

The potential and limitations of land and sea use planning to manage coastal and marine resources - MT

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

Practical application of ICZM principles for the formulation of development plans for coastal areas with very high population densities and which are subject to high development pressures for multiple uses.

4. Overview of the case

The formulation and adoption of development policies at local level that target basic principles of ICZM is securing more effective action towards sustainable use of coastal areas. This role of development plans should assist Malta in achieving most of the objectives of the EU environment acquis within the coastal environment.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

With a total land area of 316 km² and a resident population estimated at 403,000 in 2004, the Maltese Islands have one of the highest population densities, in Europe, with over 1,274 persons/km². The coastline is used by various sectors including tourism and recreation, agriculture, mineral extraction, national infrastructure (desalination plants, power plants and arterial roads) and urban development. On the seaward side, there is the fishing industry which is considered as artisanal coupled with an established aquaculture sector that has grown over the last decade. The maritime industry is focused in the main port areas. The coast is also rich in natural and cultural heritage and this is reflected in the higher proportion of land area protected by statutory designation. The Development Planning Act of 1992 and its amendments call for the development of plans and also control of development both on land and at sea. The Structure Plan of the Maltese Islands of 1990 introduced the concept of ICZM in Malta. However the lack of a co-ordinated approach at a national level leaves action towards ICZM in Malta still at an ad hoc level. As part of the Structure Plan review process the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) approved a coastal strategy in 2002 with the aim of incorporating ICZM principles in the Replacement Structure Plan which was to be published in 2006 and would guide national land and sea uses for a twenty year period. A set of Local Plans that cover a 10 year span were published in 2006 with policies that took the Coastal Strategy into account.

b) Objectives

The objectives of the Coastal Strategy aim to refine the land use zoning scheme that was adopted in 1989 and guide development on land and sea through a policy framework. The Strategy was to be incorporated in the main planning

document: the Structure Plan. Until the replacement of the strategic national plan, the subsidiary Local Plans translated the coastal strategy into the local context.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Project Management

MEPA is responsible for developing planning policy and for controlling development. In accordance with the national planning legislation the preparation of the Coastal Strategy and the Local Plans required extensive consultation with national authorities (such as the Malta Maritime Authority), the private sector and the general public including NGOs.

a) ICZM tool

The fact that development pressures have been identified as the main threat to the coast, Malta proposed that the planning system should spearhead the national strategy for the coast. Malta's 2006 report on how it is aiming to implement the EU's ICZM Recommendation states that this coastal strategy will be included in the Replacement Structure Plan. Under current planning legislation Structure Plans are to be adopted by the House of Representatives. However, since the Replacement Plan is still not published the high statutory level for a national strategy seems to be still pending. Nonetheless, the seven Local Plans approved by the Government of Malta can be considered as the most up-to-date planning policies to guide development on the coast. The preparation of such plans requires extensive consultation by law. The five Local Plans that were published in 2006 took on board most of the elements of the coastal strategy. Until the Local Plans were approved most of the coastal areas were considered as an extension of the adjacent terrain and, within urban areas, this meant that identified urban development zones extended to the waterline indiscriminately. The different Local Plans have within them policies that designate extensive areas of the coast as Areas of Ecological Importance, Sites of Scientific Importance which under planning legislation are subject to strict development control measures. In certain instances, some Plans also call for the preparation of management plans for such sites. Such designation is considered as supportive to local designations made under the provisions of the EU's Habitats and Birds Directive. With recreation being a major coastal user, most of the Plans have policies that define the spatial extent of coastal areas that can be used for recreation, ensure public access and policies that define swimming zones identified together with the Malta Maritime Authority. These policies safeguard such areas from incompatible uses and thus could be considered as supplementary to action needed for the implementation of the EU's bathing water quality directive. Some Local Plans have provided additional guidance to certain forms of development, such as aquaculture. The North West Local Plan states that such development will not be accepted in inlets and bays within 1 nautical mile of the coast or in depths of less than 50m. The Gozo and Comino Local Plan calls for specific studies for the extensions of jetties and similar structures which should look into the effects of the structures on sediment transport and existing uses. Such an approach can prove to be supplementary to Malta's efforts in implementing the Water Framework Directive.

Given that these policies are all related to specific localities and are supplemented with policy maps, they can be easily applied in the development control process when one is processing individual planning applications.

7. Cost and resources

The policies in the Local Plans clearly identify areas that should be protected and where development is allowed or not. In addition policies that guide development also address the need to reduce user conflict. Considering the population density in Malta, the Plans are a major step in trying to secure sustainable use of the coast through the planning system.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

No specific budget line is provided in MEPA's Annual Reports for the plan formulation function. It is assumed that costs incurred for the preparation of the Strategy and the Plans primarily pertain to employees' wages, specific environmental studies that may have been required and the public consultations that took place.

9. Success and Fail factors

The initial success was the participation of the national entities in the preparation and finalisation of the coastal strategy. The incorporation of the coastal strategy objectives in the Local Plans is also considered a positive outcome. The long-term success is dependent on the effectiveness of their application and consistency in the development control process.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

With the Replacement Structure Plan not published, the overall strategic planning framework is still pending. Action towards implementation of a number of EU Directives on such a small land territory as Malta is likely to lead to more integrated action that could build on the existing planning system to address coastal uses in a more comprehensive and effective manner.

11. Prepared by














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13. Sources

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	CSTP_Appendices (207.35 KB)	
	CSTP_Maps (3.87 MB)	
	Coastal Topic Paper (1.21 MB)	
	DevPlanning Act (266.39 KB)	
	EU_ICZM_MT_NatRep_fin (2.9 MB)	
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