



European Marine Board Expert Working Group

Marine Habitat Mapping

Terms of Reference

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Background and Rationale

Background

What is marine habitat mapping and why is it important?

Habitat maps are valuable spatial decision-support tools that inform and assist the sustainable use of marine space. Marine habitat mapping aims to gain a holistic representation of key marine habitats, their associated biological communities, their areal extent, distribution patterns, status, and physical conditions. Europe's marine environment is home to a plethora of valuable benthic seabed habitats including seagrass meadows, bioconstructions, kelp forests, sponge beds, cold-water coral reefs, and seamount ecosystems, as well as pelagic habitats supporting commercially important fish species, and taxa of general biodiversity importance. Europe's citizens and economy depend on these habitats to provide critical provisioning, regulating, and cultural ecosystem services. Habitat maps are needed to plan for and manage the sustainable use of the marine environment using an ecosystem-based approach. They can be used to design monitoring programmes to assess environmental status including the effect of anthropogenic pressures on marine resources and ecosystem services, to identify and plan new networks of marine protected areas (MPAs) and areas for restoration, and for planning the development of new economic activities at sea by informing marine spatial planning. The European Union (EU) has ambitious plans to protect 30% of the European marine environment, the strict protection of 10%, the effective management of MPAs, and the restoration of degraded ecosystems as part of the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy¹. The simultaneous scaling-up of offshore renewable energy² and other blue economy activities are also planned as part of the European Green Deal. Accurate and extensive marine habitat maps are essential to deliver these ambitious plans and to support European policies such as the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) Directive, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the Habitats Directive, and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The development of a comprehensive map of the ocean (i.e. a georeferenced digital atlas) is also a priority research and development area for The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021 – 2030) (Ryabinin et al. 2019), and will help to achieve the goals of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration³.

European and International Marine Habitat Mapping Efforts

Over the past decade, the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) has developed a broad-scale, high-resolution predictive seabed habitat map for European seas named EUSeaMap⁴. This map is created by harmonizing, standardizing, and assembling datasets and species distribution models from different sources in Europe, including Ocean observing and marine monitoring data collected by national efforts e.g. research and monitoring programmes, regional sea conventions e.g.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1590574123338&uri=CELEX:52020DC0380>

² https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/offshore_renewable_energy_strategy.pdf

³ <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/>

⁴ <https://www.emodnet.eu/en/seabed-habitats>

OSPAR⁵, the private sector, and past EU projects with a focus on habitat mapping, such as MESH⁶ and MeshAtlantic⁷. The EUSeaMap has total coverage of Europe's marine environment, and uses multiple habitat classification systems, including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) broad habitat types⁸ and the European Nature Information System (EUNIS)⁹ habitat classification system managed by the European Environment Agency (EEA). The EUSeaMap and survey data from the EMODnet library of habitat maps are used by Member States to report on Good Environmental Status (GES) as part of the MSFD (Andersen et al. 2018) as well as for HELCOM¹⁰ and OSPAR¹¹ assessments, among other policy applications. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) carried out an exercise in 2016 to map the distribution of seabed associated ecosystem services using the EUSeaMap as the basis (Costa Tempera et al. 2016). The EEA has also built on the EUSeaMap to develop European-wide ecosystem mapping¹². At an international level, the SeaBed 2030 Project¹³, coordinated by The Nippon Foundation-GEBCO, aims to map 100% of the ocean floor by 2030 by bringing together all available bathymetric data into one definitive map.

There are many ongoing initiatives for marine habitat mapping, however more effort is still needed to reduce fragmentation; standardize methodology and data collection; and increase high-resolution geographical, thematic, and temporal coverage to more accurately represent the three-dimensional complexity of benthic and pelagic ecosystems. There are many national programmes (e.g. MarineAtlas.be) and European and regional projects (e.g. CoCoNet¹⁴, BENTHIS¹⁵). The Regional Sea Commissions (e.g. HELCOM¹⁶ and OSPAR¹⁷), and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, ICES (e.g. ICES Working Group on Marine Habitat Mapping¹⁸) are also active in marine habitat mapping and the results from these projects and institutions should be considered by the Working Group.

In 2016, the Horizon 2020 project MERCES¹⁹ published a census on 'State of the knowledge on European marine habitat mapping and degraded habitats'²⁰, subsequently published as a peer-

⁵ <https://www.ospar.org/work-areas/bdc/species-habitats/mapping-habitats-on-the-ospar-list-of-threatened-or-declining-species-and-habitats>

⁶ <https://keep.eu/projects/1191/MESH-Development-of-a-framew-EN/>

⁷ <https://keep.eu/projects/395/Mapping-Atlantic-Area-seabed--EN/>

⁸

https://mcc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/main/dev.py?N=19&O=361&titre_chap=D1%20Biological%20diversity&titre_page=Criteria%20&%20methodological%20standards

⁹ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/eunis-habitat-classification#:~:text=The%20EUNIS%20habitat%20classification%20is,specific%20codes%2C%20names%20and%20descriptions.>

¹⁰ <http://stateofthebalticsea.helcom.fi/>

¹¹ <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/intermediate-assessment-2017/>

¹² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/mapping-europes-ecosystems>

¹³ <https://seabed2030.org/>

¹⁴ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/287844/reporting>

¹⁵ <https://www.benthis.eu/en/benthis.htm>

¹⁶ <https://helcom.fi/action-areas/monitoring-and-assessment/monitoring-manual/seabed-habitat-distribution-and-extent/>

¹⁷ <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/marine-habitat-data-product-ospar-threatened-and-or-declining-habitats/>

¹⁸ <https://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/WGMHM.aspx>

¹⁹ <http://www.merces-project.eu/>

²⁰ <https://epic.awi.de/id/eprint/45767/>

reviewed article (Gerovasileiou et al. 2019). They found that many marine habitat-mapping efforts are fragmented, that a low percentage of maps were from within MPAs, and that the state of habitat degradation and loss is often not included in assessments. This means that more work is needed to ensure that marine habitat maps are able to be used for monitoring the effectiveness of MPAs, the status of the marine environment, and to plan new areas for restoration activities. They also revealed gaps in thematic, temporal and geographic coverage and resolution in available mapping resources, and a lack of standardized data format and open access, which limits their further use. This census and gap analysis may be a good starting point for this Working Group (WG).

Rationale for the Working Group

The WG topic of Marine Habitat Mapping was proposed by EMB Delegate Katrin Schroeder (CNR, Italy) during a call for new topics in autumn 2020. The topic was discussed during the 2020 EMB Autumn Plenary, with input from Martin Pfannkuchen (IRB, Croatia), Ralph Schneider (Kiel University, Germany), and Yves-Marie Paulet (UM, France). They noted that the nuanced approach to marine habitat mapping (dependant on regional needs), the lack of detail on biological parameters and habitat loss, and the harmonization of current mapping efforts should be addressed.

Despite many efforts in marine habitat mapping (as described above), our knowledge of marine ecosystem status in Europe is still limited, and for many habitats it is still unknown (Maes et al. 2020). There is room for improvement, particularly in developing higher-resolution maps that can be enabled using new technologies and improved data quality. Methods for habitat mapping are rapidly evolving. Most efforts to date have focused on geological seabed mapping techniques to measure morphology including multibeam echosounder and seismic surveying techniques, remote sensing, *in situ* sampling, and predictive habitat suitability modelling, which uses physical and chemical data to infer benthic habitat distribution (Angeletti et al. 2019). Machine learning and big data are also being used in marine habitat mapping (Guidi et al. 2020). There is however a lack of standardized methods for biological habitat mapping. Adopting a more biologically-based approach to habitat mapping could help to detect environmental change, reduce the cost of monitoring programmes, and help with environmental impact assessments, marine spatial planning, and with developing coherent networks of MPAs based on ecosystem connectivity (Cooper et al. 2019).

An attempt to establish an integrated approach for the definition of habitats, combining multi scale biological and geological data, has been made within the framework of the CoCoNet project (Boero et al., 2016). However, benthic and pelagic habitats are typically considered independent of each other. Mapping the complexity of benthic and pelagic habitats and entire ecosystems, including their species, communities and interlinkages, such as benthic-pelagic coupling, is a priority so that marine policies and management plans can be based on ecosystem function (Boero et al., 2019). This includes the structure and function of ecosystems in four-dimensions, i.e. over time.

A key challenge is the collection of a sufficient amount of biological data and there is a need to advance the use of high-resolution technologies with three-dimensional mapping abilities in marine ecological research and monitoring in order to gain more in depth understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem productivity (e.g. González-Rivero et al. 2017). These include close-range photogrammetry, imaging

platforms, autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs), and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)²¹. A further challenge is that the accuracy of habitat maps are a result of how they have been produced, and standard methods and guidelines are needed for data collection and mapping so that they can effectively support decision-making (Lecours et al. 2017).

1. Working Group Objectives

The EMB WG on Marine Habitat Mapping should aim to highlight the science and policies needed to advance marine habitat mapping to fulfil the objectives of the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and international commitments on biodiversity and climate. The WG should also make links to the societal outcomes of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

Specific objectives could include but are not limited to:

- Highlighting current understanding and state-of-the-art research on marine habitat mapping;
- Highlighting emerging technology for high-resolution marine benthic and pelagic habitat mapping, and future technology requirements;
- Exploring how to standardize methodology used across Europe and how to address issues of fragmentation;
- Developing recommendations on how to fill geographical, thematic, and temporal gaps in marine habitat mapping in Europe;
- Exploring how to close the gap between efforts to describe habitats in relation to the Habitats Directive and GES monitoring and reporting for the MSFD to describe ecosystem health;
- Evaluating whether current classification systems, e.g. EUNIS, are fit-for-purpose; and
- Developing recommendations to improve access to marine spatial data, and for future requirements of data repositories and infrastructure for marine habitat mapping.

2. Deliverables

The final output of the WG is expected to be an EMB Future Science Brief (FSB). FSBs are concise policy focused documents that include an overview of the current state of the art based on existing literature, and policy-relevant recommendations. FSBs are typically between 30-40 pages long. The document will be peer-reviewed by a minimum of two external reviewers (one European and one international) selected from proposals by the working group members, and will be coordinated by the EMB Secretariat. In accordance with the EMB procedures, the document will also be sent to EMB Member organizations for internal review and approval prior to finalization and publication.

The impact of the publication will be achieved via a targeted dissemination strategy as described below. WG members are expected to make suggestions on how to reach end-user audiences and to

²¹ <https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/14537/advances-in-3d-habitat-mapping-of-marine-ecosystem-ecology-and-conservation>

contribute to the dissemination. Promotion of the document may include dedicated presentations at stakeholder events. WG members will also be asked to notify the Secretariat of any dissemination activities or observed uptake / impact for up to two years following publication, for future impact reporting. A full outline of the decision-making procedure and system for WG operations is outlined in Annex 2.

3. Target Audience and Expected Impact

WGs are the primary foresight and priority-setting tools of the EMB. The expected outcome is that the recommendations of the resulting policy document influence future research strategies and programmes at both national and European level. Therefore, the FSB target audience is in the first instance those who determine and set research agendas, including research funding organisations, programme managers and science policy advisors/developers both at the national and European level. To some extent, and depending on the subject, the expected outcome is also intended to strengthen the particular research domain by stimulating networking and developing common positions between expert scientists, potentially leading to new collaborative projects. The recommendations and perspectives delivered through EMB policy documents can also influence and drive broader marine and maritime policies, beyond the research realm. This publication should inform European and international initiatives for marine habitat mapping, and link to European policy including the European Green Deal, the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, and international initiatives including the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

4. Communication and Dissemination Strategy

The targeted dissemination strategy includes, but is not limited to:

- development of infographics to communicate key concepts and main messages from the FSB;
- collection of photographs and other graphics to include in the FSB, social media, and other communication activities;
- a dedicated launch event;
- a news release on the EMB website and shared with EMB member organizations to share on their websites;
- social media content for launch of the FSB;
- a printed version of the FSB sent to relevant stakeholders; and
- presentation of the document by WG members and EMB Secretariat at relevant national and European events.

5. Working Group Composition

Working Group Chair and co-Chair

The WG Chair and Co-Chair will lead the WG and take overarching responsibility for its deliverables.

Chair and Co-Chair Profile

The WG Chairs should be experienced marine scientists, practitioners or technologists in the field of marine habitat mapping. It is important that the Chairs have a big picture and interdisciplinary approach to ensure a balanced approach to the topic. The Chairs should demonstrate strong leadership skills and have sufficient time to commit to leading and facilitating the writing of the FSB.

Selection process

The WG Chairs will be selected based on a call for WG member nominations issued by the EMB Secretariat to EMB Member Organizations, and short interviews with shortlisted candidates. The EMB Secretariat and EMB Chair, in consultation with the ExCom, make the final selection of the Chair. A WG Co-Chair will be selected by the WG Chair with assistance from the EMB Secretariat. The EMB Secretariat work together with the WG Chairs to select the WG members while ensuring a balance of expertise and experience within the working group, as well as gender and geographic balance.

Roles and responsibilities of WG Chairs

The WG Chair and co-Chair are responsible for ensuring the scientific quality of the WG output and its timely delivery according to the Terms of Reference and as agreed at the kick-off meeting. The WG Chairs provide scientific leadership and act as the driving force for the WG activities with the support of a dedicated EMB Science Officer who acts in the capacity of WG facilitator.

The WG Chairs (primarily the Chair, and the co-Chair when the lead Chair is not available):

- Chair WG meetings i.e. moderate discussions and ensure delivery of meeting outputs;
- Coordinate the scientific contributions to the document draft according to the objectives defined at the kick-off meeting;
- Maintain an overview of the content and quality of the various inputs and requests additional expertise if necessary;
- Ensure timely delivery of the WG document; and
- Enhance the document's strategic impact by promoting WG activities and the output.

Working Group Members

A WG of approximately 12 members is proposed. The WG Members should comprise European scientists, practitioners and technologists who are participating in leading networks and/or research groups across different research domains relevant for marine habitat mapping. Interaction with relevant international and European initiatives working in this field should be explored. This could be achieved through informal interactions during the writing process, through consultation and/or workshops held during the lifetime of the activity, by engaging key people as external reviewers, or by selecting several key experts to serve as members of the WG.

Profile and selection process

WG Members will be drawn from the list of nominations provided by EMB Member organizations. After the WG Chair has been selected from the call for WG Members, the WG Chair(s) will select WG Members from the resulting pool of experts, supported by the EMB Secretariat. Decisions on the composition of the WG are guided by achieving the correct balance of expertise required to

comprehensively address the topic at hand as well as ensuring a wide geographic distribution and gender balance. If needed the WG can also include Members from relevant European projects and initiatives, industry and non-profit organizations. Non-selection of some nominated candidates is therefore normal, and bears no relation to the scientific excellence of those candidates.

Roles and responsibilities of WG Members

WG Members are responsible for ensuring the scientific quality of their inputs and their timely delivery according to the WG Terms of Reference.

WG Members:

- Prepare for and attend WG meetings;
- Submit written contributions in a timely manner as agreed at the kick-off meeting;
- Guide and adhere to the high-level strategic objectives of the publication;
- Promote the resulting publication at national and European levels; and
- Feedback information on dissemination activities, opportunities, impact and uptake to the EMB Secretariat.

Engaging the wider community

During the course of the WG, members may invite a selection of stakeholders or observers from the wider community to participate (e.g. from science, industry, policy, funding agencies).

EMB Facilitation of the Working Group

The EMB Executive Director is the *ex officio* WG manager. She nominates one or two Secretariat officers to support and facilitate the Working Group. The EMB Secretariat will coordinate this activity with the Chair and co-Chair. A dedicated EMB Science Officer will act in the capacity of facilitator and other EMB Secretariat staff may be involved depending on the specific topic for each WG activity.

For this WG the facilitator is: Britt Alexander, EMB Science Officer

6. Mode of Operation

Work Programme

The work programme will consist of:

- One kick-off meeting (probably virtual);
- Regular (monthly or bi-monthly) online progress meetings;
- WG member collaborative writing assignments;
- Regular email interactions;
- Editing to publication standard by the WG Chair/co-Chair and EMB Secretariat;
- External and internal peer review coordinated by EMB Secretariat;
- Revisions based on peer review comments; and
- Final copy-editing and design by the EMB Secretariat and WG Chair /co-Chair.

Support from the EMB Secretariat includes:

- Organizational support for WG meetings;
- Cost of all catering associated with WG meetings, including a WG dinner;
- Costs of publication and dissemination of the FSB to relevant stakeholders; and
- Writing and disseminate of meeting minutes, and maintenance of regular dialogue with the WG Chair and co-Chair to ensure timely delivery of the document.

Note: WG members and Chairs are not financially supported by the EMB (unless an extraordinary contribution is secured by one or more EMB Member Organizations). WG member participation (e.g. travel costs) is normally funded by their institution or the EMB member that proposed them for the WG. The establishment of a WG is for a limited duration and the WG should be disbanded by the Board when it has fulfilled its mandate.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) policy for EMB WGs

Personal data for EMB working group members and those involved in other EMB core activities is used for internal communication with the activity as well as external communication of the EMB activity via publications, the EMB website and EMB social media outlets.

For any new EMB activities, consent is sought at the kick-off of the activity to cover all relevant use and storage of personal data. It is anticipated that the subjects would also be added to the EMB mailing list, and thus their data would continue to be stored and used beyond the end of the activity, unless consent is later withdrawn. A template consent form can be found in Annex 1. After a period of 2 years, unless requested otherwise, we will keep it in our database for future roles.

Reviewers are also contacted within the context of EMB activities. The template email they receive already clearly outlines their right to act that their input remains anonymous, in which case the reviewer would simply be listed as “Anonymous”. The reviewer will be informed of how and where their personal data will be stored. The consent of the reviewer will also be specifically sought for their personal data to be used outside of any activities directly relating to their role as reviewer, using the template text included in this document.

The EMB [privacy policy contains](#) information about our compliance with GDPR (data protection law). In this document you can find how to send us a request to let you access your data that we have collected, request us to delete your data, correct any inaccuracies or restrict our processing of your data. You have the right to lodge a complaint about the way we handle your data with [Belgian Data Protection Authority](#) or you can contact us at info@marineboard.eu for more information or concerns.

7. Indicative Timetable

The WG activities are foreseen to start in the fourth quarter of 2021, and are expected to run for one year from the kick-off meeting. The final document is foreseen to be published in the first quarter of 2023. The EMB conduct impact reporting based on feedback from WG members and wider stakeholders for a period of up to two years following publication.

An indicative timetable for a Future Science Brief and order of activities is presented below.

Tasks	2021												2022								2023		
	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M
Approval of ToR by EMB member organizations	█																						
Nominations of WG members		█	█	█	█																		
Appointment of WG Chairs					█	█																	
Appointment of WG members					█	█																	
Kick-off meeting								█	█														
Content drafting										█	█	█											
Review and editing by Chairs & WG members													█	█									
Editing by Chairs & EMB Secretariat															█	█							
External review and revisions																	█	█	█				
Internal review and approval by EMB delegates																				█			
Design																					█	█	█
Publication and dissemination																							█

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Annex 1: Consent form for Core Activities

EMB holds personal data for anyone involved in core EMB activities, including Working Groups.

The following personal data may be held by the EMB Secretariat:

- Name
- Title
- Job title
- Areas of expertise and research interests
- Previously held roles
- Institute
- Country
- Institutional email address
- Institutional postal address
- Institutional telephone number
- Photographs
- Video

This information is stored in a secure spreadsheet and folder locations, that only EMB Secretariat staff have access to.

EMB may:

- Contact you regarding the EMB activity that you are directly involved with
- Contact you regarding other EMB activities
- Add you to the EMB stakeholder mailing list
- Make your name, institution and country publically available on the EMB website, in EMB communications, e.g. presentations regarding the activity you are involved in, and in EMB publications
- Take your photograph during EMB activities and use these pictures in publications, on the EMB website and on EMB social media outlets
- Take video footage during EMB activities and use these pictures in publications, on the EMB website and on EMB social media outlets

The data held may be reviewed and revised by the subject, and consent for any or all of the above may be withdrawn at any time.

Please tick this box to confirm that you understand the above, and that you give EMB permission to obtain, use and store your personal data as outlined above.

Name:

Date:

Annex 2: Decision Making Procedure

EMB Working Groups & Publications

Decision making procedures

