



LIFE Nature project “Marine Protected Areas in the Eastern Baltic Sea”

Reference number: LIFE 05 NAT/LV/000100

**Action A7 – Development of management plan
concept for MPAs and elaboration of management
plans and individual protection proposals for
selected project sites**

Action leader B, Baltic Environmental Forum – Latvia

FINAL REPORT

Authors:

**Anda Ruskule
Merle Kuris
Edgars Bojārs
Liutauras Raudonikis**

2009

CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
BACKGROUND	4
DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES	5
CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED EVENTS.....	5
MANAGEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT	6
National conditions for management plan development	6
Content of the management plans.....	7
Stakeholders' involvement in management planning	9
Submission and approval of the management plans	11
DESIGNATION OF MPAS	12
RESULTS	14
LESSONS LEARNED	14

Reporting period: 1 January, 2006 – 30 November, 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A7 action was the central activity of the project - it integrated results of the inventory actions as well as threat assessments and applied them for designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and management plan development.

The **main goals** of the action were to develop concept of management planning of MPAs and to prepare pilot management plans in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Furthermore it included also designation of new MPAs to contribute to the marine Natura 2000 network in the territorial waters of the Baltic States.

The concept development for management planning of MPAs included study of background materials - national experience and legislation in management planning of protected areas, international experience and available guidelines (e.g. EC and HELCOM) as well as conceptual discussions and experience exchange at project partners meetings and international events. As result a concept paper was prepared followed by system for evaluation of species and habitats of Community and national importance. These documents served as a basis for elaboration of the management plans by the project partners.

In each country two sites were selected as pilot areas for management plan development - Väinameri and West-Saaremaa (Küdema) in Estonia, Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga and Nida-Pērkone in Latvia and Palanga and Neringa in Lithuania. Management plan development in each country followed the official national procedures, at the same time involving permanent experience exchange and co-ordination between the countries facilitated by the partners meeting as well as particular expert meetings of A7 action. Management plan development was accompanied by intensive stakeholder dialogue in order to explain the marine nature values and necessary conservation measures and to find solutions with regard to economic interests within the proposed or existing Marine Protected Areas. All management plans are submitted to national competent authorities and approval is expected at the nearest time.

Based on information gained from inventory actions within the project territories the proposals for designation of marine Natura 2000 sites or changes of boundaries were developed in Latvia and Lithuania. This included 7 new sites in Latvia (3 SPAs; 2 pSCIs and 2 combined sites) and 1 new SPA and proposals for border changes of 2 existing pSCIs in Lithuania. The proposals are approved by the competent authorities, except proposal for minor border change of one Lithuanian site, which was mainly related to administrative aspects and not significant for ensuring the favourable conservation status of the nature values of EU importance.

Results of the action have provided major input for establishment of marine Natura 2000 network within the territorial waters of the Baltic States. Countries have gained valuable experience and basis for further management planning as well as proposals for conservation measures to protect marine nature values.

BACKGROUND

National legal systems for development of management plans of protected areas existed in all three Baltic States already at the beginning of the project. However, they were made for terrestrial areas and none of the Baltic countries had experience with planning of MPA management. At the time when LIFE project has been developed, there were no European or Baltic guidelines available, therefore besides development of the management plans for particular MPAs, the project set the task to elaborate guidelines for management plan development which would address the needs and particularities of the Eastern Baltic region.

Though, during the first years of the project international guidelines on management and protection of marine areas were launched by EC and HELCOM, which were presented and discussed also at the project partners meetings and international seminar organised by the project on “Concepts for management plan development”, held on 29-30 March, 2006 (see 1st Progress report: Annex 2:A6/A7).

HELCOM management guidelines are based on the HELCOM Recommendation 15/5 on a system of Coastal and Marine Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs). These guidelines provide good basis for elaboration of marine management plans, suggesting the structure of the management plans and describing its content, as well as providing practical tools for planning and management of the BSPAs. However, focus of the guidelines is more on assessing the conservation value of the whole BSPA and does not provide methodology for evaluation of particular habitats and species of the Community interest.

EC guidelines for establishing Natura 2000 sites in the marine environment were developed by the Marine Working group (created under the Habitats Committee in 2002). The guidelines define legal conditions for establishment of marine sites, describe different marine zones, clarify definitions of marine habitats, define procedures for location and selection of marine Natura 2000 sites as well as give practical guidance on management of sites and impact assessment related to various human activities. There are explained provisions of the Habitats Directive (particularly Article 6) with respect to marine environment - to achieve the favourable conservation status of species and habitats, for which the sites have been established, the clear conservation objectives as well as appropriate maintenance and/or conservation measures have to be defined. Management plans are recommended as useful tool for achieving conservation objective. For the content of the management plan EC recommends to use HELCOM guidelines.

Therefore the project team has decided not to develop new guidelines, but instead to use existing international guidelines as well as national guidelines for the management planning of the terrestrial areas, integrating in the existing templates specific marine features, threats and responses. It was agreed that project should elaborate more detailed methodology for evaluation of the marine species and habitats of the Community interest, which was lacking in the existing guidelines documents. Furthermore it was agreed that project should serve as a best practices example for stakeholder involvement in discussion on establishment and management of Marine Protected Areas.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED EVENTS

A concept for management plan development was prepared in first half of 2006. It was based on international experience, existing national and international (EC, HELCOM) guidelines, discussed at project partners meetings and an international seminar on “Concepts for management plan development”, held on 29-30 March, 2006 (see 1st Progress report: Annex 2:A6/A7).

As result a concept paper was prepared, including background overview on existing guidelines for marine management planning, identification of specific tasks of the project with regard to management planning and cross-country co-ordination and experience exchange, detailed time schedule, description of national specifics for site designation and MP development as well as proposal on content list of marine MPs (see 1st Progress report: Annex 2:A6/A7).

Further on a **system for evaluation of species and habitats of Community and national importance** was developed in second half of 2006 and discussed at the following project partners meetings (see Interim report: Annex 5.1.7). It was prepared to set the basis for defining the conservation objectives and prioritising the conservation/management needs as well as to provide with baseline information on status of species and habitats, essential for monitoring the effects of the management/conservation measures. This included a list of parameters for assessment of conservation value of particular features for which a site is/should be established as well as parameters for evaluation of the site itself. The evaluation of selected sites was carried out by the project experts based on data gained from the inventory actions (A2, A3, A4, A5). The application of such system insured more harmonised approach among the countries for defining common conservation values and priorities.

Conceptual input for management plan development was provided also by the **expert meetings and seminars**, which because of actual discussion needs were called up more frequently than initially planned, but within the planned seminar budget of the A7 action. Workshop on “Stakeholder involvement in management plan development” was held on 8-9 February, 2007 (see Interim report: Annex 5.1.7.) to discuss various socio-economic interests in marine areas and potential conflicts with regard to nature conservation within the group of wide range of stakeholders.

In continuous discussion between the project experts, competent authorities and stakeholders on economic interests within or in vicinities of existing and potential marine Natura 2000 sites it has turned out that in the Baltic States there is very little knowledge and no experience regarding impact assement of different projects like construction works off-shore wind parks, etc. on marine nature values. Therefore a series of events was organised to raise competence of experts and authorities on impact assessment, support for management plan development and improvement of legal system for protection of MPAs:

- Workshop on “EIA for off-shore wind parks – potentials for conflicts with Natura 2000 designation”, held on 19-20 June, 2007 (see 3rd Progress report: Annex 2.1.7.);
- Workshop on “Planning offshore windfarms in line with Natura 2000 requirements”, held on 29-30 May, 2008 (see 3rd Progress report: Annex 2.1.7.);

- Expert meeting on “Habitat and species assessment methodology”, held on 5-7 November, 2008 (see Annex 5.7.7.);
- Expert meeting “Which kind of legal frame we need?” held on 15-17 April, 2009 (see Annex 5.7.9.).

In the final stage of management plan development an expert meeting on “Cross-border aspects of management plan development for MPAs” was organised on 2-3 March 2009 to discuss compliance in setting conservation objectives and exchange experience in definition of management measures and zoning (see Annex 5.7.8.).

MANAGEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Elaboration of management plans started in 2007 and continued until the end of the project.

The project partners in cooperation with responsible competent authorities (Ministries of Environment) have **selected the following sites for MP development:**

- Estonia: Väinameri (3 EST) and West-Saaremaa: Küdema (4 EST);
- Latvia: Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga (8 LAT) and Nida-Pērkone (11 LAT);
- Lithuania: Palanga (12 LIT) and Neringa (13 LIT).

In Latvia initially a management plan was also foreseen for the Irbe Strait site (9 LAT), but later it was decided to step back from it due to insufficient data from the outer areas (deep water) available for assessment of the conservation values of the site.

The 6 management plans developed by project are attached in Annexe 5.7.10.

National conditions for management plan development

Each country followed the official procedure set by national law, which set the following conditions for the management plan development:

- **Lithuania:** The nature management planning in Lithuania is divided into two parallel processes: spatial planning and strategic planning. Since spatial planning (including development of the Special Spatial Plans, which defines zoning and restrictions in protected areas), can be carried out only by the authorised companies or experts, this could not be part of the LIFE project. The LIFE project has developed the strategic management plans. After approval of these plans the Ministry of Environment initiates a spatial planning process, which is also a condition for legal designation or changes of boundaries of the protected area.
- **Latvia:** The legal procedure for management plan development in Latvia is set by the rules of Cabinet of Ministers, however it was prescribed only for already designated protected areas. Since designation of the MPAs was part of the project tasks (the designation was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers only on 5 January, 2010) the Rules on the management plans development had to be amended in order to allow starting of the management planning process in parallel to the establishment of MPAs. The respective amendments were adopted in 10 May, 2007, providing legal basis for management plan development within the project.

- **Estonia:** The protected areas for which project developed the management plans included both marine and terrestrial parts and the competent authorities wished that the management plans should be coherent (covering the both parts). Finally it was agreed that MP for Väinameri site (which is a very big and complicate area) would cover only the marine part while MP for the much smaller Küdema Bay (West-Saaremaa) would include also the terrestrial part for which the local Environmental Board would provide the input. Although the project team was supposed to deal only the planning of marine areas, the coordination of the plan with terrestrial part had to be insured. Furthermore the Natura 2000 sites for which management plans were developed are established as Limited Conservation Areas with rather soft protection regime - no specific restrictions or zoning can be applied, protection is ensured mainly through EIA/Natura 2000 assessment. This set certain limitations for the scope of the management plans.

Although each country had to follow the national rules and conditions for management plan development, active cross-country co-ordination and experience exchange among the countries was organized through regular project partners meetings and international seminars. This included co-ordination of data gathering and assessment process, joint discussions on setting of management and conservation objectives, and monitoring. Regular experience exchange provided additional quality of the plans.

Content of the management plans

The management plan development included the following steps:

- general description of the site;
- socio-economic analysis;
- species and habitat assessments (based on results of actions A2, A3, A4, A5);
- threat assessments (based on results of actions C1, C2, C3 and C4);
- site assessment (except Estonia, where this is not part of an MP);
- conservation objectives definition and elaboration of a set of measures;
- zoning (except Estonia, where rules do not foresee zoning);
- monitoring to assess conservation status of species and habitats.

In Latvia proposals for individual protection and management rules (to be approved by the Cabinet of Ministers) were also developed and attached to the management plans.

Management and conservation measures: Specific for marine sites is that there is very little possibility to apply any active management measures. Therefore the proposed measures mainly concern regulation of economic use (e.g. fishery, tourism, port development and maintenance, etc.). The most significant measure for protection of marine nature values is the EIA procedure and the Natura 2000 assessment, which is addressed in Estonian and Latvian management plans. There is indicated need to improve the legal system for ensuring appropriate assessment of impacts on particular marine nature values as well as need for guidelines how to carry out the impact assessment procedure.

Following measures targeted at improvement of conservation status of species and habitats are included in the plans:

<p>Measures for protection of birds:</p> <p><i>Estonia:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strengthen surveillance; • To use less disturbing research/monitoring methods; • To restrict fast boats and scooters during nesting period; • To establish new reserves in case the current protection regime is not sufficient for avoiding negative impacts on bird populations; • To forbid dredging during nesting period; • To restore and manage coastal meadows on islets.
<p><i>Latvia:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure official registration of bird by-catch in MPAs; • To develop early warning system for sea bird by-catch; • To develop proposals for changes in legal acts regarding by-catch; • To investigate food base of important bird species in benthic habitats of MPA; • To ensure seasonal restrictions for water scoters and kite boards in three significant Common Goldeneye sites in the Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga.
<p><i>Lithuania:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure registration of bird by-catch in MPAs; • To promote the alternative fishery measures in the Natura 2000 sites applying EU compensatory mechanisms; • To put restrictions on the reduction of the waterbirds by-catch into the official regulations of the marine protected areas; • To improve the current legislation in order to allow use offshore waters for fishery for small fishery enterprises.
<p>Measures for protection of habitats:</p>
<p><i>Latvia:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To carry out scientific research on possible impacts of sand flows and coastal constructions against erosion on reef habitats; • To develop guidelines for coastal hydrotechnical constructions near MPAs with environmentally friendly technological solutions.
<p><i>Lithuania:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To regulate anchoring of the boats in the areas of the special type of the reefs – moraine ridge.
<p>Measures for protection of fish:</p>
<p><i>Estonia:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To add Bullhead to the conservation objectives of Küdema bay Limited Conservation Area; • To specify fishing regulations for Soonlepa bay (the borders of the restricted area should be specified as the current borders do not exactly correspond to the spawning area of Whitefish).
<p><i>Lithuania:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure an official registration of the by-catch of fish of EU importance in MPAs; • To improve the legal acts on the deepening of the Klaipėda seaport taking in consideration the requirements (especially timing) for the migration to the spawning grounds of White fish and Twaid shad; • To regulate that quotas of the retired fishery enterprises (after the getting compensation for the retirement) will not be distributed among the acting fishery enterprises; • To improve the fishery regulation avoiding the by-catch of the White fish and significantly reduce the commercial catch of the species.
<p>Measures for protection of seals:</p>
<p><i>Estonia:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To apply seal-safe fishing gears (support from EU Fishery Fund available); • To monitor continuously status of the seal populations and by-catch; • To strengthen surveillance in areas designated for protection of seals.
<p><i>Latvia:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure registration of seal by-catch in MPAs
<p>Measures on improvement of water quality and reduction of pollution risk:</p>
<p><i>Estonia:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To carry out oil monitoring, not allowing transport of hazardous substances on Väinameri sea; • To ensuring the good water quality in Kasari river basin, decreasing pollution load.

Latvia:

- To include MPAs in the list of priority areas of „The National Plan of Readiness to Combat Oil Spills in the Sea”;
- To carry out scientific research on pressures and impacts of biological pollution (invasive species) at the Baltic coastline;
- To reconstruct wastewater treatment plants in Engure, Mērsrags and Kolka near the Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga;
- To develop guidelines for reducing negative impact of liquidation of ammunition on the environment;
- To amend Administrative Code to facilitate implementation of International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships Ballast Water and Sediments.

Lithuania:

- To prepare new work working maps with marked most vulnerable coastal and sea areas for liquidation of pollution incidents in sea region;
- To reach the participation of the experts of natural values in preparation of the national plan for liquidation of pollution incidents;
- To improve national regulations of oil dispersants usage for fighting the oil spills;
- To prepare the procedure of pollution impact monitoring and evaluation, involving experts from other institutions, including state agencies.

The rest of the measures are related to improvement administrative and legal basis for protection of the MPAs as well as public information and awareness rising activities, like information brochures, books, information boards, expositions in museums of coastal municipalities and public events. Latvian management plans also foresee several measures for promotion of sustainable tourism targeted at MPAs. Essential part in all management plans takes actions related to improvement or development of monitoring system of marine nature values.

Stakeholders' involvement in management planning

An intensive stakeholders' dialogue and involvement process was carried out in all three countries in parallel to the management plan development.

In **Estonia** the consultation process with key stakeholders and environmental authorities was carried out on regular basis and no major conflicts were experienced. The public involvement was organised through the following activities:

- Public meetings to introduce the preliminary results of inventories and inform about development of MPs (announcements published in local newspapers, home pages of municipalities and environmental authorities):
 - Meeting on 14.02.2008 in Kärdla (Hiiumaa county) and Haapsalu (Lääne county) about Väinamere MP
 - Meeting on 28.02.2008 in Orissaare (Saare county) about Väinamere MP
 - Meeting on 29.02.2008 in Mustjala (Saare county) about Kudemaa Bay MP
- Submitting draft MPs to main stakeholders (municipalities, environmental/nature conservation authorities, fishermen's associations, hunters' associations, port authorities, some NGOs, local entrepreneurs) for commenting – April-June 2009
- Publishing MPs on internet in July 2009; answering to all comments and incorporating them into MPs.
- Submitting final drafts of MPs to the main stakeholders for commenting – September-October 2009
- Final public meetings and consultations to introduce final drafts of MPs and getting final comments from stakeholders:
 - Meeting on 23.09.2009 in Mustjala, Saare county (about Kudemaa Bay MP)

- E-mail consultation with local stakeholders and Environmental Board about Vāinamere MP in November, 2009.
- Presenting both management plans in the final project presentation event on 30.11.2009 in Tallinn.

In **Latvia** besides public events the stakeholder involvement was ensured through establishment of the Supervisory Board for each management plan as foreseen by the official procedure for management plan development prescribed in the rules of Cabinet of Ministers. Supervisory Boards consisted of representatives from all competent authorities, protected areas administrations, local authorities, port administrations, representatives of fisherman, etc. 5-6 meetings of the boards have been organised for each plan. In the course of management plan development good contacts were established with local stakeholders, agreements reached with local port authorities, however, difficulties were faced regarding zoning and border delineation of the MPAs due to development interests of local authorities.

The public involvement was organised through the following activities:

- Meetings of project experts with local municipalities with the aim to introduce with MPA designation and management plan development, 21 August 2008 with Rucava and Nīca Local Municipalities (“Nida-Pērkone”), 31 January 2008 with Lapmežciems, Engure, Mērsrags and Roja Local Municipalities, and 5 February 2008 with Kolka Local Municipality (“Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga”).
- Informative public events at the start of the management plan development on 27 February, 2008 in Rucava (on MP for “Nida- Pērkone”) and 29 February, 2008 in Mērsrags (on MP for “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga”).
- Supervisory Board meetings (draft plans submitted to the board before each meeting):
 - meetings on MP for “Nida- Pērkone” held on 26 May 2008, 30 October 2008, 13 March 2009, and 22 May 2009.
 - meetings on MP for “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga” held on 27 May 2008, 31 October 2008, 9 March 2009, and 19 May 2009.
- Public hearing procedure:
 - Publishing of management plans on internet and providing at local authorities for commenting;
 - Public hearing meetings held on 15 June 2009 in Engure (on MP for “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga”) and 16 June, 2009 in Rucava (on MP for “Nida-Pērkone”).
 - Submission of revised management plans to local authorities for commenting and receiving formal acceptance.
- Presentation of the final drafts of the management plans at the national stakeholders’ event on 9 June, 2009 in the Ministry of Environment.
- Final Supervisory Board meetings:
 - meeting on MP for “Nida-Pērkone” held on 21 August 2009, where agreement was reached that the Management Plan is completed.
 - meeting on MP for “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga” held on 25 September 2009. Two municipalities have raised objections regarding delineated boundaries of the MPA and it was agreed to check with experts possibilities for changing the boundaries. However, based on scientific justification provided by the Latvian Ornithological Society the proposed changes were rejected and plans latter approved by the Nature Conservation Board.

Protocols of all public events and Supervisory Board meetings attached to the Management Plans (see Annex 5.7.10).

To support the communication with stakeholders and to enhance acceptance of the management measures a socio-economic analysis was carried out for the both sites, including explanation of the costs and benefits related to establishment of the MPAs (see Annex 5.7.11).

In **Lithuania** consultations with local stakeholders were carried on face-to-face basis. Proposals for new site boundaries and conservation measures were introduced at official public meetings with national and regional authorities:

- Meeting with stakeholders on the project sites, Klaipėda, 20-21 November, 2008.
- Meeting with stakeholders from Ministries' to present and discuss the nature management plans for proposed MPA, Vilnius, 25 September, 2009;
- Meeting with stakeholders to present and discuss the nature management plans for proposed MPA, Klaipėda, 12 October, 2009.

Elaboration of the plans was carried out in good co-operation and co-ordination with Lithuanian Ministry of Environment as well as all regional authorities.

Submission and approval of the management plans

All the management plans are submitted to the competent authorities:

- **Estonia:** Official submission of the management plans to the Ministry of Environment and the Environmental Board was on 18 January 2010, although the Environmental Board received the plans already in November 2009. The reason for delayed official submission was the new regulation on preparation and adopting of MPs – the regulation was passed in November 2009 and still more than month was needed to establish relevant procedures and commission. Also the responsible authority for adoption of the MP was changed: before it was Minister of Environment, but with issuing the new regulation the responsibility was taken over by the Environmental Board. Approval of management plans is expected by end of March, 2010.
- **Latvia:** According to the procedure in Latvia, the management plans were submitted to the Nature Protection Board (on 16 September 2009 for the Nida-Pērkone MPA and on 6 November 2009 for the Western Coast of the Gulf of Rīga MPA). After examining plan compliance with the national requirements, the Nature Protection Board submitted them to the Ministry of the Environment on 11 December 2009. Approval of the management plans by the Minister of the Environment is expected by the end of February.
- **Lithuania:** The final draft of the management plan of the Palanga seacoast (project site LT12; SPA code: LTPALB001; pSCI code: LTPAL0001) was submitted for the final approval to the relevant stakeholders (including responsible authority - State Protected Areas Service) on the 10th November, 2009. The last comments were received by 28th December, 2009. After additional corrections, the draft of the MP was submitted for the legal approval on the 29th January 2010. Expected time of the final approval - mid March, 2010. The final draft of the management plan of the Kursiu nerija seacoast (project site LT13; SPA code: LTKLAB001; pSCI code: LTNER0005) was submitted for the final approval to the relevant stakeholders (including responsible authority - State Protected Areas Service) on the 15th January, 2010. The last comments have not been by 28th January, 2010 yet. After additional corrections, the draft of the MP will be submitted

for the legal approval in February 2010. Expected time of the final approval is March 2010.

DESIGNATION OF MPAS

In parallel to management plan development proposals on designation marine Natura 2000 were prepared in Latvia and Lithuania and submitted for approval to competent authorities. The map of existing Estonian marine Natura 2000 sites as well as proposed and approved Latvian and Lithuanian sites see attached in Annex 2.2.

Estonia

In Estonia a network of marine Natura 2000 sites within the territorial waters already existed at the beginning of the project. Inventories carried out within the project confirmed that no changes of borders of the already designated Natura 2000 sites are needed. Investigations outside already nominated areas were not part of the LIFE project and therefore no new sites were proposed.

Latvia

No marine Natura 2000 sites have been designated before, except the extensions of seven terrestrial areas into the sea. The project has proposed designation of 7 new MPAs (3 SPAs; 2 pSCIs and 2 combined sites):

- **„Nida – Perkone”**, proposed as pSCI and SPA for protection of reefs as well as two bird species - Goosander *Mergus merganser* and Little Gull *Larus minutus*; potentially important also for Twaid shad *Alosa falax*. This is one of the most significant areas for protection of marine biodiversity in Latvia with the greatest examples of reefs.
- **„Akmensrags”**, proposed as SPA for protection of Little Gull *Larus minutus* and Divers *Gavia sp.*, but potentially important also for reefs. Particularly significant for migratory birds, wintering birds and for birds in summer during moulting.
- **„Irbe strait”**, proposed as SPA for protection of Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*, Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*, Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*, Little Gull *Larus minutus*, Divers *Gavia sp.*, Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*. Especially significant for bird migration, characterised as “bottle-neck” area, one of three most important sites of the Velvet Scoter in the Baltic Sea and third important site for divers in Latvia.
- **„Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga”**, proposed as SPA and pSCI for protection of Divers *Gavia sp.*, Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*, Little Gull *Larus minutus*, Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* as well as reefs. It is very significant site for large amount of migrant birds during feeding and rest time all year long and one of three most important wintering sites of the Velvet Scoter in the Baltic Sea.
- **„Open sea in the West of Tuja”**, proposed as SPA for protection of Little Gull *Larus minutus* and Divers *Gavia sp.* It is second largest site of divers in Latvia during migration and wintering and also very important for little gull during its spring migration.
- **„Vitrūpe – Tuja”**, proposed as pSCI for protection of reefs, potentially important also for River lamprey *Lampreria fluviatilis*.
- **„Ainazi – Salacgriva”**, proposed as pSCI for protection of reefs, potentially important also for River lamprey *Lampreria fluviatilis*.

The proposals were submitted to the Ministry of Environment (MoE) on 2 December 2008. MoE accepted the proposals and has prepared a regulation for designation of these sites for Cabinet of Ministers, which after long and difficult stakeholder dialogue (mainly due to permanently shaking government and economic crisis in 2009, as well as opposition from some ministries and local authorities) was approved on 5th January 2010. Official procedure until nomination to EC has been started. The Ministry of the Environment has assigned NATURA codes for the MPAs and prepared amendments in the Annex of the Law on Specially Protected Nature Areas in February 2010. Formal adoption of the amendments of any law is a long process that must finally go through the Parliament of Latvia (expected after May 2010). After adoption of the new Amendments, the Ministry will submit the marine sites together with Natura 2000 data sheets to the European Commission for nomination. Map of the 7 designated MPAs proposed by the project is attached in Annex 5.7.12.

Lithuania

Marine Natura 2000 sites in Lithuania have been defined already before the beginning of the project. However, the results of project investigations showed that major changes of borders are required. As result the following proposals have been submitted:

- 1. Designation of a new SPA.** Project experts proposed designation of a new marine SPA for the protection of the Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*, Razorbill *Alca torda* and Little Gull *Larus minutus*. The proposed site is located in the coastal zone, to the west from the western border of the Curonian Spit SPA; code - LTKLAB001 (see attached file "SPA designation proposal – Annex 5.17.13). The proposal of the project experts on new SPA was first presented to the State Protected Areas Service on September 22, 2008 and to the Ministry of Environment on September 24, 2008. Official proposal was submitted to the Ministry of Environment on 25th September, 2009. This proposal was discussed by the Official Commission on the designation of the protected areas under MoE on the 23rd December, 2009 (The Commission was established by the Order of the Environmental Minister No D1-491; 26 August, 2009). The decision of the mentioned Commission was to designate the proposed site, first, as a Biosphere Polygon. After that, was decided to nominate the Biosphere Polygon as SPA. The decision of the Commission is presented in its official protocol No. V5-01 of 8th January 2010 (see attached in Annex 5.7.14). Considering existing national procedures for establishment of protected areas and current economic situation, it is expected that the new marine protected area would be designated by the end of 2012. As soon as the protected area will obtain national protection status, MoE will propose to the Lithuanian Government to nominate the site as SPA (Natura 2000).
- 2. Modification of the pSCI Curonian Spit (Kursiu nerija); code - LTNER0005.**
The project experts proposed modification of the former Curonian Spit pSCI boundaries covering a part of the marine waters of the Curonian Spit National Park. The modification was driven by following factors: a) northern part of the area is important for the spawning of Twaite shad (*Alosa fallax*); b) investigations carried out identified that the habitat “sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time” (1110) do not occur as initially was foreseen. Therefore the pSCI was suggested to modify to exclude the area nominated for 1110n habitat and include the area important for Twaite shad. The proposal was accepted by the MoE and the pSCI Curonian Spit was modified accordingly (Order of the Environmental Minister No D1-210 on the 22 April, 2009). Modification of the boundaries see in attached file

“Officially approved Curonian Spit pSCI boundaries” in Annex 5.7.15. The updated information about the site has been submitted to the EC in November, 2009.

- 3. Modification of the pSCI Palanga seaside** (Palagos priekrante); code - LTPAL0001. Project proposed to draw more accurate borders of the current pSCI (little bit reducing its area). The proposal was included in the MP of the site (see Annex 5.7.10) and presented for the representatives of MoE. The argument for this proposal was more of administrative character – to define more logical border, which would allow users of the area identify easier their location with respect to the pSCI. Currently existing borders of the site are based on 20 meters isobath, which actually differs in different maps. Proposal was to fix the boarder to the longitude coordinate. The proposal so far has not been supported by the MoE, because it does not concern significant changes of the borders, which already now cover the major part of the reef habitats, and therefore is not of urgent matter with regard to complete designation of marine Natura 2000 sites.

RESULTS

The goals of the action have been successfully achieved:

- A concept for management plan development for MPAs was prepared and tested in practice.
- 2 management plans per each country are elaborated and submitted to competent authorities.
- Proposals for marine Natura 2000 sites are submitted in Latvia and Lithuania and confirmed by the competent authorities.

After official designation of the proposed sites, the marine Natura 2000 network within the territorial waters of Latvia and Lithuania can be considered completed. In Estonia still large parts of its territorial waters remain without investigations due to size of coastline and limits of resources (investigations were not foreseen in the current project due to limited budget).

The action also gave an understanding of volume and needs for future investigations outside the currently addressed areas. In Estonia additional inventories and site designation is needed outside of the existing Natura 2000 sites within territorial waters (already partly undertaken by another project) as well EEZ. In Latvia and Lithuania additional inventories and designation of marine Natura 2000 sites is needed within the EEZ.

LESSONS LEARNED

In all three Baltic States this was first experience in development of management plans for Marine Protected Areas. Thus project has provided model management plans which can be used for future nature conservation planning in marine areas.

Experience of the project has proven that development of marine management plans is possible within the frame of existing national legal procedures, although it might require different approach with regard to stakeholder involvement. To achieve desired results

active communication with all concerned national authorities shall be undertaken, particularly, because management measures mostly concern such important sectors as shipping, port development, fishery, energy production and defence.

Management of MPAs due to the natural conditions differs a lot from management of terrestrial areas. Therefore it was practically impossible to define direct management measures at the site. Management of these areas mostly is related to administrative measures as well as educational or informative activities. The most essential measures for ensuring the conservation status of the site are improvement of existing or development of new legal acts as well as insuring effective environmental impact assessment procedure.

At the same time project experts have experienced difficulties with regard to assessment of conservation status of marine species and habitats as well as defining conservation targets. The main reason for that is very little or scattered knowledge on distribution of the species and habitats in whole marine territory of the countries. Assessment could be based only on the information gained from inventory actions, which covered only the project sites. This shows need for further ecological studies of marine environment to provide information necessary for assessment and reporting as well as to ensure favourable conservation status of the protected species and habitats.

Furthermore following country specific conclusions shall be added:

Estonia:

- National guidelines for terrestrial MP development can be used also for marine MPs, although few modifications are needed.
- In Estonia the project team has experienced difficulties to focus on marine management planning, since particular protected areas include marine as well as terrestrial parts and both should to be covered by the same MP. It was difficult to draw border between marine and terrestrial issues. MPs had to include also such activities as management of coastal seminatural habitats, reed beds etc.
- Only few stakeholders of particular protected areas (e.g. fishermen, ports, wind farm developers) were interested in marine issues. Local people, land owners, also local Environmental Board were more concerned about management of coastal areas. The main questions from fishermen were always: why there is so few fish in the sea and will the MP foresee measures against seals and cormorants.

Latvia:

- Management plan development for MPAs, although possible within the existing system, has required a bit different structure of the plan and approach to stakeholder involvement as well as caused amendments to the official procedure, introducing possibility to start management planning in parallel to designation of the MPA.
- Marine areas cover broad stakeholder spectrum with specific interests, which requires different approach to stakeholder communication – while in terrestrial areas there are mostly local stakeholders, concerned about establishment and management of the site, in marine areas strong economic interests are involved without a concrete relation to a “piece of land”. The particular interest might be rather distant to the site, but at the same time more powerful, represented by national authorities like Ministry of Transport or Regional Development etc. Therefore communication and information about MPAs and their conservation objectives and management shall be organised

not only on local, but also on national level. Very essential for this communication is strong position from the side of the Ministry of Environment.

- Partly negative attitude of stakeholders with regard to nature conservation activities are based on their previous experience in designation and protection of terrestrial sites. At the same time establishment of MPAs is relatively new issue - people are not familiar with it and do not know what to expect, which results in serious concerns and mistrust from the side of stakeholders. This shows a need for more active work on promotion and explanation of nature conservation objectives and related impacts on economic development. Project experience shows that involvement of expert on public relations would be needed.
- Nevertheless project team has established good contacts with all important stakeholder groups and managed to achieve agreements with initially rather opposing parties like port authorities. The proposed management measures, zoning and related study carried out by the project has proven that no serious implications for local development are expected due to designation of MPAs.

Lithuania:

- Same like in Estonia existing guidelines for the terrestrial management planning can be used for the development of the marine MPs, although minor modifications are needed.
- Since most of the proposed management activities are directly related with improvement of the existing and/or preparation of the new legal acts, the role of the official nature conservation authorities (especially Ministry of Environment and its divisions) is of crucial importance in the process of management plan development.
- The conservation measures of MPAs should be focused not only on the particular species for which Natura 2000 site is designated, but also on the other species of EU Importance listed in the Annex V of the EU Habitat Directive (case of fish).
- The proper regulation of the commercial fishery can ensure more effective conservation outputs related with protection of several protected bird and fish species, and, at the same time, avoiding important economical impact on the fishery sector.