

Report on Multi-level Dialogue on Land-Sea Interactions and Coastal Governance

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Introduction

A continuous and well-structured multi-level dialogue linking actors across governance levels is a cornerstone of effective and sustainable management of land–sea interactions (LSI), as well as of maritime and coastal planning more broadly - particularly in a complex and fragile ecosystem such as the Baltic Sea. Multi-level dialogue is also a fundamental element of multi-level governance (MLG), which lies at the core of the Baltic Sea2Land project, as effective multi-level governance cannot be achieved without ongoing and well-functioning interaction with relevant stakeholders. Well-structured dialogue also helps to address the long-standing planning challenges, including imbalanced representation of sectoral and stakeholder voices, insufficient coordination and collaboration, and the complexity arising from overlapping jurisdictions.

During the project implementation, a range of events aiming to support multi-level dialogue on multi-level governance (MLG) of LSI, as well as to transfer the solution developed by the Baltic Sea2Land project – the Sea2Land Navigator - were conducted in all Baltic Sea Region (BSR) countries represented in the partnership, involving more than 1800 participants from all levels, starting from local to macroregional level. Altogether 51 events were held.

The purpose of this Deliverable is to document the project efforts to support multi-level dialogue on LSI and coastal governance.

To reflect the full range of activities carried out in group of activities (GoA) 3.1., the Deliverable consists of four main parts:

- The first chapter is an overview of all **multi-level dialogue activities** conducted by project partners. This chapter is divided in three subchapters. The first subchapter summarizes events that took place in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Germany and Finland and were focused more on dialogue and experience exchange on local, regional and national level. The second subchapter describes dialogue efforts on macro-regional led by VASAB. Finally, the third subchapter summarizes the participation of project partnership in large international events that allowed us to take the discussions and experience transfer on even wider level.
- The second chapter focuses on **dissemination products** – both online and physical materials – that were created to promote MLG approach and the Sea2Land Navigator platform.
- The third chapter is devoted to the largest and most ambitious multi-level dialogue supporting event that was organised by Baltic Sea2Land project – **project's Final conference** that was integrated with the 5th Baltic MSP Forum “Navigate Planning Through Changes.”
- Finally, the last chapter introduces the **project recommendations for an integrated, resilient, sustainable and diverse coastal development and planning in the BSR** that will feed into the implementation of VASAB Long-Term Perspective 2040 and the EUSBSR Action Plan.

1. The multi-level dialogue activities to transfer experiences and knowledge about MLG of LSI and the Sea2Land Navigator

During project implementation, considerable efforts were dedicated to strengthening multi-level dialogue and facilitating the exchange of experience in the application of the multi-level governance (MLG) approach, as well as to identifying needs and gaps in different planning contexts. These activities aimed to enhance capacities and support the wider uptake of the MLG approach across all planning levels. To reflect the scope and diversity of multi-level dialogue activities implemented under GoA 3.1, this chapter is structured into three subsections. The first subsection presents activities implemented by project partners primarily at the local, regional, and national levels. The second subsection focuses on activities conducted at the macro-regional level, while the final subsection summarises the partnership’s participation in large international events.

1.1. Events to support MLG dialogue on local, regional and national level

Events aimed at supporting MLG dialogue and ensuring the transfer of knowledge and experience were organised in all six Baltic Sea Region (BSR) countries represented in the Baltic Sea2Land partnership (see Table 1). To systematically document the dialogue process, BEF-LV developed an event reporting template, which was completed by project partners after each event. All individual event reports are provided in Annex 1.

Some of the events were organised in synergy with GoA 3.3, combining support for MLG dialogue with practical training on the Sea2Land Navigator platform. In addition, to further promote both the Sea2Land Navigator and the MLG approach, project partners not only organised their own events but also participated in events organised by other organisations that brought together relevant stakeholders.

Country	Number of events	Number of participants in all 3.1. events	Number of unique organisations reached	Number of events for specific target group					
				Local authorities	Regional authorities	National authorities	International authorities	NGOs	Other
Latvia	9	333	45	5	10	4	1	2	3
Lithuania	4	35	33	2	4	1	0	2	1
Estonia	5	357	86	5	2	4	1	4	4
Germany	6	309	55	5	1	0	0	3	4
Poland	3	66	37	2	2	2	2	2	1
Finland	11	398	94	5	9	7	2	3	4

Table 1. Statistics on events held within GoA.3.1. to support MLG dialogue on local, regional and national level

Throughout the project, around 1500 participants took part in the events, representing approximately 349 unique organisations.

To ensure effective transfer of knowledge, experience, and the Sea2Land Navigator across all planning levels, project partners organised events targeting stakeholders at local, regional, national levels (see Figure 1). Although not primary audience of these events, some of them

involved also international planning level representatives. In addition to planning authorities, other key target groups were involved, including non-governmental organisations, academia, and the general public. The majority of events addressed multiple target groups and planning levels simultaneously, thereby even further fostering dialogue and exchange between levels and further strengthening the MLG approach.

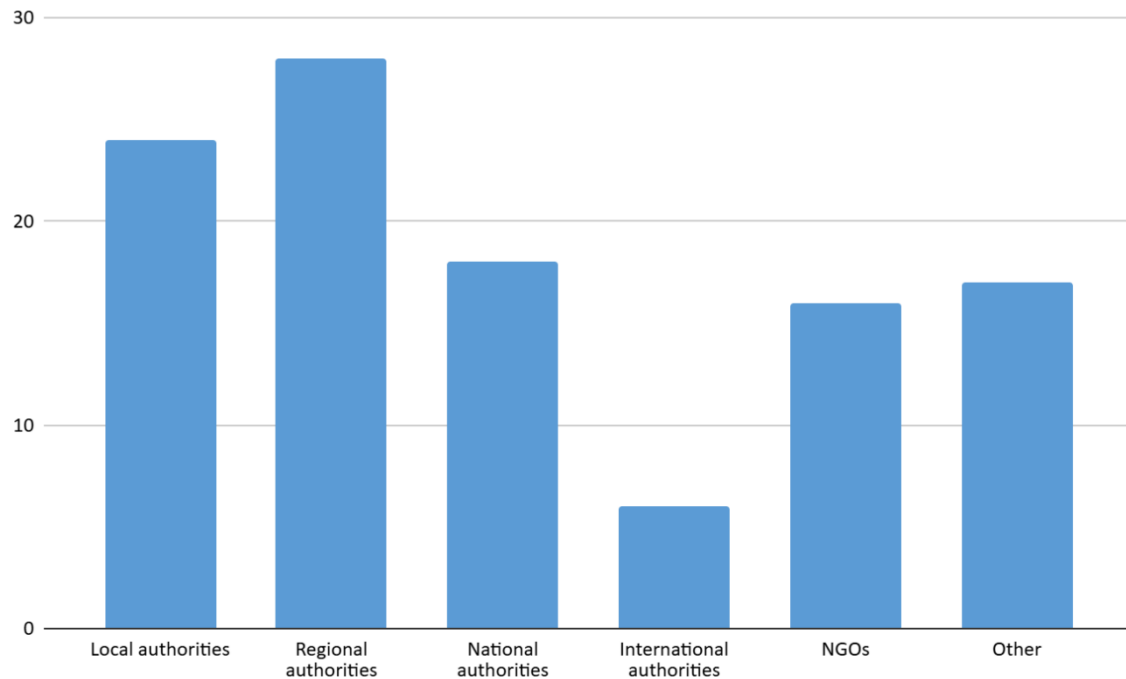


Figure 1. Number of GoA.3.1. events involving specific target groups

GoA 3.1 events contributed to strengthening MLG and land–sea interaction (LSI) practices by enabling dialogue and exchange across a wide range of thematic areas, including renewable energy transition, energy autonomy, nature protection, aquaculture and fisheries, maritime transport, climate change, defence, blue economy development, tourism, coastal accessibility, and the balancing of interests within Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP). Through these discussions, the events supported improved mutual understanding of sectoral perspectives and planning priorities, as well as increased awareness of interdependencies between land and sea uses. A key outcome across many events was the reinforced recognition of the need for closer collaboration between organisations and planning levels, consistently identified as essential for achieving more integrated, sustainable, and resilient maritime and coastal planning and management in the Baltic Sea Region.

To maximise stakeholder engagement and learning outcomes, a wide range of involvement formats were applied, including workshops, seminars, working groups, conferences, forums, public meetings, guest lectures, and other interactive formats. This diversity of approaches enabled active participation, knowledge exchange, and dialogue tailored to different target groups and planning contexts.



Figure 2. Events to support discussion and raise awareness on MLG, Sea2Land Navigator and other related topics were held in all project countries. In pictures: events from Latvia, Estonia and Finland.

The events also generated valuable feedback for further development and refinement of the Sea2Land Navigator. Suggestions collected during the GoA 3.1 events were communicated to the Navigator’s development team, and several of them were already integrated into the platform within GoA 2.5. Many stakeholders expressed strong interest in the Sea2Land Navigator and recognised its practical potential for application in their work. Participants also acknowledged the substantial amount of content already incorporated into the tool and expressed hope that its further development and evolution would continue beyond the lifetime of the Baltic Sea2Land project.

Overall, the events made a significant contribution to strengthening the capacities of stakeholders across all planning levels, while simultaneously increasing the visibility of both the project and its key solution - the Sea2Land Navigator. More detailed information on specific discussion points and thematic focus areas addressed during 3.1 events is provided in Annex 1, which contains the individual reports of all events organised within Baltic Sea2Land GoA 3.1.

1.2. Events to support MLG dialogue on macro-regional level

The transfer of the MLG framework for LSI interactions at the macro-regional level was led by VASAB Secretariat. To support macro-regional dialogue on coastal planning and development, VASAB organised two dedicated events:

- **Online seminar: “Towards Updated Coastal Planning and Development Recommendations for the Baltic Sea Region”** (20.11.2024): This online seminar was organised to support the update of the 1996 Common Recommendations for Spatial Planning of the Coastal Zone. The event aimed to gather expert input on current coastal planning challenges and future priorities in the Baltic Sea Region. Discussions focused on strengthening land–sea interactions in spatial planning and promoting ecosystem-based and integrated planning approaches, thereby directly

contributing to the objectives of the Baltic Sea2Land project. A more detailed description of the event is provided in Annex 1, Report 38.

- **Interactive workshop on Coastal Planning and Development in the Baltic Sea Region (17.06 2025):** This interactive workshop explored current coastal planning challenges, emerging macro-regional recommendations, and the potential of shared planning practices to support meaningful collaboration across governance levels - from local and national to sea-basin scale. The discussions were enriched by insights from the Baltic Sea2Land project, reflecting national, regional, and local perspectives from Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Germany. A more detailed description of the event is available in Annex 1, Report 39.

These events enabled the engagement of representatives from a wide range of institutions and organisations across the Baltic Sea Region, each contributing a macro-regional perspective for their respective countries. Together, the two events brought together 78 experts - 48 participants at the 20 November 2024 seminar and 30 participants at the 17 June 2025 workshop. In total, 47 unique organisations were represented across both events, demonstrating the broad reach and inclusiveness of the dialogue. The project's recommendations for integrated, resilient, sustainable, and diverse coastal development and planning in the Baltic Sea Region are presented in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Additionally, VASAB took part at the several other events to strengthen macro-regional level dialogue on MLG aspects at cooperation platforms. Information on the Baltic Sea2Land project, its approach to MLG and its relevance to maritime and coastal zone planning was shared with members of the regular collaboration platforms in the Baltic Sea region. These events included:

- 94th VASAB Committee on Spatial Planning and Development of the Baltic Sea Region (CSPD/BSR) meeting, 19.-20.03.2025,
- 28th Meeting of the Member States Expert Group on Maritime Spatial Planning, 24.03.2025,
- MSP Planners' Forum, 25.03.2025,
- IC HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working group meeting 6-2025, 07.-09.04.2025,
- 95th VASAB Committee on Spatial Planning and Development of the Baltic Sea Region (CSPD/BSR) meeting, 16.06.2025,
- IC HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working group meeting 7-2025, 16.17.10.2025.

Individual reports of the events are available in Annex 1.

1.3. Participation in large international events

Organisations from the Baltic Sea2Land partnership participated in several large international events. Engagement in these events is essential for advancing the discussion on the MLG approach, promoting the project and the Sea2Land Navigator, and facilitating experience and knowledge exchange on a broader scale as such events bring together a wide range of stakeholders and actors beyond the reach of any single project partnership. The events included in this Deliverable focus on those held in 2025. In addition, partners also took part in major international events in 2024, including EU Maritime Day 2024 and the EUSBSR Annual Forum 2024.



Figure 3. Baltic Sea2Land partner organisations participated in several international events. In pictures: European Maritime Day 2025 and Blue Mission BANOS Mission Arena 4 (MLG workshop).

The large international events that took place in 2025 with Baltic Sea2Land partnership's participation:

- Blue Mission BANOS Mission Arena 4, 29.04.2025 in Sopot, Poland,
- Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme Conference, 20.-22.05.2025 in Tampere, Finland,
- European Maritime Day 2025, 21.-23.05.2025 in Cork, Ireland,
- ESPON Seminar: A Focus on Adaptive Resilience and Europe's Future, 25.-26.06.2025 in Gdansk, Poland,
- EUSBSR Annual Forum 2025, 29.-30.10.2025 in Sopot, Poland.

Individual reports of the events are available in Annex 1.

2. Communication and dissemination products targeted at solution transfer, promotion of MLG approach

To support the transfer of the Sea2Land Navigator and promote the MLG approach, the partnership developed several communication and dissemination tools. The main products were the following:

- **Videos about Baltic Sea2Land project and Sea2Land Navigator platform** (one video in Latvian, one – in English) to enhance the visibility of the project and its core solution – the Sea2Land Navigator – was created by Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development (MoSARD).

Videos are available on MoSARD's Youtube channel:

- Latvian: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ee9L0ufwd1Q>
- English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-xyhFfz-o>

- **Online graphic posters about (1) blue economy and (2) accessibility of the coast** were developed by Kurzeme Planning Region (KPR) to increase awareness about the Coastal Thematic Plan of Kurzeme region developed within the framework of Baltic Sea2Land project, as well as to increase the visibility of the topics that are crucial not only in the Thematic plan, but also in broader context of the project. The poster on blue economy explains the term “blue economy”, as well as sectors and stakeholders it involves. The poster on coastal accessibility introduces the 15 potential regional

access places to the coast that are suggested by KPR Coastal Thematic plan and introduces the Guidelines for the development of public access infrastructure to the coast. Both posters are available here: <https://kurzemesregions.lv/decebri-nosledzas-baltic-sea2land-projekts/>

- **Professionally designed presentation about the coast of Kurzeme region:** developed using information from the KPR Coastal Thematic Plan, the presentation supports communication and outreach with municipalities, state institutions, and ministries both related to the KPR Coastal Thematic Plan and day-to-day cooperation. Presentation is available here: <https://kurzemesregions.lv/decebri-nosledzas-baltic-sea2land-projekts/>
- **Printed large-format project poster promoting the MLG approach, the Baltic Sea2Land project, and the Sea2Land Navigator,** prepared by the University of Tallinn. The poster was used at several in-person events attended by the Estonian project team. The digital version of the project poster is available here: <https://www.tlu.ee/en/ht/research/centre-landscape-and-culture#current-projects>

To further support transfer of the project results and draw attention to the importance on MLG, LSI, as well as other topics covered by Baltic Sea2Land, additional materials were created by project partners, including 2 printed roll-ups (in Latvian and English) and printed postcards for promotion of project's final conference – 5th Baltic MSP Forum – and Sea2Land Navigator. The postcards were distributed by project partners at various project and project-related events, while the roll-ups were used during project activities (e.g. expo stand at the conferences) to enhance the visibility of the partnership's work.



Figure 4. To further support dialogue on MLG, LSI and other topics of Baltic Sea2Land, postcards and roll-up banners were created by MoSARD. These materials were used in many events both nationally and internationally.

3. Final Conference of the Baltic Sea2Land – 5th Baltic MSP Forum

The Final Conference of the Baltic Sea2Land project was held fully on site on 11–12 November 2025 in Riga, Latvia, integrated with the 5th Baltic MSP Forum “Navigate Planning Through Changes.” It brought together around 169 participants from across the Baltic Sea Region and beyond, including MSP practitioners, coastal and marine planners, policymakers, researchers, NGOs, and experts from national, regional, and local authorities. The event ensured broad knowledge transfer through two days of intensive, moderated discussions, 9 thematic sessions, and networking opportunities, offering a platform to exchange experiences and develop new approaches for sustainable marine and coastal planning.

The Forum addressed a wide range of topical themes, including resilient and liveable coastal communities, integration of ecosystem services into MSP, coastal accessibility, climate change impacts on coastal municipalities, blue-green infrastructure (on land and at sea), sustainable blue economy, and safety and security in the Baltic Sea. A special highlight was the presentation and hands-on introduction of the Sea2Land Navigator, the project’s innovative tool designed to assist planners and strengthen links between maritime spatial planning and coastal zone planning. Thematic sessions also explored macro-regional MSP-related governance, the ecosystem-based approach, and effective use of marine and coastal space.

The Forum provided an opportunity to present information on the current state of MSP in the Baltic Sea region. Fourteen exhibition stands were set up to illustrate ongoing challenges, innovative approaches, and emerging good practices across the region.

Preparation for the conference began in late 2024, when VASAB established a dedicated Task Force of Baltic Sea2Land project partners. Throughout 2025, around ten Task Force meetings were held, enabling inclusive and gradual development of both the programme content and organisational arrangements. All partners contributed according to their roles and achievements within the project – most of the thematic sessions were prepared and/or moderated by the project partners. The development of the programme was also supported by additional content related working groups and advisory inputs from representatives of the VASAB Committee and the HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group. Communication and promotion activities accompanied the preparation process to ensure strong outreach and participation, including visibility at the EUSBSR Annual Forums in 2024 and 2025, EMD 2024 and 2025, and other relevant events.

During the conference, the thematic sessions delivered key messages for future work that are summarised as follows:

- For Stakeholders:
 - Recognize that ecological connectivity is crucial for sustaining ecosystem services (ES) and human well-being.
 - Ensure transparency and access to information, explaining the rationale behind decisions, including historical, cultural, and social contexts.
 - Support communities to build capacity for meaningful participation, guided by a clear, innovative vision of territorial priorities.

- Use ES to highlight biodiversity's multiple benefits and reframe environmental challenges (e.g., eutrophication) as opportunities (e.g., mussel farming).
- Embrace transnational solutions and acknowledge the roles of various sectors in securing resources and enhancing resilience across the region.
- For Planners:
 - Adopt a Baltic Sea-level perspective, fostering cross-border and cross-sector collaboration (defence, energy, environment).
 - Balance private financial interests with broader societal needs, following a structured Vision-Plan-Process approach grounded in knowledge.
 - Engage local communities early and integrate all relevant sectors to prevent conflicts.
 - Build trust and set shared sea-basin goals, using ES to justify decisions and guide pragmatic solutions even with limited data.
- For Policy Makers:
 - Leverage MSP to implement Marine Green Infrastructure, moving beyond limited protection measures.
 - Shift from short-term to long-term perspectives, investing in local communities and supporting leadership at all policy levels.
 - Commit politically, financially, and institutionally to enable effective transnational MSP collaboration.
 - Create economic incentives and an appropriate policy framework to support multiple uses of marine space.
 - Recognize the Baltic Sea as a nearly closed system while considering global interactions for comprehensive security.

A dedicated webpage was created to promote the event, invite registrations, and disseminate information about the 5th Baltic MSP Forum: <https://vasab.org/5th-baltic-msp-forum/>

See summarising report from the event in Annex 2.

4. Project recommendations for an integrated, resilient, sustainable and diverse coastal development and planning in the BSR

VASAB Common Recommendations for Spatial Planning of the Coastal Zone in the Baltic Sea Region (1996)¹ (hereinafter- VASAB Coastal Recommendations) need updating because the context around the Baltic Sea has changed profoundly. With most Baltic Sea countries now members of the EU and NATO - and in light of Russia's recent military aggression - the region's geopolitical and security realities have shifted. Much of VASAB's earlier guidance has rightly been mainstreamed: it is reflected in EU directives (SEA, EIA, MSP, Habitats), embedded in national planning systems, and supported by HELCOM's Baltic Sea Action Plan, the VASAB-HELCOM MSP Working Group, and other macro-regional platforms. These VASAB recommendations remain a strong basis for today's planning norms.

Yet the policy landscape has advanced: the European Green Deal, REPowerEU, the EU Biodiversity Strategy and Fit for 55; the Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy and RED III; EU climate-adaptation frameworks; the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) - with its Action Plan currently being updated - and the joint HELCOM-VASAB Regional MSP Roadmap all call for additional, up-to-date guidance to implement VASAB Vision 2040² in coastal areas. Cross-cutting priorities - circular economy, digitalization, equity, and nature restoration - also demand future-proofed coastal planning aligned with Vision 2040. At the same time, the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) faces new pressures (security and safety, climate change, declining rural/coastal populations, and the need to balance blue-economy growth with environmental goals) and new opportunities, notably the Baltic Sea2Land project (Interreg BSR) as a platform for multi-level dialogue to contribute to realisation of VASAB Vision 2040 and Tallinn Ministerial Declaration.

To address this, the update process was designed to explore gaps, needs, and opportunities in coastal planning, management, and development - and to exchange knowledge and good practices among stakeholders and experts across the BSR. Actions taken:

- A desk study of existing documents, relevant in light of existing VASAB Common Recommendations for Spatial Planning of the Coastal Zone in the Baltic Sea Region.
- Survey, discussions, and two online seminars with coastal-planning, development, and governance experts across the BSR.
- Alignment of the process of potential update of with VASAB Coastal Recommendations and the ongoing revision of HELCOM Recommendation 24/10R on Implementation of integrated coastal management and Maritime Spatial Planning in the Baltic Sea (ongoing in the join HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group).

¹ https://vasab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Recommendations_Spatial_Planning_Coastal_Zone_1996.pdf

² <https://vasab.org/vision2040/>

Key milestones:

- Discussion among the Baltic Sea2Land project partners on gaps, challenges, and opportunities based on their knowledge and experience of current situation in coastal areas (May 2024).
- Expert online survey on coastal planning and development in the Baltic Sea Region (June–October 2024)³.
- First webinar/ online seminar to share survey findings and seek common ground «Towards updated Coastal Planning and Development Recommendations for the Baltic Sea Region» (20 November 2024)⁴.
- Second webinar/ interactive workshop to discuss how to advance effective and integrated coastal and maritime spatial planning across governance levels in the Baltic Sea Region - exploring current challenges, emerging macro-regional recommendations, and how shared planning practices can support meaningful change from local to national levels, with a view toward sea-basin-scale impact (17 June 2025)⁵.
- Discussions during VASAB Committee on Spatial Planning and Development of the Baltic Sea Region (CSPD/BSR) (16 June 2025).
- Discussion in the drafting group of HELCOM and VASAB Secretariats and representatives of joint HELCOM-VASAM MSP WG from Finland, Latvia, Sweden and intersessional meeting with HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG representatives (18 August 2025).

Together, the steps taken so far have provided a solid evidence base and broad stakeholder input to support the update - and future-proofing - of the VASAB Common Recommendations. Notably, two stakeholder workshops enabled meaningful consultation with representatives from across the Baltic Sea Region, involving 47 unique institutions and organisations. These inputs, combined with project findings, ensure that the updated recommendations will be well-aligned with EU policy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), HELCOM frameworks (including Recommendation 24/10R Implementation of integrated coastal management and maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea area⁶), and the long-term goals of the VASAB Vision 2040.

During the implementation of the Baltic Sea2Land project, and thanks to the studies, discussions, and accumulated inputs, the VASAB Committee on Spatial Planning and Development of the Baltic Sea Region (CSPD/BSR) made a formal decision at its 95th meeting (online, 16 June 2025):

“The Committee agreed to update the VASAB Common Recommendations for Spatial Planning of the Coastal Zone in the Baltic Sea Region (1996) and to align them with the revised HELCOM Recommendation 24/10R on the implementation of integrated coastal management and maritime spatial planning in the Baltic Sea. The goal is to

³ <https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/baltic-sea2land/share-your-insights-in-survey-on-coastal-planning-and-development-in-the-baltic-sea-region/>

⁴ <https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/baltic-sea2land/register-and-join-seminar-towards-updated-coastal-planning-and-development-recommendations-for-the-baltic-sea-region/>

⁵ <https://vasab.org/event/bs2l-2nd-webinar/>

⁶ <https://helcom.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Rec-24-10-R.pdf>

ensure consistency in terminology, incorporate cross-references between the two documents, and explore the possibility of merging both recommendations.”

An updated version of the VASAB recommendations is now needed - not only in content but also in format. It is important to clarify the primary target groups for the updated recommendations and define their purpose: for example, whether the main goal is to address emerging topics, compile best practices, or both. There is also a question of whether to develop supporting materials, such as a background report or monitoring framework (e.g. the report on the current spatial development situation in the region’s coastal areas could describe this current spatial development situation and serve as a spatial planning–relevant assessment. It will align its findings with the themes of the existing VASAB Coastal Recommendations and other relevant guidance (e.g. from HELCOM), and it will include proposals for the upcoming update - including suggestions for future monitoring mechanisms. Together, this will support implementation of the VASAB Vision 2040.)

This means that the work on the VASAB coastal recommendations will continue beyond the Baltic Sea2Land project lifetime. However, the key findings and inputs that will influence the updated version are summarised in the next chapter. Annex 3 provides additional materials, including documentation of the main activities carried out within the Baltic Sea2Land project.

Key Findings for Future Coastal Planning and Development Recommendations in the BSR

Objectives – What we aim to achieve

Reviewing the VASAB Coastal recommendations objectives shows that their core intentions remain relevant: promoting sustainable development in coastal zones, safeguarding cultural and natural values, and ensuring balanced use of land and sea resources are still essential goals today. These principles continue to provide a strong foundation for planning across the Baltic Sea Region.

However, several objectives require modernisation to reflect today’s policy context and emerging challenges. Concepts such as climate resilience, nature restoration, ecosystem services, and ecological connectivity were not present in the original objectives but now represent indispensable components of coastal zone governance. Social dimensions - including equitable public access, wellbeing, and community resilience - also need stronger articulation.

Furthermore, the objectives should better reflect the transformation and transitions of the sustainable blue economy, changes in port, maritime and shipping sectors, and the need to reconcile renewable energy development with biodiversity protection. Security considerations, which were not specifically mentioned in 1996 but have become increasingly relevant due to the geopolitical situation in the BSR and Europe at large, now influence coastal and maritime governance and planning and should be recognised within the overarching aims. Modernised objectives should therefore articulate a more integrated, future-proof vision for the coastal zone, aligned with the VASAB Vision 2040, EUSBSR, HELCOM, and HELCOM-VASAB guidelines and frameworks.

Recommendations – How we should achieve it

Many of the VASAB coastal recommendations remain conceptually sound, particularly those promoting compact settlement development, cautious siting of new infrastructure, protection of heritage and landscape values, and the need for comprehensive planning and impact assessments. These continue to resonate with sustainable spatial planning and development principles.

Yet, the content requires significant updating to address contemporary challenges and operational realities. Fixed coastal-zone definitions, even where they exist, should be accompanied by functional, ecosystem- and risk-based approaches. Biodiversity, ecological connectivity, and restoration require stronger and more explicit guidance, particularly in relation to protected areas, green-blue infrastructure, and cumulative impacts. Climate adaptation, nature-based solutions, and coastal resilience to extreme weather events must become core operational principles.

In addition, modern recommendations must consider the demands of offshore renewable energy (both onshore and offshore), opportunities for multi-use spaces, decarbonized ports, and circular economy approaches to coastal infrastructure. Public access and social inclusion require renewed attention, especially where privatization or competing uses create tensions. More explicit guidance is also needed for integrating land–sea planning, harmonizing terrestrial and marine instruments, and supporting municipalities that often lack capacity and clear guidance. Overall, the new recommendations should offer clearer, more actionable planning and management measures for diverse coastal contexts.

Planning procedures – Who should act and how implementation should be ensured

The 1996 planning procedures emphasised subsidiarity, impact assessment, cross-border exchange, and the designation of conservation areas. These principles remain valuable, yet the mechanisms for implementing them need to be modernised.

Today's planning environment requires stronger, more structured multi-level governance arrangements that clearly describe roles and responsibilities at national, regional, and local levels. Local authorities, in particular, need clearer mandates and support tools to engage effectively in coastal planning. Monitoring and reporting procedures also require significant improvement: the future recommendations should outline simple, periodic, and harmonised monitoring systems aligned with existing EU and HELCOM processes, potentially supported by digital tools and shared data platforms.

Transboundary cooperation remains a crucial element but needs to be strengthened through more systematic information exchange, joint consultations, and the use of macroregional platforms such as the HELCOM–VASAB MSP Working Group, the MSP Planners' Forum, or evolving ones such as the Land-based Planners' Forum. Planning procedures should also recognise new domains such as security and risk management, as well as the need for capacity-building and knowledge exchange across the region.

Provisional update and additions to the existing recommendations can be structured into the following categories:

*Substantive coastal planning themes*⁷

Promote climate-resilient spatial planning in the coastal zone

Coastal spatial plans at all levels should proactively integrate climate change adaptation and risk management, addressing, for example, sea-level rise, erosion, flooding, and extreme weather events. Nature-based solutions should be prioritized where appropriate to enhance both ecological and community resilience.

Promote nature-based solutions and ecosystem restoration in coastal planning

Spatial planning should integrate nature-based solutions and promote coastal ecosystem restoration to support biodiversity, reduce risks, and deliver multifunctional benefits - where appropriate - for communities and landscapes.

Plan and manage offshore and onshore renewable energy with respect for environmental and social values

The development of offshore and onshore renewable energy infrastructure should be coordinated through marine and terrestrial spatial planning to minimize impacts on biodiversity, landscape values, and local communities. Planning should also promote opportunities for the multi-use of maritime and coastal space and infrastructure, where appropriate.

Ensure accessibility and social equity in coastal development

Planning frameworks should guarantee public access to the coast and promote inclusive development by actively involving local communities and user groups in the planning process. Coastal development plans should also anticipate and prevent conflicts arising from expanding land privatisation or the intensification of competing land uses that may restrict access for the general public and traditional users.

*Spatial planning approaches & practices*⁸

Apply ecosystem-based and landscape-sensitive approaches in coastal planning

Coastal spatial plans should apply ecosystem-based principles and take into account landscape character and visual integration. Planning decisions should consider cumulative impacts and prioritise nature-compatible solutions that preserve ecological connectivity and coastal identity.

Clarify the coastal zone as a functional planning space across land and sea

The coastal zone should be defined in a way that reflects each country's planning system while ensuring coherent treatment of land-sea interactions, ecological connectivity, and integrated stakeholder engagement.

⁷ Focuses on key coastal and marine topics such as climate change adaptation, ecosystem restoration, renewable energy, landscape protection, and public access. These recommendations guide what should be addressed to ensure sustainable and resilient coastal zones.

⁸ Deals with the technical aspects of how spatial planning is carried out - including definitions of the coastal zone, integration of marine and terrestrial plans, use of templates and examples, and cross-border data sharing.

Ensure integrated land–sea planning by strengthening coordination between marine and terrestrial spatial planning

Planning authorities should align marine and land-based spatial plans to ensure coherent development, sustainable use, and conservation across the coastal zone, drawing on the principles of integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) to guide cross-sectoral and cross-level coordination.

Strengthen multi-level governance in spatial planning for coastal areas

Effective spatial planning in the coastal zone requires coordination and clarity of roles across national, regional, and local levels. Planning frameworks should support vertical integration, mutual learning, and collaboration between institutions, ensuring that local implementation is guided by broader strategic objectives while responding to local needs and capacities.

Encourage exchange among planners on the use of spatial data for coastal planning

Countries should promote regular dialogue and knowledge exchange between planning authorities to share experiences, practices, and challenges in using spatial data for coastal and marine areas - supporting mutual learning and improved coordination across planning levels and borders. Furthermore, cross-border knowledge exchange should be actively facilitated to strengthen regional coherence and foster joint approaches to coastal planning.

*Coordination & strategic alignment*⁹

Incorporate security and resilience concerns into spatial planning and development

Spatial plans should take into account coastal and maritime security, the resilience of critical infrastructure and supply chains, and, where appropriate, the multifunctionality of such infrastructure to enhance safety and preparedness in the face of evolving risks.

Ensure coherence between coastal spatial planning and broader regional and European policy objectives

Coastal spatial planning efforts should be aligned with macroregional and EU-level policy frameworks to promote coherence, support integrated territorial development, and maximize their collective impact across the region.

*Follow-up & awareness*¹⁰

Enable follow-up through simple and regular monitoring systems

To track the implementation of recommendations and observe spatial development trends in coastal areas, a clear and lightweight monitoring and reporting system should be established. Where feasible, it should build on existing frameworks (e.g. the HELCOM–VASAB MSP Working Group) to minimise additional reporting burden for national, regional and local authorities.

⁹ Addresses who is responsible for implementation and how coastal planning is aligned across different governance levels and with macroregional or EU strategies. These recommendations call for strengthening institutional cooperation and maximising coherence.

¹⁰ Focuses on how to track and learn from the implementation of recommendations through regular, simple, and harmonised reporting tools and shared indicators - supporting adaptive learning and macroregional dialogue.

Promote multi-level awareness and dialogue to support effective and adaptive use of recommendations

To improve the relevance and uptake of coastal planning recommendations, awareness should be strengthened across all governance levels. This requires not only effective communication and training, but also continuous dialogue between national, regional, and local actors to identify evolving needs, implementation gaps, and opportunities for additional guidance or practical support.