

Finland—The Regional Plan of Kymenlaakso

The regional plan of Kymenlaakso, (Kymenlaakso Regional plan on trade and sea area / Kymenlaakson maakuntakaava, kauppa ja merialue) focuses on, among other issues, current MSP challenges. Possible future demands concerning the EU directive on MSP were also considered.

The plan was approved by the Regional Council of Kymenlaakso in December 2013 and submitted to the Ministry of the Environment. Final ratification by the Ministry of the Environment is expected in 2014.

Regional planning in Kymenlaakso is carried out in phases. Phased regional land use plans cover certain specific planning issues during each planning phase. For this reason, the current trade and sea area is based on already existing plans. The existing plan was partially updated and improved, and many new land use designations were added in the sea area.

Background

Planning in the marine areas of Kymenlaakso is aimed at implementing general goals of marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management within the framework of already existing regional land use and regional development legislation.

The MSP process aims at offering a legally binding, comprehensive and general framework for the sustainable management of marine and coastal areas. The plan is seen as a guideline for all major planning issues in the region.

The regional plan covers the territorial sea as a whole and includes explicit information on under water bio- and geodiversity. The EEZ is also included in the planning process, but the designations are only recommendations and, as such, are not legally binding (as defined by the Finnish Land Use and Building Act). The MSP process is closely connected to inland areas, as regional plans in Finland address both land and sea areas.

As the planning process is carried out according to existing legislation, endorsement by relevant governance and management institutions is strong. Planning is carried out with a timeframe of 20-30 years, but plans will be updated regularly, if necessary.

General objectives are given by Finland's land use planning system, as defined in the Land Use and Building Act. Planning is also guided by national land use guidelines issued by the national government. However, the act gives regions and municipalities a high degree of autonomy in land use planning. In the case of the Kymenlaakso MSP plan, specific objectives have been agreed on by the regional board and the assembly of the Regional Council.

Individual citizens and non-governmental organizations are fully entitled to participate in the planning processes. The planning processes set out in the Land Use and Building Act have been specifically designed to facilitate participation. Participation processes include public consultation, workshops, and stakeholder meetings.

Interplay between Scientists and Planning Officials

Scientists have provided information on underwater bio- and geodiversity, seabed geology, human pressures, and harmful substances in sediments and seafloor hypoxia, among other types of information. Data was provided by a number of sources, including research projects such as the Finnish Inventory Programme for the Underwater Marine Environment (VELMU) and the FINMARINET project, which examined the distribution of important underwater habitat types as well as their flora and fauna in key marine Natura 2000 sites and their surrounding areas. The data collected through fieldwork was partially used in the distribution modelling of habitats and species.

The regional council maintains its own databases on land-use and regional development, including data on transport, conservation, recreation, tourism, shipping and commerce, housing and cultural heritage.

The TOPCONS (Transboundary tools for spatial planning and conservation in the Gulf of Finland) project fostered cooperation with Russia on the neighboring sea area and provided, for example, cross-border information on seabed structural diversity and natural resources.

Socio-economic evaluations have been carried out during the environmental impact assessment of the plan using different data sources. The plan considers environmental, social and economic sustainability issues on all planning levels and takes into account ecosystem-based management approaches.

The MSP process supported the implementation of regional strategies such as the regional development strategy of Kymenlaakso, and the regional strategy on natural resources.

Environmental assessment according to the Land Use and Building Act is obligatory and includes evaluation of environmental changes, activity pressures or development needs.

*Note by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity: More information is available in a report entitled “Kymenlaakson maakuntakaava, Kauppa- ja merialue Merialueselvitys”, which is provided on the workshop webpage at: <http://www.cbd.int/doc/?meeting=MCBEM-2014-04>.