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Finland's comments on the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan and the related Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Ministry of the Environment received notification from the Ministry of the Environment of Estonia concerning the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan (MPS) on 26 November 2018. The Ministry of the Environment replied on 20 December that Finland wishes to participate in the planning procedure for the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan and the related Strategic Environmental Assessment, in accordance with Article 10 of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the UN/ECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. On 20 May, the Ministry of the Environment received a further notification concerning the first Draft of the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan and a description of its environmental impacts. On 10 July 2019, the Ministry of the Environment sent Finland's comments on the MPS documents.

On 15 September 2020, the Finnish Ministry of the Environment received a notification from the Ministry of the Environment of Estonia concerning the (second) Draft of the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan and its environmental report.

The Ministry of the Environment has, in accordance with the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, informed the public and the authorities and given them an opportunity to provide statements and opinions on the documents sent by Estonia. The documents have been made available on the lausuntopalvelu.fi website. The material has also been available on the Ministry of the Environment's website. The Ministry of the Environment has also requested comments and opinions from 41 authorities and other bodies.

During the consultation period from 2 October to 9 November 2020, statements were received from the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Metsähallitus, Geological Survey of Finland, the Finnish Heritage Agency, Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council, Kymenlaakso Regional Council, Finnish Transport and Communications Agency, the Federation of Finnish Fisheries Associations, Åbo Akademi, Finnish Shipbuilders' Association, and WWF Finland. The statements received are enclosed in their entirety and the summary of the statements is presented below in English.



Summary of the statements received:

Ministry of Transport and Communications	The Ministry of Transport and Communications refers to its earlier statement LVM/953/02/2019 and states that it has no objections regarding the draft Maritime Spatial Plan of Estonia and the related Impact Assessment Report.
Finnish Transport and Communications Agency Traficom	<p>Traficom states on the draft Maritime Spatial Plan that, even if it provides guidance on the maintenance and planning of safe sea routes, it does not pay attention to the transboundary impacts with respect to e.g. shipping routes and shipping in general.</p> <p>Traficom is happy that the Maritime Spatial Plan designates areas on the coast of the Gulf of Finland in Estonia where STS (Ship-to-Ship) operations, including bunkering, are still allowed.</p> <p>Further, to ensure the safety of water transport, protect the marine environment and facilitate maritime rescue operations, the Maritime Spatial Plan designates places of refuge, ports and water areas where a ship in distress at sea can be guided. However, Traficom's attention was drawn to the fact that no such areas have been proposed on the coast of the Gulf of Finland where, as estimated by the Finnish authorities, the risk of oil spills is high. Traficom wishes to ask what the reason is for not designating such places of refuge on the coast of the Gulf of Finland?</p>
Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council	<p>The Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council is happy that the Maritime Spatial Plan also presents the safety aspects of maritime transport.</p> <p>The rationale of the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan mentions a tunnel as a potential new fixed connection, but the map included in the plan does not show a tunnel connection. Even if building a tunnel will require several planning stages and joint agreements, the Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council repeats the wish presented in the previous statement that a tentative tunnel connection would also be presented on the map included in the Maritime Spatial Plan.</p>
Regional Council of Kymenlaakso	The Regional Council of Kymenlaakso refers to its earlier statement on the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan and points out that the premise for the plan related to



	<p>safeguarding and preserving a good status of the marine environment is highly relevant.</p>
Metsähallitus	<p>Metsähallitus points out that a good status of the marine environment has not been reached in any part of the Baltic Sea. The main problem seems to be the too high nutrient load and the consequent eutrophication. This is why Metsähallitus considers it desirable that the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan would also include an assessment of the “old” uses of marine areas, as these may have impacts in terms of reaching the objectives related to a good status of the Baltic Sea.</p> <p>What Metsähallitus considers positive is that the Maritime Spatial Plan takes into account the network of protected areas (Natura 2000), including the areas that are being planned, and that the envisaged new uses of marine areas, especially wind power production areas, have been excluded from these. Another new use of marine areas in the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan is aquaculture. Metsähallitus considers that aquaculture has been adequately accounted for in the plan. The Maritime Spatial Plan does not designate any concrete areas for this use, but it provides guidelines and conditions for developing the sector. This is a good way to proceed, and it provides the opportunity to consider the potential areas more broadly as more advanced fish farming technologies are developed.</p> <p>Metsähallitus considers that the combined impact of the measures have also been clearly accounted for. Metsähallitus notes that with respect to wind power production the drafting process and impact assessment of the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan leans on the available studies and expert statements. With respect to impact assessment, it is mentioned that there is far less information available on the marine environment than on the continent. However, the Impact Assessment Report states that, in cases where further details are needed for the survey of a marine area with respect to the living natural environment, proposals will be made to include a condition for the decisions under the plan that such studies should be further elaborated or repeated when the permit application is being processed.</p>
National Board of Antiquities	<p>The National Board of Antiquities states that, with respect to possible indirect impacts, the plan mentions the possibility to use cables to link the envisaged offshore wind farms e.g. to Finland in the future and that this could have transboundary impact e.g. on the underwater cultural heritage in Finland’s territory.</p>



	<p>With respect to the consideration of cultural heritage, the National Board of Antiquities notes, in addition to its earlier statement, that due to its nature, cultural heritage as such (e.g. shipwrecks in Estonian marine area) has no transboundary impacts, yet many aspects of cultural heritage are transboundary and cross the present national borders (e.g. the historical shipping routes between Tallinn and Helsinki and the concept of the Bridge of Finland/Suomen silta that describes the connection between the peoples of Estonia and Finland).</p> <p>The Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan describes cultural heritage and the possible threats and damages measures in other sectors may be cause to it in connection with the different sectors. It is mentioned, quite appropriately, that to prevent harmful impacts, cooperation is needed with the National Board of Antiquities to avoid damages to underwater cultural values.</p> <p>Through this statement procedure the National Board of Antiquities has had a very interesting opportunity to follow maritime spatial planning in Estonia and the relevant and interesting ways how cultural heritage and socio-cultural values have been handled in it.</p>
Geological Survey of Finland	<p>The Geological Survey of Finland notes that the operations within its area of responsibility (wind power, seabed infrastructure, seabed soil, dumping of dredging masses and fixed connections) have been listed in sufficient detail and their impacts have been recorded in a way that enables an appropriate assessment of the draft plan.</p> <p>With respect to licencing for dumping, the Geological Survey of Finland hopes that sufficient sediment samples are taken from both the dredged materials and soil of the seabed in the dumping site to investigate the environmental impacts. If the dredged materials contain contaminants at too high levels, this causes adverse impacts on the marine environment during dredging or if the materials enter a water column. The same applies to sediments in the dumping site, i.e. even if the material dumped were clean, the material in the dumping site may contain contaminants at levels that exceed the limits, and dumping may cause seabed sediments to puff into the water column and have adverse impacts on the marine environment. In the worst case, the impacts may exceed the limits set in the Espoo Convention and be harmful to Finland's marine environment. However, in the plan the dumping sites are far away from Finland's sea area, which makes it unlikely that any considerable harm could be caused on the Finnish side.</p>



	<p>The Geological Survey of Finland notes that the operations within its area of responsibility in the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan have been recorded in sufficient detail and their environmental impacts have been taken into account. Except for the comments concerning dumping, it has no objections regarding the plan.</p>
WWF Finland	<p>WWF considers the draft Maritime Spatial Plan of Estonia as a whole quite good and comprehensive, but wishes to draw attention to the fact that the plan does not take adequately into account the needs related to the development of a network of marine protected areas to reach the objectives presented in accordance with the new EU Biodiversity Strategy adopted by the European Commission.</p> <p>WWF points out that, as mentioned in the rationale of the Maritime Spatial Plan, the plan does not include any new nature sites to be protected, and considers that it would be very important that potential nature protection areas identified in separate processes would be included and taken into account in the Maritime Spatial Plan. WWF is worried about the fact that transboundary planning remains highly superficial in the Maritime Spatial Plans of both Estonia and Finland.</p> <p>WWF also draws attention to the fact that, for many traditional uses of marine areas such as maritime transport and fishing, the plan only presents the current situation on a map, instead of a critical assessment of whether these activities should be restricted e.g. in the Natura areas or whether the development plans of these sectors for the future are in line with sustainable development.</p> <p>To conclude, WWF points out that constant growth in the use of marine areas is not compatible with the goal of reaching a good status for the seas, which is why the plan should state more clearly how sustainable blue growth can be detached from unsustainable use of natural resources and marine areas.</p>
Åbo Akademi	<p>Åbo Akademi's statement (translated to English from Swedish) can be found attached in its entirety.</p>
Federation of Finnish Fisheries Associations	<p>The Federation of Finnish Fisheries Associations has no objections concerning the draft Maritime Spatial Plan of Estonia or the related Impact Assessment Report. The Federation is happy that fishing and aquaculture have been taken into account in the Maritime Spatial Plan.</p>



Finnish Shipowners' Association	<p>The Finnish Shipowners' Association has no objections concerning the draft Maritime Spatial Plan of Estonia or the related Impact Assessment Report.</p> <p>The Association is very happy that shipping has been taken into account in the Maritime Spatial Plan, and that it is not in conflict with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Association also considers that the traffic separation schemes approved by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) have been duly taken into account.</p> <p>The Association sees offshore wind farm areas as an opportunity, because they support the development of maritime logistics and maritime industry.</p> <p>The Association is happy for the remark in the text of the Maritime Spatial Plan and in connection with potential offshore wind farms that the need for sufficiently wide and safe sections for maritime transport will be taken into account.</p>
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The following bodies specifically notified that they have no comments on the MPS and related SEA: Natural Resources Institute Finland, Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency, Federation of Finnish Water Protection Associations, and The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners.

The Ministry of the Environment thanks for the opportunity to comment on the draft of the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan and its environmental report. The Ministry considers the plan to generally be very well prepared and well presented. Some parts of the plan are presented as a map, some as written descriptions and as preconditions for other planning. The map and text sections of the Estonian Maritime Spatial Plan are both binding. In particular, multi-use areas and new uses in the sea area are sought in the planning, although the plan itself deals with different uses more broadly. This actualizes well the Maritime Spatial Plan's goal of increasing blue growth. The Plan is based on an ecosystem approach and knowledge, and several studies have been prepared as a background. The aim is to promote good environmental status in the marine environment through the Maritime Spatial Plan. Co-operation in maritime spatial planning has taken place between Estonia and Finland in various maritime spatial planning projects, such as the Plan4Blue project, where the exchange of information between the planners of the Gulf of Finland in Finland and the planners of the Estonian maritime spatial plan was very useful.

The Ministry of the Environment has no comments on the content of the plan or its impact assessment. Estonia takes good account of the ecosystem approach and emphasizes the application of this principle in several contexts. The ecosystem approach is particularly important for fish farming, as the state of the Baltic Sea is



still poor in many respects and eutrophication will remain a major problem for several decades to come. Fish farming can increase eutrophication, as the Baltic Sea is unable to remove enough nutrients, even on local scale. This problem has also been recognized in Finland. Overall, the ecosystem approach presented in the plan is well-prepared, although on the question of fish farms the Ministry of the Environment wishes to point out that the proposed depth (5m and over) appears somewhat shallow.

Finland hopes that co-operation and co-ordination of maritime spatial plans and the development of maritime spatial planning methods between the countries can be continued and deepened. In Estonia, for example, social and economic impact assessments have been developed and applied, which could potentially be applied to maritime spatial planning in other countries in the future. There are no contradictions between the countries' plans. The Finnish and Estonian maritime spatial plans cover both regional and economic zones. With regard to the exclusive economic zone, the countries' plans seem to overlap, and the reason for the overlap should be investigated. See the attached presentation of the plan maps.

Yours sincerely,

Director General
On behalf of the Permanent Secretary

Leena Ylä-Mononen

Ministerial Adviser

Lasse Tallskog

Enclosures

Statements received
Presentation of the plan maps

For information (without enclosures)

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland