

Something is moving at sea: Fisheries measures as part of the Belgian marine spatial plan

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The Belgian Part of the North Sea (BPNS) is a relatively small (3454 km²) and shallow area. Nevertheless, it is also one of the most intensively used seas in the world by numerous activities including aggregate extraction, fisheries, wind energy development, shipping and dredging. In March 2014, Belgium approved a legally binding marine spatial plan. This plan provides a long term vision for the BPNS, translated into concrete objectives for the period 2014-2020. Within this plan, zones are delineated in which specific rules apply with respect to various human activities. For commercial fisheries, 4 areas are delineated within the protected area “Vlaamse Banken” in which a number of restrictions will be in force after approval from the EU. Several steps are proceeding this potential approval counting stakeholder involvement, political decisions and the use of scientific data. To assess the possible consequences of such measures on existing habitats (restoration) and on the fisheries sector (loss of fishing grounds) a detailed overview of fishing activities in the area is required, including fleet dispersion (per state, fishing gear and species), as well as information about the target species over the past 3 years. This information was collected based on VMS & logbook data over the period 2010-2012. The analyses highlighted which métiers will be impacted most by these fisheries measures. By evaluating all aspects on how fisheries is integrated in the Belgian process, some valuable lessons can be learned.