

Under pressures: Baltic Sea MPAs, expectations, reality and potential

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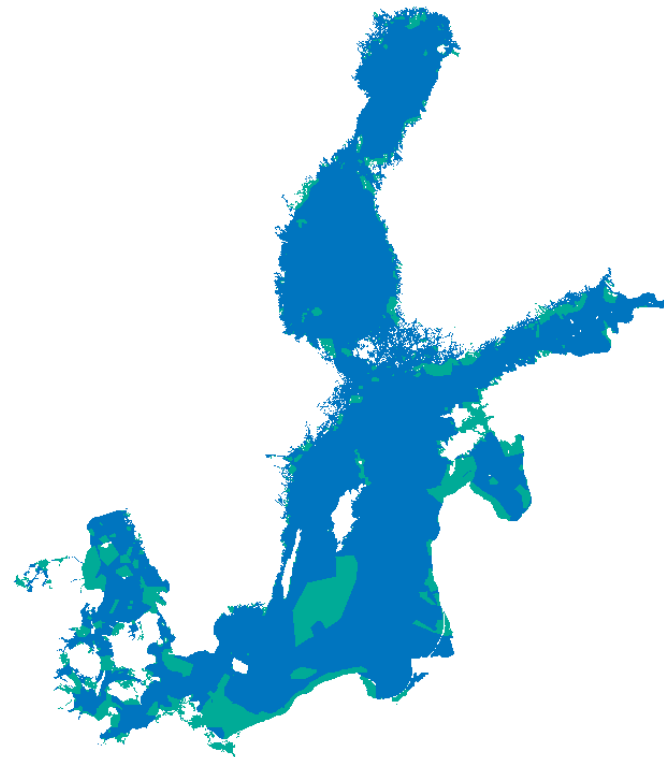


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The Baltic Sea MPA network

- 2640 MPAs, with designations across 9 countries
- First region in the world to reach the global 10% target.
- As of November 2025, the Baltic MPA network covers approximately 20.9% of the Baltic Sea, of which 18.4% is marine area (based on reported data).
- Included in this are 178 HELCOM MPAs (i.e. part of a recognised transboundary MPA network), amounting to about 13.2% of the Baltic Sea.





Sounds great! Problem solved!

Or is it?



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Looking beneath the surface: the reality facing Baltic Sea protection



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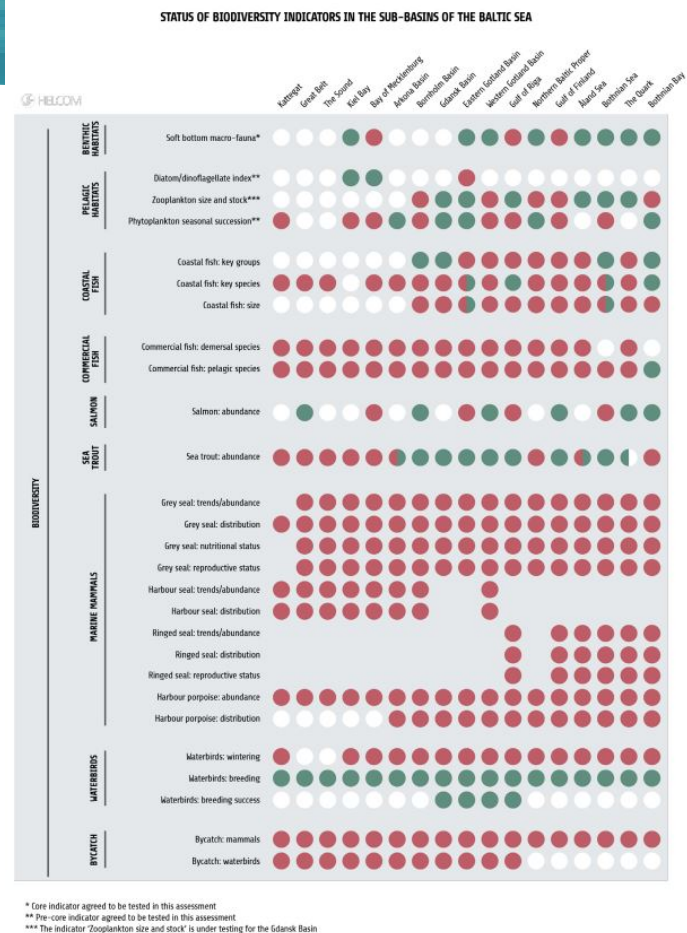


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Untangling the net of cause and effect – biodiversity

Does it mean protection doesn't actually work?



Trying to figure it out...

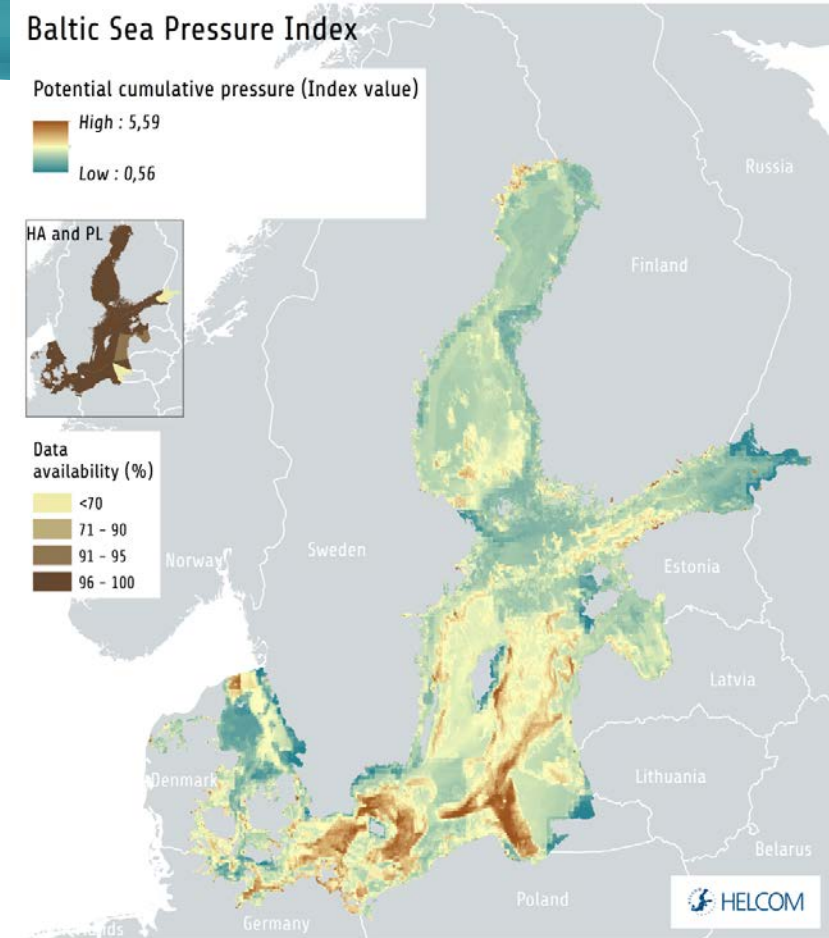
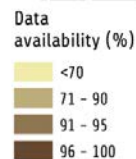
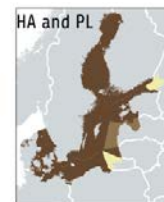


What did the countries realise?

- On paper the protection situation looks good BUT:
- Incomplete knowledge base for decision making, planning and designation.
- Gaps in governance.
- Insufficient use of, and barriers to, adaptive management.
- It took 30 years to get where we are, now we need 1/3 more it in 5 years.
- But it isn't about getting to 30%, it's about getting there in a way that actually provides the biodiversity benefits.

Baltic Sea Pressure Index

Potential cumulative pressure (Index value)



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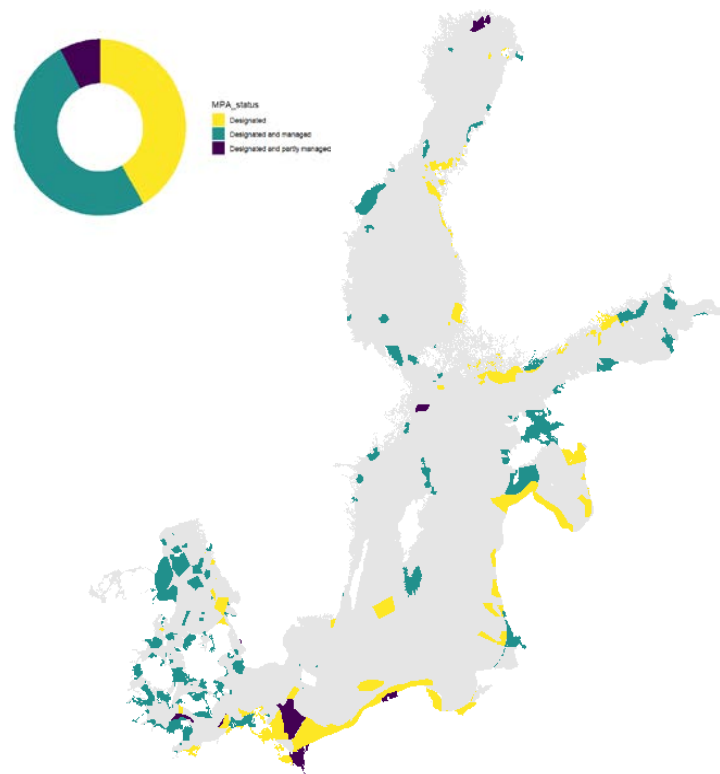


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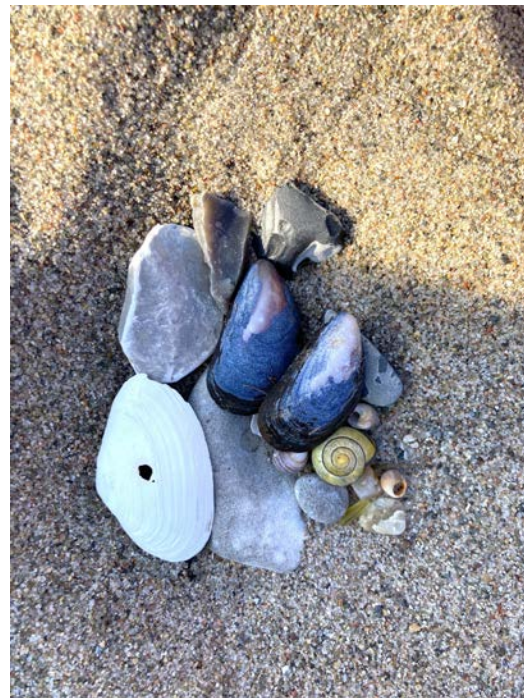
Management across Baltic Sea MPAs

- **Single site management:** One site, one plan.
- Three categories of **multi-management plans:**
 - One site, multiple plans.
 - One plan, multiple different domains that are covered.
 - One plan, multiple sites.



Currently there is no common approach in the Baltic Sea e.g. on:

- What species and habitats we should be protecting?
- How to expand the idea of what to protect to protect ecosystem function and enhance resilience?
- Moving from single site to a network level approach, where if we cooperate everyone wins.
- Sharing information on protection efforts and what we are trying to protect and from what?
- Understanding of the protection policy and legislative landscape of the region.



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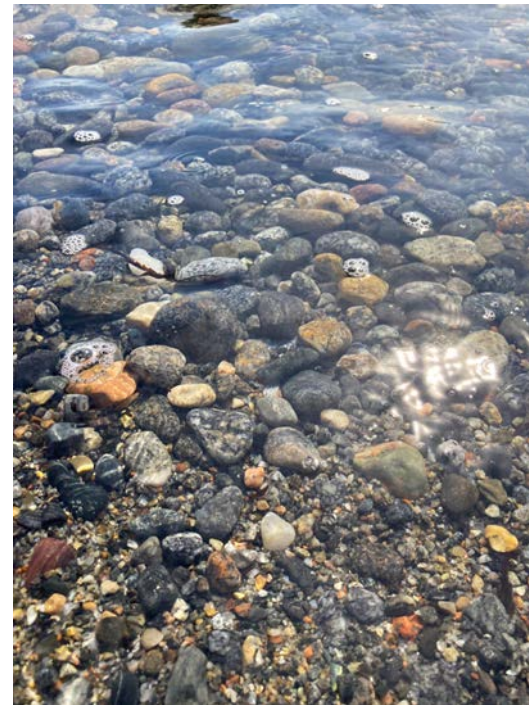


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Currently there is no up to date Baltic Sea wide information on:

- What species and habitats we likely have where, beyond a few key species?
- What do our communities look like?
- What areas provide what ecological function?
- What areas provide what ecosystem services?
- What pressures are likely to impact what areas, what activity contributes to it and how much?
- How representative the MPA network is?
- How adequate the MPA network is?
- How connected different sites in the network are with regards to different species?
- How resilient the network is to changes?
- How climate change might change these things over time?



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What have we learned so far?

INFORMATION ON, AND FOR, MANAGEMENT

- The availability of data required is not consistent across the Baltic region.
- Many times we don't actually know what is under the surface.
- Areas do not recognise, or recognise limited, marine protected features.
- Areas have few, or no measures for the marine environment.
- There is limited information on the existence and level of enforcement.
- Monitoring is insufficient or entirely lacking.

DIFFERENT NATIONAL APPROACHES TOWARDS MANAGEMENT

- Primarily due to differences in regulatory frameworks, institutional approaches, and the types of MPAs recognised.

ROLE AND VALUE OF MANAGEMENT PLANS

- Management Plans, though a very important, are only one part of the management puzzle. They have the potential to reflect the short, medium and long term implementation of measures in an MPA holistically .

INTERACTION WITH MANAGERS

- Crucial to (1) understand management scales, (2) highlight local knowledge of managers, and (3) establish contact and potential cooperation with other areas/managers.



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Seeing the bigger picture: understanding the potential of Baltic Sea protection



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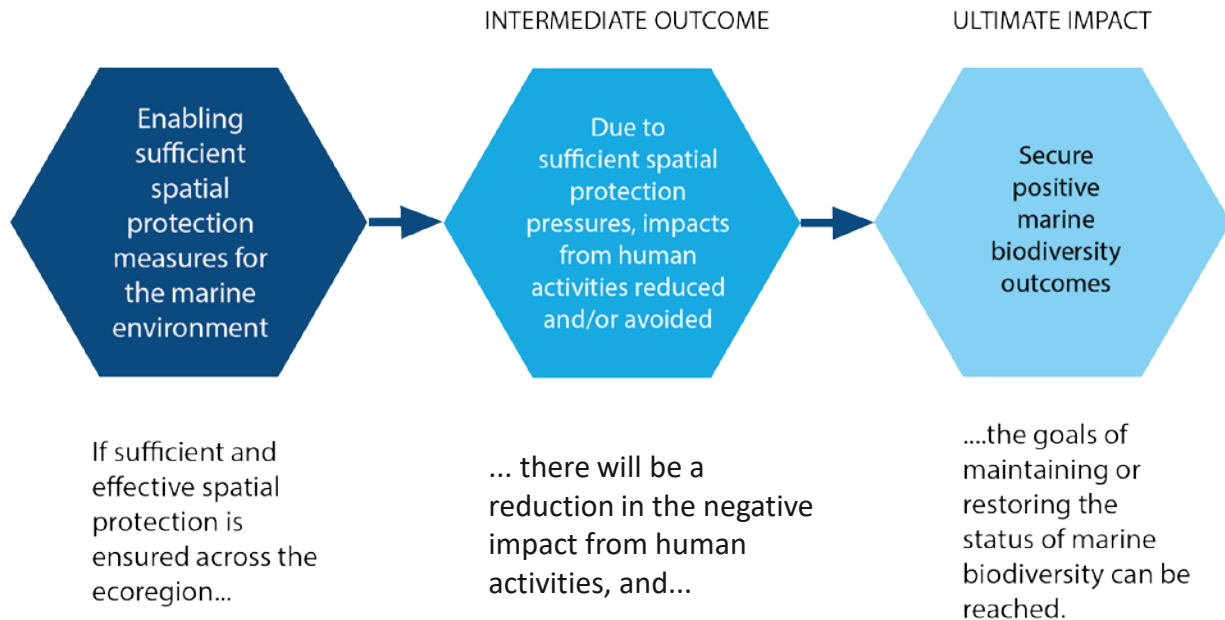
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What should protection actually do?

What do we want to achieve?

Rationale for theory of change...



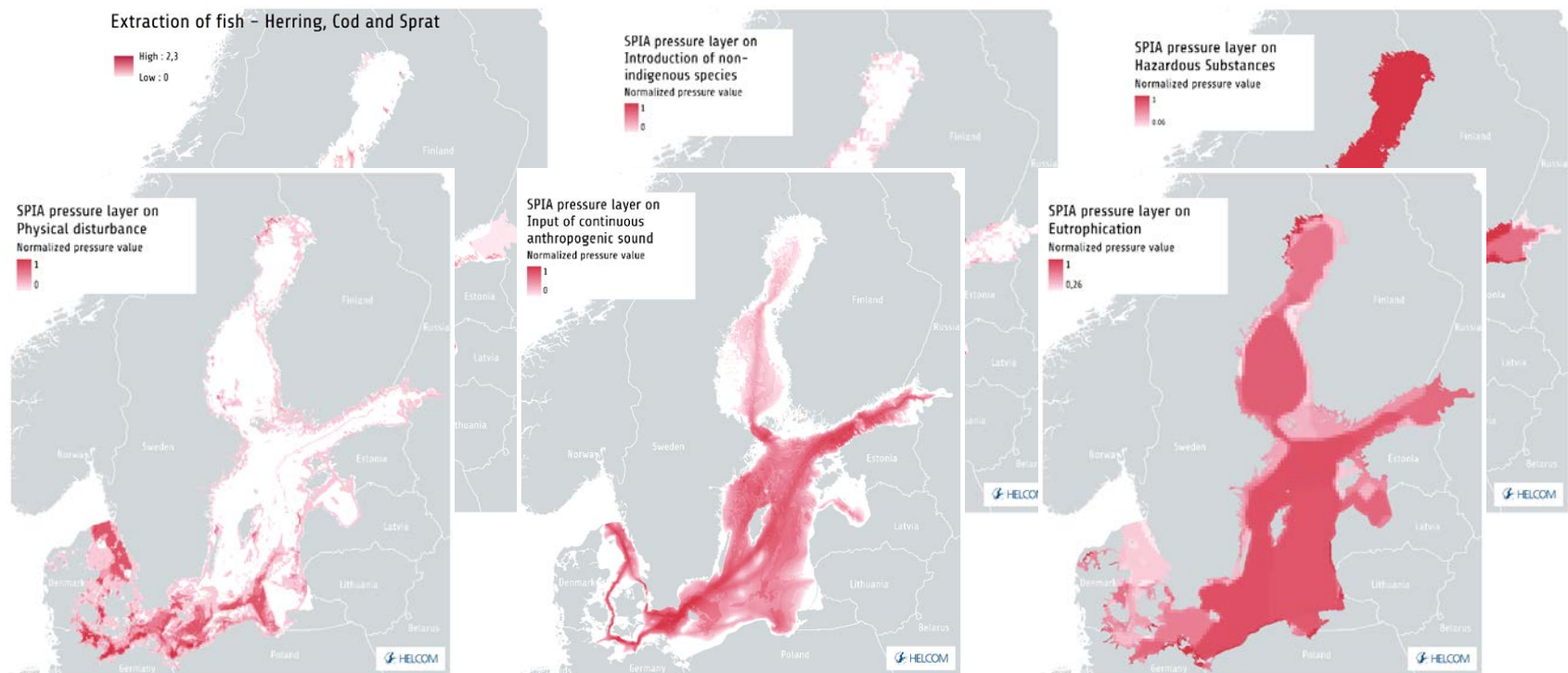
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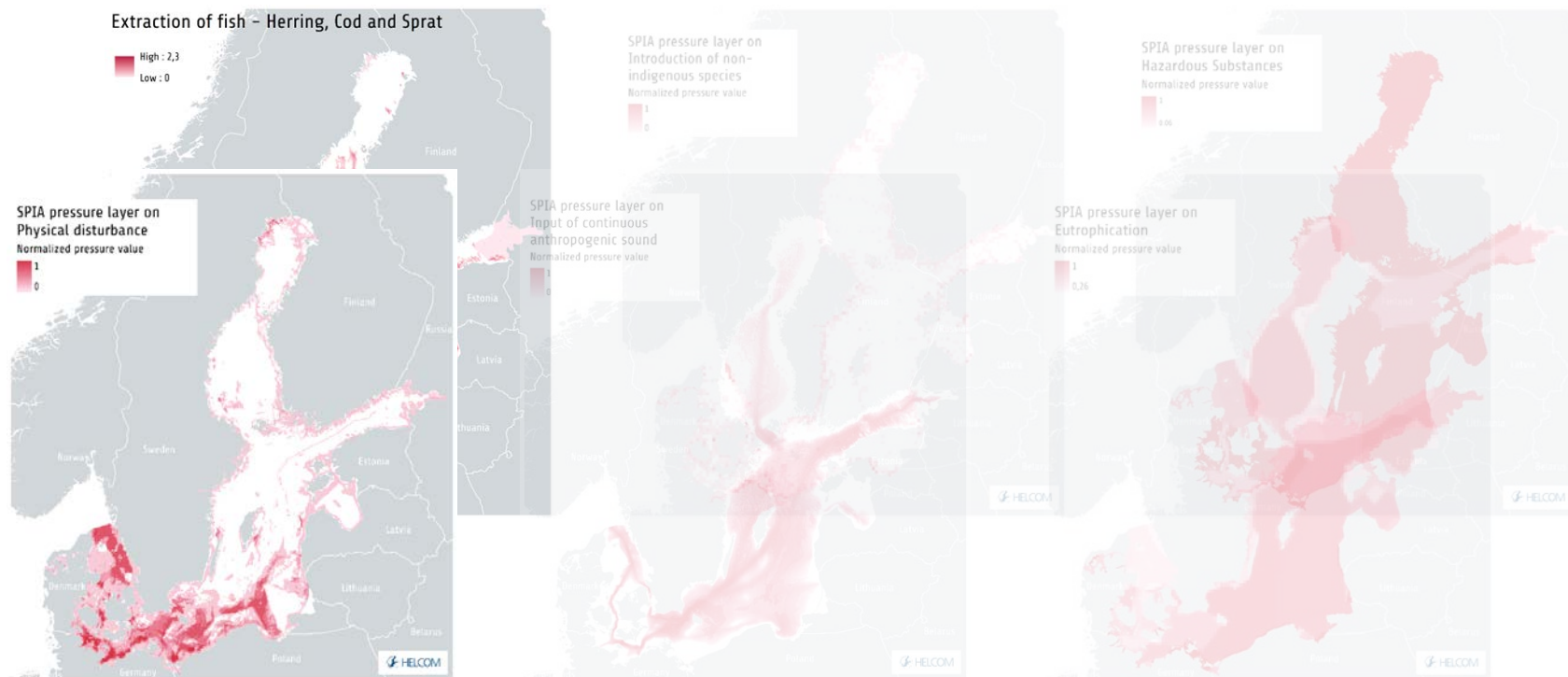
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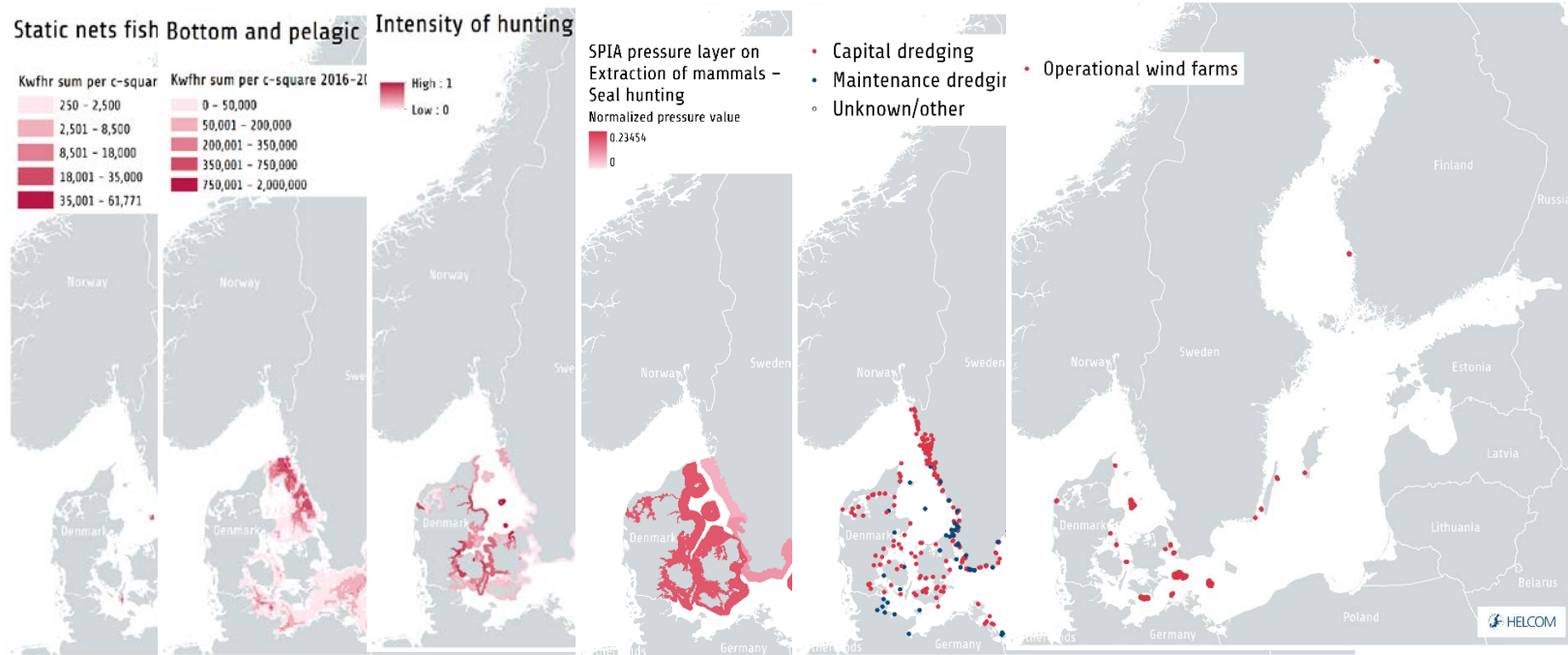
What can protection actually do?



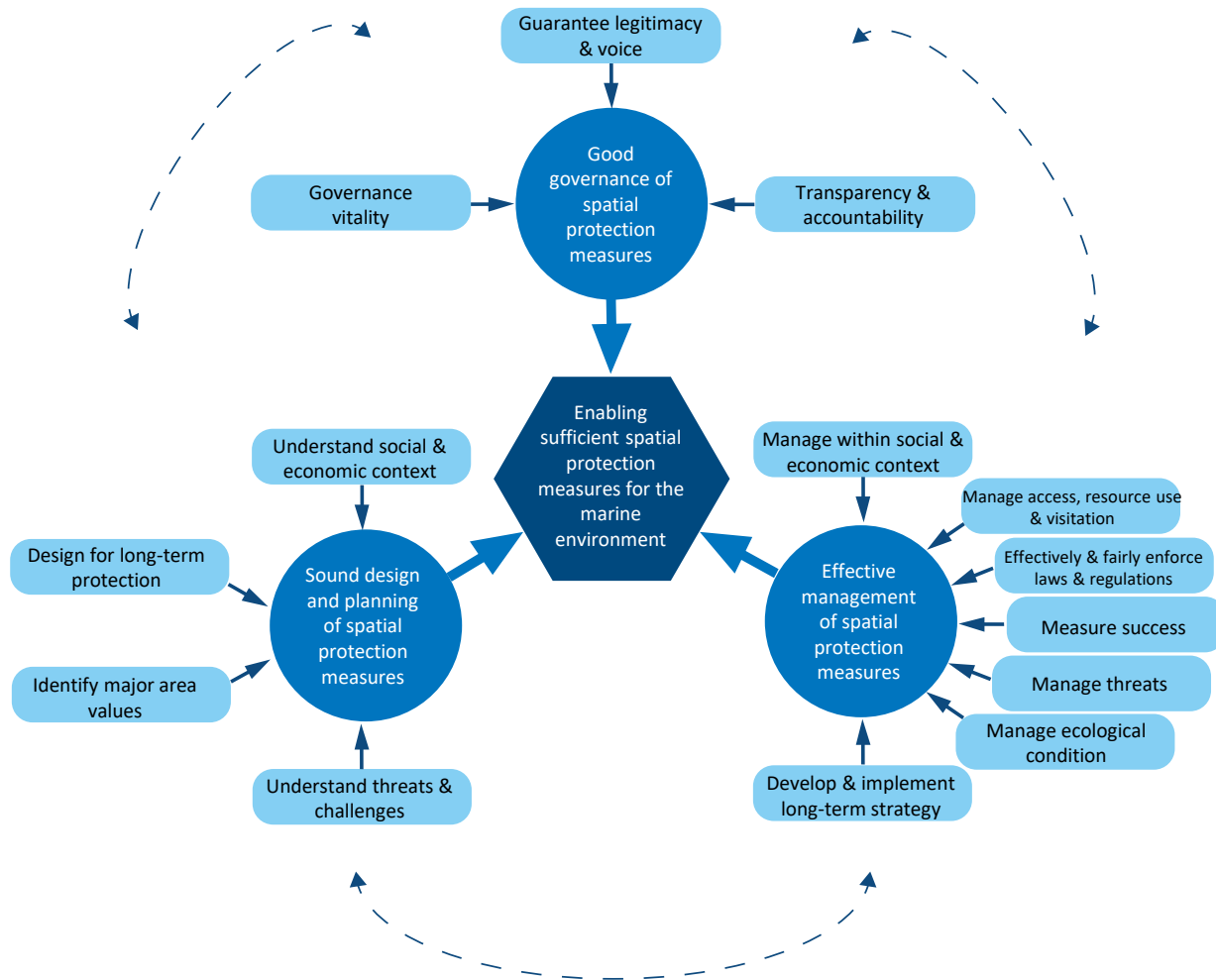
What can protection actually do?



Why can protection tackle some problems but not others?



How do we realize the potential?



How do we realize the potential?

Enabling sufficient spatial protection measures for the marine environment

What to protect and **why**?

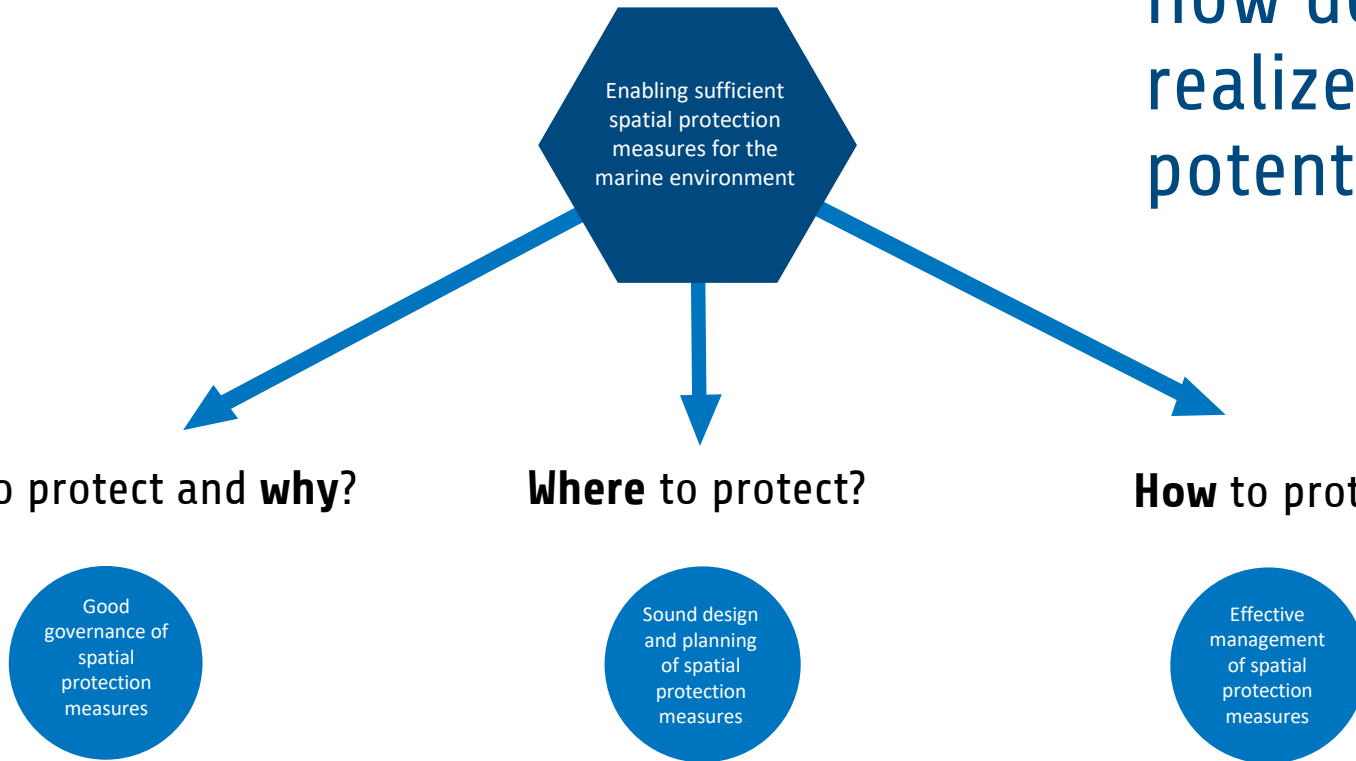
Good governance of spatial protection measures

Where to protect?

Sound design and planning of spatial protection measures

How to protect?

Effective management of spatial protection measures



Boosting the system: realising the potential of Baltic Sea protection, now and in the future



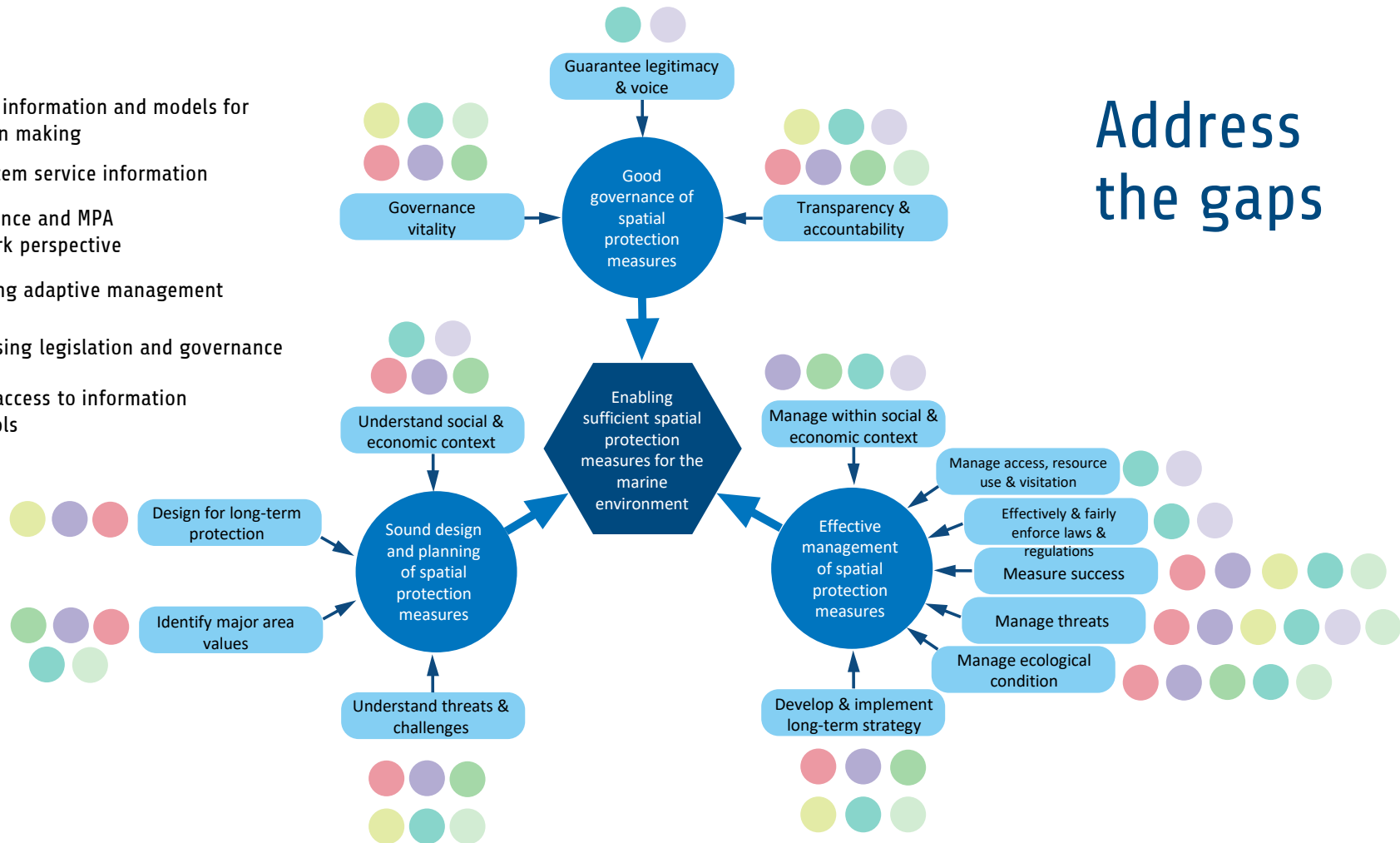
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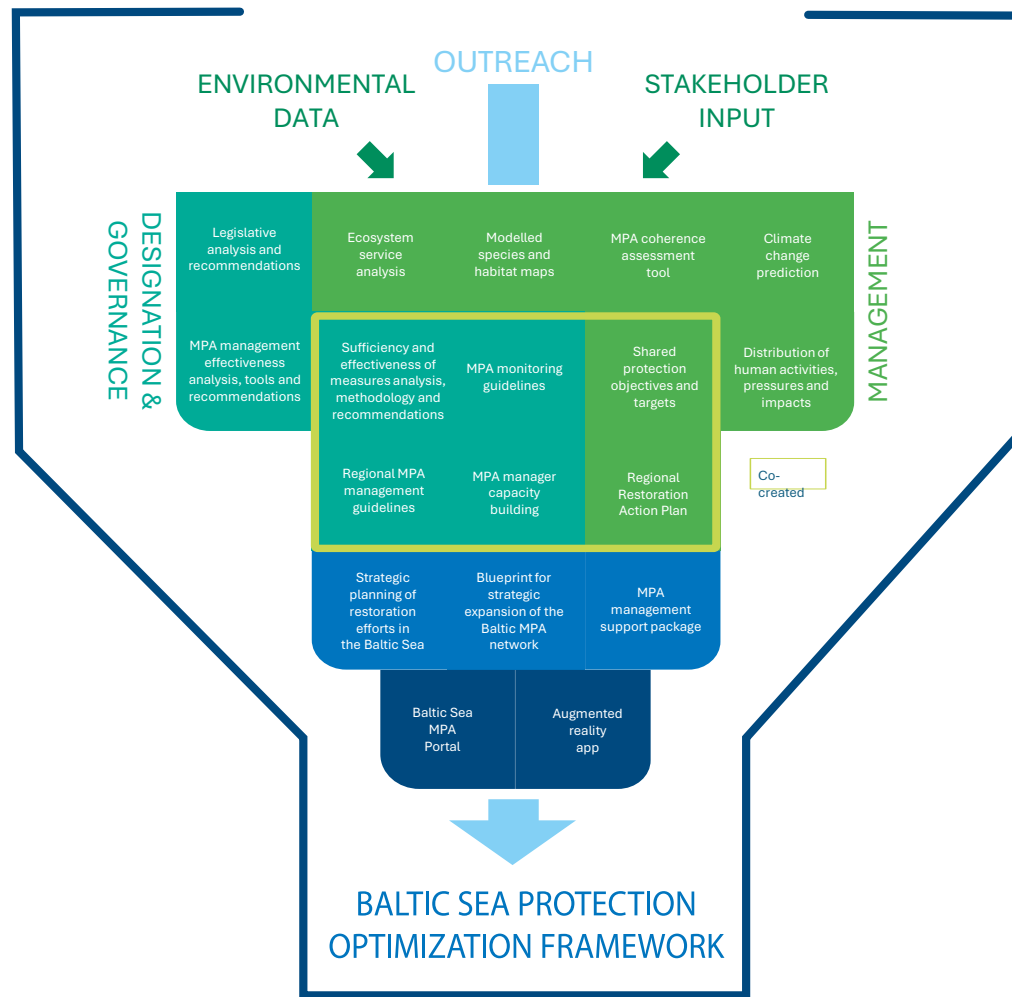


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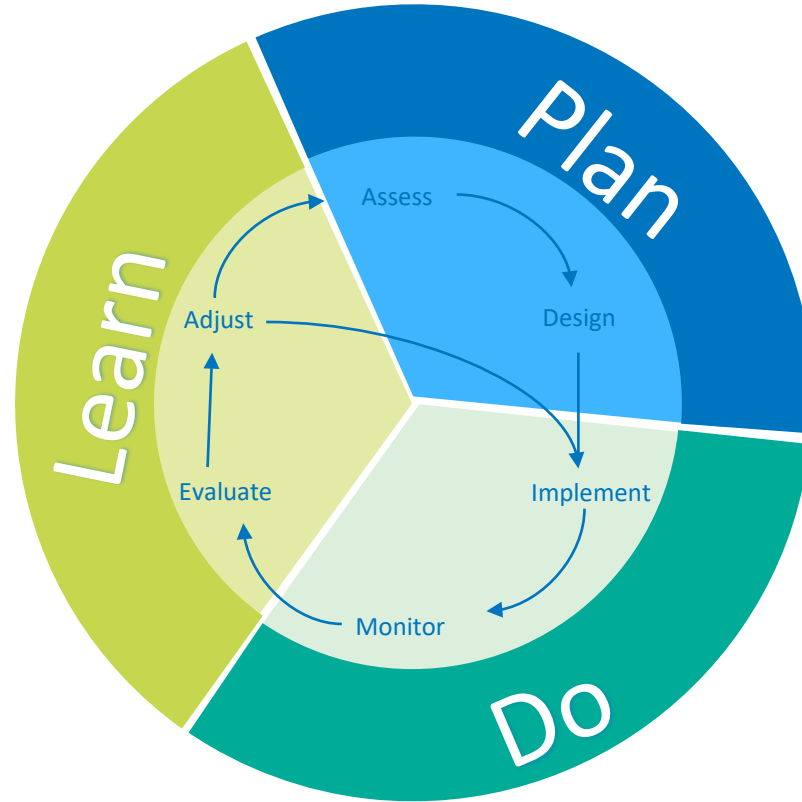


- Data
- Spatial information and models for decision making
- Ecosystem service information
- Coherence and MPA network perspective
- Ensuring adaptive management
- Addressing legislation and governance
- Public access to information and tools





The world isn't
static: using
adaptive
approaches



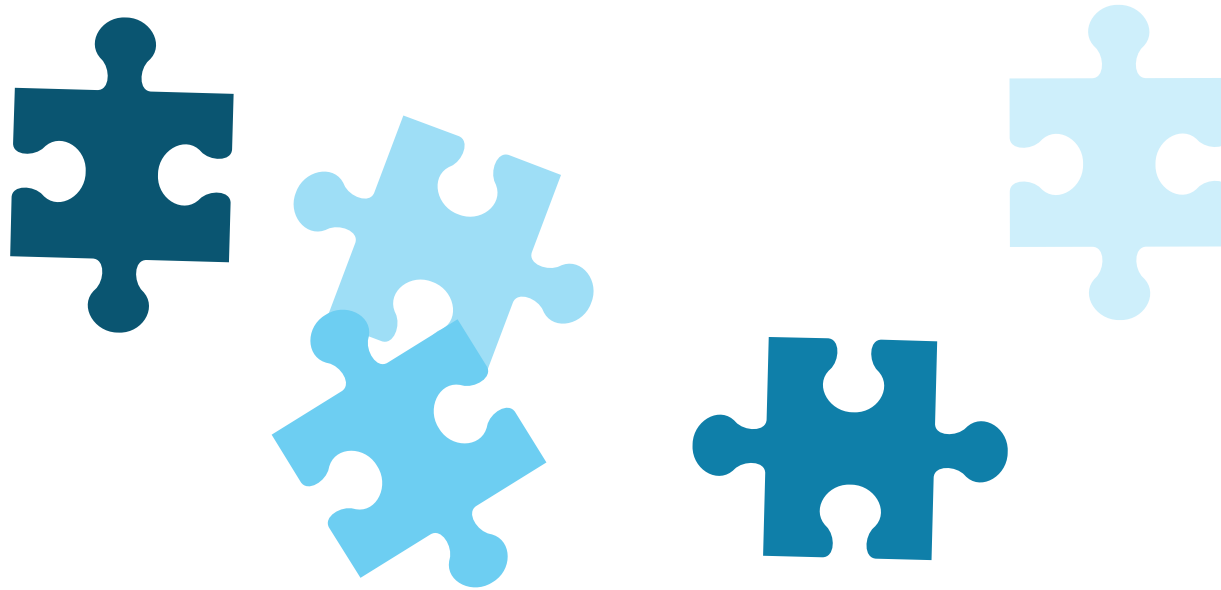
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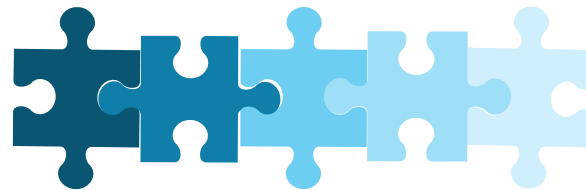


Pieces in a puzzle: why we need to think beyond sites and individual species



Pieces in a puzzle: why we need to think beyond sites and individual species

- Ecological relevance.
- Sites support each other.
- Urgency and transformative change.
- Because the current approach isn't working...



But it could work!



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