



Guest Editor's Note

Maritime Spatial Planning

Early 2010 I was looking for a new topic to concern myself with at the Ministry of Transport and Water Management in the Netherlands. Our department for Water Management appeared to be looking for someone with expertise with the sea.

The job opening was to assist our director as chair of our interdepartmental board of directors for the North Sea. It came along with a challenge to continue work and step up efforts on a future oriented policy that could deal with increased use and demand for space at sea. An integrated management framework for licensing maritime activities was already in place since 2005 and in 2009 our first integrated policy document for our part of the North Sea (58,000 km²) was published. It came as an answer to increased demand for planning our offshore wind farms, and responding to the EU legislation for a clean, healthy, and productive sea on top of establishing marine protected areas with proper management. A parliamentary motion was pending at the time to see if zoning the sea would lead to better results than the framework of self-binding statutory planning through the central government. And parliamentary resolutions – as you may well know – need to be answered in full or they will haunt your minister. In short, our government needed someone to devote time and efforts to what is (now) known as marine or maritime spatial planning (MSP).

I did not think I would qualify. To be honest, I have no systematic education or training in the marine environment or any of the businesses for which humans use the sea. Neither am I a qualified lawyer in spatial (land) planning, let alone the Law of the Sea. I am more of a civil servant than a bureaucrat; more a creative designer, artist, and storyteller with a bit of background in business and change management than an engineer. The only convincing punch line to get the job was my experience in stakeholder engagement and cooperative research with communities and specialists to explore policy options. Together with a dose of enthusiasm, my belief system that economy is best based on living and working in sync with thriving ecosystems, a willingness to explore and learn new things, a notion of how policy making and investigative journalism are similar processes

with similar conditions of hear and hearsay, I threw in a word on my passion for joint learning through serious gaming. It was enough to get the job.

But what next? How to get that MSP job done? After all, as a government/society we are not only interested in understanding, debating, and best describing the systems which form the reality today. We need such insights and evidence to build a picture of the status quo, but it will not help us make the needed policy and take the correct measures to achieve a desired societal outcome. For that we need to get our feet in the water and our ears on the ground. We need to plan for the future and check all such things as power of authority on administrative borders, money, legislation, policy styles, effectiveness of measures, external influences, and what is in our capacity to manage by ourselves and where we need to do joint work – be it nationally, cross-sectorial, cross-border – in getting the evidence and spirit for MSP. Above all, we need a process in which all stakeholders (direct or indirect) can act, but with a clear and established mandate from politics. Not too broad, not too narrow. Policy has to hold up in parliament and society; rules and regulations have to stick in court.

This being all generic and conditional to bring an MSP process to life, it is not the one-on-one stuff you really need to make a plan which addresses the experiences, evidence, emotions, dreams, and hopes of those at sea and those on land – those people whose livelihoods and well-being depend on a link with the seas, ocean, and coastal systems. Luckily for MSP officials, one can talk to these people, and that is why a political mandate is important. Unluckily for us humans, we cannot talk to the natural world, be it habitats, birds, fish, and sea mammals. And for sure an MSP officer does not have the time and resources to join all (mobile) species and seafarers in their businesses around the blue planet. We can, however, collect and build on science to bring in that understanding for sound decision making for the future of our ocean space.

And we can start preparing ourselves for MSP. We can use the amazing power of the human mind to build future scenarios based on stories of others, wander off to worlds which could be ours, and create a state of mind for overcoming problems such as a lack of common knowledge and language. Nowadays, thanks to technology including the powers of visualization, we have more tools available for MSP than ever before.

Making a map of desired use and not-use of the sea can be done in three dimensions and calculated and projected in the dimension time. All assist in creating a broad and compelling story of where we have come so far in our relation with the sea and ocean and where we collectively (as a society) want to go and what decisions we want to make in parliament.

This issue of the JOT brings you a wide range of articles and stories on MSP – from the systematic approaches to MSP, the offers and pleas for inserting certain evidence in the process or the plan, the lessons learned from all parts of the world, and the soundings they bring forward. Together they bring you a view from the ocean (both below and on top of the water), a view from the land, a view from emotion and technology. You will find both answers and (new) questions concerning MSP.

We could not cover all aspects or topics of MSP. Put together, though, the authors and contributors form a lovely core group to start an MSP process. I wish we could have gotten them all around a table to further talk and explore. And that, I think, goes for a lot of MSP officials globally who are currently forced to take a second best option of digital technology and communication in their national and international stakeholder (consultation) processes for MSP.

I have read several books giving me inspiration at the start and throughout my MSP career, among them *The Old Man and the Sea* from Ernest Hemingway and *The Edge of the World: How the North Sea Made Us Who We Are* by Michael Pye. But I honestly wish I had this MSP edition of the JOT a decade earlier.

Lodewijk Abspoel is the Netherlands' policy officer for the European Integrated Maritime Policy, North Sea and MSP. A civil servant since 1999, Mr. Abspoel has worked for the Union of Water boards and the Dutch ministry for Infrastructure and Water Management on Dutch water policy for the 21st century and on policy for aviation. In 2010 he became engaged with MSP preparing national policies; negotiated the EU MSP directive from 2014; was in the lead of the process of the North Sea 2050 Spatial Agenda (accepted in parliament in 2015); and worked on international MSP progress and projects such as NorthSEE.eu. In 2012 and 2017, he was involved in the Blue Growth agenda of the EU. Mr. Abspoel is an active member of the ICES working group on MSP to enhance the science policy interface. More recently, his work involves the EU and a global ocean governance agenda, including on SDG14 Life below Water and the MSPglobal project of IOC-UNESCO and the European Commission. He prototyped the MSP Challenge both in board and digital versions and inspired a community of professionals and students with this serious game approach. In his spare time, he sculpts.



Further Reading

Adaptive Marine Spatial Planning in the Netherlands by Leo de Vrees www.noordzeeloket.nl/en/policy/beleid-regelgeving/beleid