

Revision of EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive

EBI position paper

European Boating Industry (EBI) represents the recreational boating and nautical tourism sector at European level. The building of recreational boats, yachts and components together with a strong refit and repair sector are among one of the EU's success stories. The vast majority of the over 6.5 million boats, their components and equipment in European waters are 'Made in Europe'. It is also closely linked to nautical tourism, which offers regional and high-value tourism on lakes, canals, coastal regions and islands.

In total the sector counts 32,000 businesses, mainly SMEs, and over 280,000 jobs. Around 48 million people undertake water sports each year in Europe, the vast majority on small boats under 8 metres. Boating offers leisure and tourism opportunities, supports physical and mental wellbeing, and encourages a better understanding of Europe's seas, strengthening environmental awareness through direct experiences.

Boating is contingent on a clean marine environment, and boaters have a direct view on the environmental challenges on the water, being ambassadors for clean waters who see impacts first hand while spending their time on water. A clean marine environment is therefore critical to boating and therefore the success of the sector. The sector, from boaters to marinas and charter/rental companies, are partners in achieving Good Environmental Status.

The position of tourism, leisure and its associated infrastructure and sectors should therefore be considered in terms of promotion and support.

Overall view on MSFD revision

The revision of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) should ensure strengthened environmental protection while ensuring practical and economically viable implementation, as well as reduce regulatory burden. It should reinforce stakeholder participation from early planning stages at national level, ensuring that they can contribute to realistic national programmes of measures. A balanced approach combining environmental ambition with operational feasibility will maximise impact and foster long-term engagement from the sector.

Access to waters & spatial planning coherence

Access to the sea for citizens should be treated as a primary objective. This is increasingly important in the context of spatial squeeze and competing uses in marine areas. MSFD-driven measures (e.g., anchoring restrictions, speed limits, no-motor zones) can reduce safe access and navigation, as well as lead to negative economic impact if applied without risk-based justification or implementation of alternatives (moorings, zoning). Where possible, suitable alternatives should be developed in collaboration with stakeholders based on the overall targets provided by the MSFD. EBI calls for

evidence-based, proportionate restrictions and close alignment with Maritime Spatial Planning (MSPD) as part of the development of the European Ocean Act.

Cross-border collaboration

EU-wide coordination should be strengthened for better collaboration on environmental challenges, also ensuring that each sector can prosper through better cross-border and sea-basin collaboration, improved governance of trade-offs and a clearer approach to coexistence in constrained areas, while also responding to climate adaptation needs and new policy demands. Closer coordination would also be necessary with the Regional Seas Conventions.

Targeted measures for each sector

Where specific sectors are targeted through the descriptors, such as invasive species, underwater noise, it is important to conduct a thorough analysis of actions necessary and implement together with the sector and stakeholders. One-size-fits-all mandates risk overlooking boating diversity and local infrastructure limits. As an example, where anchoring is identified as a local pressure (e.g., fragile habitats/seagrass), eco-mooring solutions rather than outright bans can provide beneficial alternatives. A clear focus should be on identifying causes for marine environmental impacts, whether land-based or sea-based and focusing on areas where most gains can be made.

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