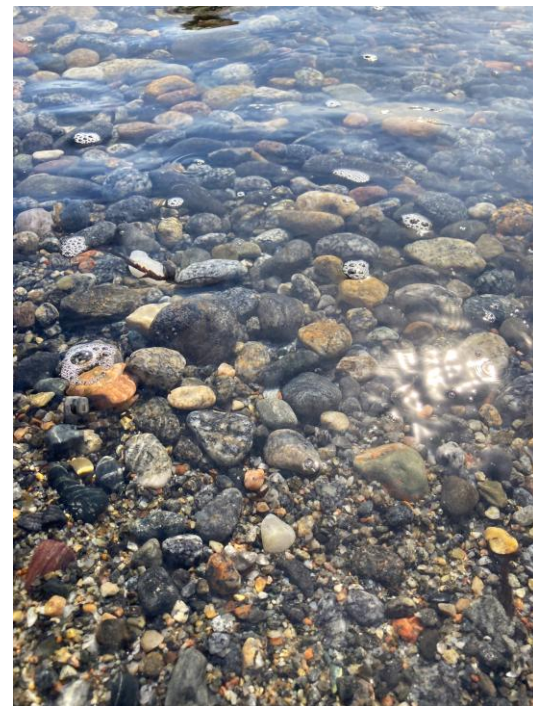


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Currently there is no up to date Baltic Sea wide information on e.g.:

- What species and habitats we likely have where, beyond a few key species?
- What areas provide what ecological function?
- What areas provide what ecosystem services?
- What pressures are likely to impact what sites?
- How representative the MPA network is?
- How adequate the MPA network is?
- How connected different sites in the network are with regards to different species?
- How resilient the network is to changes?
- How climate change might change these things over time?



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How to protect?

– Status of management of the Baltic Sea MPA network



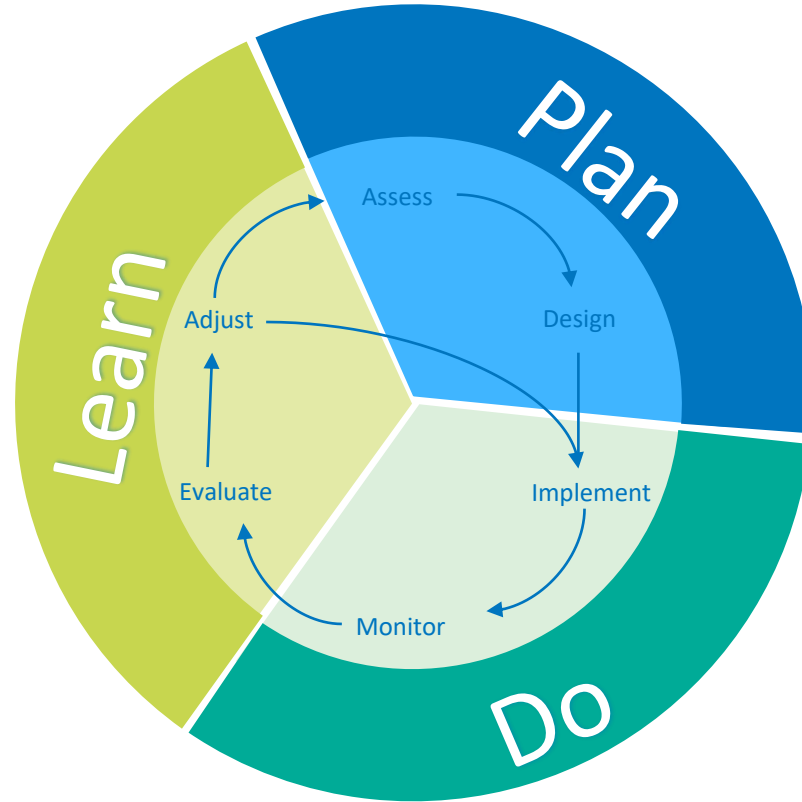
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Adaptive management: what is it?



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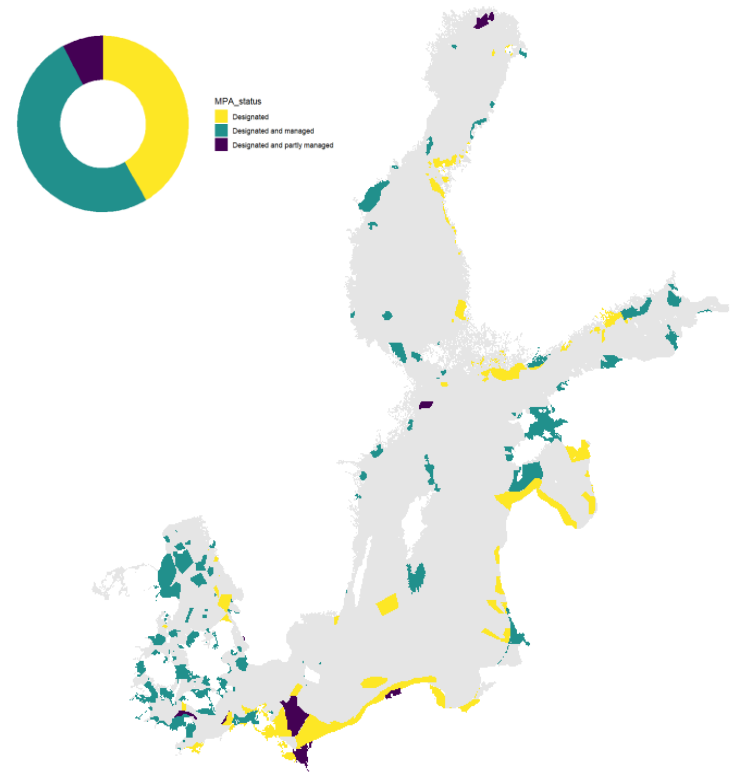


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Management across Baltic Sea MPAs

- **Single site management:** One site, one plan.
- Three categories of **multi-management plans:**
 - One site, multiple plans.
 - One plan, multiple different domains that are covered.
 - One plan, multiple sites.



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Theory vs. Practice: Mapping the real management of Baltic Sea MPAs



Regional data call

Information on MPAs in the Baltic Sea as well as confirmation of where to find their official management plans/documents.

Data collation and standardization

Standardized data harvested and translated from the **725** MPA network management plans, covering 1521 sites .

Verification and accessibility

All countries to be invited to review, revise and validate the collated details of each of their MPAs. To be made publicly available through the Baltic Sea MPA portal.



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What type of information has been harvested?

1 Protected features
Species, habitats, functions, ecosystem services, etc.

2 Pressures and threats
Human activities, pressures, level/degree of impact, etc.

3 Protection measures
Type of measures and their specific scope and details.

4 Monitoring and enforcement
Identification of ecological or activities monitoring within the MPAs identified.



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What have we learned so far?

INFORMATION ON, AND FOR, MANAGEMENT

- The availability of data required is not consistent across the Baltic region.
- Many times we don't actually know what is under the surface.
- Areas do not recognise, or recognise limited, marine protected features.
- Areas have few, or no measures for the marine environment.
- There is limited information on the existence and level of enforcement.
- Monitoring is insufficient or entirely lacking.

DIFFERENT NATIONAL APPROACHES TOWARDS MANAGEMENT

- Primarily due to differences in regulatory frameworks, institutional approaches, and the types of MPAs recognised.

ROLE AND VALUE OF MANAGEMENT PLANS

- Management Plans, though a very important, are only one part of the management puzzle. They have the potential to reflect the short, medium and long term implementation of measures in an MPA holistically .

INTERACTION WITH MANAGERS

- Crucial to (1) understand management scales, (2) highlight local knowledge of managers, and (3) establish contact and potential cooperation with other areas/managers.



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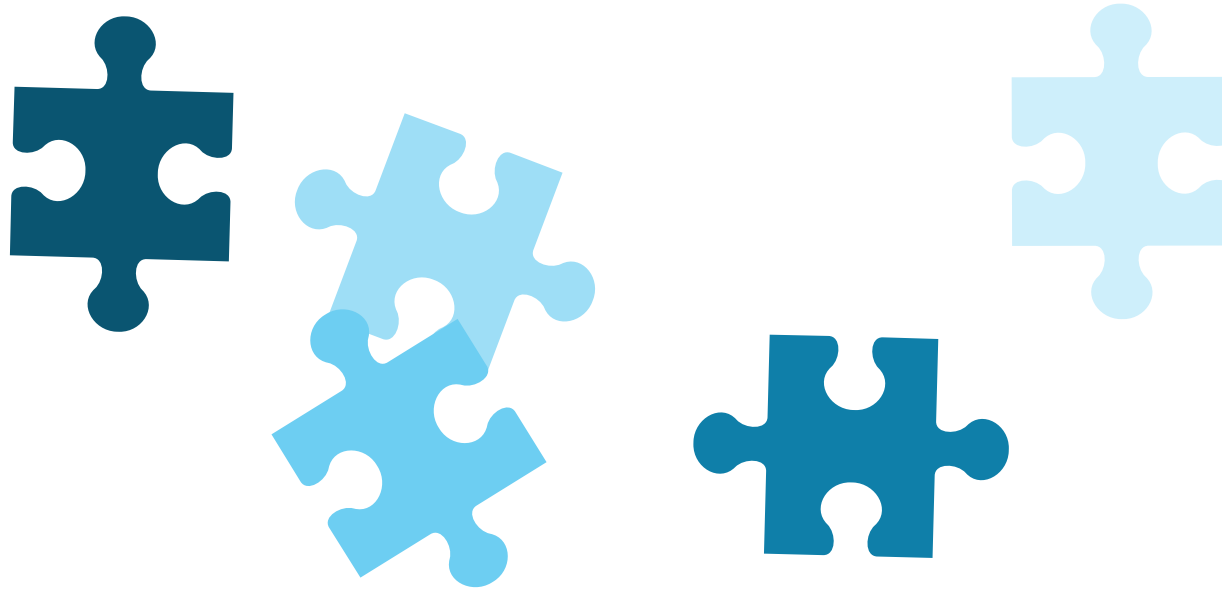
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Making 30x30 count

- Improving the status of the Baltic Sea MPA network

Pieces in a puzzle: why we need to think beyond sites and individual species



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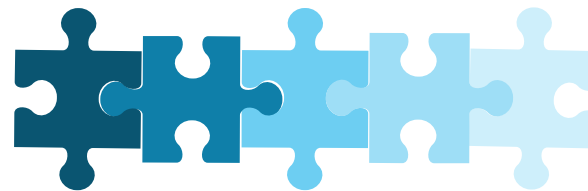


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Pieces in a puzzle: why we need to think beyond sites and individual species

- Ecological relevance.
- Sites support each other.
- Urgency and transformative change.
- Because the current approach isn't working...



but it could work!



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