

LIFE IP INTEMARES

Baseline and evaluation of the impacts on marine biodiversity conservation of the actions of the LIFE project 15 IPE ES012

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Executive Summary



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The LIFE IP INTEMARES project, coordinated by the Biodiversity Foundation of the Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge, aims to achieve effective management of the marine spaces of the Natura 2000 Network, through science and the active participation of stakeholders.

Participating partners are the Directorate-General for Biodiversity, Forests and Desertification of the ministry itself, the IEO, CEPESCA, SEO / BirdLife and WWF-Spain. It receives financial support from the European Union's LIFE program, among other sources of funding.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Objectives and methodology:

The initial objective of the study is to evaluate the impact of the 175 marine projects financed by the Biodiversity Foundation during the period 2011-2018 in the context of the LIFE IP INTEMARES project, and to assess the significance of these impacts with regards to the application of European Directives, to Spanish legislation on marine protection, and to the main international conventions related to marine conservation.

The most relevant national and international laws and agreements were selected, including those at a programmatic level, giving a total of 26 commitments. To analyse the contribution of the 175 projects, it was agreed to use 3 independent benchmarks: the objectives of INTEMARES would be compared and contrasted with the 11 descriptors of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (EU Member States), but also at a national level with the 8 goals and 23 objectives of the Spanish Strategic Plan on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity, which in certain cases is adapted to the marine environment and its public domain characteristics. The option of adopting the Prioritised Action Framework for the Natura 2000 Network as a benchmark was rejected due to its operational nature and transversal approach to meeting international objectives. In some cases, the analysis has been divided up into periods (2011-2014 and 2015-2018), by calls for proposals (CA and Pleamar), and by complementary INTEMARES projects (period 2017-2018).

2. Results

Among the 26 commitments that were analysed, a higher level of convergence was found between INTEMARES and other European ones, the Prioritised Action Framework for the Natura 2000 Network 2014-2020, and the Habitats and Birds Directives; followed by the Aichi Targets to 2020 of the Biodiversity Convention, and by the Spanish Strategic Plan on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity. The convergence of objectives is less (approx. 50%) with other commitments related to the Barcelona Convention, OSPAR, or the FAO.

The Biodiversity Foundation's marine projects are strongly aligned with the EU Marine Strategies pursuit of "Good Environmental Status by 2020". All the descriptors of the Member States have been looked at, and on average each project addresses 2.2 descriptors. Among the 11 descriptors, the scope of "1. Biodiversity" (73%), "6. Funds" (33%) and "3. Species of commercial interest" (31%) stand out, in this latter case due to the support from the Pleamar calls for proposals. Altogether, the 5 European descriptors dealing with some form of contamination are also addressed by half of the projects.

Regarding the 23 objectives and 64 actions of marine application within the Spanish Strategic Plan on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity, more focus has been put on projects with objectives relating to research and inventory (86%), as well as governance (62%) and all forms of raising awareness (77%). There is less emphasis given to those actions that are related to Marine Reserves of Fishing Interest (14%), marine spatial planning (12%), the development of the Network of Marine Protected Areas in Spain (RAMPE (9%), and everything related to monitoring and control (5%), sustainable financing of protected areas (1%), and development cooperation (1%).

Altogether, the 175 projects show a high level of coherence with the INTEMARES objectives, which are addressed evenly over both periods. The dominant theme, 2 out of 3 projects, has been the conservation of habitats and species, but there is a certain cross over in the different approaches of the projects, addressing on average 3 objectives per project for the period 2011-2014 of what later became INTEMARES, and 4 objectives per project during the period 2015-2018.

The beneficiaries reveal an open and promising approach, specialized NGOs (50%), followed by universities / public research centres, and producer associations (particularly fishermen's associations).

The focus given to the 5 marine demarcations is proportional to their surface area, for instance, the SPAMI of the Barcelona Convention receiving twice that of those of OSPAR.

Two out of three projects deal with Marine Natura 2000 sites and the same high proportion occurs in species research. Among the fauna groups, the interest given to cetaceans and sea turtles stands out, followed by that given to birds. In the second period (2015-2018) the number of projects focusing on the conservation of emblematic species (cetaceans, turtles, sharks) dropped to a third. Conversely, there has been an increase in the focus on more transversal objectives such as participation (+ 100%), and the main impacts on, and monitoring of, environmental conditions and status, (+ 70%).

Regarding the calls for proposals, Pleamar, in addition to increasing the emphasis on sustainable fishing, has an important influence on innovation and governance (doubling the participation of the private sector, fishing sector and local administrations). In the same way, 75% of the results on plastics, and on climate change, were obtained from only 10% of the projects, projects that were financed through those specific calls for proposals.

Following the terms of reference, a "baseline for the LIFE IP INTEMARES project" was developed, analyzing the rate of compliance with the binding and most prominent commitments at international, European and national levels, as well as at a regional sea level. Based on a breakdown of the main topics (23) that make up each of these commitments, their compliance is close to 50% at a national level and 60% at an international level. This analysis is repeated with other parameters, the 10 evaluation criteria most widely used internationally: the results are excellent in terms of relevance, project demand, design, leadership, and work partnerships. They are noteworthy in terms of efficiency, and acceptable in terms of impact and visibility. Finally, they are weak with regards to transference and sustainability.

3. Discussion

Both INTEMARES and INDEMARES were designed to respond to the marine conservation priorities that Spain adopted in response to European and global policies. The degree of coincidence of objectives and actions is very high, especially with regards to the two main ones, the Aichi goals of the CBD, and the PAF Natura 2000 (2014-2020), where the design of the INTEMARES project has an almost comprehensive and matching response.

The quantitative goal of Aichi (10% coverage target) was achieved through INDEMARES, almost doubling this figure with a network of spaces that, based on the Habitats Directive, is ecologically representative. Spain is one of the few countries that has exceeded the CBD's coverage threshold commitment, and in the Mediterranean, together with France, the only country whose network of spaces is representative of the diversity of marine habitats.

The flip side is, on the one hand, the *effective management* required by Aichi, and on the other, the 6 year margin that Europe has given to develop management plans for the new N2000 sites; a challenge in Spain, where two out of every three marine protected areas still lack such a management plan and the means to implement it.

The report breaks down the achievements, limitations and opportunities of the marine projects of the Biodiversity Foundation that are complementary to INTEMARES, in summary:

Among the achievements

- The strong alignment with the search for "Good Environmental Status in 2020" of the EU Marine Strategies.
- Addressing, in different measures, all the Objectives of the Spanish Strategic Plan on Heritage and Biodiversity.
- Complementary projects that achieve the desired comprehensiveness via the healthy balance between subject matter and beneficiaries, through the transversal nature of the projects, as well as receiving the financial support of other more sectoral European funds (whose contribution of 40% is an achievement in itself).
- The position of the Biodiversity Foundation and INTEMARES as the main source of funding in Spain for all sectors of marine conservation; and its successful approach to the fisheries sector, helping to share objectives and build trust between this sector, academia, and the conservation sector.
- Despite the complexity of its ambitious mission, INTEMARES is internationally recognized as a case study and as an example of governance and coordinated management in the Natura 2000 marine sites.

The limitations can be summarised in three areas:

- Applicability of the results: most of the projects are concerned with the initial phase of understanding the problem, but few have taken the step towards implementation, even in some of the basic questions and central objectives of INTEMARES, such as zoning and planning, which amount to 20 % of the worst addressed objectives. This is due, among other factors, to the general knowledge gap in relation to marine ecology, to the fragmentation of projects (becoming too small), as well as to the scarcity of transference. Many projects make management proposals (best practices, indicators, monitoring protocols, establishing baselines) without developing them or sharing them with the managers or with the institutions that should apply them.
- Thematic gaps: the scant level of attention paid to the actions of the Spanish Strategic Plan on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity that are related to marine spatial planning (12%), the development of the Network of Marine Protected Areas in Spain (RAMPE) (9%), everything related to surveillance and monitoring (5%) and to sustainable financing (1%). Nor has it been possible to define a governance framework between institutions and stakeholders. Other relevant issues, such as new and efficient co-management practices, sport fishing, the exchange of experiences or networking, have barely been addressed in 1% of the projects.

- Sustainability: factors such as the integration in other sectors (except in the case of Pleamar), a review of incentives, alternative financing, and transference, are among the least addressed elements.
- However, the overall results should be considered satisfactory, given the breadth and complexity involved in moving towards an effective management of marine protected areas. The consolidation of these spaces goes through three phases: implementation, operation, and sustainability. The Biodiversity Foundation's marine projects follow this pattern, with the greatest effort going into the implementation phase and the least in the sustainability phase. During the years 2011-2018 this trend saw something of a reversal, although in 2018 there was still a long way to go to achieve the target of consolidated effective management.

4. Conclusions

The relevance and design of INTEMARES meets national and international priorities, with its objectives and priorities being fully and opportunely aligned. It has managed to achieve promising results in previously unproductive or undeveloped areas. It has also been successful in integrating European funds for these purposes.

The previous cycle, INDEMARES, had spectacular efficiency and effectiveness, but the two phases are not comparable. The first one consolidated its results in a permanent way with the Royal Decrees that established the Natura 2000 marine sites. A specific and relatively entrenched achievement that constitutes the hardware of marine conservation in Spain. INTEMARES, however, has the difficult mission of providing these sites with management plans and governance models that will lead to efficient and sustainable management, an almost invisible software that will require more years to achieve.

The INTEMARES process is just beginning and whilst assessing it one should take into account its ambitious objectives and long-term vision. The effective management of the Marine Natura 2000 Network represents a formidable challenge within the national context, with the management of these spaces characterized by limited plans, resources and financing. It is also characterized by the fragmentation of responsibilities and the lack of a dedicated administration, with an appropriate mandate, that would guarantee the necessary coordination between the different levels of government and the stakeholders. Furthermore, outside the borders of the protected areas, the understanding of their value is very limited.

These difficulties contrast with the documented evidence on the importance of marine conservation, fully recognised at an international level. Concepts such as the ecosystem approach, marine spatial planning, integrated marine governance, and sustainable fisheries are the objectives of the main multilateral initiatives.

In this context, marine protected areas are, by acquired right, the only ones where such widespread concepts are actually carried out. They have a great potential for achieving acceptance within a society that shows growing concerns about pollution, plastics, global warming, overfishing, and threats to the most emblematic marine fauna. Sectors such as fisheries and tourism are also seeing the value of these protected areas as an investment for their economic activities. There are therefore significant opportunities for the Marine Natura 2000 Network pending a much larger-scale communication campaign.

5. Recommendations

We believe that any action that fulfils the objectives of INTEMARES will translate into better compliance with international agreements, given the strong alignment between the two; Also, that INTEMARES and complementary projects can contribute to the development of the network of marine protected areas in Spain, given its ability to influence, from the bottom up, the development of a national system of marine protected areas.

In general terms, the recommendations have been grouped into three related areas:

- Build on what has already been done: recover the available information from the Biodiversity Foundation and other administrations- synthesize and transfer results, form the embryo of a network. Three areas that could be suitable for cases studies are: selective fishing gear, good practices, and in some cases, monitoring records and protocols.
- Work on priorities that have received the least amount of coverage: firstly, the planning of the spaces, this would cause a surge of participatory projects that would require little additional information to achieve their objectives; pilot cases where a governance structure and essential management resources are defined, based on a distribution of tasks and responsibilities.
- Ideas for future projects: advancing towards effective management, promoting the declaration of some core areas, and moving forward with essential tools such as remote surveillance, harmonized monitoring systems, communication on a larger scale, and sustainable funding alternatives

These types of initiatives do not just happen; it is necessary to trigger them through an active search, finding the best people possible to implement the project, or via specific calls for proposals focused on the concept of a transition towards sustainability and incorporating transfer criteria.