

Management and conservation of coastal protected areas in the Baltic States - EE

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space

2. Key Approaches

- Ecosystems based approach

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

Estonia has one of the most sophisticated networks of coastal protected areas and some of the best preserved coastal NATURA 2000 habitats in the Northern Europe. This was achieved through long-term coastal conservation traditions and a rational spatial planning approach as well as due to substantial financial support from the World Bank and the EU.

4. Overview of the case

In Estonia, the environmental state and management regime of coastal protected areas is rather good. The urbanisation of the coast and the pressure by tourism is low. The authorities pay little attention to the coastal zone because the coasts are relatively undisturbed. It is now necessary to translate the integration of environmental concerns and challenges related to coastal habitat conservation into practical management solutions. There is a need for a responsible authority or a legal framework specifically addressing ICZM issues.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The main trends in coastal land-use dynamics in Estonia have been a decrease in the proportion of agricultural land, especially semi-natural grasslands (from 65% in 1918 to 30% in 1994) and an increase in the proportion of forests (from 21 to 48%, respectively). The most relevant driving factors of this shift have been land reforms, collectivisation, formation of the Soviet border zone along the coasts, concentration of agricultural production, and urbanisation. To date, there are two main threats to the listed habitats: changes in land use systems and changes in management systems. Restitution and changes in the land ownership exhibit a major impact on land use and, thus, on habitats. On the one hand, the set-aside land soon becomes overgrown and the re-forestation process develops. On the other hand, the structure of the established land-use systems is changing: natural or semi-natural meadows are ploughed into fields, forests are clear-cut. Commercial pressure on certain habitat types is strong.

b) Objectives

The specific objectives to be achieved with the ICZM approach are to apply a proper functional zoning approach and a flexible coastal management regime for the most valuable semi-natural coastal habitats of Western Estonia involving local communities. Other relevant issues being considered in this approach are to educate people on themes related to coastal nature, nature protection legislation and sustainable tourism development, and to get experiences from these activities, and to provide better information to visitors and tourists as well. The timescale associated with implementation and goals achievement should be assessed in decades rather than years, since this is a continuous activity.

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

a) Management

At a national level, the Ministry of Environment is responsible for environmental and nature protection policy. Several departments deal with marine coastal zones. The Strategy and Planning Department is responsible for the co-ordination and the elaboration of environmental policy and sustainable development principles. The Nature Protection Department is responsible for elaboration and implementation of Estonia's nature protection policy and co-ordinates state nature-protection programmes. The Vilsandi National Park and Matsalu National Park are administrated by State Nature Conservation Centre - Saare Region (since 1.1.2006). The Vilsandi National Park is also part of the West Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve. The latter was set up from the 1st of January 1990, with a total area of 1,560,078 hectares. It is also administrated by the State Nature Conservation Centre - Saare Region. The National Forest Board (with its 15 county forest departments and 120 forest districts) is responsible for management of forests inside all protected areas (including national parks). Other areas are managed by County Authorities (through their Environmental Departments). Hence, the level of entities involved and the level of responsibility is national and regional.

b) ICZM tools

The ICZM tools in this case study fall within the policy, legislative and planning categories. They are pertinent mainly to spatial planning and multi-sectoral management planning. The area of protected coastal nature territories is divided into different zones. After the Act on Protected Natural Objects came into force in 1998, a revision of the protected areas network has commenced. The aim of the work, carried out in parallel to the Land and Property Reform, is to optimize and improve the protected areas network. In Western Estonia, there is one complex programme area (West-Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve) comprising more than 50 specified and strictly conserved areas. Around these core areas there are buffer zones with limited nature management, such as Natura 2000 areas. The development zones are the remaining areas of the Biosphere Reserve with sustainable nature use without any specific restrictions. In the development zones there is space for living and active operations.

Three coastal national parks of Estonia include: Lahemaa, which was established in 1971 for the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of the coastal landscapes of Northern Estonia; Vilsandi, which was established in 1997 for the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of the coastal landscapes of the Western Estonian archipelago; and Matsalu, which was established in 1997 for the protection of the characteristic biotic communities of Western Estonia and of the natural and cultural heritage of the Vainameri Sea region. The Act on Protected Natural Objects stipulates procedures for the establishment of environmental restrictions to property, and the obligations of owners concerning different types of protected zones. The Act also includes provisions for financial compensation to landowners for the restrictions in land use in protected areas. The compensation is granted via reduction of the land tax. The Act also defines the classification categories, and determines protection regimes and zoning. The three coastal national parks and the West-Estonian Archipelago Biosphere Reserve are funded from the state budget through the Ministry of the Environment.

7. Cost and resources

Information not available.

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

As of 1 July 2007, a total of 17.9% of Estonian territory was under protection. The greatest amount of land is protected in the case of coastal habitats (68.7%). About 20% of the Estonian coastline is protected to a different degree: national park, nature protection area, protected landscape (nature park) and programme area. Most of the small islands have some protective designation. Changes are being made in the delineation and distinction of the coastal nature conservation areas in Estonia.

9. Success and Fail factors

In 1995, the Parliament adopted the Act on the Protection of Marine and Freshwater Coasts, Shores and Banks to replace a previous ministerial regulation of similar content. Under the new act, a protected strip is established along all shores, including the coast of the Baltic Sea. Hence, after the adoption of the Act on Protected Natural Objects (1998), Estonia has a comprehensive legal system facilitating effective management and conservation of coastal protected areas.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

New areas are taken under protection and new regulations are being worked out for the former protected areas according to the Act on Protected Natural Objects. The policy on the maintenance of coastal landscapes and biodiversity is aimed to improve the existing network of protected coastal areas and habitats in accordance with EU recommendations.

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13. Sources

- Estonian Nature Conservation in 2007. Estonian Environment Information Centre, Tallinn 2008



Estonian Nature Conservation in 2007 (2.51 MB)

