

The Celtic Seas Partnership

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD, Directive 2008/56/EC) was introduced in 2008 by the European Union as the environmental pillar of the Integrated Maritime Policy (Markus et al, 2011). The main goal is to achieve or maintain ‘Good Environmental Status’ in Europe’s waters by 2020. ‘Good Environmental Status’ involves protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration and restoring it where practical, while using marine resources sustainably. The Directive specifies that Member States should use an ecosystem-based approach to managing human activities

The EC LIFE+ funded Celtic Seas Partnership project’s aim is to support the implementation of MSFD and delivery of Good Environmental Status in the Celtic Seas through applying an ecosystem approach. Effective stakeholder engagement is an essential, but commonly overlooked, component of the ecosystem approach. The Celtic Seas Partnership, which is led by WWF-UK, facilitates engagement between sectors and across borders to ensure the long term future of the environment, while safeguarding people’s livelihoods and the communities that have a relationship with the sea. The Celtic Seas Partnership project has engaged with over 950 marine stakeholders, from 6 countries and 14 broad sectors, including policy makers, scientists, fisheries, energy, environmental NGOs, aquaculture and shipping.

Within this presentation we will review the Celtic Seas Partnership’s practical experiences of operationalising an ecosystem approach in the Celtic Seas, and draw out examples of best practice that could be applied in other regional seas, areas and projects. We will focus on how the Celtic Seas Partnership empowered stakeholders to become involved in the implementation of MSFD and collaboratively developed sustainable management solutions. The Celtic Seas Partnership is unique in terms of the geographic scale it covers and we will highlight the lessons learnt in terms of what is needed to achieve effective stakeholder engagement across multiple sectors and countries, in order to consider both local topics as well as identify key transboundary issues for discussion.

Based on lessons learned we will present recommended steps for involving stakeholders in the delivery of the ecosystem approach, which can be applied to other areas and contexts. These are:

1. Identify a relevant policy framework and the role of stakeholders in its implementation (or in the absence of a policy framework agree environmental, social and economic objectives for the area)
2. Create an open, neutral, cross-sectoral forum and design an engagement process
3. Demystify terminology and develop a shared vision or principles through an engagement process
4. Collaboratively develop management actions that are needed to achieve objectives and implement them.

