

Ocean INSTITUTE

# Marine protected areas

■ RECOMMENDATIONS



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## 1. Overview: Recommendations for MPAs

1. **By 2030, at least 30 % of The Danish marine area must be included in an ecologically coherent and representative network of MPAs** covering the diversity of marine biodiversity. The network must consist of:
  - 1.1. 20 % standard-level protected MPAs
  - 1.2. 10 % strictly protected MPAs, of which approx. 8 % are scientific reference areas and the remaining approx. 2 % have the current level of protection from the Danish Marine Strategy.
2. **An ambitious national protection standard must be set for standard-level protected MPAs**, where activities such as dumping of marine sediment, new infrastructure, raw material extraction and fishing with bottom towed fishing gear are not permitted.
3. **A national protection standard must be established for marine scientific reference areas in strictly protected MPAs**, where only low-disturbance marine science research, nature restoration and sailing without stopovers are permitted.
4. **Parts of existing marine environmental designations and areas with a ban on bottom towed fishing** can be included **in the ecologically coherent and representative network of MPAs** through strengthened environmental protection in relation to other pressures.
5. **New MPAs must be designated** on a scientific basis and in an inclusive process involving citizens and stakeholders.
6. **Special Protection Areas (SPAs) protecting the conservation of wild birds must be better protected**, regardless of whether they are considered MPAs or not.
7. **Funds must be allocated for effective management**, including control, enforcement and nature restoration within the MPAs.
8. **OECMs must be screened, and funds must be allocated for research, monitoring, citizen involvement and communication** so that the effects of MPAs and any OECMs can be documented, evaluated and shared – with citizen involvement.
9. **The new MPAs and zones dedicated to commercial fishing must be included in The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan.**
10. **Synergies must be created** between MPAs and the initiatives under the Green Tripartite Agreement.

Each recommendation is elaborated on in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains a table with the recommended national protection standard (see recommendations 2+3), and Chapter 6 presents a concrete action plan.

## 2. Members who support the recommendations

The recommendations were developed based on a meeting between the members of the Ocean Institute in September 2025 followed by written and oral dialogue with members. The following members of the Ocean Institute support the recommendations:



- |                                                     |                                         |                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1. BAWAT A/S                                        | 2. Danish Hunters Association           | 3. Danish Society for Nature Conservation    |
| 4. Danish Fishers Producers Organisation            | 5. The Danish Sportfishing Association. | 6. Danish Aquaculture Producers Organisation |
| 7. Danish Pelagic Producers Organisation            | 8. DOF BirdLife Denmark                 | 9. DANVA                                     |
| 10. DHI                                             | 11. European Energy A/S                 | 12. FOGA Consult ApS                         |
| 13. Danish Low-Impact Fishers Producer Organisation | 14. Green Power Denmark                 | 15. Havhøst                                  |
| 16. Køge Bugt Alliancen                             | 17. Danish Agriculture & Food Council   | 18. Landsforeningen Levende Hav              |
| 19. the Wadden Sea National Park of Denmark         | 20. NCC                                 | 21. NIVA Denmark                             |
| 22. Rohde Nielsen                                   | 23. Søuld                               | 24. Thyborøn Harbour                         |
| 25. TotalEnergies Denmark                           | 26. Vattenfall                          | 27. Ørsted                                   |

### 3. Framework

The Ocean Institute and multiple members have agreed on joint recommendations that will contribute to the work on the upcoming national Nature and Biodiversity Act and the further development of MPAs in Denmark.

Research shows that MPAs have significant positive effects if they are effectively protected. They can lead to larger and more fish, more life in the sea and contribute to restoring marine ecosystems.

However, in many of Denmark's so-called "MPAs", nature is not effectively protected, and the network of "MPAs" is not representative either. The Danish marine environment must therefore be better protected than it is today, while at the same time ensuring a fair and consistent process for stakeholders who use the sea.

Denmark's upcoming national Nature and Biodiversity Act will ensure this.

#### Denmark has taken significant steps at sea

In recent years, Denmark has taken significant steps to strengthen the protection of the marine environment. New political and legislative initiatives have been decided upon, which deserves great recognition. At the same time, there is awareness that this may have negative economic consequences for fisheries, and other commercial stakeholders of the sea.

An example is the decision to establish a number of strictly protected MPAs<sup>1</sup> and zones with a ban on fishing with bottom towed fishing gear covering the Belt Sea, parts of Kattegat and in Kilen in the Sound<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, bottom towed fishing has been banned in many special areas of conservation (SACs) within 3 nautical miles<sup>3</sup> and in areas with targets for eelgrass growth<sup>4</sup>.

The Danish government has announced another important step in the form of a national nature and biodiversity law in its Government Policy Statement<sup>5</sup>. The June 2024 Agreement on a Green Denmark<sup>6</sup>, also referred to as The Green Tripartite Agreement, forms a central starting point here: *"The parties note that the government will present a proposal for a new Nature and Biodiversity Act with targets and measures for a greener Denmark. The aim of the law is to contribute to the EU's biodiversity strategy for 2030, which aims to have 30 % of the EU's land and sea area protected as nature, of which 10 % must be strictly protected."*

The parties behind the agreement (the government, the Danish Agriculture & Food Council, the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, the trade union NNF, the Danish Metal Workers' Union, Danish Industry (DI) and KL – Local Government Denmark) recommend that the upcoming nature and biodiversity law be based on two fundamental principles:

- 1) More and better nature must be created in Denmark, and the law must set a clear framework for this.
- 2) The law must contain a clear definition of protected nature, including strictly protected nature.

In May 2025, the Danish Biodiversity Council presented its recommendations<sup>7</sup> for the upcoming nature and biodiversity law. These have been an important source of inspiration for the present recommendations, which, among other things, specify which maritime activities should be permitted in protected and strictly protected MPAs.

## Denmark has not reached the targets

The EU Biodiversity Strategy<sup>8</sup> states that at least 30 % of marine areas in the EU should be designated as MPA. At least one third of the MPAs (10 %) should be strictly protected MPAs.

Government authorities estimate that 31.7 % of The Danish marine area has been designated as MPAs. However, in a new analysis<sup>9</sup> the Ocean Institute has calculated that only around a quarter of these areas – corresponding to a maximum of 8.3 % of the Danish marine area – can be described as effectively and long-term protected. If the additional planned bans on fishing with bottom towed fishing gear within the current "MPAs" are included, 15.3 % of The Danish marine area can be described as effectively protected MPAs. This means that at least 14.7 % of The Danish marine area has yet to be identified as effectively protected MPAs.

At the same time, Denmark is obliged to work towards achieving the objectives of restoring marine habitats in the EU's Nature Restoration Regulation and ensuring a coherent and representative network of MPAs and good environmental status (GES) in the Danish sea, including compliance with established threshold values.

## The Ocean Institute and members unite to strengthen ocean protection

Denmark must therefore strengthen its environmental protection at sea through an ecologically coherent and representative network of 30 % effectively protected MPAs. The network must include standard-level protected MPAs, strictly protected MPAs and scientific reference areas.

The Ocean Institute has brought together many of its members and is making joint recommendations to raise the level of protection in the Danish sea. The recommendations outline several measures where individual members have come together in a shared ambition to strengthen the level of protection and thus demonstrate concrete steps towards improving the marine environment in the 30 % MPAs.

The recommendations apply exclusively to protected areas in the marine environment and should not set a precedent for protected areas on land.

It is important for the restoration of the Danish marine environment and for our common understanding of nature conservation that MPAs are effectively protected and strengthen biodiversity. Therefore, there should be an ambitious national protection standard for both standard-level protected MPAs and strictly protected MPAs. The IUCN's international guidelines<sup>10</sup> should be considered and the goal should be for MPAs to meet the EU standards<sup>11</sup> in order for them to be included in the Danish contribution to the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

Part of the missing area to be designated as effectively protected MPAs can be found by strengthening protection in existing marine environmental designations or by designating MPAs in areas that are regulated in other ways, for example within the upcoming zones where fishing with bottom towed fishing gear is prohibited. The missing area can also be found by designating new marine environmental areas with biodiversity as the basis for designation.

At the same time, opportunities for possible OECMs<sup>1</sup> in the Danish marine area should be screened and assessed in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity. Currently, Danish experience with OECMs is limited, and it is therefore recommended to investigate, how Denmark can integrate these areas into future marine management. What is special about an OECM, is that an area can only be recognised as an OECM once the biodiversity benefits can be

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<sup>1</sup> Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures, as defined in the Convention on Biological Diversity. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures, as defined in the Convention on Biological Diversity.

documented. An OECM is defined under the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>12</sup> as “a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio–economic, and other locally relevant values”. In other words, OECMs can contribute to the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats, as well as the maintenance and restoration of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings. They can complement MPAs and contribute to greater representativeness and ecological coherence in the network of MPAs, thereby helping to address broader and more widespread threats to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services. Therefore, where appropriate, OECMs can strengthen the network of MPAs. An OECM does not necessarily have nature conservation as its main purpose and cannot be designated but must be identified based on the area's existing management and documented positive effects on biodiversity. As in Denmark, there is not much experience with OECMs in most EU countries, which is why it could be relevant to work with OECMs in an international perspective and across EU countries.

It is crucial that the civil society has the opportunity to experience and contribute to the Danish marine environment. When we humans experience the marine environment up close, it strengthens our understanding of why it must be preserved. Experiencing nature creates engagement, learning and pride in our shared marine environment – and is crucial to building the public support that real nature conservation and other nature restoration opportunities require.

It must also be possible to use the sea's resources in a sustainable way.

Denmark has high ambitions for the expansion of offshore wind farms, and the geopolitical situation has also led to an increased need for renewable energy production. Throughout the Danish marine area, there should be a strong focus on nature conservation and mitigation measures when locating, constructing and operating new offshore renewable energy facilities. For example, biodiversity-promoting measures adapted to local conditions can be established to promote sustainability and nature when establishing offshore facilities.

The extraction of sand and gravel is crucial for coastal protection in Denmark, including in connection with the implementation of Denmark's Climate Adaptation Plan. Raw material extraction and other similar activities are currently regulated by nature legislation, and a concrete assessment is made of the impact of extraction on the marine environment.

Additionally, fishery is related to food security in Denmark and the EU. Therefore, the Ocean Institute and its members also recommend that the Danish Maritime Spatial Plan designate zones dedicated to commercial fishing. At the same time, it is crucial that efforts to strengthen the marine environment are carried out in dialogue with the stakeholders who use the sea today, and that the transition to better nature conservation is done in a fair and well-planned manner.

MPAs cannot stand alone in achieving good environmental status. There is also a need to significantly reduce nutrient pollution and environmentally hazardous substances. In coastal waters pollution from agriculture, industry, urban wastewater and diffuse sources continue to place a significant burden on the Danish marine environment. Here, the implementation of the Green Tripartite Agreement and new purification technologies are important steps to supplement nature conservation.

## 4. Elaboration of recommendations

The following section elaborates on and specifies each of the 10 overall recommendations.

**Recommendation 1.** By 2030, at least 30 % of The Danish marine area must be included in an ecologically coherent and representative network of MPAs covering the diversity of marine biodiversity. The network must consist of:

- 20 % standard-level protected MPAs
- 10 % strictly protected MPAs, of which approx. 8 % are scientific reference areas and the remaining approx. 2 % have the current level of protection from The Danish Marine Strategy.

- 1) Through the adoption of the Biodiversity Act in 2026, **the government must be obliged** to establish an ecologically coherent and representative network of effectively protected MPAs that reflect and support the diversity of Denmark's marine biodiversity. The network must consist of 20 % standard-level protected MPAs and 10 % strictly protected MPAs, with approximately 8 % constituting scientific reference areas. The network must be fully established by 2030.
- 2) A **standard-level protected MPA** must be defined in the Nature and Biodiversity Act as a marine area that is legally designated under the Act for the purpose of protecting marine habitats, ecosystems and associated species in the area. The area must have clear geographical boundaries, clear conservation objectives, long-term protection measures and, where necessary, a restoration plan that meets at least the recommended national protection standard in Recommendation 2. The area must have effective management, enforcement, environmental monitoring and communication.
- 3) A **strictly protected MPA** must be defined in the Nature and Biodiversity Act based on the same criteria as a standard-level protected marine area, but in addition ensure that natural processes can proceed with minimal human disturbance. As part of this, a **marine scientific reference area** must be defined in the Nature and Biodiversity Act as a marine area where only low-disturbance marine science research, nature restoration and sailing without stopovers are permitted. This is to support the natural processes proceeding with minimal human disturbance and to serve as a basis for comparison for assessing the impact of human activities and nature conservation. For research, such areas will be indispensable in assessing the state and development of the marine environment over time. Only limited activities may be permitted in strictly protected MPAs, and these must meet the protection standard in Recommendation 3.

**Recommendation 2.** An ambitious national protection standard should be established for standard-level protected MPAs, where activities such as dumping marine sediment, new infrastructure, raw material extraction and fishing with bottom towed fishing gear are not permitted.

- 1) **In standard-level protected MPAs**, there should be a particular focus on protecting the integrity of the seabed, including habitats and ecosystems and associated species throughout the area's range. A national protection standard for standard-level protected MPAs is recommended, as specified in the table in Chapter 5.
- 2) The protection measures must be introduced within the MPA, and the recommendations do not address any restrictions on activities taking place outside the area, regardless of whether they may have an impact on the area. Requirements in other legislation, such as the Habitats Directive's requirements for environmental impact assessments, must of course continue to be followed.
- 3) Continued access for recreational activities along the coast, including in the fjords (e.g. diving, rowing, surfing, recreational boating, etc.), should be ensured. This should be regulated locally, if relevant.

**Recommendation 3:** A national protection standard should be established for scientific reference areas within strictly protected MPAs, where only low-disturbance marine science research, nature restoration and sailing without stopovers are permitted.

- 1) **In strictly protected MPAs**, the focus must be on protecting the entire marine ecosystem in the area – i.e. seabed habitats, geology and dynamic processes, ecosystems and associated species, as well as species and environment in the water column and at the sea surface. Therefore, only very limited activities may take place in strictly protected MPAs. A national protection standard for strictly protected MPAs is recommended, as specified in the table in Chapter 5.
- 2) Approximately 8 % must consist of scientific reference areas, where only low-disturbance marine science research, nature restoration and sailing without stopovers are permitted, cf. the table in Chapter 5.
- 3) Approximately 2 % should consist of strictly protected MPAs with the current level of protection from The Danish Marine Strategy. Here, emphasis is placed on civil society's continued opportunity to experience nature in MPAs.
- 4) To prevent activities and external pressures from affecting the strictly protected MPAs, it is recommended that the small strictly protected MPAs (10 %) be surrounded by a buffer zone consisting of a standard-level protected MPA, in accordance with the principle of zoning.
- 5) It must be ensured that the 10 % strictly protected MPAs are designated based on ecological and scientific criteria and distributed representatively in the Danish marine area, both far from the coast and close to the coast, cf. also points 12 and 13 on the designation of strictly protected MPAs in the agreement on The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan. At the same time, they should be placed in such a way that existing activities are taken into account, including the civil society's opportunities for recreational activities and nature experiences. New strictly protected MPAs should also be established outside areas planned for cables, pipes, wires, etc. and areas of significant defence interests that could harm marine life.

**Recommendation 4:** Parts of existing marine environmental designations and areas with a ban on bottom towed fishing can be included in the ecologically coherent and representative network of MPAs through strengthened environmental protection in relation to other pressures.

- 1) It is essential that **existing marine environmental designations** are included where possible in the new network of MPAs in order to strengthen protection in already designated areas. This applies in particular to MSFD areas, special areas of conservation (SACs), conservation areas and nature and wildlife reserves. With regard to Special Protection Areas (SPAs), please refer to recommendation 6.
- 2) Parts of the **areas with an existing or planned ban** on fishing with bottom towed fishing gear can be included in the network of ecologically coherent and representative MPAs through enhanced protection in relation to other activities, to meet the protection standard in either standard-level or strictly protected MPAs (see table in Chapter 5). This applies, for example, to parts of the future zones with bans on fishing with bottom towed fishing gear. The missing areas can also be found by **designating new** marine environmental areas with biodiversity as the basis for designation.

**Recommendation 5.** New MPAs must be designated on a scientific basis and in an inclusive process involving citizens and stakeholders

- 1) As a first step after the adoption of the Nature and Biodiversity Act, the government must initiate and conduct a long **public consultation** in 2026, in which citizens, stakeholders, municipalities and municipal associations, as well as stakeholders who use the sea, can voluntarily submit proposals for new MPAs. Local citizen and stakeholder meetings must be held, and funding must be allocated for this **citizen involvement**.
- 2) The new MPAs must be designated based on **ecological and scientific criteria**. In addition, there must be **thorough involvement of the local citizens**, stakeholders and actors to ensure an inclusive and predictable process, coordinated with our neighbouring countries as far as possible.
- 3) By 2026, a **review** of all existing marine environmental designations must be conducted, with the aims of 1) identifying which existing marine environmental designations can be characterised as **effectively protected MPAs** based on the recommendations in this report and 2) which habitats and ecosystems **should be further included** in the network of MPAs to reflect and support the ecological diversity of the Danish marine area.
- 4) By 2027, **ecological and scientific criteria** must be **established** for the designation of the network of at least 30 % MPAs, so that it reflects Denmark's most important marine habitat types, species and ecosystems, taking into account the requirements of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Habitats Directive and the Nature Restoration Regulation. Recommendations on ecological and scientific criteria include: representativeness and ecological coherence in relation to ecosystems, seabed habitats and species, important spawning and nursery areas for fish, endangered or rare species, as well as habitats, species and populations that Denmark has an international responsibility to protect, carbon-rich ecosystems, areas characterised by important oceanographic processes that are of great significance to the dynamics and ecosystems of the sea, or areas of high ecological integrity where ecosystems function without significant human influence.

- 5) By 2027, **dialogue** must be initiated **with Denmark's neighbouring countries** with intentions of coordinating the designation of adjacent MPAs, in order to achieve the best protection and ecological coherence of the MPAs.
- 6) By 2028, **new effectively protected MPAs** must be **designated** in Denmark to ensure an ecologically coherent and representative network of effectively protected MPAs covering at least 30 % of The Danish marine area. The 30 % MPAs must be designated in accordance with the Marine Strategy Act as standard-level or strictly protected MPAs.
- 7) By early 2029, the government must have prepared proposals for EU regulation of commercial fishing and UN regulation of shipping, so that the proposals can be negotiated during 2029 with an aim of **full implementation by 2030 at the latest**. National regulation must also come into force by 2030 at the latest.

**Recommendation 6. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) protecting the conservation of wild birds must be better protected, regardless of whether they are considered MPAs or not.**

The existing Special Protection Areas (SPAs) protecting the conservation of wild birds cover 24.1 % of The Danish marine area. However, most SPAs overlap with other marine environmental designations, and thus 10.8 % of The Danish marine area consists solely of SPAs. Currently, an SPA does not provide comprehensive protection for the marine ecosystems in an area.

- 1) If an **SPA** – or parts thereof – is to be included in the network of MPAs, the area must meet the national protection standard, cf. recommendation 2.
- 2) If all SPAs are included in the network of MPAs, it will not be possible to achieve a network that representatively reflects the variation in marine ecosystems in 30 % of The Danish marine area, cf. the requirements of the MSFD. Therefore, it may be considered, for example, that only parts of the large SPAs in the Skagerrak and North Sea be included in the network of MPAs and that **new MPAs** be designated instead **in order to meet the requirements for representativeness**.
- 3) **Level of protection in SPAs should be improved by 2030**. New offshore wind farms and other new physical installations should not be permitted in SPAs, but it should be possible to extend the lifetime and repower existing farms, however, based on a specific assessment in the individual area. In addition, focus should be placed on improving protection of breeding, resting, moulting and wintering birds against disturbances. Protection must be organised on a scientific basis and be included in the specific Natura 2000 plan for the area.

Recommendation 7. Funds must be allocated for effective management, including control, enforcement and nature restoration within the MPAs.

- 1) **The Nature and Biodiversity Act must set criteria for effective management**  
The Nature and Biodiversity Act must set criteria for effective management of an MPA, and the government should allocate funds for this management.
- 2) **Legal designation**  
An MPA must be both legally designated and legally protected under the law.
- 3) **Protection standard**  
Protective measures must be based on the proposed national protection standard for standard-level and strictly protected MPAs, respectively (see recommendations 2 and 3 and the table in chapter 5). There may be specific circumstances that justify additional protection.
- 4) **Conservation objectives**  
The area must have clear conservation objectives. The conservation objectives may mean that, in addition to the minimum protection, there may be a need for additional protection in a specific area, e.g. for the sake of birds or marine mammals, or that there is a need for active nature restoration.
- 5) **Management**  
The area must be managed effectively on the basis of an action plan. For areas near the coast, the introduction of local nature managers may be considered. Nature managers can also contribute to nature communication in the area.
- 6) **Control, enforcement and sanctions**  
There must be effective control of regulated activities and proportionate sanctions.

Recommendation 8. OECCMs must be screened, and funds must be allocated for research, monitoring, citizen involvement and communication so that the effects of MPAs and any OECCMs can be documented, evaluated and shared – with citizen involvement.

- 1) **Seabed mapping and baseline surveys**  
From 2028, the government must allocate funds for scientific mapping of the seabed and for baseline surveys of nature and biodiversity within the MPAs. Emphasis should be placed on using the scientific reference areas for building knowledge and research on MPAs and the marine environment in general, including climate change and the areas' recovery potential in a changing climate. To shed light on the area's historical natural values, local knowledge from, for example, commercial and recreational fishermen, sailors and coastal residents can supplement the basis of knowledge.

**2) Long-term monitoring, data management and citizen involvement**

From 2029, the government must finance ongoing, long-term monitoring to document the effects of protection on a scientific basis. The monitoring must cover a longer period (more than 10 years) so that developments can be assessed and evaluated. Citizen science and local stakeholders should be actively involved where relevant, e.g. through collaboration with outdoor associations, diving clubs, recreational fishing associations, hunting clubs, sailing clubs and local schools. Data must be made publicly available so that it can be used, among other things, in the communication and knowledge sharing about MPAs. The government must therefore also allocate funds to support the Danish Environmental Portal (Miljøportalen) so that it can act as a comprehensive data platform for collected data on MPAs.

**3) Climate-related effects**

The government should allocate funds to document carbon storage and other climate-related effects in selected MPAs – both before and after the protection comes into force – and over a longer period of time. Projects in which citizens and local communities can contribute with observations or measurements, can strengthen both the data basis and public understanding of the effects of climate change.

**4) Analyses of the effects of MPAs on environment and society**

Monitoring of MPAs must be followed up by research and analyses that shed light on the effects of MPAs on biodiversity. Economic analyses of MPAs should also be carried out, including any economic benefits and social effects. It should also be investigated how citizen involvement, outdoor activities and local involvement can create added value in MPAs in the form of increased awareness, engagement and local anchoring.

**5) Communication and evaluation**

From 2029, the government must allocate funds for communication and evaluation of monitoring results and of the environment in general in the MPAs. In particular, information about the environment in the strictly protected coastal marine areas should be communicated to and shared with the public. Communication can take place in collaboration with national parks, nature parks, coastal municipalities, outdoor organisations and volunteers, e.g. anglers, sailors, divers, scouts and nature guides.

**6) Knowledge and research on MPAs**

Annual funds must be allocated from 2026 to build up knowledge and research on the effects of MPAs.

**7) Knowledge, research and screening of potential OECMs**

By 2027 at the latest, a screening of potential OECMs in Denmark must be carried out. Currently, Danish experience with OECMs is limited, and funds should be allocated from 2026 to build knowledge, research and identification of OECMs<sup>2</sup>, including how OECMs can contribute to protecting biodiversity, strengthening the resilience of ecosystems and supplementing the network of MPAs in Denmark and the EU. It is therefore recommended that Denmark investigate how OECMs can be integrated into future marine management in Denmark. As part of this knowledge-building process, a national standard for OECMs should be established in accordance with the criteria of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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<sup>2</sup> Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures, cf. the definitions in the Convention on Biological Diversity

**Recommendation 9. The new MPAs and zones dedicated to commercial fishing must be included in The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan.**

**1) MPAs in The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan**

The parties to the political agreement on The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan must, in accordance with the agreement on the plan, discuss the plan no later than four years into the planning period, i.e. no later than September 2027, based on an increased data basis, the upcoming Raw Materials Extraction Plan, the recommendations of the Fisheries Commission, the EU Commission's initiatives in this area, offshore wind screening, developments in CO<sub>2</sub> storage and experiences with coexistence. The objectives of the Nature and Biodiversity Act and the new MPAs must thus be incorporated into The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan by 2028.

**2) Fishing zones in The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan**

From 2028, The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan should include zones dedicated to commercial fishing. The fishing zones should be located in areas that are of particular importance to fisheries, while taking into account the protection and restoration of the marine environment and the EU's obligations in this regard, including the objective of achieving good environmental status. The designation of fishing zones is important to ensure recognition of the purpose of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and recognition of the geopolitical situation, which highlights the importance of food security in Denmark and the EU. With such zones dedicated to commercial fishing, steps can be taken towards reducing conflicts between protection and use of areas, which can benefit both fisheries and the environment.

**Recommendation 10. Synergies must be created between MPAs and the initiatives under the Green Tripartite Agreement.**

**1) Interactions between land and sea**

The nature along the coasts is shaped by the interactions between land and sea. Salt marshes in particular overlap between land and sea and would not exist without the free dynamics between them. At the same time, Danish freshwater systems and marine areas interact closely, for example when fish move between streams and the sea. Nature-based initiatives on land can therefore be usefully combined with MPAs.

**2) Green Tripartite**

It would be relevant to incorporate the targeted conversion of agricultural land under the Green Tripartite Agreement into designating protected areas on both land and at sea. Reducing nutrient pollution from land can help to improve the environment in MPAs and can therefore be usefully considered in the designation of new MPAs.

## 5. Table: Recommended protection standard

The following protection standard is recommended for **standard-level** and **strictly protected** MPAs, including scientific reference areas. The protection standard should be seen as the minimum level of protection required in the area, as there may be a specific and local need for additional protection.

	Activities	At least 20 % standard-level protected MPAs
Access and outdoor recreation	Traffic on and in the water without motor	<b>Permitted</b>
	Tourism and recreational boating with and without motor, including anchoring	<b>Permitted</b>
Recreational use of resources	Underwater fishing (underwater hunting)	<b>Permitted</b>
	Recreational angling	<b>Permitted</b>
	Recreational fishing with gear (e.g. nets, traps, lines, etc.)	<b>Permitted</b>
	Hunting	<b>Permitted</b>
	Blue gardens (small-scale aquaculture production of shellfish and seaweed)	<b>Permitted</b> up to a maximum of 100 m <sup>2</sup> , based on a specific assessment and taking into account the conservation objectives for the area.
Commercial use of resources	Oil and gas extraction	<b>Not permitted</b>
	Extraction of raw materials (sand, gravel, crushed stone, etc.)	<b>Not permitted</b>
	Exploitation of energy resources other than offshore wind	<b>Not permitted</b>
	New offshore wind farms	MPAs are not suitable for infrastructure, and offshore wind farms and associated infrastructure should therefore be an exception that can only be considered and developed under strict conditions. Such exceptions and associated conditions should always be evaluated in a multi-stakeholder process and may only take place within the offshore wind development zones.
	Commercial fishing in general (see, however, under physical disturbance)	<b>Permitted.</b> However, a specific assessment must be made in relation to the conservation objectives for the area, which may entail that fishing must be restricted in the area.

Establishment of new physical facilities	New commercial aquaculture facilities (fish, shellfish, seaweed)	<b>Not permitted.</b> However, in suitable areas with documented significant internal nutrient loading, and as a supplementary measure to accelerate positive environmental development, temporary (up to 10 years) permission may be granted for line farms (see definition in note 3) for consumption and for restoration purposes. Permission is subject to a specific assessment of the area's environmental and conservation objectives, vulnerability to human activities and a landscape assessment of the visual impact, including possible limitations of the visual impact. The result of the assessment must show that the measure will accelerate the desired nature development.
	New transport infrastructure (bridges, tunnels, port expansions, etc.)	<b>Not permitted</b>
	New islands, land reclamation, energy islands, physical installations and constructions, etc.	<b>Not permitted</b>
Physical disturbance and impact on the seabed	Commercial fishing with bottom towed fishing gear (including beam trawls, bottom trawls, semi-pelagic trawls, seines and dredges, etc.)	<b>Not permitted</b>
	Dumping: Extracted seabed sediment dumping and storage of CO <sub>2</sub> in the seabed	<b>Not permitted</b>
	New shipping channels that are continuously maintained	<b>Not permitted.</b> Generally, MPAs should, as far as possible, be designated outside existing navigation channels that are being maintained (such as the SAC and SPA areas in the Danish Wadden Sea).
	Installation and maintenance of cables, pipes, wires, etc.	New cables, pipes, wires, etc. should be avoided if there are alternative options. If there are no alternative options, or the alternative options are disproportionately expensive, it may be permitted on the basis of a specific assessment of the specific project, taking into account the conservation objectives of the area with a particular focus on protecting the integrity of the seabed. New cables, pipes, wires, etc. should, as far as possible, be laid in a few, combined routes. Maintenance may be permitted but taking into account the conservation objectives of the area.
Other activities	Nature restoration, e.g. establishing biogenic reefs and stone reefs, and planting eelgrass	<b>Permitted</b> , including the use of volunteers. However, a specific assessment must be made in relation to the conservation objectives of the area and its vulnerability to human disturbance.
	Low-disturbance marine science research	<b>Permitted</b> , including the use of volunteers. However, a specific assessment must be made in relation to the conservation objectives and the areas vulnerability to human disturbance.
	Defence (test explosions, sonar, etc.)	The defence forces must, as far as possible, take into account the nature and biodiversity of the area. If defence activities are carried out in an MPA, the Ministry of Defence should draw up operational and maintenance plans for the specific area to ensure compliance with obligations under nature legislation.
	Commercial sailing	<b>Permitted.</b> However, new navigation channels and routes should, as far as possible, be planned to avoid MPAs.
	Activities other than those mentioned above	<b>Assessed on a case-by-case basis</b> , taking into account the conservation objectives of the area and its vulnerability to human disturbance.

*Note 1:* For all activities named "new" (e.g. new commercial aquaculture facilities), the restrictions apply to new and thus non-existing activities. The standard-level protected MPAs should therefore, as far as possible, be designated away from existing activities.

*Note 2:* The recommendations shall not affect the government authorities' processing of location permits, environmental approvals, etc. for existing marine aquaculture facilities and for new marine aquaculture facilities where applications for establishment have already been submitted.

*Note 3:* A line mussel farm in Denmark is a floating, feed-free aquaculture facility where shellfish (mussels or oysters) are cultivated hanging in lines (longlines) that are attached between anchoring systems and held up by small buoys. Production of mussels happens exclusively through the mussels' filtering of nutrients, particles, and microalgae from the surrounding water column. No feed, chemicals, or technological controls are used, and the facility is therefore operated as a passive, nature-based aquaculture system. Longlines used in Danish mussel farms are typically 200 metres long and approx. 2 cm thick and are stretched out 0.5–1 metre below the water surface, where they are supported by small individual buoys. The longline acts as a support structure for the production itself and can take various shapes based on the chosen hanging formation – e.g. stockings, vertically hanging lines, straps or ladders, depending on the species and local conditions. This flexibility makes it possible to adapt the method without changing the basic principles of the facility. Dismantling and re-establishing traditional longline facilities is technically difficult and costly, as the lines are adapted to local current and seabed conditions. Longline systems are therefore permanently anchored, low-tech systems that in practice cannot be moved without extensive reconstruction. It is therefore recommended that traditional line mussel farming be permitted for up to 10 years. In The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan, there is an overlap between marine environmental designations and shellfish aquaculture in the water column in Limfjorden and Horsens Fjord. The definition covers only traditional longline facilities and not technologically complex facilities such as smart farms. Smart farms (farming on nets) cannot be recommended in the 20 % standard-level protected or 10 % strictly protected MPAs.

10 % strictly protected MPAs	
Approx. 8 % scientific reference areas	Approximately 2 % strictly protected MPAs
<p>Approximately 8 % of the strictly protected MPAs must consist of scientific reference areas, which will provide a unique opportunity to monitor developments in the marine environment and the effect of marine environmental protection in Denmark.</p> <p>It is estimated that it will be necessary to allow careful sailing passage through the area if this is in accordance with the specific area's vulnerability to disturbance.</p> <p>In scientific reference areas, all activities except the following must be prohibited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-disturbance marine science research (based on a specific assessment of the area's conservation objectives and vulnerability to disturbance).</li> <li>• Nature restoration/re-establishment of lost habitats where they were known to occur, or of lost species in their natural range and densities.</li> <li>• Transit with no stopovers in vessels with and without engines, i.e. sailboats, motorboats and commercial vessels. Sailing must be strictly regulated through bans on anchoring, maintenance of navigation channels, discharge of wastewater from vessels, cleaning of tanks, etc. A specific assessment must be made of any speed restrictions to limit disturbances in the area. In selected smaller areas, sailing may be completely excluded. In cases of force majeure, e.g. emergencies and accidents (such as technical problems), stopping and anchoring may be permitted.</li> </ul>	<p>Approximately 2 % of strictly protected MPAs should consist of strictly protected MPAs with the current level of protection from The Danish Marine Strategy. It should be assessed whether this definition of strictly protected MPAs complies with the EU <sup>11</sup>, IUCN <sup>10</sup> and the Biodiversity Council <sup>7</sup> definitions of strictly protected MPAs. The aim should be for strictly protected MPAs to meet EU standards so that they can be included in Denmark's contribution to the EU's biodiversity strategy.</p> <p>Emphasis is placed on the continued opportunity for the civil society to access areas, have nature experiences and engage in recreational activities. In strictly protected MPAs, all activities except the following are prohibited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sailing and floating navigation marks that are important for navigational safety. This also includes activities that are necessary for navigation, such as maintenance of navigation channels.</li> <li>• Recreational fishing from land and recreational fishing from boats with a maximum of two fishing rods per person, but no more than four fishing rods per boat.</li> <li>• Traffic and bathing.</li> <li>• Anchoring.</li> <li>• Hunting and underwater hunting.</li> <li>• Nature restoration and studies related to scientific research or nature conservation. Seismic surveys related to this will be possible.</li> <li>• Installation and maintenance of cables, pipes, wires, etc. However, the approving authority is required to ensure that this is done with the greatest possible consideration for the protected natural values/designation basis. Economic considerations may be taken into account in this assessment. Seismic surveys in connection with this will be possible.</li> <li>• Marine archaeological surveys and cultural heritage preservation.</li> </ul>

## 6. Action plan: MPAs 2026-2030

### 2026:

- The Nature and Biodiversity Act has been passed with the aim of establishing an ecological and coherent network of effectively protected MPAs covering at least 30 % of the Danish sea area. The network will consist of 20 % standard-level protection MPAs, including 10 % strictly protected MPAs, of which approximately 8 % will be scientific reference areas. An ambitious national protection standard and criteria for effective management and monitoring will be established.
- Funds have been allocated for citizen involvement and for building knowledge and research on the effects of MPAs.
- A public consultation with local citizen involvement has been conducted on proposals from citizens, stakeholders, municipalities, etc. for the designation of new effectively protected MPAs.
- The government has reviewed existing marine environmental designations.
- The government has allocated funds for knowledge building on OECMs (3) and the development of a Danish standard for OECMs that complies with the criteria of the Convention on Biological Diversity. An assessment has also been made of how OECMs can be integrated into future marine management in Denmark.

### 2027:

- Ecological and scientific criteria for the designation of new effectively protected MPAs have been established for standard-level protected and strictly protected MPAs, including scientific reference areas.
- A national screening of potential OECMs in Denmark has been carried out.
- Dialogue with neighbouring countries on the designation of new MPAs.
- The government has sent out proposals for new effectively protected MPAs for public consultation.

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<sup>3</sup> Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures, cf. the definitions in the Convention on Biological Diversity

**2028:**

- New effectively protected MPAs have been designated under the Marine Strategy Act, ensuring that the network is ecologically coherent and representative for standard-level protected and strictly protected MPAs including scientific reference areas.
- The new effectively protected MPAs have been incorporated into The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan.
- Zones for commercial fishing are included in The Danish Maritime Spatial Plan.
- Funds have been allocated for seabed mapping, baseline surveys and ongoing management of the areas.

**2029:**

- Public consultation has been completed on national regulation of all relevant activities.
- Proposal for fisheries regulation has been sent to the EU.
- Proposal for navigation regulation has been sent to the UN International Maritime Organisation.
- Funds have been allocated for ongoing long-term monitoring, data management and communication of information about the areas, including research in the scientific reference areas.

**2030:**

- Baseline studies have been completed.
- New legislation (Danish, EU and international) on the protection of 30% of effectively protected MPAs has entered into force.
- The network of effectively protected MPAs is fully established.
- Additional protection in SPAs has entered into force.

**After 2030:**

- Continued management of MPAs.

## 7. Colophon

### **MPAs: Recommendations.**

The Ocean Institute. December 2025.

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### **About the Ocean Institute**

The Ocean Institute represents the ocean and the voice of the ocean. The Ocean Institute was founded on the initiative of the VELUX FOUNDATION with the purpose to contribute to a healthy and clean ocean around Denmark, where the ocean is used sustainably with respect for animal and plant life.

The Ocean Institute contributes with analyses, proposes concrete measures and facilitates dialogue across the ocean's stakeholders, both politically, in business and in the general society – for the benefit of a marine environment under pressure.

The Ocean Institute is an independent, knowledge-based think tank and is founded as an association with members. The Copenhagen-based think tank acts independently of financial considerations and party-political interests. The Ocean Institute does not represent the interests of individual members, but members are involved and their perspectives are considered important for the qualification and development of The Ocean Institute's work. The Ocean Institute is financially independent of its members' contributions.

Members of the Ocean Institute have no decision-making authority in relation to the analyses, conclusions and recommendations from The Ocean Institute. In preparing the recommendations in this report, The Ocean Institute has involved its members and listened to their perspectives and comments. On this basis The Ocean Institute has prepared the recommendations and gathered a large number of members around the given recommendations.

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