

POLICY BRIEF

WWF Baltic Ecoregion Programme and
Coalition Clean Baltic - September 2023



Working
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Baltic Sea

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GETTING OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY EXPANSION RIGHT FOR NATURE IN THE BALTIC SEA

The EU plans to “massively speed up and scale up renewable energy” across the region with the goal of increasing energy security and independence as well as meeting global climate goals. In the Baltic Sea, **offshore renewable energy (ORE)** is considered a key component of EU energy security, climate neutrality and economic development.

The Marienborg Declaration was signed in August 2022, to seven-fold commitments for offshore wind capacity in the Baltic Sea to 19.6 GW by 2030.¹ Additionally, in January 2023, Baltic Sea member states further updated these goals, in a non-binding agreement, to preliminarily reach 22.5 GW by 2030, 34.6 GW by 2040 and 46.8 GW by 2050, following the provisions of the revised TEN-E Regulation.²

Though the expansion of ORE is needed and unavoidable, we must ensure that it is developed in line with principles of environmental and nature protection and restoration - to meet the 30x30 protection target and bend the curve on biodiversity loss.

MARINE PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

- The Baltic Sea is affected by a series of **human-induced stressors**.
- Offshore wind expansion will have **broad-scale spatial effects in the marine ecosystem**.
- Accelerated deployment of ORE **should not** increase human pressure on marine habitats and species **nor undermine efforts towards the 30% protection target by 2030**.
- Reaching ORE ambitions should reflect on the **EU Biodiversity Strategy** and the **Nature Restoration Law** with aim for **halting the resulting loss of biodiversity**.
- **Ecological effects of offshore wind must be fully understood**, and the entire mitigation hierarchy needs to be implemented.
- Marine spatial planning should further **assess cross-sectoral cumulative effects** of anthropogenic maritime activities and regulate them accordingly.

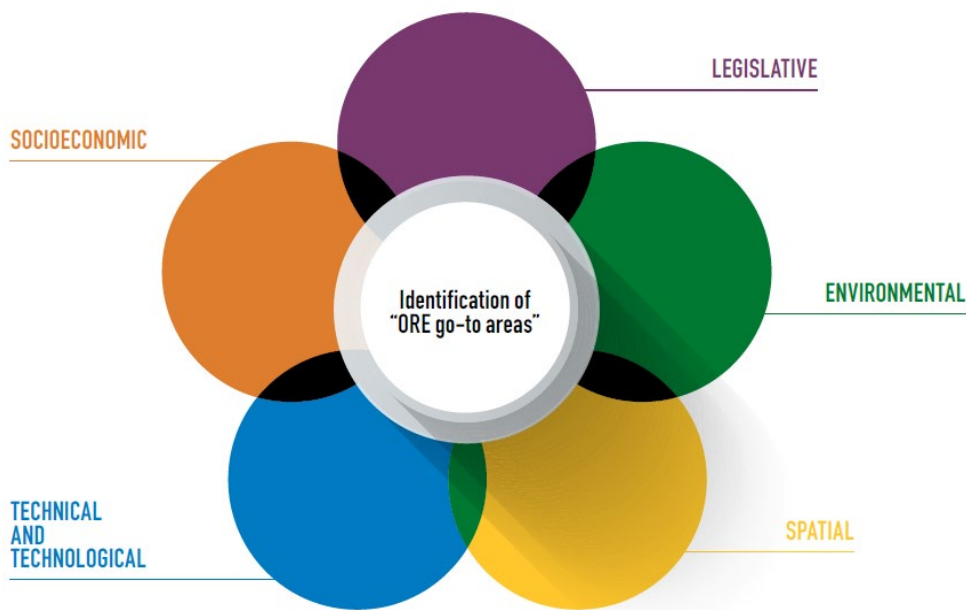
¹ The Baltic Sea Energy Security Summit, 2022. [The Marienborg Declaration](#).

² [Non-binding agreement BEMIP, 2023](#).



THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

When planning new ORE developments, five main areas should be considered according to our proposed framework:



Based on this framework, we have developed a decision tree and roadmap for identifying and strategically planning areas for offshore renewable energy, addressing these five areas of consideration (page 3 and 4).



Photo by Jörn Sieveneck on Unsplash

Five main considerations in detail

Legislative

International, EU, regional and national legislation on climate, ORE and nature, as well as policies, plans and agreements relevant to these three spheres within the Baltic Sea Region.

Environmental

Environmental impacts from ORE, protection of valuable and vulnerable species and ecosystems and consideration of Wildlife Sensitivity Maps and impact assessments (Strategic Environmental Assessment [SEA], Environmental Impact Assessment [EIA] and Appropriate Assessment [AA]), including cumulative and compounding impacts.

Spatial

Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) under the ecosystem-based approach and the precautionary principle, focused on goals and principles applicable to the Baltic Sea region and the specific national plans for site selection, legal considerations and transboundary opportunities.

Technical and technological

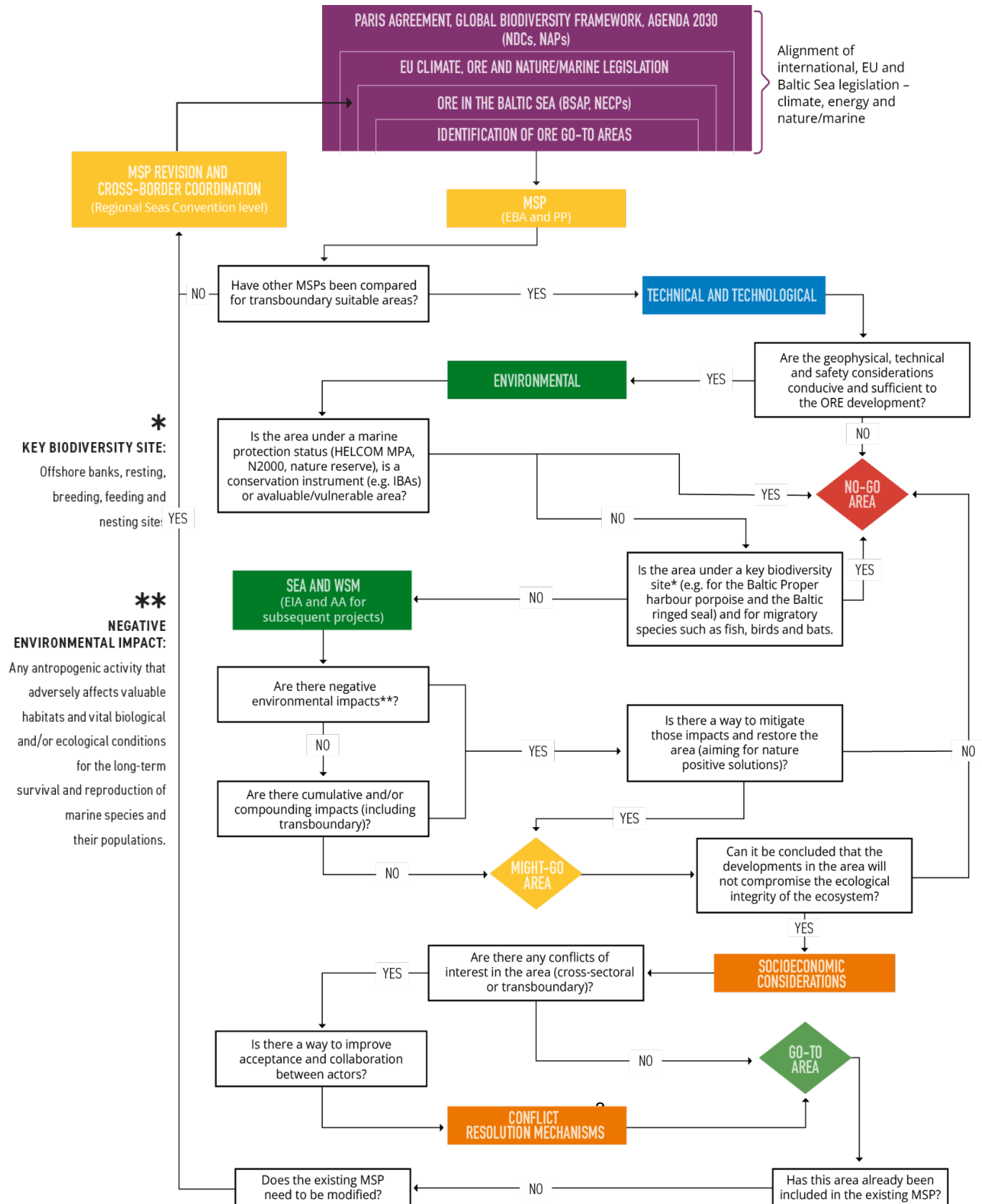
Technical aspects for identification of areas, such as storage, grid connections, and cables. Moreover, instruments and tools that support the planning process.

Socioeconomic

Transboundary and cross-sectoral cooperation, conflicts of interest, transparency, stakeholder engagement, risks of overriding public interest and just transition to a renewable energy job market.

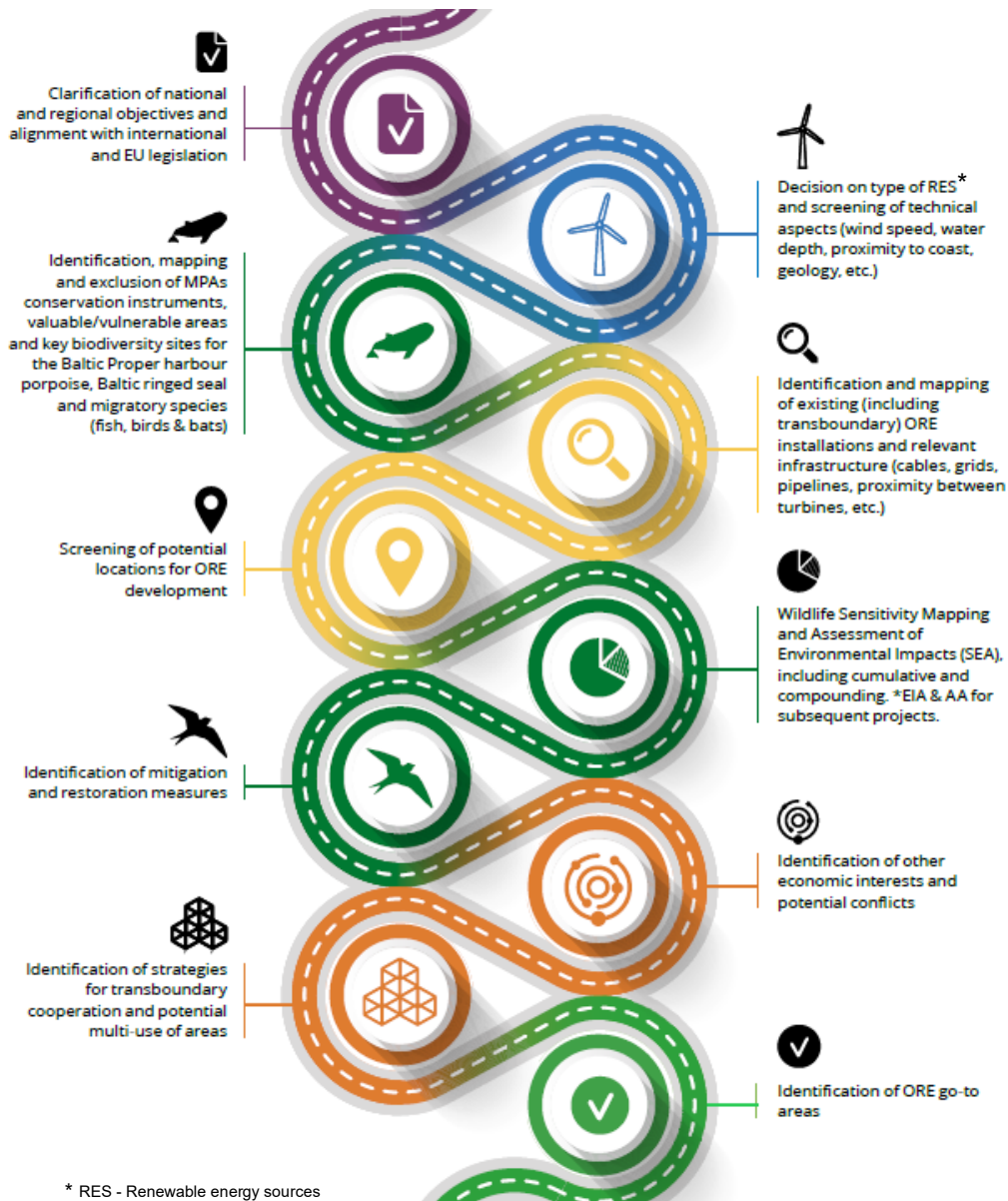


DECISION TREE FOR IDENTIFYING AREAS FOR ORE





A ROADMAP FOR PLANNING AREAS FOR OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY



OUR POSITION

The climate crisis cannot be solved without solving the biodiversity crisis.

Whilst a rapid acceleration of ORE is needed to step out of the fossil-fuel energy crisis, this cannot come at the expense of nature. If contributing to meet climate commitments to achieve neutrality are ultimate goals for the ORE industry and the EU, acknowledgement and consideration of the **vital role that healthy oceans and MPAs have for carbon sequestration and biodiversity** must take place in fighting the climate crisis.

We do not support the acceleration of areas or permitting processes without carrying out **site-specific Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)**, especially, considering the current lack of data and science gaps related to potential **on-site and cumulative impacts** into already heavily pressured ecosystems in the Baltic Sea.

Acceleration and faster permitting processes should be achieved by **better spatial planning and more administrative capacity** in permitting authorities, not by skipping important rules on nature protection and public participation.

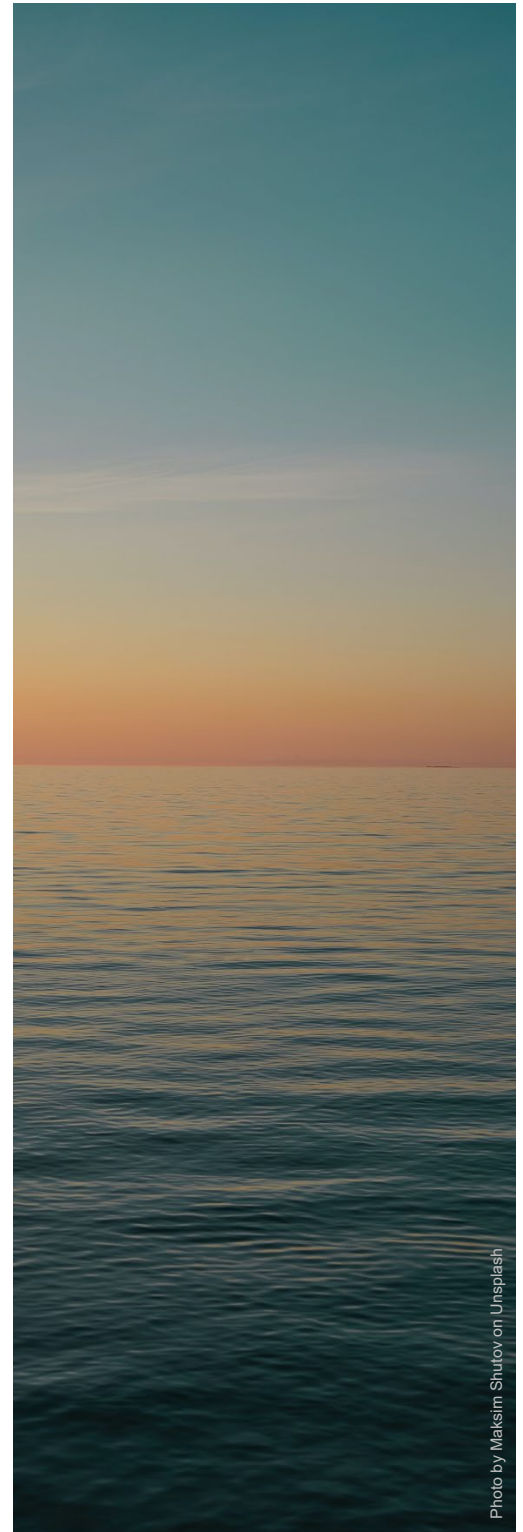
Deployment **should not take place in marine protected areas** (e.g., Natura 2000 areas) and the acceleration of restoring nature should be supported - a highly needed and urgent task to be achieved by 2030.



KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PLANNING OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY IN THE BALTIC SEA FROM WWF AND CCB

This policy brief outlines key WWF BEP and CCB policy recommendations:

1. **HELCOM and Contracting Parties to improve centralised digital MSP portals** (both regional and national) to standardise data collection, enhance harmonisation and offer open access to data.
2. **Baltic Sea member states** must ensure efficient **transboundary cooperation and planning** to reduce spatial demand, environmental effects and funding needs, including properly allocated common/hybrid projects.
3. **Work together across industry to plan and develop projects with nature in mind**, regarding existing maritime laws and regulatory EU and Baltic Sea frameworks to support and deliver targets and goals of the MSFD and HELCOM BSAP.
4. **Industry actors and/or Baltic Sea member states should form a dedicated Baltic marine stakeholder platform hub** to offer the opportunity of sharing challenges and finding potential synergies across countries and sectors.
5. **Baltic Sea member states to establish permitting processes where funds** for monitoring and evaluation of environmental impacts, including cumulative and compounding effects, **are mandatory**.
6. All ORE projects to have **decommissioning plans** and funds set aside for it.
7. Baltic Sea member states to **enforce the polluter-pays principle** for prevention of and caused environmental damage.
8. Baltic Sea member states to **eliminate or reform harmful energy subsidies**, especially those incentivizing fossil fuels.





FINAL REMARKS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The ORE sector should aim to become nature-positive* by 2030, contributing to the EU to take “a leading position in the world in addressing the global biodiversity crisis”, an ambition already stated in the EU Biodiversity Strategy.³

The expansion of offshore renewable energy is unavoidable. EU Member States, ORE industry, sectors involved, and consumers must be aware and acknowledge that this expansion comes with both positive and negative implications to marine biodiversity and human activities, which depend on healthy marine ecosystems. We need to ensure that the development of ORE is compatible with nature and that already established energy systems are efficiently used.

Identifying adequate areas for ORE among other maritime activities and implementing strategies that allow the recovery and viability of marine ecosystems are crucial steps that will determine the pathway to a sustainable use of and coexistence with nature.

Finally, participation across sectors, instead of isolated actions, will allow us to work together towards long-term sustainable development of the region and to build environmentally conscious solutions for the future, to ultimately achieve a Good Environmental Status in the Baltic Sea.

* **Nature-positive**: is defined as halting and reversing nature loss, measured from 2020 levels, by restoring and increasing the health, abundance, diversity, and resilience of species, populations, and ecosystems; so that by 2030, nature is visibly and measurably on the path of recovery.^{4,5}

For more information

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³ European Commission, 2020. Bringing nature back into our lives. [EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy](#).

⁴ Cambridge University, 2023. [Nature-positive](#).

⁵ WWF, 2020. [Nature-positive by 2030](#).



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