



Wild nature and biodiversity
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Non-technical summary

The environmental assessment describes the likely and significant effects on the environment of implementing the proposed designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Danish waters. The proposal forms part of the programme of measures that fall under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The environmental report has been prepared in accordance with the Danish Act on Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programs and of Specific Projects (EIA) (Consolidated Act no. 4 of 3 January 2023).

The purpose of the proposal is to establish a coherent and representative network of protected areas in Danish waters. As well as implementing the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the areas will also contribute to fulfilling the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the Kunming-Montreal Agreement and other international agreements.

It is proposed that 11 MPAs are designated in the North Sea, including Skagerrak and Kattegat, and that 8 MPAs are designated in the Baltic Sea, including the Oresund and the Belt Sea, which together cover 7,781 km², corresponding to 7.42% of the total Danish marine area. The proposal will protect the areas by limiting activities that may negatively impact species and habitats in the areas, with a particular focus on the seabed. The proposal also seeks to limit the socio-economic impact. The recommendation is to designate 6.02% of strictly protected marine areas, corresponding to 6.301 km². In the strictly protected MPAs, all fishing activities will be banned, with the exception of certain types of recreational fishing. This is to protect both the seabed and life in the water column. In the general protected MPAs, only fishing with bottom trawling gear will be prohibited. In both areas, navigation and the construction and maintenance of cables, pipes, wires, etc. will be permitted.

Overall, the proposal is assessed as having a favourable impact on the marine environment. The areas are designated with the aim of complementing the existing network of marine protected areas (Natura 2000 sites) in Danish waters. The aim is to establish an integrated network of marine protected areas that is ecologically coherent and representative and that adequately covers the diversity of individual ecosystems. This designation therefore aims to protect a number of habitats and species that either do not exist in existing protected areas, or are not protected within an existing area. Protection includes deep-water bottom habitats and habitats with sand, gravel and muddy substrates, as well as the water column and a number of species on the Red List of Threatened Species and Habitats.

The proposal will establish areas where communities of vulnerable species can live undisturbed, the benefits of which will be reflected in the improved natural habitats and a possible increase in biodiversity.

The protection will also future-proof the areas against physical impacts, even if fishing patterns change. This means that protection will contribute to achieving the goal of good environmental status, which is the purpose of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

The total annual landing value for fisheries in the areas of the North Sea, including Skagerrak and Kattegat, is estimated at approximately DKK 11.4 million, and DKK 0.8 million in the Baltic Sea, including Kattegat and the Belt Sea. The total landing value for Danish fisheries in all waters was around DKK 2.5-3.5 billion annually in the period 2016-2020.

Fishing vessels will be able to fish their full quota in other parts of the two waters, and the overall assessment is therefore that the protection of the proposed areas will have little impact on actual fishing opportunities and the associated economic activity in fishing ports. However, it is likely that the location of the areas may make fishing more difficult and costly in practice, as there may be areas where it will no longer be possible to fish in continuous trawls to the same extent as before. Transport to fishing sites may also take longer, incurring higher costs as a result.

There are no existing permits for any activities within the MPAs. The proposal does not affect the activities of the Armed Forces at sea.

Transboundary effects/impacts

When identifying areas to add to a coherent network of protected areas, knowledge of MPAs in Denmark's neighbouring countries was also taken into account. The goal is therefore that the designation and management of new MPAs in Danish waters must contribute to the overall coherent network in terms of species distribution, and thus help increase the total biodiversity in the areas across national borders. The proposal is thus expected to have positive transboundary effects.

The MPAs are likely to contribute to an increased food supply for other marine species, including fish, birds and marine mammals, which can eventually benefit individual stocks and the overall food chain. In this context, the MPAs will also be able to serve as a foundation for the recolonisation of other areas.

The assessment is that there will be limited undesirable transboundary effects and only in relation to fisheries, including international fisheries. These mainly concern fishing with bottom trawlers and some other types of fishing gear. The proposal entails the closure or exclusion of a number of business sectors in the areas. The long-term goal is to establish areas where habitats for vulnerable species will be less disturbed, a goal that would be reflected in better habitats and a possible increase in biodiversity.

A number of countries currently have fishing rights in the North Sea, including the Skagerrak and Kattegat, where 11 areas will be designated. Enquiries show that Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany and, to some extent, France in particular have extensive fishing activities in these areas. A screening shows that foreign bottom trawling and fishing with other gear is currently active in the strictly protected areas.

A number of countries currently have fishing rights in the Baltic Sea, including the Oresund and the Belt Sea, where 8 areas will be designated. Enquiries show that Poland, Sweden and Germany in particular, and to some extent Lithuania, have extensive fishing activities in these areas. A screening shows that foreign bottom trawling and fishing with other gear is currently active in the strictly protected areas.

By setting up a nature reserve, protected areas will safeguard particularly vulnerable species that are damaged during the first bottom trawls. Furthermore, the strictly protected areas will protect the water column, safeguarding marine ecosystems as a whole. The regulation therefore entails a risk of displacement, where fishing will move to other areas with the same seabed types. Based on an assessment of existing fisheries, areas with the highest current fishing pressure have not been selected. It is therefore expected that such fishing can move to alternative locations. The designation of protected areas is also expected to have a positive spill-over effect on fisheries.

The introduction of fisheries management measures in EU waters will take place in accordance with the provisions of the Common Fisheries Policy. This means that these measures will apply to fishing vessels from all member states. The process will take place after a final national decision has been made on the proposed designated areas. The process will include a more detailed analysis of the landing values in the proposed areas and an agreed joint initiative for resolution with the other EU member states involved.