

Marine mammals and good environmental status: science, policy and society; challenges and opportunities

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The Marine Strategy Framework Directive has become the key instrument for marine conservation in European seas. We review progress with its implementation, focusing on cetaceans, using the examples of Spain and the Regional Seas Convention, OSPAR. The MSFD has been criticised for legal vagueness, lack of coordination, uncertainty about funding, and poor governance; its future role within EU Integrated Maritime Policy remains unclear. Nevertheless, the first stages of the process have run broadly to schedule: current status, environmental objectives and indicators have been described and the design of monitoring programmes is in progress, drawing on experience with other environmental legislation. The implementation of the MSFD is now at a critical phase, facing issues including lack of funding for monitoring, limited scope for management interventions, and uncertainty about how conservation objectives will be reconciled with the needs of other marine and maritime sectors. Clarity in governance, about the roles of the EU, Member States, Regional Seas Conventions and stakeholders, is needed to ensure success. The role of ICES in this process is still evolving. Even if (as seems likely) good environmental status cannot be achieved by 2020, significant steps will have been taken to place environmental sustainability centre-stage in the development of Integrated Maritime Policy for EU seas.

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