



Assessment of socioeconomic impacts of the designation of Marine Protected Areas and implementation of nature conservation measures

Summary

The study was carried out by “AKTiVS Ltd” within the EU LIFE-Nature Programme funded project “Marine Protected Areas in the Eastern Baltic Sea” (LIFE05NAT/LV/000100).

Traditionally, it is believed that designation of specially protected nature areas will restrict economic development of the territory. At present, there is experience only with terrestrial protected areas in Latvia. Marine Protected Areas are being designated first time, and they will occupy a large aquatic area. Therefore, fears of different stakeholders how this will influence economy and coastal development are understandable. The study aims to answer the question, whether designation of Marine Protected Areas will really interfere with development of the territory.

The objectives of the study are following:

- To provide objective overview on the potential socioeconomic impacts of the designation of Marine Protected Areas and implementation of nature conservation measures to policy makers, stakeholders and the society. The assessment includes information about costs and benefits for the society, public and environment from designation of MPAs and conservation of nature assets.
- To facilitate harmonisation of the interests of nature conservation and marine area use by analysing potential “interest conflicts” and helping to find acceptable solutions.

The study was carried out in line with development of Nature Management Plans for two Marine Protected Areas in Latvia: “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga” and “Nida-Pērkone”. Although the both MPAs form the bases for the study, the results may be referred to all MPAs, because the Management Plan areas represent all most significant sea and coastal uses and socioeconomic interests. Especially diverse is “Western Coast of the Gulf of Riga” with sea ports, shipping routes, fishery, tourism and recreation. Near “Nida –Pērkone”, there is potential interest in building wind parks and extracting oil.

The conclusions from the study are as follows:

- No economic losses for present or potential sectors and no additional financial expenses are expected in the MPAs. Additional financial costs may arise from potential economic

activities (e.g., oil exploration and extraction, extraction of other mineral resources, building wind parks).

- Individual economic sectors, as well as small and middle size enterprises will benefit from the designation of the MPAs and implementation of measures from the Nature Management Plans, e.g. tourism and fishery companies.
- It can be concluded that harmonisation of nature conservation and socioeconomic interests is possible facilitating sustainable development of an MPA.
- Expenses from implementation of nature conservation requirements and management measures are mainly attributed to the State budget. The total financial costs for all seven MPAs could be ca 300 thousand lats (LVL) a year that is 6-7% of the total state budget in nature conservation and 0.2% of the budget for the whole environmental protection. Monitoring and administration expenses constitute biggest part of the expenses.
- Ecosystems, species and habitats fulfil many functions. The “ecological goods and services” of bird species and reef habitats reach an economic value of hundreds of millions LVL a year. By ensuring their protection, the society will have long-term gains that exceed the costs of policy implementation.
- Marine Protected Areas may be as a factor facilitating socioeconomic development. Studies in other European countries and Latvia let to conclude that advantages of MPAs would benefit economy and social environment of the territory in long-term. Winners would be providers of tourism services, as well as related economic sectors and residents of the territory.