



MARINE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

Regional Training

Good Environmental Status (GES)

Background document

Annex 2

ECRAN - XXXXX

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**ECRAN beneficiary countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
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Reference: <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/taieux>.





1. Background

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) establishes a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy. Within this framework, Member States (MS) shall take the necessary measures **to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status in the marine environment by the year 2020 at the latest**. For that purpose, marine strategies shall be developed and implemented in order to protect and preserve the marine environment, prevent its deterioration or, where practicable, restore marine ecosystems in areas where they have been adversely affected. In addition, marine strategies shall prevent and reduce inputs into the marine environment, with a view to phasing out pollution (as defined in Art. 3(8) in the MSFD), so as to ensure that there are no significant impacts on or risks to marine biodiversity, marine ecosystems, human health or legitimate uses of the sea.

2. Good Environmental Status

The MSFD focuses on the protection of marine waters as defined in Art. 3.1 of the MSFD, by preventing deterioration or, where practicable, restoration of marine ecosystems. Therefore, the Directive calls for a management that aims at achieving Good Environmental Status and enables sustainable use. This means that the Directive does not prohibit the use of the marine environment, but requires the use to be sustainable. Directive integrates socio-economic analysis, requiring the Economic and Social Analysis (ESA) as part of the initial assessment, and then: consideration of socio-economic effects of choosing targets; cost-effectiveness analysis and cost-benefit analysis of measures; economic incentives to support GES; and exemptions where costs are disproportionate.

Good Environmental Status is the essential concept in the MSFD.

It is defined in the Directive as, **“the environmental status of marine waters where these provide ecologically diverse and dynamic oceans and seas which are clean, healthy and productive within their intrinsic conditions, and the use of the marine environment is at a level that is sustainable, thus safeguarding the potential for uses and activities by current and future generations”**.

GES involves protecting the marine environment, preventing its deterioration and restoring it where practical, while using marine resources sustainably. The MSFD is very complex and sets out eleven descriptors of GES relating to biological diversity, non-indigenous species introductions, commercially exploited fish and shellfish populations, food webs, human-induced eutrophication, sea floor integrity, impacts on hydrographical conditions, concentrations of contaminants, contaminants in fish and other seafood, marine litter and underwater noise.



The MSFD is an ambitious piece of legislation not only in terms of its overall objective of achieving good environmental status by 2020, but also because it requires marine strategies to apply an **ecosystem-based approach covering a diverse set of descriptors**. Member States will need to focus on making best use of the available data in order to account for marine uses and cost of degradation for the purposes of their Initial Assessment, whilst working towards more comprehensive coverage over the longer term. This will inevitably mean using a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, employing expert opinion and being transparent about levels of certainty and confidence in the assessment.

The MSFD requires Member States to determine GES for their waters by **reference to a series of eleven indicators**, and which range from the extent to which biodiversity and diverse marine habitats are maintained, to the sustainability of fish stocks, through to indicators of the levels of marine litter and noise.

The full list of indicators is reproduced at Annex A of MSFD. Although the Directive does not prescribe what level, the Member States should accept as being characteristic of GES, it does provide for the Commission, in partnership with Member States, to devise and set criteria and methodological standards to be used by Member States when determining GES.

Member States are required to determine what constitutes GES at a regional level – in other words, each Member State must make its determination of GES in consultation with those other Member States (and third party countries) it shares regional seas with. Once GES is determined, a Member State must establish targets and indicators aimed at achieving or maintaining it by 2020, and subsequently devise and implement programmes of measures for this purpose.

Member States are not required to carry out measures which are not cost effective, provided the quality of their marine waters does not deteriorate as a result, and the Directive also recognises that natural forces or other factors for which individual Member States are not responsible may prevent GES targets from being achieved.

However, through the MSFD, the Member States are obliged to **put in place cost effective and proportionate programmes of measures aimed at achieving GES to the extent to which that is in a Member State's power, including by cooperating with other Member States and by seeking additional international action**.



3. Key messages

The setting of GES targets should **link to the WFD 'good ecological' status values defined for coastal waters in those areas where the directives overlap and where same indicators may be used in the assessment.**

The WFD ecological status classification is based on biological and physico-chemical monitoring results. The WFD stipulates that the lower of the values for the biological and physico-chemical monitoring results for the relevant quality elements should be used (WFD, Annex 5, 1.4.2. (i)).

The normative definitions of the WFD (Annex 5, 1.2, Tables 1.2.1-1.2.5) set the descriptive definitions for the high, good, and moderate status for different water categories and quality elements.

The Guidance¹ on ecological status classification described common understanding how the biological and physico-chemical quality elements should be used in the classification of surface waters (including heavily modified water bodies). The normative definitions provide a general description how the critical biological components such as species composition, diversity, abundance, biomass, etc. change as response to environmental degradation and pressures, and thus provide generic description what is a good ecological status.

The descriptors can be translated into specific quantitative metrics (e.g. various diversity indices or biomass metrics, or metrics describing numbers of sensitive vs. non-sensitive species in the marine environment).

Similar normative definitions describing the desirable status of biological quality elements as in WFD are not included in the MSFD. Instead the Member States should **use a set of qualitative descriptors (11 descriptors) to determine the characteristics of the good environmental status – GES** (MSFD, Annex I).

The normative definitions were useful in the process of setting the 'good ecological status' for the WFD, and those were applied as part of the WFD intercalibration process. Several indices, that have been developed for WFD purposes, follow the concepts of the normative definitions and can be used to assess the changes in biomass, species composition (sensitive vs. non-sensitive species).

Such community/ habitat specific indices may be applied also to MSFD determination of GES, which would allow application of the conceptual approach of normative definitions in order to facilitate the setting of GES.

¹ Guidance Document N° 13. Overall Approach to the Classification of Ecological Status and Ecological Potential. Common Implementation Strategy for the Water Framework Directive (200/60/EC). European Commission, Brussels, 2005