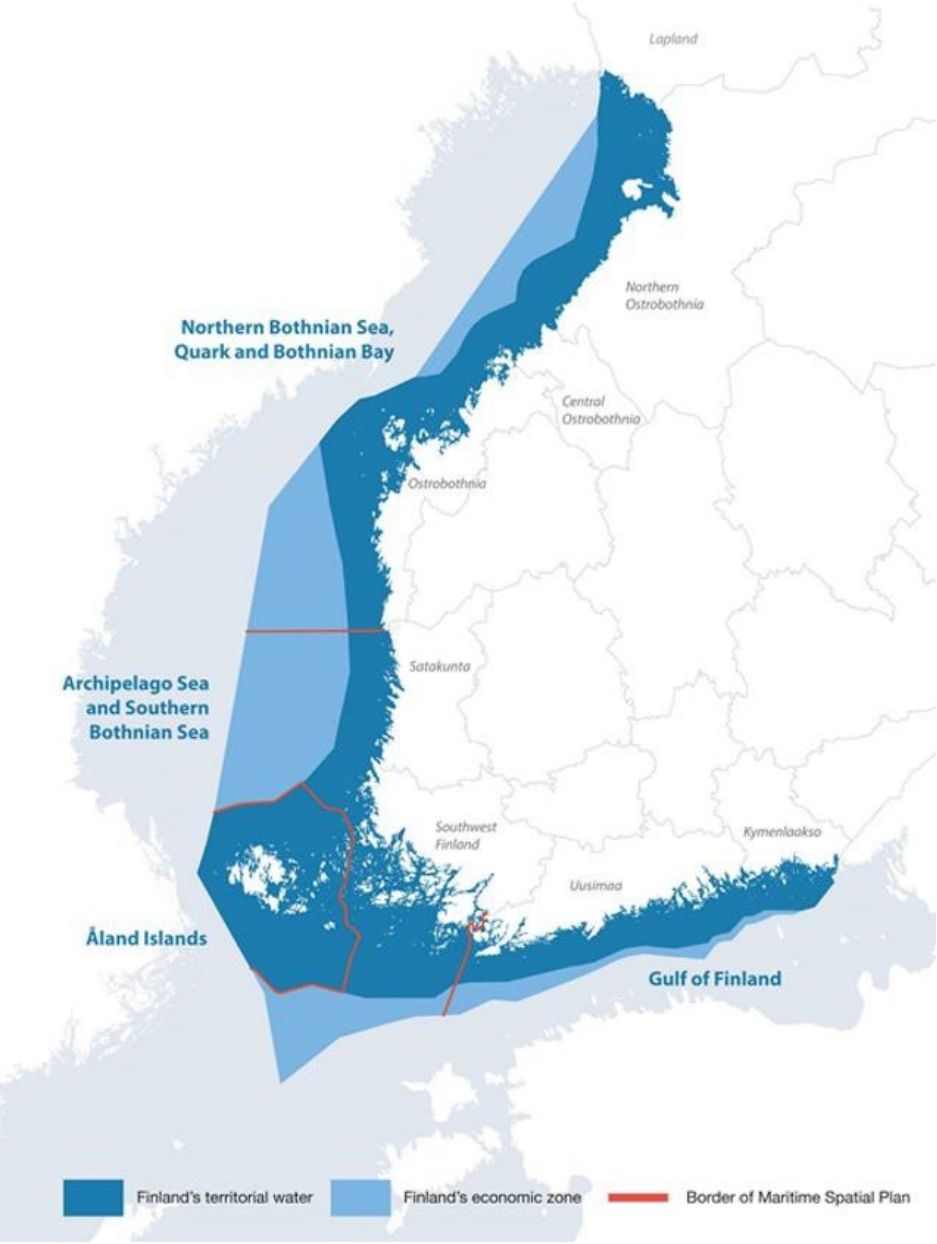
Country Fiche

Finland and Åland

Updated April 2025

Finland

1. General information



Map: Coastal Regional Councils, EEZ and territorial sea.

- Territorial Sea 12 nm zone: 52 581 km^2 including coastal waters around Åland 11 764 km^2 (the area of islands including Åland Islands is 5 716 km^2, and not included in the water area)
- Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ): 29 078 km^2
- Territorial Sea and Exclusive Economic Zone are limited to the adjacent states.

1.1. Governance

The Exclusive economic zone is governed by the Finnish Government.

The territorial sea is a part of local municipalities. Local municipal authorities have strong self-government based on local democracy and decision making, the right to levy taxes, and the mandate for land use planning.

Finland is divided into 18 regions of which eight are coastal ones. A Regional Council is a statutory consortium of municipalities. It is responsible for regional development and for drafting regional land use plans. Councils are made up of politically selected representatives from the municipalities.

Åland is an autonomous region of Finland and governed according to the Act on the Autonomy of Åland and international treaties. It has an own government and parliament, as well as own legislation. Åland also has responsibility for the functions undertaken by Finland's regional councils. The Finnish territorial sea around Åland is part of local municipalities of Åland.

1.2. Contacts

Regional Councils responsible for maritime spatial planning on the Exclusive Economic Zone and on the territorial sea, as well as for regional land-use planning on the territorial sea:

1. The Regional Council of Kymenlaakso
2. The Regional Council of Helsinki-Uusimaa
3. The Regional Council of Southwest Finland
4. The Regional Council of Satakunta
5. The Regional Council of Ostrobothnia
6. The Regional Council of Central Ostrobothnia
7. The Regional Council of Oulu Region
8. The Regional Council of Lapland

MSP in general:

Ministry of the Environment
Ms. Mari POHJA-MYKRÄ
Ministerial Adviser
Sustainable Construction and Housing Department
Aleksanterinkatu 4-10, Helsinki
P.O. Box 35, FI-00023 Government, Finland
Phone +358 2952 500005
E-mail: mari.pohja-mykra(at)gov.fi
Web: www.ym.fi/en-US

MSP Data Focal point:

Ministry of the Environment
Ms. Maaret Stenström
Senior Environmental Adviser
Sustainable Construction and Housing Department
Aleksanterinkatu 4-10, Helsinki
P.O. Box 35, FI-00023 Government, Finland
Phone: +358 2952 50277
E-mail: maaret.stenstrom(at)gov.fi
Web: www.ym.fi/en-US

Espoo points of contacts:

SEA:

Ministry of the Environment
Mr. Lasse TALLSKOG
Ministerial Adviser
P.O. Box 35
FIN-00023 GOVERNMENT
Telephone: +358 50 413 0550
Fax: +358 9 1603 9395
E-mail: lasse.tallskog(at)gov.fi

EIA:

Ministry of the Environment
Ms. Seija RANTAKALLIO
Ministerial Adviser
P.O. Box 35
FIN-00023 GOVERNMENT
Telephone: +358 400 143 937
Fax: +358 9 1603 9365
E-mail: seija.rantakallio(at)gov.fi

2. General information on legislation

Maritime spatial planning legislation

The maritime spatial planning directive was transposed into Finnish law in 2016. MSP regulations are given as a part of the Land Use Act (482/2016), which is the most important act to steer land use, spatial planning and construction. The maritime spatial plan is a strategic plan with indirect steering impacts.

Eight coastal Regional Councils are responsible for drafting and approving the maritime spatial plan for territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone.

The first maritime spatial plan was approved in December 2020. It is drafted in three parts; one for the Northern Bothnian Sea, Quark and Bothnian Bay by the Regional Councils of Lappi, Oulu Region, Central Ostrobothnia and Ostrobothnia; one for the Archipelago Sea and the Southern Bothnian Sea by the Regional Councils of Satakunta and Southwest Finland; and one for the Gulf of Finland by the Regional Councils of Helsinki-Uusimaa and Kymenlaakso.

The maritime spatial plan promotes sustainable development of marine areas, the sustainable use of marine resources, and the achievement of a good status of the marine environment. Marine energy sectors, maritime transport (including ports), the maritime industry, the extractive sector, fishing and aquaculture, blue biotechnology, tourism and recreation, cultural heritage, conservation and preservation, and the protection and enhancement of nature are considered and reconciled among other activities.

When drafting the plan, special attention has been given to the characteristics of the sea and coastal areas, as well as to land–sea interactions. Communication and participation have been emphasized throughout the planning process, and regional councils have collaborated with stakeholders when drafting the plans.

The Ministry of the Environment develops and guides maritime spatial planning and is responsible for intergovernmental cooperation.

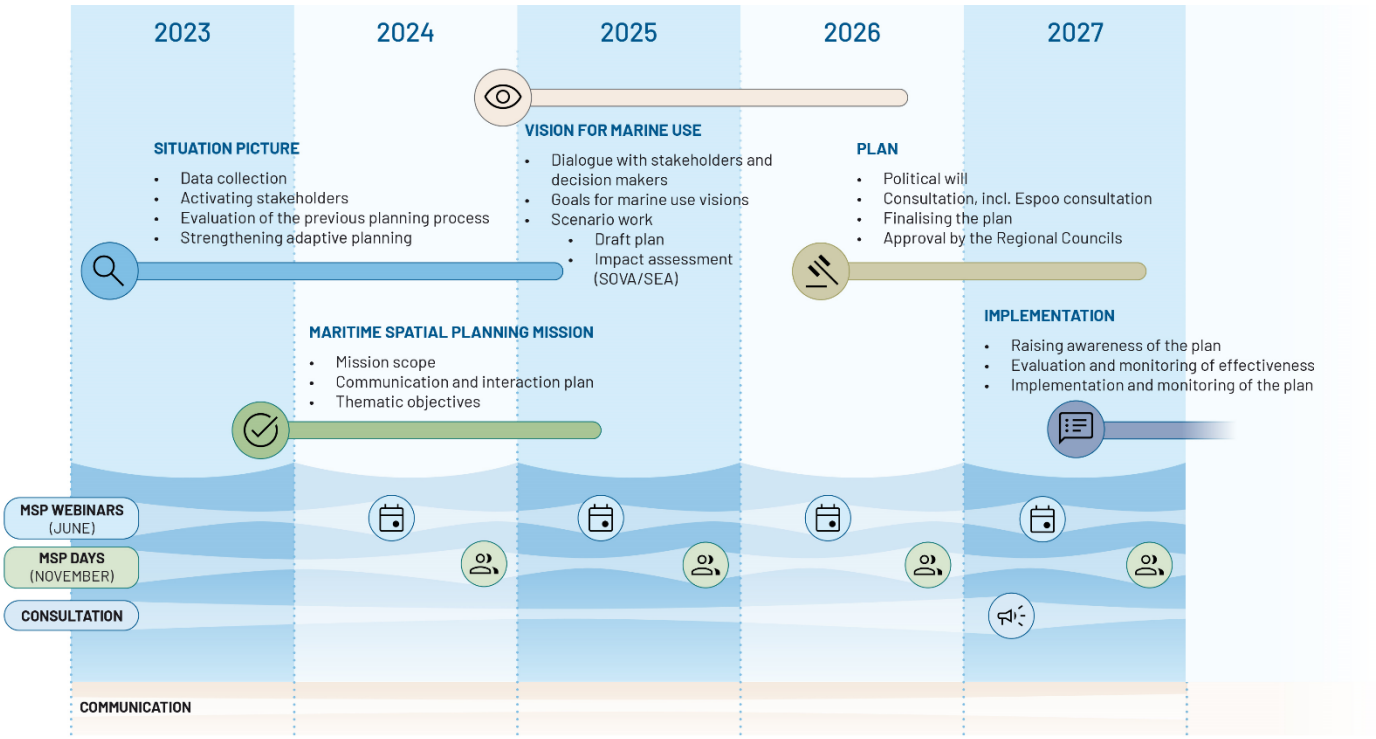
A national Maritime Spatial Planning Coordination Group was established to develop maritime spatial plans and to carry out the planning process. Group members include representatives of coastal Regional Councils, the Ministry of the Environment and Åland Island. The aim of the group is to facilitate coherence between the Finnish maritime spatial plans and to supervise the participation and cooperation needed for drafting the plans. The Regional Council of Southwest Finland administrates the coordination of MSP.

The maritime spatial planning process was developed by the MSP Coordination Group, in cooperation with different stakeholders. The first planning process during 2017-2021 was divided into the following phases: the definition and data collection phase, the scenario phase, the target phase with vision work, the planning phase and the approval phase.

Stocktaking, data and other planning materials as well as scenario work were finalized in early 2019, and a public consultation of the planning evidence was carried out in spring 2019. The vision phase and

planning phase were carried out in late 2019 and early 2020, and the second public consultation took place in spring 2020. Finnish Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 was approved by the boards of the regional councils by December 2020.

The revision of the plan started in January 2024. The Plan will be updated by 2027. The planning process follows the steps defined in the Interaction Plan 2024-2027, see picture below.



Regional land use plans for the Territorial Sea

According to the Land Use Act, land use planning applies to both territorial sea and land areas. Regional Councils are responsible for drafting and approving regional land use plans, which may also cover territorial waters. Regional land use plans are legally binding.

Currently, the territorial sea is included in the regional land use plans developed by coastal regional councils. These general plans set out medium-term and long-term objectives for regional land use strategies, guiding regional development and steering decisions on issues of a trans-municipal or regional nature.

When drafting a regional land use plan, special attention is given to the following: the appropriate regional and community structure, ecological sustainability of land use, environmentally and economically sustainable transportation and technical services, the sustainable use of water and extractable land resources, the operating conditions for regional businesses, the protection of landscapes, natural values, and cultural heritage, and the sufficient availability of areas suitable for recreation.

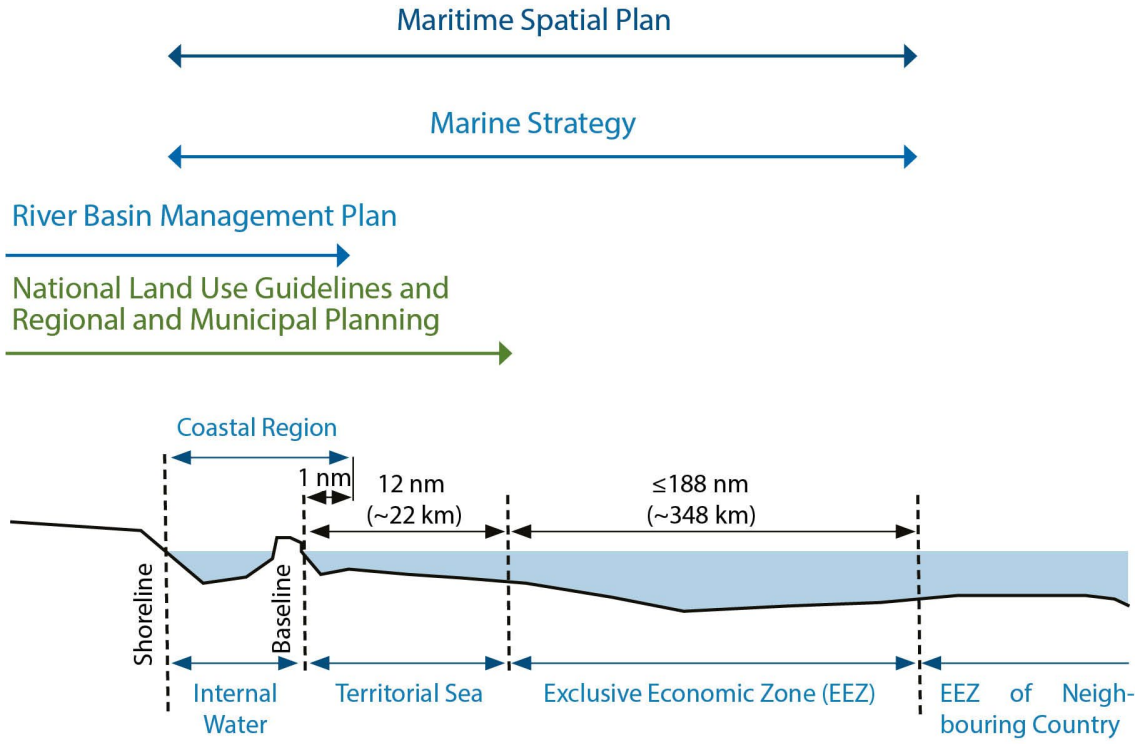
In addition, the Government defines national Land Use Guidelines, which must be considered in all land use decisions and land use planning.

3. General applicability (e.g. territorial sea, EEZ, other distinctions)

The maritime spatial planning regulations are implemented in the territorial sea and the Finnish Exclusive Economic Zone.

Maritime spatial planning overlaps with the legally binding national Land Use Guidelines and regional and municipal land-use planning in the territorial sea area.

The UNCLOS Law of the Seas is implemented in national legislation on the Exclusive Economic Zone (2004). It specifies sectoral laws that are implemented in the EEZ.

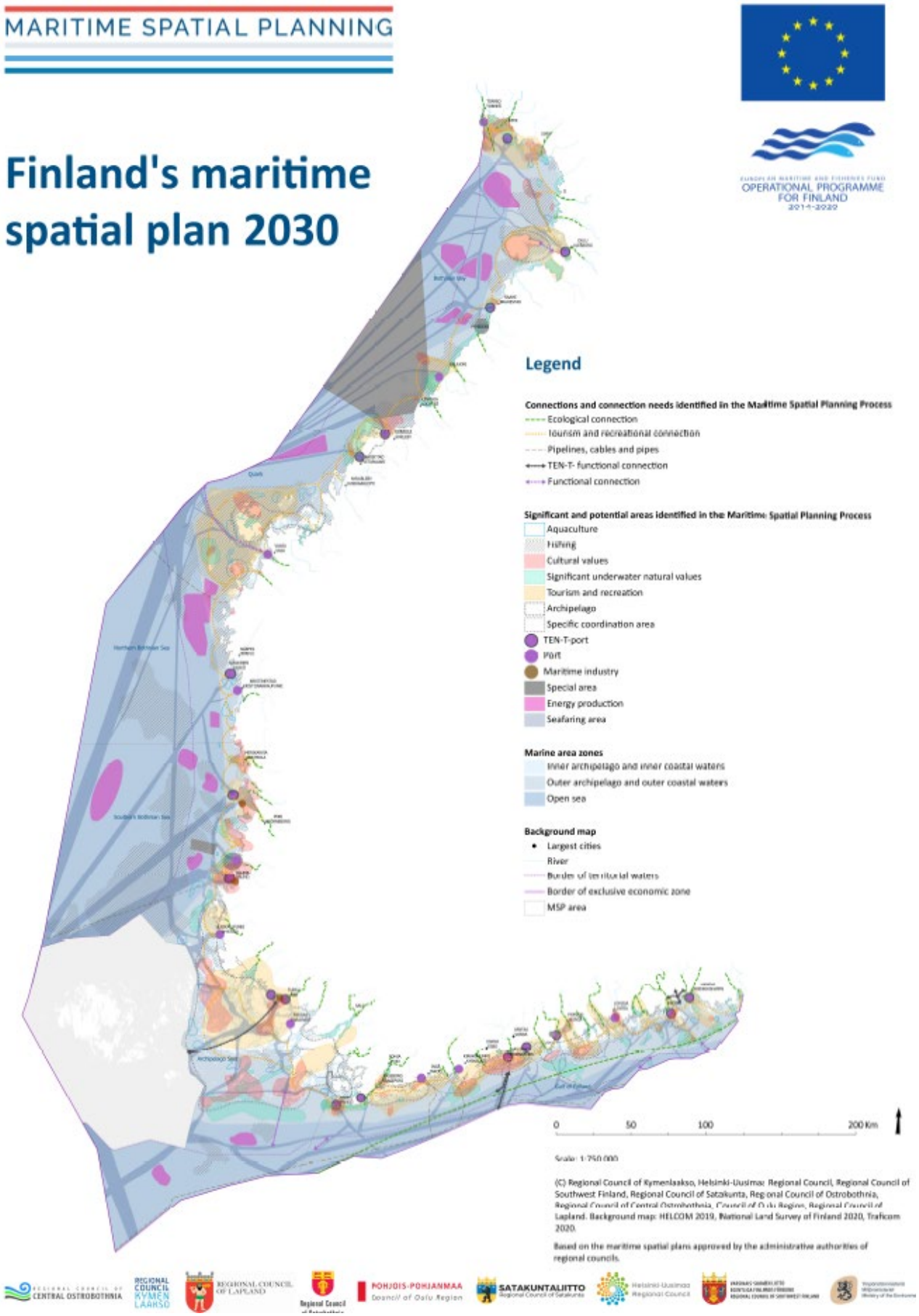


4. Maritime Spatial Plans

4.1. Finland`s Maritime Spatial Plan 2030

The first *Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 for Finland* is in force. The Plan consists of three maritime spatial plans covering both territorial waters and the EEZ: one for the Northern Bothnian Sea, Quark and Bothnian Bay drafted by the Regional Councils of Lapland, Oulu Region, Central Ostrobothnia and Ostrobothnia; one for the Archipelago Sea and Southern Bothnian Sea drafted by the Regional Councils of Satakunta and Southwest Finland; and one for the Gulf of Finland drafted by the Regional Councils of Helsinki-Uusimaa and Kymenlaakso. The plan is available in Finnish, Swedish and English here.

Area covered



A Zoning approach is used in MSP to efficiently designate functions that are appropriate for each zone. This enables planning areas to develop on the basis of their own strengths, ensuring the compatibility of operations while mitigating their environmental impacts and achieving a good marine environmental status.

Maritime spatial planning zones are 1) inner archipelago and inner coastal waters, 2) outer archipelago and outer coastal waters and 3) open sea. The zone division is based on the classification of coastal waters covering the entire cost of Finland.

Zoning covers principles that allow the characteristics of the different parts of the planning areas to be taken into account. Zoning takes into consideration, among other things, the marine and water protection objectives that are typical of the areas, marine livelihoods, cultural values, development needs for tourism and recreational use, securing the operating conditions of maritime transport, and international infrastructure and transport connections. In addition, the aim is to preserve open seascape and landscape values in the planning and development of all zones.

Objectives and nature of the planning and the plan

The purpose of maritime spatial planning is to promote the sustainable development and growth of different uses of the marine area, the sustainable use of natural resources, and the achievement of a good status of the marine environment.

In order to coordinate the needs of the different uses, they have been examined in maritime spatial planning. The uses under examination include the energy sectors, maritime transport, fishing and aquaculture, tourism and recreation, as well as the preservation, conservation and improvement of nature in particular. In addition, cultural heritage, marine industry, extractive sector and blue biotechnology have been focused on. Attention has also been paid to the special characteristics of the marine area and the interaction between land and sea. Consideration has also been given to national defence needs.

The Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 for Finland is a strategic development document illustrated by a map. Map markings are used to show the values of marine areas and existing activities and potential future sites for new activities and their alternative placement in all of Finland's marine areas.

The maritime spatial plan has indirect steering impacts; as a tool for spatial planning it supports regional land use planning and regional development by providing a collaboration platform for authorities, stakeholders, and experts, and by producing information about the opportunities and framework conditions of maritime industries and the marine environment. The impact of the maritime spatial plan also arises from its link with national, regional and sectoral policy guidelines and strategies, marine natural resource and management plans, and regional programmes and their realisation.

Designated uses, areas and connections

The maritime spatial plan identifies the needs of the marine environment and the wellbeing of maritime actors equally, without placing them in an order of importance. The sectors examined have different societal and community values, which the plan seeks to foster.

The Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 for Finland contains the following sectors: Energy, maritime logistics, maritime industry, fishing and aquaculture, tourism and recreation, cultural heritage, archipelago, extractive sector, blue biotechnology, nature values and national defence.

The planning solutions are based on the best available information, such as surveys, studies, modellings, expert assessments and regional characteristics.

Energy

MSP identifies potential areas for offshore wind power development in terms of energy production. Potential areas are mainly located in the outer archipelago and outer coastal water, and open sea zones. The offshore wind farm layout optimisation takes into account ecological, socio-cultural and economic factors.

In offshore wind power development, it is important to pay attention to marine livelihoods such as fishing,

landscape values, natural values and cultural values, recreational use, seafaring and defence.

The MSP indicates also existing national and international pipelines, cables and pipes as well as those under development.

It is important to pay attention to the impact of the placement of pipelines, cables and pipes on the marine environment and underwater cultural heritage when developing the infrastructure connections.

Maritime logistics

MSP identifies the internationally significant TEN-T core network ports and comprehensive network ports as well as other regionally important ports. Seafaring areas, further connections on the mainland, smooth transport flow and safety are central to the conditions determining the functioning and development of ports. The port markings also cover other operations which depend on port areas such as industry and logistics centres.

The seafaring areas indicated in the plan are mainly Class 1 and 2 merchant shipping fairways and other busy marine areas.

Maritime industry

Maritime industry is identified as a central part of entities comprising maritime livelihoods, maritime clusters. Maritime industry operations are often centralised in the vicinity of large ports. Maritime industry is identified as a significant sector in terms of regional development.

Fishing and Aquaculture

MSP identifies potential areas for coastal net fishing and open sea trawl fishing in terms of professional fishing. Other professional fishing, such as trap locations, have been considered as part of the planning process, but they are not presented on the plan map.

MSP identifies potential areas for fish farming in terms of aquaculture. The map marking indicates the potential areas for further rearing. The modelling produced by the Natural Resources Institute Finland has been utilised when identifying areas.

In aquaculture development, the needs regarding the entire aquaculture production chain, such as infrastructure connections, ports and areas required by different production phases, must be considered. The baseline for developing aquaculture are the new possibilities that new technologies provide to locate aquaculture in a way that load, that may be directed to the sea and marine environment, is as small as possible. The objectives of water management and marine management may limit the exploitation of potential fish farming areas.

Tourism and recreation

For tourism and recreation, MSP identifies areas potential for regional development.

The archipelago and coastal areas are nature and culture attractions and the tourism and recreation map marking includes areas significant also for recreational fishing and hunting.

MSP identifies internationally, nationally or regionally important and potential tourism and recreational connections where attention must be paid to the accessibility and creation of functional entities.

Cultural heritage

The MSP identifies significant clusters of cultural values, which include, for example, nationally valuable landscape areas, nationally significant built cultural environments (RKY), underwater cultural landscapes, coastal fishing tradition areas and entities related to marine cultural heritage, such as entities related to the military history, seafaring, traditional biotopes, landscape as well as coastal, archipelago and villa culture.

When developing the areas, it is important to pay attention to the preservation of the characteristics of the area, sensitivity and enhancement of cultural values, accessibility of areas, natural values, value of the open sea landscape as well as marine livelihoods.

Archipelago

MSP identifies important functional archipelago entities of marine areas, which combine the local archipelago culture, year-round settlement and recreational settlement, several marine industries, biodiversity and cultural environment.

The preconditions for permanent residents should be promoted, and the vital archipelago culture, diverse business life and year-round accessibility of the areas should be considered when developing the areas. The infrastructure in the area should be developed to support the vitality and characteristics of the area.

Extractive sector

In vision work phase, the mining industry is identified as a sector of the future, and it has also been examined in the report on the current state of the Blue Economy. In the 1st planning round, no mineral potential is indicated in the plan. The underlying data for identifying potential areas is not yet sufficient and the small size of mining sites poses challenges when indicating potential in the maritime spatial plan.

Blue biotechnology

In vision work phase, blue biotechnology is identified as an important sector of the future, and it has also been examined in the report on the current state of the Blue Economy. In the 1st planning round, no blue biotechnology potential is indicated in the plan given the lack of more detailed research and reports.

Nature values

Maritime spatial planning identifies areas with significant valuable underwater natural areas, which are potential production areas of ecosystem services. The utilized survey has been Finnish ecologically significant marine underwater areas (EMMA). The valuable areas are significant especially in terms of the biodiversity, vulnerability and uniqueness of biotopes. Geologically diverse and natural state areas are also included. The area definitions rely mainly on the data collected during the VELMU programme: The Finnish Inventory Programme for the Underwater Marine Environment.

Maritime spatial planning identifies significant ecological connections that are significant in terms of the interaction of the land and sea or otherwise significant in terms of biodiversity.

MSP does not indicate existing areas of the Natura 2000 network, national parks or other nature reserves whose protection and implementation is guided by other legislation.

National defence

Safeguarding the operations of Finland's defence forces has been taken into account in the MSP. Attention has been paid to restricted marine areas in line with the Territorial Surveillance Act and to firing and military training areas. Of the uses of marine areas set to grow in the future, offshore wind power construction will require harmonisation with the needs of national defence.

Pilot plans or projects

Not legally binding:

- Bothnian Sea Transboundary Pilot Project between Finland and Sweden (Plan Bothnia project, 2010-2012).
- Maritime Spatial Plan: Regional land use plan for the Sea, Kymenlaakso Region (MSP equivalent)

Aspects of the MSP process

Ecosystem-based approach (EBA)

The ecosystem-based approach is considered a leading principle of the Finnish Marine Strategy that aims to secure a healthy and functioning marine ecosystem.

Maritime spatial planning in Finland is based on the ecosystem paradigm developed and operationalised by the VASAB-HELCOM Working Group on Maritime Spatial Planning based on the Malawi Principles. When applying the ecosystem-based approach, maritime spatial planning is based on goals related to the status of the marine environment. Such goals determine growth limits for operations in marine areas, as well as ensuring the sustainability of maritime activities. Application of the EBA in MSP in Finland has been studied in more detail, report is available.

Regional land use plans for maritime areas (Kymenlaakso, Lapland) aim to preserve ecosystem services and the sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystem services. The MSPs, which are carried out under the regional land use plans, differ from plan to plan depending on the specific aspects of each area. Coastal and marine areas in Finland are different and therefore may require a different emphasis, depending on the sea uses.

Land-sea interactions

Land–sea interactions were taken into account when preparing maritime spatial plan. During the vision work phase of the maritime spatial planning process, land–sea interactions were discussed with maritime stakeholders, and in terms of mainland-based activities, such as industry, communities, agriculture and forestry, the direct and indirect impacts on marine areas were made visible. Stakeholders' views on key sector-specific factors affecting land–sea interaction are visible in the sector- specific roadmaps created during the vision work phase.

Coastal regional councils have planned for land and coastal areas, but also for islands and offshore marine areas. The integration of the land-sea Interaction depends on the specific aspects of the coastal and marine area under planning, as these interactions can be different across the different regions.

In general, LSI in Finland is covered not only by regional spatial plans but also regional strategies and development plans. Plans and strategies designed for the marine transport and ports network cover the area from land to the boundaries of the territorial waters. Separately, the nature conservation plans cover both land and water. ICZM and regional coastal strategies also cover island areas and, in some cases, the open sea.

Land-sea interaction in plans is strong, because the Land Use Act is implemented on territorial waters as well, and plans usually cover both land and sea. Nevertheless, there are some regional land use plans focusing on sea areas: *Kymenlaakso trade and marine spatial plan*; and *Lapland marine and coastal wind energy spatial plan*. In other cases, marine areas are planned in the scope of regional plans covering both terrestrial and marine areas (Helsinki-Uusimaa, Southwest Finland, Satakunta, Ostrobothnia, Central Ostrobothnia, and Oulu Region).

Coherence with other processes

Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)

The MSFD was transposed into national legislation in 2011. The MSFD has been implemented in Finland by means of the Act on the Organisation of River Basin Management and the Marine Strategy and Government Decree on the Organisation of the Development and Implementation of the Marine Strategy. The preparation of the national Marine Strategy began in 2011 and covers Finnish territorial waters and the EEZ. The last step of the strategy is the Assessment of the State of Finland's Marine Environment in 2024. The assessment defines good environmental status, evaluates its achievement, and sets environmental objectives to monitor threats to the environment.

The preparation process of the MSFD and Marine Strategy is characterised by cross-sectoral cooperation,

and MSP activities are considered as measures to plan human-activities in a sustainable manner. The environmental goals of Finland's national Marine Strategy are taken into account in MSP. MSP and national land use planning can have an indirect positive impact on several descriptors of the good status of the marine environment. These include loss of biodiversity, the state of commercial fish stocks, changes in marine food webs, seabed destruction and disturbance, changes in hydrographical seabed characteristics, the control of alien species, levels of harmful substances in the marine environment, increases in marine litter, and amounts of energy and noise carried into the sea. As the MSP in Finland has been carried out under the Land Use Act, a participatory process is required by Finnish law on Land Use.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)

The Finland's Coastal Strategy was adopted by the Ministry of the Environment in February 2024. The Coastal Strategy is a coordinated process with MSP, focusing on the land-sea interface and coastal actions. The main goal of the Strategy is to promote the sustainable use of the coast in the face of a changing environment and emerging threats. The Strategy guides and steers development and planning activities along the coast. The implementation is ongoing, and a national Forum for Best Practices will be established in 2025 to serve as an interactive channel for sharing best practices and knowledge concerning the coastal zone.

In addition to inland and coastal areas, most coastal area regional plans also cover island and marine areas. Participation activities are carried out according to the same legal framework (Land Use Act).

Strategic Environmental Assessment

According to the 'Act on the Assessment of the Impacts of the Effects of Certain Plans Plans and Programmes on the Environment' (200/2005), the authority responsible for a plan or programme shall ensure that its environmental impacts are adequately examined and assessed during the preparation process if the implementation of the plan or programme may have significant environmental impacts.

The authorities responsible for the maritime spatial plan must ensure that the environmental impacts of the plan are studied and assessed to a sufficient extent during its preparation if the implementation of the plan may have significant environmental impacts. The impact assessment of the Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 for Finland takes into account the ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects. The review takes into account the direction of the impact – positive or negative change – and its significance. The maritime spatial plan is a strategic document, meaning that it can only have indirect impacts. Impact path analyses of the sector have been carried out by comparing the key content of the maritime spatial plan with any executive processes and the impacts of implementation in terms of the vision, roadmap and planning solutions.

The combined impacts of maritime industries and marine area in relation to ecosystems have been assessed from the perspective of planetary boundaries and the carrying capacity of the Baltic Sea. The overall impacts have also been assessed from the perspective of economic and socio-cultural impacts, including land–sea interaction.

The impact assessment covers the significant direct and indirect impacts of maritime spatial plans for the sectors considered in maritime spatial planning. The impact assessment is based on an examination of the change caused by the maritime spatial plan compared with a situation that would prevail if the plan did not exist. The review has been carried out by planning area.

The maritime spatial plan covers the Finnish territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone of Finland, which also include many Natura 2000 areas. The maritime spatial plan identifies potential for existing and new operations that may have an impact on the nature values based on which areas have been included in the Natura 2000 network. Assessments in accordance with the Nature Conservation Act must not be prepared until in connection with projects and plans, such as planning and permit procedures, that compromise the nature values on which the protection of Natura 2000 areas is based.

You can download the Impact assessment of the Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 for Finland.

An international information meeting was held in Helsinki in April 2018 and 2020. A cross-border consultation took place in the spring of 2020, aligning with the national consultation phase.

For the revised Plan, Finland will carry out Espoo consultations on the strategic environmental assessment report in 2026. SEAs will be prepared for three maritime plans: the Northern Bothnian Sea, Quark and Bothnian Bay, the Archipelago Sea and the Southern Bothnian Sea, and the Gulf of Finland.

Stakeholder Involvement

According to the Land Use Act stakeholders must be involved in the maritime spatial planning process. The maritime spatial planning process is based on collaboration. The following parties have participated: ministries; regional environmental authorities (ELY Centres); municipalities, towns and cities; local and regional level politicians, national-level agencies, institutes and research centres; maritime and coastal industries; sector-specific interest groups, federations and associations; private expert organisations and research institutes; ports; museums; and universities and other higher education institutions.

The maritime spatial planning *Open Cooperation Network* has served as an information sharing channel. Anyone interested in maritime spatial planning can join the network at www.merialuesuunnittelu.fi. At the time of completion of the first plan, the network had 380 members, who were informed by means of regular newsletters. The network has expanded to cover over 1000 members in 2024.

During the start-up, data collection and planning phases of maritime spatial planning, stakeholders discussed maritime spatial planning themes and the content and presentation of the plan, as well as the actual planning process, among other aspects. This created a common understanding of how to plan and what the plan must include. In addition, based on workshops, *an Interaction Plan* was prepared to provide an overview of maritime spatial planning and the influencing opportunities of stakeholders and citizens.

The future scenarios, visions and roadmaps were prepared in cooperation with stakeholders. During the scenario phase, the cooperation network met at national and regional workshops. In the autumn of 2019, the *Vision 2050* was prepared for marine areas, as well as regional target states and sector-specific roadmaps for 2030. Thematic regional and national discussions were also held. Stakeholders were also able to participate in the scenario and vision work on a digital platform and had an opportunity to present their opinions on the draft plans. A hearing on the situational picture and scenario work was organised in the spring of 2019, and a hearing on the vision work, draft plan and impact assessment was held in the spring of 2020.

During the maritime spatial planning process, the Ministry of the Environment and the Coordination Group organised several national briefing events and workshops between 2016 and 2020. Regional Councils organised dozens of regional workshops and regularly informed regional council boards and assemblies about the progress of maritime spatial planning.

Information about the first planning cycle and the completion of the planning was provided on the merialuesuunnittelu.fi website and via social media channels. The planning material was available on the www.merialuesuunnittelu.fi website, and the approved plan is available in dated format on the www.merialuesuunnitelma.fi website. Information about maritime spatial planning was also published on the websites of regional councils and the Ministry of the Environment.

During the second panning cycle starting in 2022, stakeholder collaboration consists of three new networks: 1) Interministerial MSP Network to facilitate sectoral needs in the national level, 2) MSP Research Collaboration Group for integrating MSP-related research into the planning process, and 3) the Sectoral Contact Group, consisting of representatives from national maritime sector organizations, aimed at facilitating cooperation between MSP and the sectors.

Information, such as surveys are published on the webpage www.merialuesuunnittelu.fi (in Finnish Swedish, and English). The Ministry of the Environment has also published analyses on MSP, which are publicly available. In addition, EU-funded projects have greatly contributed to providing planning evidence.

Transboundary cooperation

According to the legislation on MSP, the Ministry of the Environment is responsible for cooperation with neighbouring countries with the aim of ensuring that the maritime spatial plans are coherent and coordinated across the relevant marine region. The Ministry cooperates closely with regional councils who draft and approve the maritime spatial plans.

There was close cooperation with the other Baltic Sea countries during the first planning process to coordinate maritime spatial plans. Separate consultation meetings were held twice during the planning period, in 2018 and 2020. The various MSP projects in which the regional councils have participated have also involved cooperation. Information about maritime spatial planning in Finland has been presented at several international events, and an international hearing on the draft plans was held during the spring of 2020.

Finland is a member of the Joint HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group, which is established to ensure cooperation among the Baltic Sea Region countries for coherent regional Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) processes in the Baltic Sea.

4.2. Regional land use plan for the Territorial Sea, Kymenlaakso Region

The very first regional land use plan for the Territorial Sea of Kymenlaakso Region was drafted and approved by the Regional Council of Kymenlaakso and ratified by the Ministry of the Environment in 2014. The Kymenlaakso regional plan does not fully incorporate the MSP directive's goals – such as covering the EEZ - but it was the first attempt at integrated spatial planning for the sea area.

Legal basis

The legal basis for regional land use plans are in the Land Use Act. The legislation is applicable to Territorial sea as well as to land areas. The binding regional land use plans must take in to account the National Land Use Objectives in a way that promotes their implementation.

The regional plans set out the principles of land use and community structure, and designates areas as necessary for regional development. Areas are designated as reserved only to the extent and accuracy required by national or regional land use goals or by harmonizing the use of land in more than one municipality.

Legal impact

The plan sets binding guidelines for municipal land use plans and other authorities' land use related planning.

Area covered

The plan area covers the Kymenlaakso Region. A total area of 1822 sq km of Territorial sea was planned. This contributes to ca. 25 % of the total surface area of the region. The plan does not cover the EEZ as the Land Use Act is not currently applicable to the EEZ.

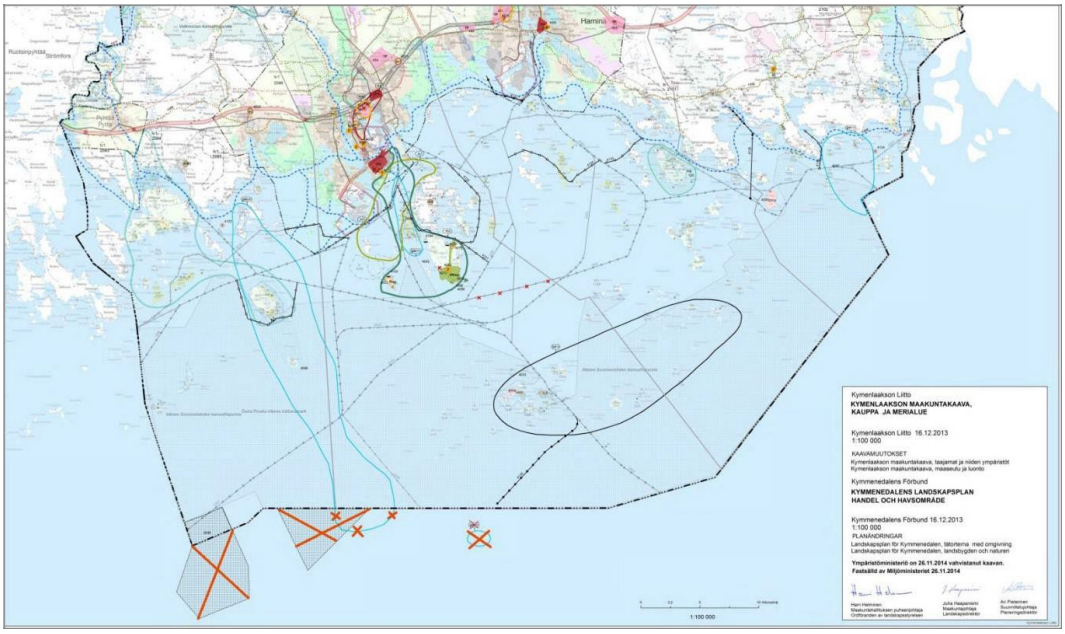
Historic development

The planning process took place from May 2012 to November 2014.

Objectives of the plan

The plan aims to strengthen the region's marine area's nature, cultural heritage, natural and ecosystem resources use as well as the shipping, military and tourism sectors. Known environmental risks such as eutrophication, seafaring accidents and sedimentary pollution have been recognized. The plan also aims to address issues concerning the marine strategy and water framework directives, maritime spatial planning directive and ecosystem-based planning goals of the European Union.

Map



Map: Part of the ratified regional land use plan of Kymenlaakso Region (Ministry of the Environment 2014)

Designation

Binding land use areas have been designated according to relevant studies of the current environment and future needs. Studies used and conducted in planning include studies of the seabed's geology, sea's environmental status and ecology, seafaring safety and noise pollution as well as particularities of the sea. Designations are planned to enhance the coexistence and synergies of different functions.

Cultural heritage, nature conservation and natural resources

Known cultural heritage loci at sea were categorized, generalized and designated in to regional zones of cultural heritage importance.

Valuable geological seabed formations have been categorized, generalized and designated.

The military has closed some island military facilities, which have been designated to new land uses in nature conservation, tourism and recreation.

Biodiverse seabed and island areas have been categorized and designated so as to create functioning ecosystems. Ecosystem areas that are able to better withstand use of natural resources (incl. dredging and depositing) have been identified. Previous deposit areas were shrunk in order to better protect the functioning of ecosystems. A balance between natural habitat preservation and natural resource exploitation has been achieved.

Fishing and Aquaculture

Primary fishing and aquaculture areas have been designated according to national strategies.

Shipping

Main shipping routes and harbors were designated. Regional recreational boating routes and harbors were designated.

Military

Functioning military areas on islands and inland have been designated. Important nature conservation areas within the military areas have been designated as secondary functions.

Tourism and Recreation

Main tourism and recreation possibilities have been designated especially to rich nature areas that withstand tourism, islands that facilitate cottages and closed military facilities.

Regulations

Regulations of designations are binding and detail what land uses are allowed, what is to be taken in to account in their use and what administrative procedures are required in more detailed planning.

Single use and combined use functions are designated as either primary or secondary functions. Some land uses are explicitly restricted in certain areas (such as dredging or depositing in biodiverse areas).

Detailed planning or project planning in certain designated areas requires detailed surveys, studies and hearings before project approval.

Adoption

The plan was approved by the Regional Council's highest decision-making body on the 16th of March 2013.

The plan was ratified with some changes by the Ministry of the Environment on the 26th of November 2014. Most notably the land use reservations within the EEZ were crossed out, as the Land Use Act is not applicable to the EEZ.

SEA

The Land Use Act regulates that an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the land use plan must be

carried out before plan approval. The EIA recognized that certain land use restrictions and planning guidelines will preserve and enhance cultural heritage and nature values as well as ecosystem services. The development of tourism, fishing and aquaculture will strengthen the regional economy. However, tourism development will increase the load of human activity to the environment.

Public participation

Broad public participation was held throughout the planning process. Several workshops were held with relevant national and local stakeholders. A total of twelve public hearings were held in the six municipalities of the region.

Transboundary consultation

N/A

Harmonisation with other plans

The Land Use Act requires the harmonization of regional land use plans with neighboring regional plans whenever possible.

Monitoring

The Regional Council will monitor the progress of the plan and commence new planning when deemed necessary.

5. What countries want to share

N/A

6. New developments / current status

Finland is revising its Maritime Spatial Plan 2030 during 2024 - 2027. In maritime spatial planning, the evaluation of the stakeholder participation has been completed, and according to the new *Interaction Plan* the *Vision Phase* is taking place in 2025. National and regional maritime sector consultation meetings, as well as broader stakeholder workshops, will be organized to build a shared vision for the use of marine areas. The focus is on overall maritime security and security of supply, the marine green transition, climate-smart planning, and planning areas for multi-use.

7. How coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas (HELCOM MPAs) are taken into account in MSP

Coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas were taken into account in preparing the plan. They are included and presented in the background information.

Åland

1. General

Territorial Sea 12 nm zone: 11 764 km^2

1.1. Governance

The territorial sea is under the jurisdiction of local municipalities. Local municipal authorities have strong self-governments based on local democracy and decision making, the right to levy taxes, and the mandate for land use planning. The Government of Åland has the planning mandate for the sea areas, more specifically the areas of the common-water areas (planning sea-use recommendation). There are privately owned water areas on Åland, and in these areas, the owner(s) can plan the sea-uses as long as they are abiding by other current legislations. The privately-owned water areas are to be included in municipal master plans.

1.2. Contacts

MSP in general:

The Government of Åland
Ms. Annica BRINK
Senior Advisor in Water Management
Department of Social Affairs, Health, and Environment
Självstyrelsegården
Strandgatan 37, AX-22100 Mariehamn, Finland
Phone +358 18 25542
E-mail: annica.brink (a)regeringen.ax
Web: https://www.regeringen.ax

2. General information on legislation

2.1. Maritime spatial planning legislation

The maritime spatial planning directive was transposed into Åland's legislation in 2018. MSP regulations are provided as a part of the Water Act, which is the most crucial legislation to steer water usage and development of the freshwater and sea area. Maritime spatial plan is general, non-binding plan drafted and approved by the Government of Åland (Ålands landskapsregering). The Government of Åland oversaw the development of a maritime spatial plan over common territorial waters by March 2021.

The plan aims to promote the sustainable development of marine areas and the sustainable use of marine resources, and the achievement of the good environmental status of the sea areas. Energy sectors at sea, maritime transport, the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, conservation, protection, and improvement of the environment and nature, tourism, and recreational use of marine areas are specifically focussed on, among other activities, and reconciled.

When drafting a plan, special attention was given to the characteristics of the sea area and the land-sea interaction. Communication and participation were highlighted throughout the planning process, and the Government of Åland engaged stakeholders and worked together with them in drafting the plans.

Åland takes part in the Finnish national maritime spatial planning coordination group to facilitate coherence of the Åland and the Finnish maritime spatial plans and the MSPs of Sweden, Estonia, and other BSR countries.

2.2. Land-use plans and the territorial sea

According to the Land Use Act, land use planning is implemented on land, and the territorial sea is planned according to the Water Act.

At present, the territorial sea is not fully included in the master plans of the municipalities. These master plans set out medium-term and long-term objectives for regional land-use strategies that guide regional development and steer decisions on trans-municipal or regional nature issues. The master plans are not legally binding. Hence, it is essential for the MSP, designated by the Government of Åland, to collaborate with the municipalities to implement the Land-Sea Interaction aspect in the MSP process fully fully.

3. General applicability

The maritime spatial planning regulations are implemented on the common waters of the territorial sea. The master plans of the municipalities are to include privately owned waters.

4. Spatial Plans

4.1 Land use planning

The municipalities of the Åland Islands (16 municipalities) are in charge of designating master plans that cover land areas and privately-owned water areas. The master plans are regulated in the Land Use Act. The master plans are not legally binding.

General land-use plans detailed development plans set out medium-term and long-term objectives for regional land-use strategies that guide regional development and steer decisions on trans-municipal or regional nature issues. The general land use plans and detailed development plans are legally binding.

4.2. Maritime Spatial Plan

4.2.1. Legal basis

The legal basis for Maritime Spatial Planning on Åland is regulated in the Water Act of the Åland Islands. The legislation applies to territorial seas.

The MSP sets out the principles and strategies of using common waters, governed by the Government of Åland, and designates areas as necessary for regional development. Areas are designated strategies for development only to the extent and accuracy of 1:200 000.

4.2.2. Legal impact

The plan sets strategies and guidelines for governmental and municipal land use plans and other authorities' related planning.

4.2.3. Area covered

The plan area covers the common waters of the territorial sea of the Åland Islands region. A total area of 7239 sq km of territorial sea was planned, approximately 62 % of the territorial sea. The plan does not cover the EEZ as the region of Åland Islands does not have an EEZ.

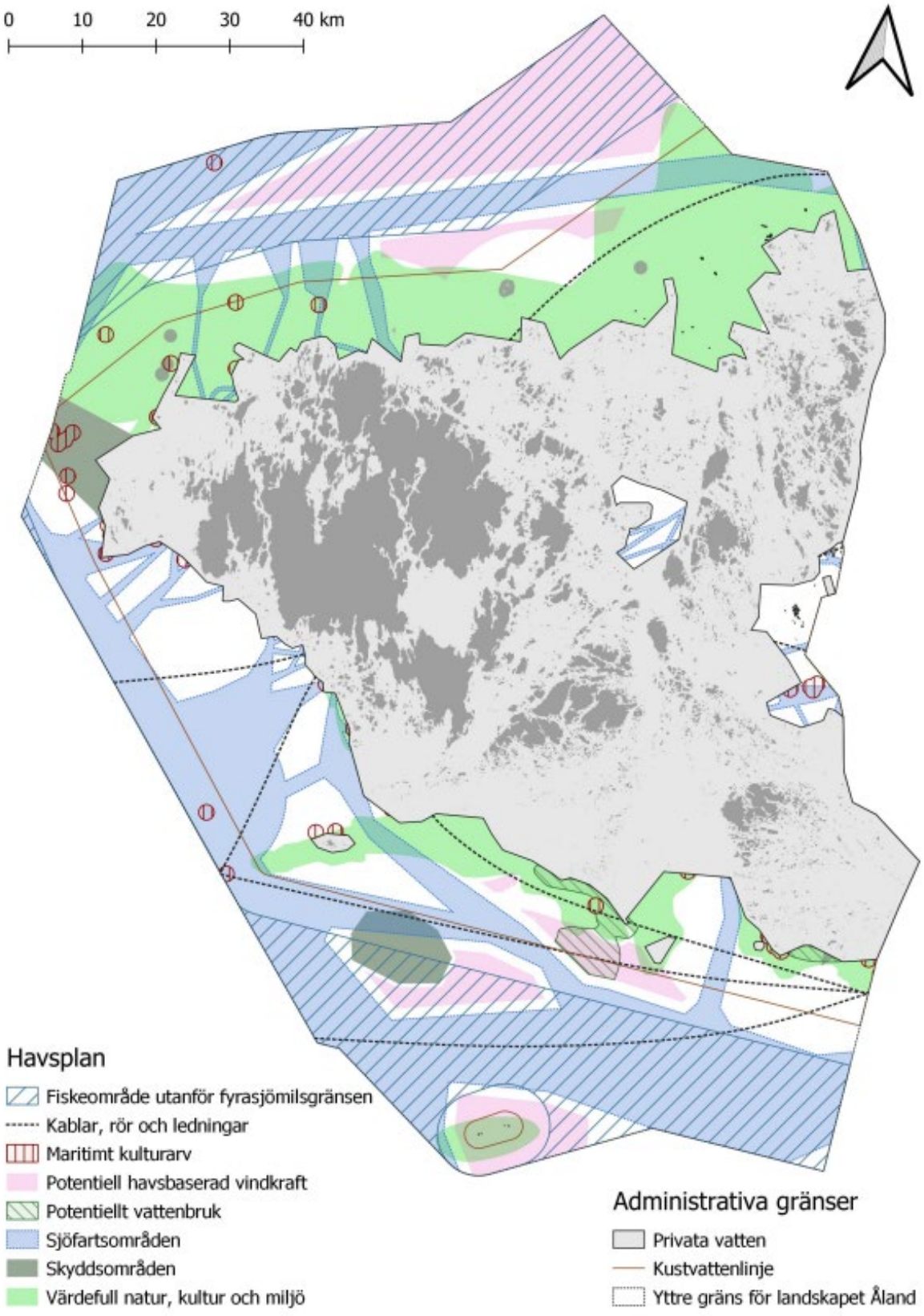
4.2.4. Historic development

The planning process in 2018.

4.2.5. Objectives of the plan

The plan aims to strengthen the region's marine area's nature, cultural heritage, natural and ecosystem resources use as well as the shipping, aquaculture, fishing, and potential for Offshore Windfarms. Known environmental risks such as eutrophication, maritime accidents, and sedimentary pollution have been recognized. The plan also aims to address issues concerning the marine strategy and water framework directives and ecosystem-based planning goals of the European Union.

4.2.6. Map



Map: Maritime Spatial Plan of the Åland Islands (Government of Åland, 2021)

4.2.7. Designation

Guiding and strategic areas have been designated according to relevant studies of the current environment and future needs. Studies used and conducted in planning include studies of the seabed's geology, sea's environmental status and ecology, maritime safety, noise pollution, and particularities of the sea. Designations are planned to enhance the coexistence and synergies of different functions. The MSP is separated into two categories: the guiding and strategic plans and the administrative borders.

4.2.7.1. Guiding and strategic plans

Fishing

A fishing area is marked on the MSP according to the EU regulation. The area in the MSP is calculated from the baseline in which commercial Finnish and Swedish fishing vessels can fish as long as they are following current rulings, legislation, and quotas. The area that is marked on the map is four nautical miles outside the baseline, except the area of Bogskär, which has a three nautical mile border.

Cables and pipelines

A schematic overview of the most important cable and pipeline connections between Åland and neighboring regions and connections between regions has been marked in the MSP.

Maritime cultural heritage

Known cultural heritage loci at sea were buffered with a 1km radius, generalized, and designated into regional zones of cultural heritage importance.

Potential Offshore Windfarms

In the MSP, areas are marked where it is currently deemed most appropriate to place offshore wind farms (OWF). When designing offshore wind power, the conditions for maritime traffic safety must be taken into account, and any consequences, e.g., ship radar and maritime traffic management radar surveillance, must be explored.

To find coexistence opportunities, e.g., between offshore wind power and other activities, the marking for offshore wind power partly overlaps with the fishing areas and nature, culture, and environmental areas. It is up to the operator to find solutions between offshore wind power and other activities.

The Finnish Ministry of Defense has pointed out that it is problematic if wind power is established in the areas south of Åland that are in the MSP. Further investigations and more detailed statements by the ministry will be required to clarify whether wind power projects south of Åland can be initiated.

The areas for OWF areas marked in the MSP that is deemed most suitable based on the following criteria:

- The depth should be between 10–70 m
- Wind conditions must be good, with an average wind speed of 8 m / s 100 m above sea level.
- Areas smaller than five sq km are not marked in the MSP

Areas have not been marked on the maps if they overlap with the following criteria:

- Shipping areas with a 1.5 km buffer
- Cultural landscapes (Holmar av Krononatur) with a 3 km buffer
- FINIBA areas with a 500 m buffer
- IBA areas with a 500 m buffer
- Protected areas with a 500 m buffer
- Maritime wrecks with a 1 km buffer
- Recreational buildings with a 10 km buffer
- Residential buildings with a 15 km buffer
- Lighthouses with a 1 km buffer
- Migratory bird areas

Note that the suggestions for placement are indicative. The exact location of wind turbines can be determined only after careful investigations of, e.g., bottom quality, plant and animal life, the possible occurrence of wrecks, and more. This means that there may be areas within the now marked areas where it will not be allowed to place wind turbines. Correspondingly, there may be areas outside the areas now marked where it will be permitted to build wind turbines if investigations show that it does not conflict with other needs and other uses.

Potential aquaculture

Sustainable fish farming continues to be considered important for Åland. The fact that the MSP does not mark potential fish farming areas at present does not mean that future opportunities are excluded for this industry. There is currently no basis, such as the provincial government's location plan, which would enable fish farming in common waters. The provincial government develops a location plan in close consultation with the industry and other relevant actors.

Algae cultivation has the potential to become a new industry in the near future, and the MSP thus proposes areas for possible areas for macroalgae cultivation. In the MSP, areas are identified that are most suitable for the cultivation of macroalgae (bladderwrack and *Ulva*). The marked areas are locations where either the bladderwrack or *Ulva* has the most significant production potential or the most effective potential for nutrient uptake in Ålands sea areas. The areas are marked based on the results of an EU-funded project which goal was to identify solutions for growing algae in the Baltic Sea in a sustainable way (EU project GRASS). Shipping areas have a 1500 m protection buffer where areas for potential aquaculture of algae cultivation are not marked.

Shipping

Main shipping routes were designated based on previously defined fairway areas and IMO areas as well as airways with a 250 m wide buffer. Other shipping areas were designated based on available AIS line data acquired from HELCOM for shipping traffic for 2019. A density of 150 or more vessels per year was designated as shipping areas marked in the MSP.

Protected areas

Åland has approved and joined the Convention on Biological Diversity. According to the convention, the parties must protect at least 10 % of their coastal and marine areas. The EU's goal is for 30 % of land and water to be protected by 2030. The target of 10% protection has been set in the Åland Development and Sustainability Agenda. According to the strategic development goal "Ecosystems in balance and biodiversity", at least 10 % of the coastal and marine areas must be protected by 2030. Åland has currently protected 2.8 % of its water areas. Work is underway to map and identify high-value sea areas and underwater nature as a basis for protecting areas according to the objective. Implementing protected areas would contribute to Åland fulfilling both the development and sustainability agenda goals and goal 14 in the UN's Agenda 2030 on the conservation and use of coastal and marine areas and marine resources in a sustainable way.

In the MSP, protected areas on public waters are marked for the areas that the provincial government has already established as protected areas. The protected area marking consists of a composition of:

- Nature reserves
- Natura 2000 sites
- HELCOM protected areas (Baltic Sea Protected Areas, BSPA)
- RAMSAR
- Bird protection areas

Valuable nature, culture, and environment

The marking serves as a compilation of several important natural, cultural, and environmental values in common waters. The total area is approximately 27 % of the common waters. The marked areas are important for the Ålanders, e.g., for household fishing, small-scale commercial fishing, hunting,

recreation, cultural heritage, and tourism. It is essential that these areas are preserved for Ålanders and local needs. The intangible cultural heritage should be protected in these areas. Large-scale industries or large-scale exploitation activities are not recommended in these areas if they risk adversely affecting nature, the environment, or local needs. The definition of values for the area is defined below.

Internationally and nationally important bird areas

Including FINIBA and IBA areas. The areas are important for migratory birds, nesting, and resting places. The areas are identified by BirdLife Finland, which includes the Åland Birds Association. The areas are particularly important for species worthy of protection and internationally important biodiversity areas.

Seal areas

The areas are important density areas, e.g., gray seal. The areas are based on the Finnish Institute of Natural Resources' mappings of gray seal density, and within the areas, there are so-called "seal islets" that are important for gray seal. Marine mammals are sensitive to underwater noise.

Underwater biotope for red algae and bladderwrack communities

The areas are identified with documented occurrences of deep bladderwrack belts or species-rich red algae communities. Both the bladderwrack and the red algae communities are essential for fish spawning and nurseries and contribute to healthy fish stocks. Both ecosystems are sensitive to eutrophication.

Valuable underwater areas

The areas include rich deposits of underwater reefs and reef environments. These areas are sensitive to human activities, e.g., to underwater noise and eutrophication. The areas have varying bottom structures, and the hard bottom material and rich red algae communities also benefit herring spawning. The deeper areas can also offer important areas for cod. The areas also include important areas around nesting sites. As the areas are relatively undisturbed, they generally function as important areas for several bird species.

Fish spawning and nursery areas

The areas are a compilation of information that the provincial government's fisheries agency has collected from various studies and models that are potentially important for fish spawning and nurseries.

Areas with natural values

Based on a scientific analysis where the best available information and knowledge about the underwater natural values, areas with high species diversity, minimal impact on human pressure, and areas that could be considered valuable to preserve for ecosystem services were identified. From the areas identified in the analysis to be valuable to preserve, it has been chosen to mark a comprehensive area northwest/north of Åland that includes several smaller areas together. The area northwest/north of Åland has been marked on the basis that the area has existing data from underwater mapping, i.e., one can confirm the analysis result with underlying data. The area of natural values identified with the help of the analysis also has minimal impact on exploitative activities, at the same time as there are high biodiversity and minimal impact from other negative environmental effects. Therefore, it is important that the area is preserved to benefit the current and future Åland population and local needs.

Culture and nature

The marking refers to areas that have important connections to cultural-historical islands and islets, as well as important areas for several bird and marine species. The area marked in the proposal is important for the public and the local population, holds cultural-historical values, and is important, e.g., small-scale commercial fishing, household needs fishing, hunting, recreation, tourism, and nature.

4.2.7.2. Administrative borders

Privately owned waters

Privately owned water areas are not included in the MSP for the Åland Islands. The privately-owned water areas are governed by the owner in the same way an owner governs over their land areas.

Border for coastal water

The border for coastal waters is calculated one nautical mile outside of the baseline.

Border for the planning area

The map also has a border that visualizes the outer border of the Åland Islands. Areas within this border are a part of the autonomous region of the Åland Islands and are governed by the Government of Åland.

4.2.8. Regulations

Regulations of designations are binding and detail what land uses are allowed, what is to be taken into account in their use, and what administrative procedures are required in more detailed planning.

Single-use and combined-use functions are designated as either primary or secondary functions. Some land uses are explicitly restricted in certain areas (such as dredging or depositing in biodiverse areas).

4.2.9. Adoption

The plan was approved by the Government of Ålands highest decision-making body on the 18th of March 2021. The plan entered into force on the 22nd of March 2021 and will be updated by the latest of the 22nd of March 2027.

4.2.10. Environmental report

The environmental report is drafted after the MSP was adopted, and it recognized that certain sea use restrictions and planning guidelines would preserve and enhance cultural heritage and natural values as well as ecosystem services. The development of tourism, offshore windfarm, fishing, and aquaculture will strengthen the regional economy. However, some activities will increase a load of human activity to the environment.

4.2.11. Public participation

Broad public participation was held throughout the planning process. Several workshops were held with relevant national, regional, and local stakeholders. A total of two public hearings were held during the MSP process.

4.2.12. Transboundary consultation

Transboundary consultation was conducted through public hearings at the same time as public consultations were held. Åland was also a part of the Finnish MSP coordination group to actively seek out transboundary solutions when possible.

4.2.13. Harmonization with other plans

The Water Act requires the harmonization of regional land use plans with neighboring regional plans whenever possible.

4.3 Access to MSP data (Electronic resources)

https://www.regeringen.ax/demokrati-hallbarhet/hallbar-utveckling/marin-kustomradesplanering-havsplanering

Electronic map (available in Swedish):
https://aland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=3fe10bf5d03c409ead0aa103f01301b3

5. New developments / current status

The Government of Åland has adopted its first Maritime Spatial Plan in 22.3.2021.

6. How coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas (HELCOM MPAs) are taken into account in MSP

HELCOM MPAs, as well as other protected areas, were taken into consideration when planning other activities in the MSP. For example, Offshore Wind farms or aquaculture areas are not overlapping with protected areas. However, IMO areas and maritime cultural heritage areas partly overlap with HELCOM MPA's in the south of Åland