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DIRECTORATE OF WATER AND BIODIVERSITY

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COASTAL AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS**

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF SEA
BASIN STRATEGIES**

Environmental report
submitted for consultation

Addendum on additional targets

February 2021

South Atlantic Sea Basin



Évaluer les Politiques et Innover
pour les Citoyens et les Espaces



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Introduction

The first two parts of the South Atlantic Sea Basin Strategy Document (SBSD SA), forming the Sea Basin Strategy (SBS), were adopted by interprefectural order on 14 October 2019. This strategy defines maritime spatial planning, 7 vocation areas for the South Atlantic coastline and the objectives to be achieved in each of these areas or for the entire coastline. On the environmental aspects, this document is the local version of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The second cycle of the Marine Environment Action Plan (PAMM) is therefore integrated into the SBSB.

The order of 11 July 2018 on the criteria and methods to be implemented for the preparation of the first two parts of the SBSB recalls that the environmental targets (mentioned in Article R. 219-7 of the Environmental Code) are defined so that the pressures exerted by human activities on the marine environment are compatible with the achievement or maintenance of good environmental status of marine waters by the end of the current cycle of the "Marine Strategy" framework directive. This order also recalls that the indicators associated with the environmental targets include targets against which the achievement of the targets is assessed.

At the time the sea basin strategy was adopted, not all of these targets could be defined, due to a lack of data or maturity of consultations: 28 targets were still to be defined for the South Atlantic coastline, within a timeframe that allowed for various elements to be taken into account:

- the progress of studies under the first cycle of the Bay of Biscay PAMM (2016-2021), on the "M003" measure aimed at setting up strong protection zones;
- the new issues and ambitions of the SBSB, in particular artificialization of the coastline and seabed, careening areas, incidental catches of seabirds and cetaceans, the preservation of functional habitats for seabirds and the preservation of eelgrass beds;
- the revision of the Adour-Garonne and Loire-Brittany Water Development and Management Master Plans (SDAGE).

Work was carried out to evaluate and consolidate existing monitoring networks in order to define them at the time the action plan was adopted: the coherence between these networks and those used for monitoring the objectives of the Water Framework Directive has sometimes been increased on this occasion. In accordance with Annex 6b of the SBS, of these 28 indicators, 26 targets could be defined and agreed in parallel with the work on developing the action plan and will be adopted jointly in 2022.

The "Explanatory note on the additional targets for the indicators of the environmental targets of the South Atlantic Sea Basin Strategy" produced in the context of the Environmental Authority's (EA) referral for the operational part of the SBSB provides a summary explanation of the methods used to define each of the additional targets set, and the nature of the work carried out.

As the sea basin strategy has been the subject of an environmental assessment, dealing in particular with the potential environmental repercussions in relation to the ambition of the targets set, it is now necessary to complete it with regard to the setting of additional targets. This is the purpose of this Addendum, which has two objectives:

(1) analyse the ambition of the 28 additional targets defined after the adoption of the sea basin strategy. This analysis will be conducted in this addendum in relation to the three sets of targets presented in the above-mentioned note, namely (i) the targets relating to defining strong protection zones, (ii) the targets relating to addressing new issues and ambitions of the SBSB in relation to the first cycle of the Marine Environment Action Plan, and (iii) the targets created as part of

establishing the Adour-Garonne and Loire-Brittany Water Development and Management Master Plans, and their consistency with the SBSD;

(2) conclude from this analysis whether the conclusions of the strategic part of the SEA should be modified, which could result from these 28 additional targets being set.

Targets for defining Strong Protection Zones

Eight targets are covered by this first set. They relate to the following environmental targets: D01-HB-OE3, D01-HB-OE4, D01-HB-OE6, D01-HB-OE10, D01-OM-OE06, D06-OE02 and D07-OE03. For the majority of them, they are formulated in a qualitative way, based on the following model "Upward trend in the area of habitat X under strong protection, with at least one proposed SPZ per SBS area where habitat X is a strong or major concern". The setting of these targets refers directly to the implementation of measure M003-NAT1B adopted in the framework of the first cycle of the PAMM, which provided for "Completing the network of marine protected areas by setting up strong protection in sectors of remarkable marine biodiversity". The aim of this measure is to establish a coherent, connected network of strong protection zones (SPZ) that is representative of the diversity of marine ecosystems on each sea basin in mainland France. This strong protection will be established as a priority within existing marine protected areas.

In order to judge the ambition of the targets proposed by the SA coastline, it is therefore necessary to go back to the implementation of measure M003-NAT1B. The latter was the subject of a national framework note in June 2018 proposing the following steps for its implementation:

- Step 1: inventory of existing strong protection in the network of marine protected areas (MPA);
- Step 2: analysis of the coherence of the current network of strong protection in MPAs;
- Step 3: identification of sectors and issues requiring a higher level of protection to strengthen the network
- Step 4: association and then consultation of the Sea Basin Councils on the additions to be made to the network of strong protection by 2030 and establishment of the corresponding target as a proportion of the EEZ in strong protection in mainland France and intermediary targets for 2021 and 2026
- Step 5: installation of strong protection on the coastlines

As these different steps were planned to take place until the end of 2019, they should have made it possible to set quantitative targets for the proportions of habitats of concern located in the SPZs (for example: 10% of the area of habitat X located in the SPZ). However, the process has been delayed, particularly in the early stages, and has not allowed new SPZs to be defined within the timetable for setting the additional targets of the Sea Basin Strategy. In a national working group, it was therefore decided on 13 March 2020 to change the wording of the initially envisaged targets, as described in this extract from the national working group's decision statement:

"In order to reflect the different levels of progress and ambition of the coastlines, the following general wording is proposed:

"Increase [the proportion] of the area of [name of habitat] in strong protection [in each of the following areas [, with at least one area per strong or major sector of concern]: list of potential SPZs relevant to this habitat]*

** Naming of a zone intended to host a SPZ, the precise perimeter of which will be defined after local consultations. "*

This wording may be adapted for each indicator, with or without the bracketed words. This wording therefore provides for an increase in the coverage of strong protection, with, if possible, a list of potential SPZs in which this habitat will be protected, and, if possible, a criterion of representativeness of strong or major issues.

Note that in some cases, more specific targets are proposed, in the following form: "X% of the known area of habitat X is located in a strong protection zone"

With regard to the SA coastline in particular, the following points should be noted in relation to this implementation process, which is common to all coastlines:

- that 7 study sectors for potential SPZs could be defined, corresponding to marine protected areas (Natura 2000 zones or Marine Nature Parks). The SA coastline has actually chosen to leave it to the MPA management bodies to define the precise perimeter and the measures associated with this strong protection;
- that these study sectors are both coastal and offshore, even if the main issue taken into account in the offshore area is that of the reefs, whereas other important issues are also present in the offshore areas (e.g. the Gouf de Capbreton canyon);
- that one target out of the 8 in this first set is quantitative, that of D01- HB-OE10 (100% of the reef sub-areas of the Natura 2000 site "Celtic Seas - Bay of Biscay slope" are located in a SPZ).

In conclusion, with regard to the ambition of this first set of targets, it is regrettable that in most cases a quantitative target has been abandoned in favour of an "upward trend" associated with a list of "potential" SPZs whose actual surface area has yet to be defined (in fact, a potential SPZ within a larger MPA gives no indication of the surface area that will be retained at the end of the consultation processes that have yet to be conducted). The designation of a list of new SPZs to be created is nevertheless a step forward, even though it is as much a part of the national protected areas strategy as it is of the sea basin strategy.

As far as the SA coastline is concerned, even though the offshore sector could make it possible to classify a relatively large surface area, it is difficult at this stage of progress in creating the network of SPZs to judge the capacity of the coastline to fall within the "framework" objective of the protected areas strategy, setting the surface area of SPZs at 10% to be achieved by 20221.

¹ This objective is global for all French waters and therefore does not apply to each coastline. Nevertheless, the OFB (French Office for Biodiversity) sets a benchmark of 5% in mainland France, with a minimum of 3% on each coastline.

Targets for addressing the new issues and ambitions of the SBSD

Twelve targets are covered by this second set. They relate to the following environmental targets: D01-HB-OE5, D01-HB-OE6, D01-OM-OE01, D01-OM-OE04, D01-OM-OE05, D06-OE01, D08-OE04 and D11-OE01 and refer to four different topics which we will deal with in turn: (1) special habitats (for the first two objectives), (2) sea birds (for the next three), (3) the integrity of the seabed and in particular artificialization (for D06-OE01) and (4) two other anthropogenic pressures (careening areas and noise).

1. SPECIAL HABITATS

The three targets relate to avoiding or reducing physical disturbance to eelgrass beds and subtidal and circalittoral sedimentary habitats, particularly in the 3-mile zone, which are important issues.

On the SA coastline, only one of these three targets is partially quantitative, the one concerning Natura 2000 sites where eelgrass is protected by decrees allowing for no pressure from foot fishing. The other targets are more of a qualitative nature such as a "downward trend" type.

Given this qualitative dominance, this first group of targets can be considered relatively unambitious in terms of the fundamental ecological functioning of these habitats and their high sensitivity to anthropogenic pressures (anchoring, bottom towed gears).

2. SEA BIRDS

The four targets relate to reducing incidental catches of sea birds, reducing the pressure exerted by certain introduced and domesticated species on sea bird breeding sites and maintaining/restoring functional sea bird habitats in coastal wetlands.

On the SA coastline, two of these four targets are quantitative and the other two qualitative, in particular because certain elements of knowledge remain to be established (map of functional sites or reference value/state 0).

In addition to their partially quantitative nature, these targets were set based on consultation with the Groupement d'Intérêt Scientifique Oiseaux Marins (GISOM), which also undertook to monitor the indicators associated with these targets. This second group of targets can therefore be considered to be rather ambitiously defined.

3. ARTIFICIALIZATION

The three targets relate to the average rate of artificialization of the foreshore (structures and facilities in the water) and the coastal seabed (structures and facilities in the water and underwater between 0 and 20 metres).

On the SA coastline, these three targets are "semi-quantitative", i.e. they are worded as follows: "Downward trend in the average rate of artificialization compared with the average reference rate evaluated at x% for SA over 6 years".

The identification of a reference rate of artificialization was therefore essential to establish these targets. This rate was established by CEREMA for the linear and foreshore areas only (i.e. for indicators 1 and 2) and for the period 2002-2014, within the framework of a report entitled "Artificialization of coastal and littoral marine environments, Methods for determining indicators 1 and 2" (CEREMA, 2021), which can be found in the annex to the explanatory note mentioned in the introduction.

From both a methodological and regulatory point of view, the production of this reference value represents a considerable step forward. Since:

- methodologically, this calculation raises many challenges such as (1) taking into account only the physical losses (linear or surface of the structures) or also the physical disturbances generated by the structures, or (2) the need to adapt to the change in the reference land/sea boundary, currently being redefined. These challenges in particular raise strong issues of coherence between the calculation carried out by CEREMA and other existing calculations (within the framework of the sea basin management strategy for example);
- from a regulatory point of view, the environmental targets (ET) indicators of the MSFD and their targets are subject to a compatibility obligation for permits at sea, which increases the requirement in terms of the reliability of the results and requires that they can be converted into absolute values in an accurate manner to facilitate the processing of permits.

The setting of semi-quantitative targets can therefore be considered a real step forward, which has for that matter been the subject of much debate and required many explanations of the study carried out by CEREMA and its method. However, the fact that no quantified objective for reducing the rate of artificialization has been set for this cycle poses a certain risk to achieving the national objective of "zero net artificialization by 2030" at the end of the next cycle. Furthermore, the implementation and monitoring of these targets remains a challenge in terms of support for the investigating authorities.

4. OTHER ANTHROPOGENIC PRESSURES

The two targets relating to this fourth set are, on the one hand, the number of ports equipped with careening areas with an effluent treatment system and, on the other hand, the spatial extent of events with a high level of noise related to impulsive emissions.

The first target is of a qualitative "upward trend" nature and the second is not yet fixed as work is still in progress. It is therefore difficult to comment on the ambition of these two targets, although the former appears modest.

Targets created as part of establishing SDAGEs

Eight targets are covered by this third set. They relate to the following environmental targets: D05-OE01, D05-OE02, D07-OE03, D08-OE07 and D09-OE01. Two subsets can be distinguished within these eight targets:

- on the one hand, the relative D5 targets (Eutrophication), which take the form of % of streams, rivers and watercourses leading to eutrophied marine areas whose nitrate/phosphate concentrations are compatible with the Good Environmental Status (GES) threshold values for the Nutrients criterion (mainly with regard to the chlorophyll-a criterion);
- on the other hand, the targets relating to D7, D8 and D9 (hydrographical conditions and contaminants), which concern obstacles that cannot be removed in streams (D7), the quality of sediments and coastal bodies of water (D8) and the microbiological quality of coastal waters (D9).

Before commenting on the value of these targets, let us first recall the strong link between SDAGE and SBS. In fact, by virtue of IX of Article L. 212-1 of the Environmental Code, the SDAGE must be compatible or made compatible with the environmental targets defined in the PAMM, at the time of its periodic update provided for in IV of Article L. 212-2. Conversely, the PAMM includes environmental targets and associated indicators for achieving good environmental status of marine waters, which are compatible or made compatible with the SDAGE (Article L. 219-9 of the Environmental Code). Pursuant to the provisions mentioned in IX of Article L. 212-1 and insofar as many of the pressures on marine ecosystems are generated on land, the environmental targets of the SBS, concerning these pressures on land or in relation to water policy, define new results to be achieved within the framework of the SDAGEs currently being drawn up for the third management cycle 2022-2027. As a result, the SDAGEs and the Water Framework Directive Programme of Measures must define the measures contributing to the achievement of these results, within the limits of their legal scope, unless exemptions or exceptions to the achievement of these targets are integrated into the sea basin strategy documents.

Within the framework of this necessary coordination, setting targets for this third set was the subject of several national working groups involving the departments responsible for drawing up the SBSs (DIRMs), SDAGEs (Water Agencies) or both (basin DREALs). In addition, in order to contribute to setting eutrophication targets, a modelling study on restoring the good environmental status of coastal waters by reducing the flow of nutrients from watercourses has been entrusted to IFREMER by the Directorate of Water and Biodiversity. Following some methodological limitations being highlighted in this study, in the end it was not used to set watercourse-by-watercourse reduction levels, and the targets finally adopted were instead a global % of streams with a concentration compatible with the GES (see above).

With specific reference to the SA coastline:

- all four D5 targets are set at 100%;
- the D7 target is set qualitatively as "Upward trend";
- the two D8 targets are, for one of them, not defined (the associated indicator therefore having candidate status and will not be reported to the EC for this cycle), and for the other, set at 100% of coastal bodies of water in good chemical status;

- finally, the D9 target is quantitative in nature and presents a good level of prevention since it sets the number of monitoring points showing a deterioration in microbiological quality at 0.

In total, the targets in this third set generally have an ambition level compatible with compliance with the GES.

Conclusion

At the end of this analysis, it can be considered that a dozen additional targets have been defined in a rather ambitious way (i.e. a little more than 40%), the others having a medium to low level of ambition.

As the environmental assessment of the sea basin strategy concluded that a significant proportion of environmental targets had targets with modest ambition, the setting of additional targets discussed in this addendum does not appear likely to significantly alter the conclusions of that assessment.